

Spoken Discourse Competence of Grade 5 ESL Learners: Inputs to Teaching Speaking

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Abstract. Proficiency in speaking English significantly enhances professional and academic growth. Through speaking, individuals enrich their vocabulary, practice correct syntax, and develop spoken discourse competence. Consequently, many countries have prioritized English language learning to help students improve their spoken discourse skills. This descriptive study aimed to determine the spoken discourse competence of Grade 5 ESL learners and identify the factors students consider crucial in developing this competence. Additionally, the study sought to provide insights for improving the teaching of speaking skills. The findings reveal that Grade 5 ESL learners exhibit characteristics of developing English speakers, indicating that while they possess competency in spoken discourse, there is still room for improvement. Focus Group Discussions highlighted several factors instrumental in developing spoken discourse competence, including early exposure to the target language, interaction with family, school, and community, communicative situations, confidence in using English, media exposure, and English language instruction. The study recommends strengthening school programs that promote interaction and implementing teacher training programs to integrate media use in interactive lessons, thereby enhancing learners' communicative competence.

Keywords: English as a Second Language; Spoken discourse competence; Teaching of speaking.

1.0 Introduction

Speaking is a key pivotal skill that allows individuals to express themselves and develop their confidence (Namaziandost & Nasri, 2019). Through speaking, individuals acquire or learn vocabulary words and observe and practice correct syntax, leading to their competency in spoken discourse (Malec et al., 2017). In terms of establishing effective communication, English has been recognized as a common language that allows people from different parts of the world to properly communicate without the need for one to know how to speak the native language of the other. This further reinforces the need to develop fluency in the English language for purposes of surviving in the urban context and the global workplace (Mondez, 2013). Developing spoken discourse is a necessary skill that leads to developing communicative competence.

Communicative competence is recognized to have multiple interrelated components that reflect an individual's knowledge and expertise of different linguistic elements such as vocabulary words, syntax, and grammar, as well as a person's ability to use a language in meaningful conversations based on the situation that he/she is in (Celce-Murcia, 2007). Celce-Murica (2007) further explains that it is based on the individual's knowledge and expertise of linguistic elements such as vocabulary, syntax, and grammar (linguistic competence), his ability to appropriately use a language to engage in meaningful communication as dictated by the situation and context (sociolinguistic competence), the ability to use various means and strategies to communicate effectively with other

people (strategic competence), his ability to comprehend and produce significant speech acts and speech act sets (actional competence), and the ability to produce and interpret language beyond the sentence level (discourse competence). This indicates that an individual's competence in spoken discourse results from the continuous interaction of the different competencies.

In the context of spoken discourse, Eghtesadi (2017) reinforces the idea presented by Littlewood (2011), stating that spoken discourse competence enables a person to engage in continuous communication through exchange of ideas with other people, active participation in interactions, and knowing the mechanics of handling conversations. Cummins (1999) discussed that spoken discourse may be in the form of regular everyday interaction with family members and friends (BICS) or specialized and academic interaction with teachers or other professionals (CALP). Thus, how individuals interact through spoken discourse depends on the group of people they are interacting with or the communicative situation they are in (Cruz & Mahboob, 2018).

The development of spoken discourse competence is influenced by multiple factors, various forms of meaningful input (Krashen, 1982) contribute to learning a target language and applying it in spoken discourse. Krashen's principle of comprehensible input maintains that learning a target language occurs when learners are exposed to understandable/comprehensible input. This asserts that the students' understandable input in the target language will affect their ability to use the said language when engaging in discourse (Patrick, 2019). Through their exposure to different sources of meaningful input, students are given opportunities to learn more about the target language (Tuan, 2017). One form of meaningful input is reading. Through reading, learners enrich their vocabulary, which can help facilitate their speaking performance and use of structure in the target language (Akbar, 2014). In a similar vein of thought, Luan and Sappathy (2011) revealed that input and interaction help students learn and retain more vocabulary.

Al-Zoubi (2018) and De Vera and De Vera (2018) further show that various means of exposure to the English language contribute to the development of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). These forms of exposure include direct interaction with Native speakers and listening to English programs and songs thus confirming that exposure to various forms of media can be beneficial as this helps improve the learners' language development in English. Additionally, Abilasha and Ilankumaran (2018), Albahiri and Alhaj (2020), çakır, (2006), Kaewchawee (2013), Namanya (2017), and Villanueva (2019) confirm that media exposure and its integration in teaching English has an effect in the development of the discourse competence of an individual.

