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English Conversational Skills of Grade 11 Students as Predictors of Their Performance in Oral Communication

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Abstract

Conversation is embedded in speaking activities and performance tasks in any subject area. However, students struggle to engage in conversations, especially if the English language is used as the medium of instruction, affecting their performances. This study examined the Grade 11 students' conversational skills in terms of attentiveness, composure, coordination, expressiveness, and grammar as predictors of their performance in oral communication. A quantitative descriptive correlational design was used. Twenty-seven Grade 11 students were chosen via the purposeful sampling method. In data collection, the researcher video-recorded a conversation between each student and the researcher. The conversations were assessed by the researcher and interrater using the Conversational Skills Rating Scale. The semester grade of the students' oral communication performance was also taken and analyzed through descriptive statistics. A regression analysis was done to determine if the participants' conversational skills predicted their performance in oral communication. Data reveal that participants' conversational skills were generally good which implies that students have sufficient conversational skills but still need to be developed. Moreover, participants' conversational skills significantly influence their oral communication performance and among the five skills, expressiveness stands out as having a significant influence on their performance in oral communication. It is recommended that teachers implement engaging speaking activities in the teaching of oral communication.

Keywords: conversational skills, oral communication, predictors

Introduction

English is now the primary language for worldwide communication and, as such, is integral to information and knowledge in the fields of commerce, technology, education across many disciplines, health, and science. Interactions with global communities have led to an emphasis on English as the dominant language. English is learned in the contemporary world for its obvious practical importance, as a way to connect at the international level, and as a means to optimize one's access to different opportunities in the employment sector (Estanislao, 2013). Thus, students must acquire English oral communication skills, specifically conversation skills, as they should be able to communicate effectively in their personal lives, future workplaces, social contacts, and political initiatives and to keep up with the globally competitive world.

Most people communicate through conversation in their daily lives. Conversation refers to two or more people exchanging words on a common topic (Heo & Lee, 2012). It differs from other types of interactive oral speech as it is spontaneous, the subject is unpredictable, and the characters may be familiar and improvised (Cestero, 2017). Giving and taking turns and the capacity to handle conversation subjects are vital for a good conversation. (Choi & Lee, 2013). A conversation not only consists of words but also actions, gestures, and other forms of nonverbal cues that all contribute to the meaning of the words said.

Conversations involve speaking. Akkakoson (2016) posited that, among other language skills, speaking is assumed to be the most stressful. Due to a lack of sufficient knowledge on how to carry out conversations, a shortage of opportunities to speak the target language, and limitations in the use of a second language, students speaking competence declines over time. Cabigon (2015) cited in his article in the Philippine Daily Inquirer that the quality of English is deteriorating in the Philippines and that there is an increasing number of unfilled jobs that require certain levels of English communication skills.

To combat the existing problem, the Department of Education embedded in the K–12 curriculum the teaching of communication and included the subject of oral communication in context to expose learners to different speaking activities and techniques to become good speakers. Most activities that students undertake in this subject are speaking activities, of which a big part is engaging in conversations. Therefore, students should have adequate conversational skills to be able to perform well in the different oral communication tasks.

However, the researcher observed that students find it hard to converse and express their thoughts and ideas using English. Students perform poorly in several of their classes due to poor oral communication skills. They cannot answer in straight, spontaneous English when asked a question, and it is even more challenging when one wants to have a conversation with them. This observation was also evident in the study by Separa et al. (2019), which showed that many college students in the Philippines are still not comfortable using the English language, especially when required to do recitations, reports, oral presentations, and even engage in casual conversations.

The biggest challenge for teachers is finding effective ways to teach students to converse effectively and acquire adequate conversational skills for them to be able to perform well in different subjects, especially in Oral Communication. The implications of conversational skills in terms attentiveness, coordination, composure, expressiveness, and grammar as predictors of the performance in oral communication of high school students are yet unexplored. It is due to this premise that the researcher investigated the conversational skills of Grade 11 students as predictors of their performance in Oral Communication.

Research Objectives

This study intends to determine if the conversational skills of the Grade 11 students predict their performance in oral communication. Specifically, it aims to know the participants' level of English conversational skills considering attentiveness, composure, coordination, expressiveness, and grammar; the participants' performance in oral communication; and if the participants' conversational skills significantly influence their performance in oral communication class activities.

