An Exploration on the Expressive Skills among Elementary-grade Learners: A Bedrock for the Development t of Computer-assisted Teaching Strategies

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Abstract

A person's thoughts, ideas and feelings are expressed through speaking and writing which are commonly termed as expressive skills. Through these skills, teachers are able to assess the level of understanding of the learners on a particular lesson that was taught. Employing the descriptive –quantitative-correlational research design, this study aims to assess the level of the speaking and writing skills of the six grader learners among the selected schools in one of the Division in Zamboanga Peninsula. Furthermore, it also sought to know if significant correlation exists between the two expressive skills. This study enlisted 180 pupils from different public schools which were chosen through stratified sampling. Using the series of pictures taken from the Language Expressway 6 which is a standardized instrument, the respondents where ask to narrate a story out of the pictures through speaking and writing. Their oral and written output were then rated by the three English language teachers using the assessment matrix of DepEd Order no.8, series of 2015.

The findings of the study concludes that the speaking and writing skills of the six grader learners falls below the level of 75% which is the national passing rate of public schools in the Philippines. Moreover, a positive correlation was noted between the two expressive skills. Hence, the Ha is being accepted. Therefore, it is safe to say that the learners did not meet the level of speaking and writing that is expected of them. This result may be associated with the implementation of the Mother Tongue Based instruction from Grade I-III which focuses on the mastery of the L1 of the learners. Perhaps, we may consider that reason for the present level of speaking and writing among the six grader learners.

Keywords: expressive skills, speaking skill, writing skill, correlational, English, L1,L2, teaching strategies

Introduction

The use of language skills to think and express oneself through the use of appropriate words and grammatically correct sentences is known as expressive skills. These skills may also refer to non-verbal cues such as the use of body movements or gestures and even facial expressions. Of all the macro skills, productive and receptive, the former is considered to be the expressive skills.

These skills allow a language learner to express his or her thoughts and/or ideas, wants and needs, refute a point, engage in an informative discussion and hone his or her skills in language.

According to Ur (1996), of all the skills in language, speaking is viewed as one of the most relevant skills in learning a language. This is due to the fact that language learners are also viewed as the speakers of the target language. In achieving effective communication, speaking is one of the skills a language learner must hone. In fact, speaking skill is observed both in first and second languages of a speaker. Moreover, one's knowledge of this skill is an important aspect of learning a second or a foreign language since it is seen as a basis of a language learner's ability to engage in an informative discussion (Nunan, 1995).

However, it is very apparent that most language learners find it most difficult to speak using the target language. Many of these learners are having difficulties in expressing themselves. Moreover, considering all these concerns, some language learners are fronting with various concerns in the use of the FL to express their ideas more effectively.

Davies & Pearse (2000) articulated that it is the aim of the educators in the field of English language teaching to help learners maximize their ability to express their thoughts in the use of the target language correctly and more effectively. However, it can be observed that there are still language learners who cannot communicate accurately and fluently even after spending years in studying the target language (Bueno, Madrid, &Mclaren, 2006). Subsequently, Clifford (1987) also claimed that there are various reasons why some do not pay much attention in developing the speaking skill of the students. This skill, accordingly, had been ignored in schools due to the emphasis on grammar. Instead of exposing the learners to use the language consistently in conversations, some would focus much on the conventions and rules of the target language. Speaking assessments are even rarely applied due to the time it takes.

Writing is considered to be another skill codified under expressive skills. And it is defined as a skill that comprises the learners' knowledge about the language in a written form. Writing is also considered important for effective communication. Good and effective writing skills will allow the person to communicate his or her thoughts with clarity, conciseness, and correctness.Furthermore, it is believed that the writing skills would come last. Some would even believe that of all the macro skills, writing is the most challenging task to teach and learn. With this in mind, we can possibly say that writing is the basis of one's proficiency in a particular language. If a language learner can write effectively through the use of the target language, a learner can be considered as a proficient in that language.

