Teaching Speaking Skills through Self-Learning Modules:
A Case of a School in a Hinterland

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Abstract

Teaching speaking skills during pandemic times seemed challenging not only for the learners but also among the teachers. This study explored the experiences of junior high school teachers in a hinterland school who taught speaking skills through the use of Self-Learning Modules (SLM). The case study identified six language educators who were purposefully chosen based on the following criteria: they are licensed language educators; they are currently teaching in the Department of Education, and they have expressed willingness to participate in the study. To understand their experiences, a Qualitative Case Study research design was employed. In-depth interviews were conducted to gather the data. The responses were analyzed through Braun and Victoria Clarke's six-phase approach to coding and theme development. From the responses of the participants, three themes emerged namely: teachers as collaborators of the educational process, teachers experiencing complexities of teaching speaking skills, and teachers' developmental strategies. These themes reflect the complex situation of teaching speaking skills among teachers in a hinterland school. Facilitating learning in speaking skills during the pandemic is a confluence of challenges and job fulfillment. Further empirical investigation may be conducted to verify the findings in other hinterland schools.

Introduction

The public health emergency brought about by COVID-19 calls for the Department of Education (DepEd) to be innovative and resourceful in delivering quality, accessible, relevant and liberating education. In response to this emergency, DepEd developed the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) to ensure that learners are provided with opportunities through different learning delivery. By its legal mandate, DepEd has promulgated issues on flexible learning and materials, specifically, DepEd Order No. (DO) 21, s. 2019, or the Policy Guidelines on the K to 12 Basic Education Program. These policy guidelines aim to set the standards and specifications for providing learning resources in implementing the BE-LCP. In response to this, DepEd has endorsed the use of Self- Learning Modules (SLMs) in education, which has brought changes in the landscape of language learning and has set English learning proficiency even more challenging, as observed. Hence, this awakened significant inquiries in the teaching and learning process, quality of instruction, the layout of knowledge, and the social role of education in times of crisis. SLMs are often

noted as an alternative learning approach that will aid students as they manage the transition to flexible teaching and learning. The current situation transformed the students into researchers by making them learning outside the school boundaries, reinforcing their critical thinking, self-learning, and bringing about a change in their achievement of high educational outcomes (Grow, 1991). For the Former DepEd Secretary Leonor Briones, SLMs caters to the needs and situations of learners.

When the pandemic began, numerous educators who had experienced teaching English through SLMs changed their methodology of conveying guidance and adapted to the need of ensuring students' progress in their speaking skills and abilities.

The abrupt change of the mode of instruction using SLMs has been difficult for the educators because it affects the students' performance. The researcher observed in her school, that the quality of modules can affect the students' learning and acquisition of speaking skills. If the modules clearly contain contextualized communicative directions that the students can follow so that they can apply it in a relatable setting or scenario, then students can probably learn to become fluent and articulate in speaking. However, this can only be achieved by improving the quality of modules that students can easily follow and navigate so that their theoretical learning can be translated to practical use.

Modules must not only teach the rules of grammar, but most of all, it should contain sample communicative discourses that students may use to practice orally. Also, it must have clear directions that students can easily follow for transfer of learning. However, the problem comes when there is less exposure to two-way transactional communication between and among students and teachers. Teaching speaking must involve exchanges of discourse, interactive conversations, and constant feedback to improve the articulation of ideas when expressed orally. This study explored experiences of teachers on facilitating the teaching of speaking using SLMs during pandemic times when movements and face-to-face interactions were restricted.

Framework

This study is grounded on the following theories: Constructivist Theory, Independent Learning Theory or Self-Directed Learning Theory, and Speaking Theory. According to constructivism theory, the greatest way to gain knowledge is through a process of contemplation and active mental construction. (McLeod, 2019). It makes sense of how individuals secure information and retain it. It claims that rather than passively absorbing information, learners learn best when they actively engage in possibilities for progress. As students and teachers work together to create information, learning is inherently a social cycle anchored in a social environment. Furthermore, constructivist theories take into account the extraction of sensory stimuli as well as its evaluation, interpretation, and backward arrangement. This idea also suggests that people gain knowledge and meaning from their interactions. Given that discernment is a result of mental development, this is one way to approach teaching and learning. Students therefore acquire knowledge by relating new information to what they already know. On the other hand, Independent Learning Theory (Knowles, 1975) or Self-directed Learning (SDL) Theory, portrays a cycle wherein people step up, regardless of the aid of others in determining their educational needs, forming learning objectives, recognizing sources, and carrying out suitable learning techniques, and assessing learning results. As indicated by this theory, students become progressively