Methodology

This research employed the quantitative descriptive correlational design which was complemented with data emanating from a video recording of a conversation of each student which the researcher and interrater assessed using the Conversational Skills Rating Scale (CSRS) along with their semester rating of their performances in Oral Communication class. Twenty-seven Grade 11 students participated in this study. Frequency distribution, mean score, mean percentage score and regression analysis were used to analyze the data.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the frequency, percentage, and mean distribution of the participants' conversational skills in terms of attentiveness. Results reveal that their level of attentiveness was good, as indicated by the overall mean of 2.72. Looking closely at the figures, it can be seen that 37.04 percent of the students had good attentiveness skills. This implies that students have sufficient but neither noticeable nor excellent skills. Students have the necessary attentiveness skills but still need to be developed. Although some students care about, are interested in, and pay attention to a conversation partner, there are still others who lack this skill and need further exposure to conversations to develop it.

Table 1

Frequency, Percentage, and Mean Distribution of the Participants' Conversational Skills (Attentiveness)

Range	Description	Frequency	Percentage
4.51-5.00	Outstanding	1	3.70
3.51-4.50	Very Good	5	18.52
2.51-3.50	Good	10	37.04
1.51-2.50	Fair	9	33.33
1.00-1.50	Poor	2	7.41
	Total	**27**	**100.00**
Overall Mean		**2.72**	
Interpretation		**Good**	
SD		**0.90**	

In the specific indicators, the highest rating is concerning *leaning toward the partner* (M=3.00). Students faced their speaking partners but others showed hesitations when conversing since they were conversing with the researcher who was not in their age group or already had a higher degree or status in life. This result was supported by the Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, 1973) which stated that individuals adjust their conversation while talking with someone who they believe had higher standards and other traits than them and individuals utilize communication to express their opinions toward one another, and as such, it served as a barometer of the extent of social distance between them.

Speaking about self was rated next to the highest (M=2.91) which implies that students were able to share information or talk about themselves. Students would answer questions about themselves but this was limited to questions about personal information. When they were asked to share an experience, they hesitated to answer. This was because they didn't have to think of an answer when giving information about themselves. If the researcher would ask to share an experience or an opinion about a certain topic, some of the students only shared shallow information and would not elaborate it further and some would just even smile and not answer. According to Brown (2001) in Harris (2019), the most difficult aspect of speaking for students was the interactive element of communication. People engage in a process of meaning negotiation as they communicate, especially when talking. As a result, students frequently struggle with how to express themselves, when to speak, and other aspects of dialogue.

Among the indicators, *encouragements or agreements* (M = 2.44) got the lowest rating. Students would not provide verbal reinforcements to their partner, including verbal affirmations. Instead of saying something, they would just smile or nod in response to statements. They would prefer to respond silently through nonverbal language. Chowdhury et al. (2017) found that silence indicated that the next speaker required more time to respond to the previous speaker's turn and that silence, particularly a long one, indicated hesitation or indecisiveness in a speaker.

Speaking about the partner (M = 2.52) was rated next to the lowest. Some students made no comments or inquiries about the partner. This implied that students did not comment on the ideas presented by their speaking partner or give their own opinion about what was said. The same result was found in a pretest conducted by Kaboyashi (2013) that showed common issues in speaking, such as students not helping each other to communicate, like no rephrasing comments.

Table 2 presents the frequency, percentage, and mean distribution of the participants' conversational skills in terms of composure. The findings show that the pupils maintained good composure, as evidenced by the aggregate mean of 3.02. The statistics show that 10.4%, or 10 out of 27, of the pupils demonstrated good composure. The necessary skills that must be cultivated are already present in students. While most students make an effort to appear assertively or confidently and avoid anxiety cues, some nonetheless exhibit uneasiness during conversations.

Table 2

Frequency, Percentage, and Mean Distribution of the Participants' Conversational Skills (Composure)

Range	Description	Frequency	Percentage
4.51-5.00	Outstanding	2	7.41
3.51-4.50	Very Good	6	22.22
2.51-3.50	Good	10	37.04
1.51-2.50	Fair	8	29.63
1.00-1.50	Poor	1	3.70
	Total	**27**	**100.00**
	Overall Mean	**3.02**	
	Interpretation	**Good**	
	SD	**0.82**	

The indicator of *unmotivated movements* (M = 3.20) got the highest mean and is interpreted as good, which implies that students avoid movements that show unmotivation or uninterest in their speaking partners. However, there are still students who are fidgety when talking. They tend to keep playing with an object or moving their bodies. A similar result in a pretest conducted by Kaboyashi (2013) showed common issues in speaking, such as students displaying unfriendly body language.