In the contemporary world, English language is commonly known as the international or universal language. People who use English language consider it to be an opportunity for their professional growth. Learners of the language specifically non-native English speakers tend to learn and use the language for various purposes. According to Tardy (2003), Amamio and Anyadubalu (2010), English language takes a positive lead in science communication, (I.T.)

information technology, and communication and international affairs. Even in other core academic subjects, English language plays very important roles in teaching different subject matters. Even the use of English language in a classroom can help students create something new for them (Hill and Miller, 2013).

Considering the present conditions, Philippines is one of the many countries which regard the use of English language as a powerful tool to global advancement. It had already been integrated in the education system of the Philippines to use English language as a medium of instruction.The executive order 210 had been in play in the education system of the Philippines since 2003. This order promotes the use of the English language in the education system from first grade as a medium of instruction. Since 2011, this program was reformed by the MTB-MLE of the K to 12 curriculum that orders the use of English as a medium of instruction from 4th grade onwards. Regardless of the adjustment, it is still apparent that PH acknowledges the relevance of English language, even making the country as one of the top in terms of its number of English speakers.

Milan (2019) stated that in the year 2016, Philippines ranked 4th in the poll of top English speaking countries worldwide with its number of English language speakers. However, this does not tell us the language proficiency of the speakers. There were surveys and studies done locally to observe the slow impairment of English language mastery in the country. In the year 2006, a survey commissioned by PEP discovered the decline in self-assessment of speakers' ability to speak in the use of English language that is from 53% to 32 since year 2000. Results from the IELTS in the year 2008, show that OFWs who were looking for jobs as engineers or nurses scored lower than those of from Malaysia (Wilson, 2009).

In the contemporary world where the interconnectedness of various countries from one another is evident, a default language like English is expected to be used. Since English is considered to be a universal language, the demand for speaking in the use of target language with mastery is observed. This is due to the fact that English has been used as a default language for international communication. In fact, non-native English speakers are confronted with challenges in improving the quality education of teaching and learning the English language. Considering the fact that this language is incorporated already in the Philippine education system, it only means that the educational institutions across the country see its significance. However, despite its importance in the Philippine education system, several studies show low mastery and performance of students in the language. The result of the study could serve as a bedrock for the development of the computer-assisted teaching strategies.That is why after the last NAT conducted, an assessment on the expressive skills of the elementary learners is still necessary to find out so that curriculum planners may look into the possibilities on how to improve the expressive skills of the learners in the foundation level of education.

Review of Related Literature
The Importance of Speaking

Speaking is a skill that is learned before reading and writing. Thus, this becomes the most important skill because humans spend more time using the language orally than in its written for. This skill is also essential in performing conversations, especially when using the English language. Speakers must recognize the different substantial components like pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension in order to communicate easily and effectively with other individuals.

Additionally, Rivers (1981) stated that speaking is utilized twice as much as reading and writing when the language is used outside the classroom context. Brown (1994) also emphasized that both speaking and listening are essential language tools. Likewise, researchers (Efrizal, 2012; PourhoseinGilakjani, 2016) have perceived speaking as a skill of great importance for it is crucial in the daily interaction of every individual – it is an avenue to convey ideas and messages orally. If students are motivated to communicate in English, then the language must be used in real life context and encourage them to do undergo the same process.

On another note, Richards and Rodgers (2001) expressed that speaking skill was not given importance in the traditional methods, for reading was the central focus inside the classroom. The Grammar-Translation method is one of its examples where reading and writing were of great significance. As stated by Ur (2000), among the four language skills, speaking is the most significant one for effective communication.

The integration of speaking to other language skills highlights the important role it plays in communication. Students develop their vocabulary, grammar skill, and improve writing skills thru speaking. Moreover, students are able to express emotions and ideas; relay stories; request; discuss, and demonstrate the various purposes of language. With the significance of speaking outside the classroom setting, language speakers have more options in finding opportunities from different institutions and companies. Baker and Westrup (2003) expressed similar idea – that learners who communicate using English have greater opportunities in terms of earning education, finding a job, and getting a promotion.