independent as they mature. "SDL can be considered as advancing without help from anyone else (auto-arrangement), instead of learning through the activities of others (hetero-development)" (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2012). Subagia (2020) has depicted three principal objectives for SDL: to improve students' capacity, cultivate groundbreaking learning, and advance emancipatory knowledge and social activity. Despite the potential use of distance learning during the time of pandemic, quality of instruction, independence, hidden costs, time, family support, misuse of technology, and the attitudes of teachers, students and administrators were some of the seen drawbacks. On the context of online based learning, found out that online-based platform for learning is new to students and they lack the elementary computer skills while others were newcomers in the internet. Supervisors for distance learning also faced a lot of concerns like time constraints, official restrictions, irregular contacts and technology itself. On modular based learning, noted that teachers failed to provide written or oral feedback on the assessment of learning especially in large classes/sections. They further noted that modular instruction is below expectation. Likewise, narrated that modular approach had some challenges especially on getting engage students who lack interest in studying. They further noted that modular approach lacks the adequate supply of facilities at the required quality and quantity. Nevertheless, the literature of studies holds insufficient data on the ways how students cope with these problems encountered in distance learning. Reinforcing Vygotsky's Social Constructivism Theory, Kearsley and Schneiderman's (1998) Self-directed Learning Theory asserts that students' must take the initiative and responsibility for their own learning in order to engage in self-directed learning. The decision of what is worthwhile learning is left up to the individual. Learning that is self-directed can take place inside and outside of official educational institutions. When educators are involved, they should act as facilitators rather than carriers of knowledge. According to Chandler (2016), the conception of some personal control over either one or both of the preparation (objectives) and administration (support) of the growth opportunity is typical for most conceptualizations. Subagia (2020) likewise highlights that a definitive objective of independent learning is not entirely independent learning since it involves a degree. Independent learning does not altogether rely upon the open door yet and the capacity to go with learning choices.

As for Garrison (2017), it ought to be viewed as a cooperative cycle between the educator and the student in an appropriate learning circumstance. According to a fundamental perspective, lessening self-course to an issue of outside control is inadequate. Subagia (2020) asserts that because of our interdependence, knowledge is socially determined. The theory likewise hypothesizes three means to accomplish commitment: an accentuation on a more extensive acknowledgment of the associated, cooperative parts of independent learning, and in order to generate and affirm substantial and beneficial learning results, students are convinced to assume private responsibility and joint control of the mental (self-observing) and logical (self-administration) processes.

The first is Piaget's hypothesis of the mental turn of events, and the other is Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of the mental turn of events. Candy (1991) contends that the connection of these hypotheses to independent learning is self-evident. Concerning Piaget, interest is the way to get information and learn new things in a meaningful manner. Piaget's constructivist hypothesis of improvement is the possibility that further developed types of discernment are built by the person through a course of independent" or "self-directed" movement, as per Knowles (1975). Regarding Vygotsky and the idea of a platform, Candy (1991) emphasized the educator's job in elevating a climate helpful for independent learning. Despite the potential use of distance learning during the epidemic, some downsides were observed, including quality of education, independence, hidden costs, time, family support, availability of resources, and the attitudes of teachers, students, and administrators. Teachers failed to provide written or spoken feedback on learning assessment in modular-based learning, particularly in big classes/sections. Similarly, it was stated that the modular approach had significant difficulties, particularly in engaging students who were disinterested in studying. They also stated that the modular method does not provide an enough supply of amenities in the requisite quality and quantity. Nonetheless, the research literature contains scant evidence on how students cope with the issues experienced with modular learning.