Language learning is also considered a factor in developing spoken discourse competence. It should be noted that language learning and development and communicative competence are interconnected (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Through language learning, individuals can develop mastery and proficiency in a target language by learning vocabulary words, grammar, correct structure, etc., which they then apply when communicating using the target language (Tuan, 2017). De Vera and De Vera (2018) reinforce this by stating that formal instruction influences the development of an individual's communicative competence. Salvador (2020) supports this by explaining that the communicative competence of an individual is influenced by his/her knowledge of grammar rules and patterns.

Another source of input is learners' interaction with other people, which allows them to practice expressing their views, ideas, and opinions using the target language, leading to the development and further improvement of their oral fluency and accuracy when speaking (Namaziandost, 2019). This emphasizes the importance of having authentic, meaningful, and interactive communication for the learners inside the classroom (Jaroszek, 2008). Exposure to a natural language environment is necessary as this allows individuals to become familiar with the basics and nuances of a target language (Savignon, 2017). When language learners are immersed in natural language environments, they acquire how sounds are produced, how certain words are pronounced, and how various expressions are delivered (Kirkpatrick, 2012). Thus, providing relevant speaking activities to the learners would help them use what they have learned when communicating with other people in various social contexts, contributing to developing their discourse competence (Celce-Murcia, 2007; Nguyễn, 2020; Pangket, 2019).

Given the discussions presented, this study highlights the notion that an individual's discourse competence is influenced by multiple factors (Celce-Murcia, 2007). Liu (2015) asserts the idea earlier presented by (Krashen,

1982), which underscores that such factors are further influenced by meaningful input from various sources. This study aims to determine the spoken discourse competence of grade 5 ESL students in using English and determine the factors that influence the development of their spoken discourse competence in English.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This descriptive qualitative study focused on determining the competence of Grade 5 students in using English for spoken discourse. This study also aims to determine the various factors the students consider instrumental in developing their competence. The participants involved are Grade 5 students from Pateros Catholic School.

2.2 Research Participants

The participants involved in this study were selected from sections at the 5th-grade level of Pateros Catholic School. The sections that were part of the class observations were selected through random selection, while purposive selection was used to identify the eight students to be interviewed. The selection of the interviewees is based on how the students participated during the class discussions. It is important to note that the study participants were selected based on the following criteria: a) they must be Grade 5 students currently enrolled in the mentioned school during the study, b) they can use English when engaging in spoken discourse, c) the participants must have access to online learning.

2.3 Research Instrument

The data gathering involved two steps: class observations to determine the spoken discourse competence of the learners involved in the study and Focus Group Discussions to help identify the factors that the participants deemed instrumental in developing their spoken discourse competence. For the class observations, this study adopted the speaking rubric from WIDA, also known as “World-class Instructional Design and Assessment” (wida.wisc.edu), designed to determine the level of competence in terms of speaking. WIDA is an international organization that aims to help advance academic language development and academic achievement for children by providing language development resources for multilingual learners.

The rubric is divided into three major areas: the Word/Phrase level, which reflects the students’ vocabulary knowledge and usage, Sentence level, which is focused on the ability of the students to form grammatical sentences and observe correct language forms. The last area is the Discourse level, which deals with the ability to use the target language to effectively and appropriately express ideas based on the communicative situation the student is in. Each major area is further divided into varying levels, each containing standards per level that correspond to the ability of a learner to engage in spoken discourse. It should be noted the rubrics used by WIDA is used as it is designed for multiple grade levels (Grades 1-12).

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The data gathering process is twofold: the first part involved class observations of selected Grade 5 sections, where the participants’ ability to use English in class participation and interaction was monitored and evaluated using a standardized speaking rubric adapted from WIDA, also known as “World-class Instructional Design and Assessment” (<https://wida.wisc.edu>), to help determine the spoken discourse competence of the learners. WIDA is an international organization that aims to help advance academic language development and academic achievement for children by providing language development resources for multilingual learners.

During class observations, notes on meaningful observations were recorded and evaluated based on the rubrics. Participants were observed in terms of their manner of speaking in English, their ability to construct sentences when responding, delivery, the vocabulary and expressions they use, the presence of fillers in their delivery, possible nuances, and whether they shift to using their mother tongue when interacting with their classmates.