Researchers also support the idea that individuals are unmotivated to learn a language without chances to use it in a meaningful context. By this, it means that oral language interactions and situations to use the language in meaningful contexts allow these individuals to practice the language. Thus, they are able to internalize the language, which is essential in the process. Similarly, Asher (2003) stated that learners are more likely to imitate what has been modelled by the teacher when using the language. Likewise, Krashen (1988) investigated the correlation between listening and speaking skills, in which it was revealed that when students speak, it is taken as evidence that they have acquired the language. Thus, some teachers quickly jump from teaching speaking to teaching reading and writing skills.

Factors Affecting Speaking Skill

A student's speaking performance is strongly influenced by factors such as performance conditions, affective factors, listening skills, and feedback while doing the speaking tasks. These factors must be recognized by teachers if they want to aid their learners improve their speaking skills (Tuan & Mai, 2015). The first factor, pertaining to performance conditions, involves time pressure, planning of the quality performance, and the amount of support. All of which affects the student's speaking performance (Nation & Newton, 2009). The second factor, which is the affective ones, is considered as one of the significant factors in learning the language (Oxford, 1990). Moreover, Krashen (1982) emphasized that affective variables are interconnected with second language acquisition, along with motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety.

The third factor, the individual's learning ability, has to be developed in order to improve one's speaking ability (Doff, 1998). Learners must understand what is orally conveyed to them in order to successfully communicate. This idea is supported by Shumin (1997), claiming that when students speak, the receiving end responses through listening. A speaker must both be a listener and a speaker in order to comprehend what is being said. To conclude, speaking is interrelated to listening.

In addition to this, topical knowledge is the fourth factor that affects one's speaking skill. Defined as the knowledge structure in long-term memory, it pertains to the speaker's knowledge that enables him to use the language based on the context present. This factor greatly affects the learner's speaking performance (Bachman and Palmer, 1996).

Lastly, the feedback provided during the speaking activities is an essential factor affecting one's speaking skills. Teacher are expected to provide the learners essential and timely feedback during a speaking performance, all of which needs to depend on the stages of the lesson, difficulty of the task, and the kind of mistakes committed. Also, if the teachers correct the learners' problems in a forward manner, the flow of the process and the goal of the speaking activity will be wasted (Hammer, 1991). This is supported by Baker and Westrup (2003), stating that if the learners are constantly corrected, they will be motivated and anxious to speak. It is suggested that learners must be corrected in a positive manner and must be supported and persuaded to speak.

The Importance of Writing skills for Students

Writing is one of the essential skills a language learner must learn, but it is also a difficult skill to master. If a learner fails to learn the writing skill at an early age, then it would be difficult for him to master this skill in the future. Learners must be proficient in order to compose paragraphs accurately, and in the long run, written communication in the real world. With the advancement the technology, writing is also present in its digital form – emails, online conversations, faxes, even website updates. Moreover, excellent writing skill is defined as the ability to construct meaningful sentences and paragraphs which can be comprehended easily by a variety of readers, regardless of the diverse views and topics among the target audience. Learning how to write also

facilitates the process of learning how to analyse what is read, interpret and think, making this skill integral in the any field or profession.

Several importance of acquiring excellent writing skill was enumerated by the Asian School (2019). This includes: (a) the ability to explain one's self; (b) a way to record for future use; (c) an essential skill to get employed in the future; (d) improvement of one's communication skills; (e) improvement of focus and self-connection; and (f) improvement of knowledge, creativity, and imagination. These also serve as advantages for acquiring and harnessing the learners' writing skills.