The second highest indicator is *posture* (M = 3.13). This implies that students maintain good posture and a good distance from their speaking partners. According to Hidayat (2015), the forms of posture strongly reflect the self-confidence of locators and interlocutors. Matsumoto & Hwang (2013) also added that we perceive a person as authoritative when they are calm and confident because they are practically presenting the finest version of themselves. Nasir (2015) opined that each body posture reflected the person's occupation or emotional state and was influenced by a variety of elements such as social position, current energy level, training, and others.

However, the indicator of *eye contact* (M = 2.85) got the lowest rating. This implies that students avoid eye contact with their speaking partners. This may be because they were not confident when speaking. Crozier (2002), as cited by Rahim and Quraishi (2019), concluded in their study that shy children and adults made less eye contact and touched their faces and bodies more frequently with their hands.

Vocal confidence (M = 2.87) also got a low rating. Students' voices are occasionally nervous, shaky, breaking in pitch, and/or equivocal in tone or volume. Students' voices trembled a few times, but they managed to calm them down. Their voices mostly trembled when they started talking but faded when they had composed themselves. The same results were presented by Hulu (2018), where the majority of the respondents' voices slightly trembled at the beginning of their presentation.

Table 3 presents the frequency, percentage, and mean distribution of the participants' conversational skills in terms of coordination. The data showed that the students' coordination was good, with an overall mean of 3.22. This implies that students have a smooth entry and exit from talks and a smooth transition between turns in a conversation, a new topic discussion, etc. Although students' coordination level is good, they still need further practice to develop this skill. Looking closely at the figures, 48.14 percent got a good rating.

Table 3

Frequency, Percentage, and Mean Distribution of the Participants' Conversational Skills (Coordination)

Range	Description	Frequency	Percentage
4.51-5.00	Outstanding	2	7.41
3.51-4.50	Very Good	7	25.93
2.51-3.50	Good	13	48.14
1.51-2.50	Fair	5	18.52
1.00-1.50	Poor	0	0
	Total	**27**	**100.00**
Overall Mean		**3.22**	
Interpretation		**Good**	
SD		**0.78**	

The indicator that has the highest mean is *the interruption of partner speaking turns (M = 4.69).* This means that the students let their partners finish talking first. In conversations where the speakers knew each other and possessed equal power, the interruption may reflect the membership of the speakers (Lestary et al., 2017). Although letting the speaker finish first had a positive implication, so did interruptions. According to Lestary et al. et al. (2017), the occurrence of interruptions can be used as a marker for lively conversations, which means that the participants engaged actively during the talk.

Next to the highest is the *speaking rate* (M = 3.33). The data revealed that students' speaking pace was, in only a small number of instances, difficult to comprehend or disruptive to the normal flow of partner responses. Some of the students talked slowly because they were finding the right words to say. This slow pacing disrupted the flow of normal responses as others still needed to wait for the speaker to finish the sentence. Students should respond with proper pacing to have interactive communication. Thornbury (2005), cited by Harris (2019), stated that interactive communication referred to a candidate's ability to interact with the interlocutor and the other candidates by initiating and answering properly and at the appropriate pace and rhythm to fulfill the required tasks.

The indicator on *maintenance of topics and follow-up comments* (M=S.59) got the lowest rating. Many students provided no extension of topics once initiated. In a study conducted by Mofarah (2019), it was evident that students' inability to communicate in the English language fostered frustration and exacerbated anxieties about entering into any conversation initiated by others. They would not add anything to continue the flow of conversation.

The indicator *asking questions* (M=2.72) had a low rating as well. Only a few students also asked questions and the others would just answer and not ask. A similar result in a pretest conducted by Kaboyashi (2013) showed unnatural conversational techniques where one student took the role of interviewer and the other student would just reply to their questions.

Table 4 presents the frequency, percentage, and mean distribution of the participants' conversational skills in terms of expressiveness. Results reveal that students got an overall mean of 3.07, which was interpreted as good. This means that students had good gestural and facial animation. The student's expressiveness skill is enough to engage in effective conversation but is not outstanding, so it still needs to be developed. It can be seen from the data that 37.04 percent are on the level of good.