The second part made use of Focus Group Discussions from 8 selected learners to help identify the factors that the participants deem instrumental in the development of their spoken discourse competence in English by sharing their experiences.

3.0 Ethical Considerations

As this study involves minors participating in the interviews during these times of the pandemic, the primary concern is to ensure that their safety, wellness, and welfare are considered. To ensure the welfare of the research participants, interviews were conducted using an online platform; this allows for limited physical interaction between the researcher and the participants as the interviewees can participate in the interview while they are at home. Regarding the platform to be used when conducting the interviews, online learning platforms that conform to what the participants use for their online classes were used for the convenience of the participants.

Furthermore, during the conduct of the interview, the questions asked mainly focused on various factors that influenced the students' spoken discourse competence; this includes the various media exposure, interaction with members of the family and the class, as well as the various learning activities that they experienced during their English classes.

Since the target research participants are minors, the approval of the parents or guardians was secured together with the approval of the participants before the interviews were conducted. As part of obtaining consent, parents, guardians, and participants were informed of the nature and objectives of the research to provide them with an idea regarding what is expected of the participants should they agree to participate in the study.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 How ESL Learners Express Themselves in Spoken English

Using the standardized evaluation tool for spoken discourse, the students' competence level in terms of vocabulary usage, language forms, and spoken discourse was determined based on how well they expressed themselves in English in the given aspects. During the class observations, the following observations were made regarding the following indicators:

Table 1. Key observations from class discussions

Indicators	Characteristics Observed
Word/ Phrase level (Vocabulary Usage)	- Students can use words and expressions which are appropriate to their levels. - Students show recognition of words by their subjects. - Shows familiarity and recognition of academic terms/concepts. - Students can use academic concepts/expressions learned when reciting in class discussions.
Sentence level (Language Forms)	- Students know proper sentence patterns. - They can construct grammatical sentences to respond to questions asked by the teacher. - Although the students can respond in complete sentences, the content of the responses tends to be patterned on the concepts that have been discussed.
Discourse level (Linguistic Complexity)	- Uses generic expressions when greeting the teacher in class. - Students are familiar with the correct pronunciation of words and expressions. - Students can apply proper pacing and pausing when asked to read and deliver poetry. - Students show listening comprehension and exhibit analytical thinking as they can understand, interpret, and accurately respond to the questions asked by the teacher. - They can respond in complete sentences yet tend to respond in fragments, phrases, and words. - Capable of asking questions in English. - Students can use basic expressions such as asking permission to go to the restroom. - Students' responses are structured based on the concepts discussed in class, although they can apply the structure to answer other questions in similar contexts.

Based on the standards in the rubrics, it can be stated that Grade 5 student participants who were part of the study show the characteristics of individuals whose spoken discourse competence is that of Level 3 (Developing). Level 3 speakers are characterized as having the ability to use English to make generally comprehensible responses yet still have room for further development. The following standards further determine this: ability to use specific content words, use of appropriate words/expressions, correct usage of vocabulary words based on what is needed, ability to apply sentence patterns and grammatical structures, developing control in the use of oral

language to convey meaning, development of connected language in the expression of ideas, evidence of a developing sense of perspective and register.

Observations reveal that the participants' vocabulary knowledge is appropriate to their grade level, as evidenced by their ability to use appropriate words and expressions. In terms of language forms and construction, while the learners are capable of constructing complete sentences to respond to questions, it has also been observed that the responses of the students to the questions tend to be patterned to the concepts that have been discussed in class, which suggests that the learners can acquire patterns that are taught to them and apply them in sentence construction, strengthening the notion regarding the role of instruction (De Vera & De Vera, 2018) in the development of spoken discourse competence.

Moreover, regarding their ability to use English in spoken discourse, the learners can use routine expressions, which reflect the role of exposure to meaningful input (Krashen, 1982; Tuan, 2017) in their ability to apply learned expressions when interacting inside the classroom. However, it should also be noted that some learners called to recite tend to answer in single words, phrases, or fragments, which might be indicative of the influence of the interaction they have with the community (Cruz & Mahboob, 2018), which may imply that even though the participants show knowledge of the correct sentence patterns and structures and can respond in complete sentences, they would prefer to respond or communicate in a more practical way to be easily understood.

