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Research Article

Mixed-Methods Analysis of Oral Proficiency of Tertiary ESL Students: Basis for Pedagogical Intervention

Maribeth A. Bante*

Department of English, College of Arts of Letters, Bulacan State University, City of Malolos, Bulacan 3000, Philippines

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*Corresponding author:

E-mail:

maribeth.bante@bulsu.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

State universities and colleges in the Philippines adopted English as the primary medium of instruction, with speaking playing a significant role as part of the four basic skills when learning a language. Therefore, the study explored the perceived oral proficiency of tertiary students in a state university, with ESL teachers suggesting possible interventions to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning oral English skills. A sequential explanatory mixed methods design was used, where simple random sampled respondents among tertiary students answered online survey questionnaires, while conveniently sampled ESL teachers answered the supplementary open-ended questions based on the initial quantitative results. Through descriptive analysis, students were found to have generally decent oral proficiency skills, with strong to neutral agreement on the influence of environmental and psychological factors. The teachers then interpreted the quantitative results, saying that for oral proficiency skills, students had satisfactory skills, a lack of self-assurance in those skills, and a need for targeted support for those skills, while for environmental and psychological factors, students had confused self-concepts, primarily extrinsic motivation for learning, and an appreciation for their learning environment. ESL teachers suggested speech practice and integration, interactive activities, and real-world experiences as pedagogical interventions for oral proficiency and motivating experiences, acceptance of mistakes, and safe learning environments for the factors of oral proficiency. Besides taking into consideration the possible pedagogical interventions, the researcher recommended expanding research on the structures and variables that affect oral proficiency skills.

Keywords: *English as a second language, Mixed methods, Oral proficiency, Pedagogical interventions, Tertiary students*

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Background

English as a language circulates most extensively and dominates a number of important fields, including international commerce, education, the Internet, communication, and even media. The importance of English in the Philippines was emphasized through the government's Philippine Bilingual Policy in 1974 and 1987, which established English and Filipino as the languages of education and literacy (Dumanig et al., 2012). Later, Section 2 of Executive Order No. 210, s. 2003 further necessitated the language as it aimed to strengthen the use of the English language as a medium of instruction in the educational system. All-State Colleges and Universities [SUCs] are therefore encouraged to adopt the use of the English language as the primary medium of instruction at the tertiary level. The importance of the language as a result of its gradual institutionalization in the Philippines grants English the classification as a secondary language (Dela Cruz, 2022), thus categorizing Filipino learners as English as a second language (ESL) learners rather than English as a foreign language (EFL).

Speaking plays a more significant role among the four basic skills because the essence of learning a language is to communicate (Kartini et al., 2021). As it stands, oral proficiency does not only mean knowledge of how to speak English, but also how to speak English well. Speaking is deemed to be difficult because of its spontaneous nature, requiring proper mastery of grammar and adequate vocabulary for a decent sentence (Rao, 2019). Furthermore, it requires great effort to learn and practice the language from teachers to master several aspects of speaking, namely, pronunciation, speaking performance, listening skills, and vocabulary. In terms of pronunciation, students have difficulties in learning this aspect of oral proficiency mainly because of the phonological and morphological differences of sounds between the mother tongue and the target language, specifically English, which proves a great challenge for English instructors (Shak et al., 2016). As for English speaking performance, there are ESL students who already struggle to perform in controlled situations due to performance conditions, motivation, self-confidence, and more, which raises concerns about their

proficiency when they graduate (Nguyen & Tran, 2015). There are also listening skills that pair with speaking, which require concentration, linguistic and background knowledge, competence, and meaning construction (Yildiz & Albay, 2015). Lastly, the lack of opportunity to use words outside of the classroom makes learned vocabulary difficult to remember (Khan et al., 2018).

The oral proficiency of ESL students can be affected by environmental factors. The learning environment plays a role in the development, as the degree of exposure to the English language, according to Magno et al. (2011), has an effect on students' acquisition of said tongue. Other than the learning environment, talking about topics of interest plays a role in proficiency. One speaks better when talking about a subject that they are familiar with or interested in (Thi & Hoang, 2020). Interesting topics can also increase the exposure of students to the language being taught. Lastly, the use of native languages alongside the second language, which is English in this case, is also an environmental factor in oral proficiency. Using the first language to teach students English can influence the thinking process of English speakers. An example is thinking in Filipino before speaking out thoughts in English.