Table 4

Frequency, Percentage, and Mean Distribution of the Participants' Conversational Skills (Expressiveness)

Range	Description	Frequency	Percentage
4.51-5.00	Outstanding	3	11.11
3.51-4.50	Very Good	5	18.52
2.51-3.50	Good	10	37.04
1.51-2.50	Fair	8	29.63
1.00-1.50	Poor	1	3.70

Table 4 (Continued)

Range	Description	Frequency	Percentage
	Total	**27**	**100.00**
	Overall Mean	**3.07**	
	Interpretation	**Good**	
	SD	**0.98**	

As regards the specific indicators, the highest rating is for *smiling and/or laughing* (M = 3.59). This implies that students can express themselves in a nonverbal way and smile or laugh in response to humorous stimuli. According to Glenn (2003), cited by Chen (2016), laughter was treated simplistically as a response to humor and thus implied a casual, stimulus-response relationship from a humorous event to the perception of humor to laughter.

Facial expressiveness also got a high rating (M = 3.19), which implies that students show expressions on their faces. This meant that students' facial expressions varied depending on the topic, and once they understood what the topic was for, they were able to react to it. According to Xu et al. et al. (2017), facial expressions can display personal emotions and indicate an individual's intentions in a social situation.

The indicator on *articulation (clarity of pronunciation and linguistic expression)* (M = 2.83) got the lowest mean. Errors in pronunciation were noticeable in the student's conversation. This meant that students still lacked the linguistic skills to converse effectively. The same observations were presented by Protacio (2021) that students had been struggling to speak English as the medium of instruction and communication since they had difficulties and confusion as to the appropriate production of the speech sounds.

The second-low indicator was *the use of eye contact,* since this indicator is redundant. It already appeared under *composure* and was also the lowest indicator.

Table 5 presents the frequency, percentage, and mean distribution of the participants' conversational skills in terms of grammar. Results reveal that their grammar level is good as indicated by the overall mean of 2.81. Looking closely at the figures, it can be seen that 44.44 percent of the students' grammar level is good. This implies that students can construct correct sentences when they share their opinions and respond to questions asked during the conversations but there are also a few who find it difficult to construct correct sentences.

Table 5

Frequency, Percentage, and Mean Distribution of the Participants' Conversational Skills (Grammar)

Range	Description	Frequency	Percentage
4.51-5.00	Outstanding	1	3.70
3.51-4.50	Very Good	4	14.82
2.51-3.50	Good	12	44.44
1.51-2.50	Fair	7	25.93
1.00-1.50	Poor	3	11.11

Table 5 (Continued)

Range	Description	Frequency	Percentage
	Total	**27**	**100.00**
	Overall Mean	**2.81**	
	Interpretation	**Good**	
	SD	**0.87**	

The indicator on *meaning of sentences is clear and understandable* (M = 2.94), and *correct sentence structure* (M = 2.93) got the highest mean. This indicates that students can construct sentences correctly and grammatically arrange the words to form correct sentences. The two indicators are closely related. If one can construct sentences with the correct structure, then, the meaning of those sentences will be clear and understandable. According to Faradiba et al. et al. (2018), it is vital to make a good sentence while writing or speaking, for it will make the sentence easier to understand.

Among the indicators, *proper usage of the tenses and aspects of the verb* (M = 2.54) is the lowest. This indicates that most students do not mind the tense of the verb they use while speaking. A similar result was found by Aditya & Chairuddin (2020), where the students had difficulties using the correct tense in conversation and tended to use only one tense in all situations.

The indicator of *correct subject-verb agreement* (M = 2.80) also got a low rating. This implies that students can relay the messages that they want to their speaking partners and that their sentences are somehow complete and not fragmented, but they do not mind its subject-verb agreement rules. According to Tafida & Okunade (2016), subject-verb agreement problems are becoming increasingly widespread, and it appears that many people are either uninformed of the rules or dismiss the importance of grammatical rules as long as they can convey their message.

Problem 2. What is the participants' performance in Oral Communication?

Table 6 presents the frequency, percentage, and mean distribution of the participants' performance in oral communication activities. Results reveal that their level is proficient as indicated by the overall mean of 85.87. This implies that students perform well in the different performance tasks and activities in the Oral Communication subject. Looking closely at the figures, it can be seen that 48.14 percent are approaching proficiency. This means that students have acquired the skills needed to perform well in their oral communication class. This must be the outcome of their constant practice inside the classroom, especially during their Oral Communication class where students are encouraged to talk and converse with their classmates and teachers using the English language.