3.2 Factors ESL Learners Find Contribute to their Ability to Speak English

Analysis of the participants' responses through the Focus Group Discussions determined that early exposure to the target language and interaction influence the learners' spoken discourse competence.

KG: Since I was very young, my parents have spoken to me in English as a form of practice.

HC: My parents always taught me to speak English when I was young...

MA: I learned it at a very young age because I was influenced by other people speaking in English.

JC: I am more comfortable using English because it is the first language I have learned.

The participants' responses also hint at their ability to use English and their Mother tongue when conversing with others.

KG: I speak Tagalog at home. In the community, I adjust myself to whatever [language] the person I'm talking to is speaking so we understand each other better.

JA: When talking with friends, sometimes Tagalog, sometimes English

MA: I am more comfortable speaking English but use Tagalog when talking to my friends.

HC: I usually use English more because I have more English-speaking classmates than Tagalog.

Another factor that affects the participants' ability to speak English is their confidence in using English.

KG: I feel confident whenever I am talking to a huge crowd that expects me to speak English to them

MC: I feel confident when reciting or speaking on stage and even when speaking with friends.

Incidentally, the communicative situations also affect their confidence in communicating in English.

MA: When no one is looking at me, I speak English fluently, but when someone is with me, my mind goes blank, and I sometimes forget how to speak English.

MC: Some of my friends, whenever I talk in English, they'd be like, "Wow, foreigner ka? (are you a foreigner?)" They are gonna be like that, so I am hesitant to speak English because of that... I speak English so that they would try to adjust.

KG: Like MC's experience... sometimes kahit sanay po akong mag-English (even though I know how to speak English), it depends on the person I am talking to kase (because) those people they are usually like, "wow, why are you speaking English, nasa Pilipinas tayo (we are in the Philippines)?"

MA: Same with MC. Sometimes, it feels like a compliment; sometimes, it feels like an insult.

Apart from early exposure to the target language, learners' motivation to learn English is also a factor they deemed instrumental in developing their ability to speak English. This motivation may result from a need to have a means to communicate.

AL: I prefer to speak English more because I can express my expressions and feelings more.

KG: I feel confident whenever I am talking to a huge crowd that expects me to speak English to them

This motivation may result from the need for self-improvement in communication skills.

JA: I believe speaking English can make me become a better person.

KG: I realized that learning English could help me communicate better with people.

Media is also recognized as a factor that helps learners learn English.

JA: I learned English because of Cartoons or movies. There was no reason for me to learn English; I just wanted to.

AL: I learned to speak English very young by watching cartoons and speaking to relatives and friends.

SD: I like English movies because I find them understandable.

SE: I did not improve it. I guess I just learned it from something... I guess it is just from the movies I watch, the animes I watch, the videos I watch... I guess I learned something from that.

The role of instruction is also recognized; this may be in formal classroom instruction or instruction from parents or other community members.

HC: My parents always taught me to speak English when I was young, and my mother enrolled me in Kumon at three years old.

MA: I was inspired by my teachers because English is the language of the world.

MA: Most of the subjects are based on English; sometimes, when I mispronounce words, the teachers help me pronounce them correctly.

The answers of the participants who have shared that they have been exposed to communicative situations that entail them to interact or communicate with other people using English confirm that the interaction learners have with people who speak English is essential as the learners get to use English in practical conversations while also learning from the other person they are communicating with (Eisenring, 2017).

The responses of the participants further reflect their early exposure to both English and MT since the participants can use both languages when interacting with members of the family at home; the same can be said when it comes to interacting with other members of the community, such as friends, neighbors, other relatives, teachers, and classmates. Throughout the sharing and discussions, it was established that the environment or community affects how they learn and communicate in English, further reinforcing the premise that an individual's discourse competence is influenced by multiple factors (Celce-Murcia, 2007). Since the students are exposed to environments that use English and MT to communicate, they can also conform to these structures when communicating with others (Malec, 2017). Moreover, the answers of the participants also align with Al-Zoubi's (2018) statement, which emphasises the benefits of media exposure to the learner's language development as well as the studies of Albahiri and Alhaj (2020), and çakır (2006), which focus on the effect of media exposure on the development of an individual's discourse competence.