Figure 1
Visual Representation of Prevailing Themes on the Teachers Educational Experiences Using Self-Learning Modules
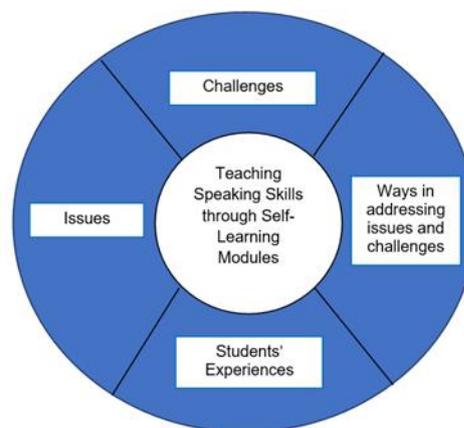
Objective of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to describe the issues and challenges of English teachers in teaching English speaking skills through Self-Learning Modules. There is ample evidence demonstrating the failure of schools for students at-risk. The use of a constructivist approach in service-learning in an alternative mode of learning was examined in an effort to determine whether self-learning modules' participation contributes positively to academic, personal, and civic gain for students, and to examine student and teacher views regarding the overall outcomes of self-learning modules in teaching speaking skills.

Methods

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/ theoretical frameworks that inform the study or research problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry such as the collection of data in a natural setting, sensitivity to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change (Creswell, 2013, p. 44). Qualitative research is a mature field of study with its own literature base, research journals, special interest groups, and regularly scheduled conferences. Indeed, staying current is a daunting task for any single individual (Van Maanen, 2011). The qualitative, interpretive, or naturalistic research paradigm defines the methods and techniques most suitable for collecting and analyzing data. Qualitative inquiry, which focuses on meaning in context, requires a data collection instrument that is sensitive to underlying meaning when gathering and interpreting data. Humans are best suited for this task, especially because interviewing, observing, and analyzing are activities central to qualitative research (Merriam, 2016).

Result and Discussion

This study explored the exceptional case of how teachers facilitate teaching of speaking during pandemic times using only the SLMs. Studying the underpinnings of how senior high school teachers experience teaching of speaking without the actual interaction or face-to-face engagement with their students revealed significant challenges and ways of coping of teachers in a very challenging situation. A qualitative framework was utilized to design the study. Case study methods guided the data collection and analysis. The results presented in this chapter describe the experience of the case. To study about the case of these teachers in the hinterland, the research framework has been established based on this central question: How do the teachers facilitate the development of students' speaking skills using self-learning modules?
Chapter Four presents' findings and discussion that emerged from the data that were collected through multiple sources.

Primary Participants

There were six primary participants in the study. These participants were chosen to take part in the ongoing endeavor given the following criteria: they ought to have extraordinary knowledge, experience, and interest in the phenomenon under study (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011; Patton, 2015), they ought to be tenured English educators who had experienced self-learning modules as an instruction. They were chosen purposefully, and they came from the same school.

Participant 1 is Mari. She has been teaching in DepEd for five years and ten months. She's currently the Reading Coordinator of the said school.

Participant 2 is Cris. She has been teaching in DepEd for four years and seven months. She's currently the LRMDS Coordinator of the said school.

Participant 3 is Liza. She has been teaching in DepEd for twelve years. She's currently the NDEP Coordinator of the said school.

Participant 4 is Shine. She has been teaching in DepEd for sixteen years nine months. She's currently the ACAD Coordinator and SBAC of the said school.

Participant 5 is Jen. She has been teaching in DepEd for nine years nine months. She's currently the School Paper Adviser of the said school.

Participant 6 is Rick. He has been teaching in DepEd for twelve years and four months. He's currently the SHS Coordinator at the same time the School's Prefect of Students' Discipline Coordinator.

My primary participants consisted of six high school English teachers from a hinterland school in Southwest II District. To identify common patterns with great variation between each of the three cases, the case study component of this piece of research utilized maximum variation sampling (Patton, 1990) for selecting interview participants. Patton (1990) defines maximum variation sampling as "purposeful sampling [that] aims at capturing and describing the central themes or principal outcomes that cut across a lot of participants or program variation" (p. 172). Maximum variation sampling (Patton, 1990) yields, "high-quality, detailed descriptions of each case, which are useful for documenting uniqueness and important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity" (p. 172).