Table 6
Frequency, Percentage, and Mean Distribution of the Participants' Performance in Oral Communication Activities

Range	Description	Frequency	Percentage
90% and Above	Advanced	6	22.22
85%-89%	Proficient	7	25.93
80%-84%	Approaching Proficiency	13	48.14
75%-79%	Developing	1	3.70
74% and Below	Beginning	0	0
	Total	**27**	**100.00**
	Overall Mean	**85.87**	
	Interpretation	**Proficient**	
	SD	**4.55**	

The similar conclusion was drawn from Palmero's study (2019), which indicated that students' oral communication competency in English was excellent in both verbal and non-verbal domains (4.09 and 3.98, respectively). Contrary to Andes' (2019) findings, which indicated that students' average oral communication ability rating was 77 percent, or fair in a descriptive sense, this isn't the case. This indicates that in order to improve their oral communication skills, children must be exposed to more communication situations. These barriers can be psychological, educational, or linguistic.

Problem 3. Do the participants' conversational skills significantly influence their performance in oral communication?

Ho: The participants' conversational skills do not significantly influence their performance in oral communication.

Table 7 presents the regression analysis of the implication of participants' conversational skills on their performance in Oral Communication. Data reveal that the whole model is significant ($F = 32.37$, $p = .000$) with 85.8 percent of the variability in their grades as being accounted for by a combination of the components of their conversational skills. Thus, this allows for the rejection of the null hypothesis. Only the remaining 14.2 percent may be attributed to other factors not covered in this study. This implies that conversational skills significantly affect the students' performance in Oral Communication. When students have a high degree of conversational skills, they would also have a high-performance rating in the different activities in Oral Communication given the fact that these activities focus on speaking.

Table 7

Regression Analysis of the Grade 11 Students' Conversational Skills as Predictors of their Performance in Oral Communication

Conversational Skills	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	74.93	1.86		40.23	.000
Attentiveness	1.80	1.47	.351	1.223	.235
Composure	1.41	1.69	.278	.831	.415
Coordination	-3.23	1.72	-.546	-1.88	.074
Expressiveness	3.07	1.00	.659	3.06**	.006
Grammar	.995	1.14	.190	.873	.392
Model Summary					
R = .941	R^2 = .885	Adjusted R^2 = .858		F = 32.37**	p = .000

Note. significant at 0.01 level

The findings find resonance with Mahmud's (2014) assertion that students with good actual communication skills perform better in academics. This can be applied to how oral communication abilities are regarded as important contributors to academic performance. However, this is in contrast with the findings of Shah et al. et al. (2020), where it was found that students' communication skills had statistically no effect on their academic achievement.

Specifically, among the components of conversational skills, it is expressiveness that stands out as having a significant influence on their performance in oral communication, indicating that for every unit increase in their expressiveness, there is a corresponding 3.07 increase in their performance (B = 3.07, t = 3.06, p =.006). This implies that students know how to express themselves well, especially with the use of gestures, facial expressions, and smiling or laughing, and that it is through expressiveness that students can better convey what they want to say. In the same way, students show understanding of what the other person is talking about in the conversation, specifically through their facial expressions.

The same result was yielded by Sathik & Jonathan (2013), in which it was found that facial expressiveness is the most frequently used nonverbal communication mode by the students in the virtual classroom, and facial expressions of the students are significantly correlated to their emotions, which helps to recognize their comprehension of the lecture. The other conversational skills (attentiveness, composure, coordination, and grammar) were not influential enough and not as evident since students still need more time to develop them, unlike expressiveness, which is already innate in humans to express, especially using nonverbal cues, and developed over time through interactions.

Recommendations

From the major findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are hereby endorsed: that,

1. language teachers may design an intervention and/or innovation and continue to find effective techniques and strategies to develop further the students' oral communication skills. They are also encouraged to attend seminar workshops or even enroll in post-graduate studies to enrich their teaching skills and oral communication skills to better facilitate learning in oral communication and attain excellent student outcomes.

2. future researchers may replicate the study in other grade levels to validate the result, considering more participants across disciplines. They may also venture into the implications of the students' conversational skills on their performance in other subject areas.

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