Another factor contributing to the development of spoken discourse competence in English of the participants is the motivation of the learner to learn the target language and apply it in spoken discourse (Al Hosni, 2014), as reflected by the participants' answers. Motivation to learn a target language and use it in communication may be due to the learner's need for a means to effectively express himself/herself or for purposes of self-improvement in terms of communication skills reflecting their attitude towards the target language further supporting the premise that motivation is necessary to become familiar with the concepts, patterns, vocabulary words and expressions needed, and opportunity to apply these concepts when interacting to have fluency and accuracy in the language used (Namaziandost, 2019).

Lastly, the participants' answers also highlight the role of language instruction. Through language instruction, the students are given the chance to actively learn vocabulary words, expressions, and patterns that they can use when they communicate in English (Salvador, 2020; Tuan, 2017).

4.0 Conclusion

This research was conducted to determine the spoken discourse competence of Grade 5 ESL learners and recognize the various factors deemed instrumental in the development of their competence in spoken discourse. It follows the idea presented by Celce-Murcia (2007), which states that multiple factors influence the ability of individuals to use English for spoken discourse.

Based on the study's results, class observations reveal that the students can effectively use English for spoken discourse when interacting inside the classroom, particularly during class discussions. Based on the standards in the evaluation tool taken from the WIDA consortium, the participants exhibit characteristics of Level 3 or developing speakers. Developing English speakers shows the ability to make generally comprehensible responses, though they still have room for further improvement.

Regarding the factors the participants consider contributory in their ability to speak English, focus group discussions with selected Grade 5 students affirm the statement of Celce-Murcia (2007), which states that multiple factors influence the ability of individuals to use English for spoken discourse. Early exposure to the target language and interaction with different community members they are a part of (Eisenring, 2017) contribute to how the students learn or acquire the target language and apply it through basic interaction. Also, different communicative situations help speakers adapt and conform to what is needed for meaningful interaction (Malec, 2017). It is also important to recognize the individual's motivation to learn the target language (Al Hosni, 2014) and his confidence in using English in spoken discourse.

Exposure to media (Albahiri & Alhaj, 2020; Al-Zoubi, 2018; çakır, 2006), whether at home or in other settings, also helps with learning and acquiring a target language. Lastly, language instruction, as well as interaction with the teacher inside the classroom (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Tuan, 2017; Salvador, 2020), further reinforce the skills of the students in a way that they can learn vocabulary words, expressions, and patterns, which they use when communicating in English.

The study revealed that the communicative situation, where they interact with other people, contributes to developing their spoken discourse competence. With this, it is recommended that school administrators implement policies and promote practices that would help reinforce the continuity of using English not only inside the classroom but also outside to help strengthen their spoken discourse competence as they are given more opportunities to learn English through meaningful input and apply them in different communicative situations that require the use of English in authentic interactions.

In line with the findings that indicate the role of the teachers inside the classroom, it is recommended that teacher training programs that would help reinforce the skills needed to develop spoken discourse competence in English since the interactions that the students have with the teachers and other school personnel also contribute to their ability to use English in spoken discourse.

As it was reflected that interaction and exposure to other forms of input (media and instruction) help in the development of spoken discourse, these findings may be used as a basis for improvement regarding designing activities and learning strategies that would allow for full and effective utilization of both MT and English to ensure that competency in both languages is developed well. Thus, this study recommends the further integration of media into different learning activities and teaching strategies designed by English language teachers to help motivate the participants to become more active in class discussions and help promote active interaction amongst the members of the class, further reinforcing exposure to situations and meaningful input in the target language allowing them to become more active communicators in the target language.

While it was determined that the participants know, understand, and have been exposed to their MT, the interview results provide little evidence of the role of MT in their ability to speak English. In line with this, it is recommended

that research be conducted focused on the perspectives of learners regarding the role of MT use in their ability to communicate in English.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

All parts of the research paper, from searching related literature to writing the initial parts, data gathering, analysis, interpretation, discussion of results, etc., are done by the researcher himself, with support and guidance from his thesis adviser and recommendations from his research panelists.

6.0 Funding

As this research is part of the requirements for the completion of the researcher's Master's Degree program, no external party or sponsors have been involved in the conduct of this study. The researcher himself shouldered all expenses incurred during the process of writing the paper.

7.0 Conflict of Interests

The author reports that there are no competing interests to declare in this research.

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