Secondary Participants

The secondary participants consisted of seven high school students from a hinterland school in Southwest II District. The secondary participants provided me with additional data. I interviewed seven Junior High School learners for a period lasting one hour. I met with each learner in a classroom as this was convenient and comfortable for them. Each of the seven learners were selected purposively and based on the fact that they were mentioned by one or more of the primary participants as being influential in the utilization of self-learning modules.

Presentation of Findings

The findings are presented based on the central research question: How do the teachers facilitate the development of students' speaking skills using self-learning modules? The, data that were gathered based on the various sources are presented here in themes and categories. From the categories, three themes emerged: 1) Teachers as Collaborators of the Educational Process; (exploring innovative and creative activities, monitoring students' progress), 2) Teachers Experiencing Complexities in Teaching Speaking; (limited availability of resources, inappropriate module activities, and parents' non- observance of getting and retrieval of modules); and 3) Teachers' Developmental Strategies (family involvement, developing new routine and strategies in answering the modules, and utilization of self-learning modules).

Theme One: Teachers as Collaborators in the Educational Process

The narrative of the participants revealed their experiences as hinterland teachers. Facilitating the development of students' speaking skills using the self-learning modules during the pandemic times requires the roles of the teachers as collaborators. From the stories of the participants, teachers as collaborators in the educational process mean exploring innovative and creative activities and monitoring students' progress. These are the categories that defined teachers as collaborators. As collaborators in the educational process, all of them were determined to deliver quality

instruction to their students despite the hurdles of life that they have gone through caused by the pandemic. Category 1. Exploring innovative and creative activities for the students. The narrative of the participants revealed that teachers explored innovative and creative activities. Students in today's society face many stresses from a variety of sources that have a major impact on their psychosocial adjustment and academic performance in school. Category 2. Monitoring Students' Progress The narrative of the participants revealed that teachers constantly monitored the students' progress specifically in learning English speaking skills through self-learning modules. Some students possessed competence or attained some levels of mastery and some were effective in a task or activity since they took it religiously.

The participants even shared that they tried varied teaching strategies that they never experienced before such as the use of MS Teams presentations and even how to use online platforms such as Google Meet though they also emphasized the difficulties of these platforms since most of the students don't have internet connectivity. As much as they could, they took risks for their learning by being productive despite the distance. For example, one of the participants said: "I surveyed to assist students' needs and constant follow up on their progress." (Teacher-Participant 4, IDI, Transcript no.1, page no. 1, line no. 31). In another conversation, the participant added: "Students sent me part of modules that are difficult for them to read and understand, through video calls I help them and let my students read them and speak up their ideas through "Question and Answer" between us. However, those who can't access the internet we do it through phone calls." (Teacher-Participant 2, IDI, Transcript no.2, page no. 2, line no. 79).

Theme Two: Teachers Experiencing Complexities in Teaching Speaking

The narratives of the participants revealed that the teachers had undergone a lot of obstacles during their self-learning module experience. It was indicated that some hurdles and setbacks happened during those dire times. There were negative feelings that emerged; feeling unmotivated and even frustrations. The transcript of their interviews showed the three categories of obstacles during the pandemic times. Category 1: Limited Availability of Resources The COVID-19 pandemic was a painful example of a natural disaster with such a large global health impact. (Salehi et al., 2020). Every aspect of daily life, including how people work, live, shop, interact with one another, plan for the future, and even educate themselves, has been dramatically and quickly impacted (Lee et al., 2020).