Essentially, writing focuses not only on the output, but also on the process. It is a great way to teach, inform, and entertain, all the while sorting necessary knowledge and appropriate experiences on the given topic. Moreover, writing is compulsory when cataloguing pieces of information in the field of science, technology, and logic. Journals, diaries and white papers are published by researchers as records of experiments and breakthroughs in a composed format.

It is also highly noted that writing is a basic skill required in all sorts of employment. Mastery of the writing skill is correlated with better overall performance of learners in school. Learning to write early with accuracy is beneficial because it provides an avenue for improvement in the later age. Additionally, developing one's writing skills is also improving one's communication skills. Writing channels one's knowledge and conveys one's point to other people. It also serves the purpose for intrapersonal communication. As an individual writes his thoughts in blogs, essays, even feature articles, the connection between the individual's cognitive and affective aspects are strengthened, allowing both logic and creativity to work hand in hand. Thus, proficiency in writing makes a student in demand in advertising organizations, news websites, social media marketing companies, along with other non IT companies which require a writer to write for their digital marketing (Asian School, 2019)

Simple ways to assess the writing skills of students with learning disabilities

Feedback is fundamental in the learning process. Teachers have the responsibility of providing opportunities and encouragement for students as they learn how to write. As students improve, assessment comes into the picture, playing an integral role in the instruction. Christenson, Ysseldyke, and Thurlow (1989) stated in their study that the following conditions positively affect students' achievement: (a) the degree of appropriateness in matching student characteristics and task characteristics; (b) the degree of teacher monitoring of student understanding and progress; and (c) the degree of frequency and appropriateness of student performance evaluation.

It can be concluded that assessment is a highly essential factor in effective instruction, which can be categorized into three according to Airasian (1996): (a) sizing-up assessments, which is usually done at the beginning to provide an overview of the students' level when beginning instructions; (b) instructional assessments, which is utilized for daily planning, giving

feedback, and monitoring students' progress; and (c) official assessments, which are done periodically as formal assessment for grouping, grading, and reporting. Moreover, assessments are used to not only to identify students' strengths and weaknesses, but also to design classroom instruction fit to their needs and evaluate instructional material. A simple curriculum-based assessment for writing can address all these purposes (Isaacson, 2018).

Research Questions
This study is being conducted to assess the expressive skills in English of the elementary learners in selected schools in Zamboanga City Division. Specifically, the researcher would like to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the speaking level in English of the six grader elementary learners?
2. What is the writing level in English of the six grader elementary learners?
3. Is the speaking level of the learners significantly correlates to their writing level?

Methodology

This investigation employed a quantitative-correlational design which primarily aims to determine the level of expressiveskills in English and find out if there is a correlation between the speaking and writing skills of the selected six grader learners in one of the Divisions of Zamboanga Peninsula.The research enlisted 180 pupils from selected public schools which were chosen through stratified sampling.

Using the standardized series of pictures taken from the Language Expressway 6, which underwent validation and reliability test, the pupils were instructed to narrate a story out of the pictures through speaking and writing.The researcher recorded the speaking narration and collected the written narration of the pupils which were then rated by the three (3) Grade Six language teachers who are not teaching from the participating schools and have more than 10 years teaching experience.

The respondents scores were then interpreted using the assessment matrix of the Department of Education Order no. 8 series of 2015 which is shown below.

Mean/Grading Scale	Interpretation/Descriptor	Remark
90.00-100.00	Outstanding	Passed
84.50-89.99	Very Satisfactory	Passed
79.50-84.49	Satisfactory	Passed
74.50-79.49	Fair	Passed
74.49 below	Did not meet expectation	Failed

DepEd Order no.8 series of 2015

Ethical Consideration

Prior to the conduct of the study, letters were sent to the school principals to seek their approval. When the permission was granted to the researcher, an orientation was then conducted to the respondents, where the researchers explained the salient points of the study to include the respondents' rights and privileges if they chose to participate in the study. They were also asked to sign the informed consent form with their parents' consent which signified their voluntary participation. It was also made clear that the respondents' and the schools' identity will be kept with the utmost confidentiality.