Summary of Findings

Figure 2
The Structural Representation of Prevailing Themes on the Teachers' Educational Experiences Using Self-Learning Modules
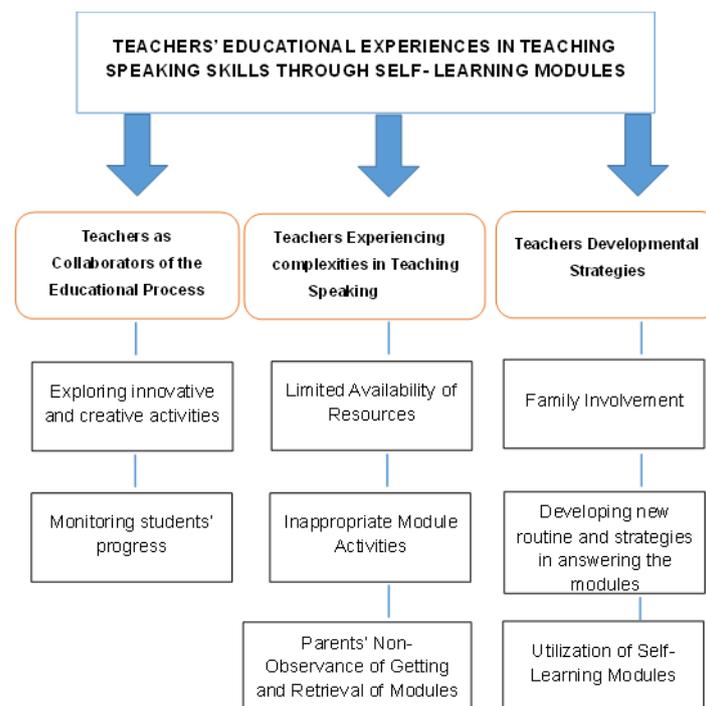
Three (3) themes and eight (8) categories emerged, specifically from the utterances expressed by the teachers about their educational experiences in teaching English speaking skills using self-learning modules. These are as follows, in no particular order: Theme 1 Teachers as Collaborators of the Educational Process Categories: 1.1. Exploring innovative and creative activities and 1.2. Monitoring students' progress Theme 2 Teachers Experiencing complexities in Teaching Speaking 2.1 Limited Availability of Resources 2.2. Inappropriate Module Activities 2.3. Parents' Non-Observance of Getting and Retrieval of Modules Theme 3 Teachers Developmental Strategies 3.1. Family Involvement 3.2. Developing new routine and strategies in answering the modules 3.3. Utilization of Self-Learning Modules

The summary of findings presented in this section provides answers to the central research question which were done through in-depth interviews with six language educators, and focus group discussions participated in by the seven students. From the analysis of the study, three main themes emerged to characterize the teaching and learning process of English teachers and students from the hinterland during the pandemic. English Language teachers' theoretical and practical bounds are stretched by the need to manage the transition to flexible teaching and learning. High-quality education through self-learning modules is based on the relationship between teachers and students and the support of parents and other stakeholders.

1. Teachers as collaborators of the educational process unveils their exploration of innovative and creative activities and monitoring of their students.

2. In discussing teachers experiencing complexities in teaching speaking skills, the teacher-participants acknowledged the limited availability of resources, inappropriate module activities, and parents' non-observance of getting and retrieving the modules.

3. The teachers' developmental strategies in teaching speaking through self-learning modules include the involvement of family, developing new routines and strategies in answering the SLMs, and utilization of self-learning modules.

Implications and Conclusions

In this study, children participate in creative and sensory activities tailored fit to their interests. However, facilitating learning during the pandemic is extremely difficult as it requires eliciting students' participation in various activities that should be found in SLMs with high cognizance of the contextualized communicative directions, judicious interactive conversations, and constant feedback to ensure articulation of ideas when expressed by the students orally. Furthermore, Piaget's theory of Constructivism, as cited by Martin (2021) saw students as actively constructing their understanding of the world for themselves and as active seekers of solutions to problems despite the hurdles they encountered during those times. Students learn best when they participate in growth opportunities instead of latently getting data. In this study, English language teachers served as collaborators in the educational process in which students take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes. Based on the given findings, the educational experiences of the teachers in the teaching of English-speaking skills using self-learning modules are challenging. Educators face challenges while engaging in the educational process. As a result, educators become aware of and sensitive to the needs, circumstances, and worldviews of learners from the hinterland. Despite the shortcomings mentioned, educators respond imaginatively to the pedagogical challenges they faced by employing various instructional approaches to provide the students in their classes with quality education. This finding supports the theoretical implications advanced by Piaget and Knowles as regards Constructivism and Independent Learning Theory. Facilitating learning in the new normal necessitates English educators to streamline the use of self-learning modules through creative scaffolding, collaborating, as well as adjusting in their teaching most especially their implementation of contextualized communicative discourses. English educators become more cognizant and deeply aware of the student's needs and interests.

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