Results and Discussion

Table 2. Speaking Level of the Selected Grade Six Learners

Macro Skill	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Speaking Skill	73.219	2.108	Did not meet expectation

DepEd Order Order 8 s. 2015

Table 2 shows the speaking level of the selected grade six learners. The data revealed that the respondents' over-all speaking level is 73.219 with a standard deviation of 2.108 which means that the respondents "did not meet the level" that is expected to a six grader pupil in the Philippines on the way they should express their thoughts and ideas through speaking. The result tells us that pupils still need more practice and exposure to different speaking activities in order for this skill to be fully developed.

Almost the same result was noted in the study of Separa, Generales and Medina (2019) wherein they found out that in terms of pronunciation, majority of the respondents are also not sure if they do it properly when speaking in English. Meanwhile more than 20% of them are good in pronunciation and only 17% consider themselves not good in pronunciation. Half of them also are not sure if they can consider themselves as fluent English speakers while more than one-thirds claims they cannot speak fluently.

The proficiency of language learners in elementary education is believed to be linked to the accounts of Mahripah in 2014. The speaking skill of the EFL learners is assumed to be affected by major components of the structure of language: the sound system, sentence structure, lexicon, word structure, and other reasons like psychological factors such as the motivation and personality of the learners. Since the pronunciations of some English words are not similar to their spellings, some consider the learning of phonology as a difficult aspect of learning a language. As part of the history of the English language, from Great Vowel Shift to the influence of its language families, pronunciations of some English words are undeniably surprising. Thus,

some learners of the target language, especially the non-native speakers, see the English language as a very challenging task to learn.

Aside from the fact that EFL learners should have a rudimentary knowledge about words and sentences of the target language, they must also grasp how words are codified into different sounds and how these structures of sentences are stressed in specific ways.

According to Tuan & Mai (2015), concerns regarding the speaking skill of the students may be encountered: the use of the mother tongue and interest of the students in learning that affects their knowledge and participation. It is believed that inhibition is the primary problem of the students in class. These learners are much concern of the possible criticisms that they may encounter when committing mistakes. Littlewood (2007) emphasized that a student's learning environment can also create these factors that affect their learning.

Other problems of the learners are they cannot remember what to say and the lack of motivation to express them. The idea is supported by Rivers in 1968 who considers that language learners may find it difficult to express themselves about something because of the topics that are assigned to them which they may have no knowledge about. According to Baker and Westrup (2003) language learners find it difficult to answer their teachers in a foreign language about something they have no idea about, which more appropriate words to use, and or how to use grammar accurately.

Another problem a teacher in a speaking class may encounter is the students' low participation. A class with larger number of language learners, each may have a very little time for talking because one student talks at a time and the other learners try to listen. In a speaking class, some learners speak a lot while the other learners speak very little or not even once.

Tuan & Mai (2015) also added that another problem of the language learners is when they prefer to use their first language instead of the target language whenever they speak in a class. For them, it is a lot easier to express themselves using their mother tongue. Harmer (1991) emphasized several reasons why these learners prefer to use their MT in a class. One reason is when teachers ask the learners to say something about a topic they have little knowledge about; they will try to use their MT. Another reason is that, learners feel more comfortable in using their MT. If the teachers do not encourage them to use the target language, learners will just use their first language. One last reason is when teachers consistently use the learners' MT instead of the target language. In doing so, learners would not feel encouraged to use the target language.

	Pearson r	Description	Sig. (2 tailed)	Interpretation
Speaking and Writing Skill	0.482	Moderate Relationship	0.003	Significant

Table 3.Writing Level of the Selected Grade Six Pupils

Macro Skill	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Speaking Skill	67.867	2.004	Did not meet expectation

DepEd Order no. 8 s. 2015

Table 4. Correlational Matrix between Speaking and Writing Skills of the Respondents

On the other hand, it was revealed that the respondents' over-all writing level is 67.867 with a standard deviation of 2.004 still "did not meet the standard level" which is expected of a Grade six pupil in the Philippines. They still lack the ability to transform their thoughts into series of words that tells story.

The finding may have relevance to the paper of Troia (2014) that emphasizes writing as a difficult task that composes several component skills which some learners may lack or partially have. These include the basic language skills such as analytical skills, reading comprehension, and writing skills – including the writing mechanics: system of rules, syntax, spelling, and principles of effective written communication: clear, concise, complete, coherent, and concrete. Moreover, it is believed that when students lack skills in some of these areas, their writing may undeniably be affected. Some students lack the metacognitive skills to realize which of these areas they need to improve

The findings of Pablo and Lasaten (2018) study show that there are various reasons why some students have difficulties in writing their academic essays. These problems include: knowledge about the topic, coherence, word choice, poor sentence structures, and even in the use of proper citation. However, the results of the students' essays range from poor to fair. Further, it shows that academic essays of students from the private schools are better than of the students in public institutions.

It can be gleaned from Table 4 the result of the correlation between the two expressive skills. The respondents' scores got a Pearson-r value of 0.482 sig value of 0.003. Furthermore, a positive moderate correlation between the respondents' speaking and writing skills was also noted. The result also manifest that when a respondent's score in the speaking test is low, the score in the written test is also low. Thus, the correlation between the two skills is positively significant.

The study of Elvita and Indrasari (2016) on the correlation between students' speaking and writing ability bears similarity with the result of this study. They found out that there is a correlation between students' speaking and writing ability of descriptive text among the High school students. Mahmudah (2019) also concluded the same result on the relationship between students' speaking ability and their writing achievement where it indicated that there is high relationship between two variables (students' speaking ability and writing achievement). Therefore, it can be interpreted that students' speaking ability has high correlation with their writing achievement.

In like manner, Ebrianti'sstudy (2018) on the correlation between students' speaking and writing achievement at seventh semester students highlighted a moderate positive correlation between the two macro skills.

Conclusion

Based on the data gathered from the respondents, this study concludes that the speaking and writing skills of the six grader learners falls below the passing level of 75% which is the national passing rate of the elementary public schools in the Philippines. Moreover, a positive correlation was noted between the two expressive skills. Hence, the Ha is being accepted. Therefore, it is safe to say that the learners did not meet the level of speaking and writing proficiency that is expected of them.

Implications Since English is considered as a second language among Filipinos, we may say that this language is not yet developed from the respondents. Although this has been taught and also used as one of the media of instructions in their primary, it is also important to note that the Philippines has seriously implemented the Mother Tongue Based instruction from Grade I-III. This K to 12 program put emphasis on the mastery of the L1 of the learners secondary to their L2 such as English. Perhaps, we may consider that reason for the present level of speaking and writing among the six grader learners.

Recommendations

1. This study recommends that teachers may look into the development of computer assisted teaching strategies that could help improved learners' expressive skills.

2. On the findings that respondents' level of speaking skill is low or did not meet the expected level from a six grader learners, this study recommends for a regular assessment on the speaking skills of the learners. Aside from the classroom-made materials, teachers may also use assessment materials which are already standardized. They may also create a classroom environment where language anxiety is absent and where learners feel confident in expressing their thoughts, ideas and beliefs until they will be used to that scenario which will later on results to their progress in speaking.

3. It is also recommended to expose learners to different types of writing activities which are appropriate to their level. if learners are on the beginning stage, controlled writing may be appropriate to them while for learners with higher level of skill in writing, a complex writing activities may be given to them which could also enhance their writing skill.

4. Since many studies concludes that Filipino elementary learners speaking and writing skills is far beyond compare with other ESL, curriculum planners may also revisit the competencies included in the curriculum guide particularly in English subject on the speaking and writing components.

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