Either directly or indirectly as a result of the aforementioned environmental factors, ESL students may develop a sense of shame and anxiety or motivation and confidence when speaking English. These four emotions are also factors in determining students' oral proficiency. Shame and anxiety come from stress caused by situations such as talking face-to-face with instructors or speaking without any preparations beforehand (Pangket, 2019), while motivation and self-confidence increase the interest in learning more about the language and the effectiveness of English as a way to express ideas to other English speakers (Yousefabadi et al., 2022).

It is important for students to be proficient in English, not only because it is their medium of instruction, but because English has become a core element in communication in the digital era (Wahyuningsih & Dewi, 2019). Amoah & Yeboah (2021) explained that oral proficiency is the ultimate tool for communication that

helps learners to express themselves to other people. However, speaking in the target language is difficult because of the necessary vocabulary, semantic knowledge, and grammatical rules that ESL learners must master in addition to the environmental and psychological factors that impact their learning. Thus, ESL teachers should engage in different teaching methods and strategies to promote the development of the oral proficiency of students, which will help them with speaking skills (Greenfader et al., 2015). Oral proficiency can be attained by students through activities and tasks that teachers facilitate (Shantha & Mekala, 2018), deepening the need for teachers to acquire different pedagogical techniques to aid students in developing oral proficiency capable of actively achieving curriculum implementation and goals (Mousena & Sidiropoulou, 2016).

Review of Related Literature

Factors Affecting Oral Proficiency

Oral proficiency is described as the ability of language learners to communicate with one or more interlocutors (Kasper & Ross, 2013). It is mentioned to be an important indicator of communicative competence among ESL speakers. Its development is affected by a speaker's linguistic and pragmatic knowledge, as well as cognitive and metacognitive processes that correlate to second-language oral proficiency (Lin, 2022).

Among the linguistic and pragmatic knowledge required, pronunciation is considered to be one of the most difficult skills to acquire and one of the basic requirements of linguistic competence, making pronunciation an important feature of language teaching (Gilakjani, 2016). Despite this, not many teachers prioritize the necessity of intelligible pronunciation, mostly seeing the skill as a waste of time because, as long as the speakers are understood, nothing more should be taught. This may be true for interactions with speakers of English as a native language (ENL), as they can use context clues to identify intended meaning, but ESL learners who depend on the distinction of words and their individual meaning may find the lack of intelligible pronunciation a cause for

communication breakdown (Abu Bakar & Abdullah, 2015).

Aside from pronunciation, the speaking performance of students in classroom environments can be used to assess and practice the oral proficiency of students. The ability of language learners is measured by the efficiency of their speaking performance, leading to the demand for effective methods to develop this aspect of oral proficiency (Abdullah et al., 2019). Nevertheless, students are hindered by inhibition towards mistakes and criticism, a lack of interest in assigned topics, minimized participation of many students, and the dominant use of the mother tongue during English classes (Qasemi, 2020). ESL students, therefore, can have the ability to excel in reading, writing, and listening tasks and assessments inside the classroom while struggling with their speaking performance because of the mentioned factors, among other environmental and psychological factors.

To pair with speaking, listening skills are considered to be another set of skills that are important for ESL students' oral proficiency. Listening is regarded as a prior condition for oral output, meaning it is a crucial tool for ESL learners to be able to input knowledge and understanding (Yavuz & Celik, 2017). Active and proper participation with listening provides ESL learners with knowledge connected between interlocutors and comprehensive inference of the intention of the other party during communication, further emphasizing its role as the medium for speakers to obtain a large amount of knowledge and education (Yildirim & Yildirim, 2016). Overall, listening skills are necessary to obtain relevant information that is processed and communicated effectively and substantially through speaking.

Lastly, for important aspects of oral proficiency, vocabulary provides ESL students with knowledge about the structures and functions of words, which are argued to be essential for successful and comprehensible communication (Alqahtani, 2015). The lack of contextual knowledge about the diverse participants of English interactions can be compensated for through a thorough understanding of the wide array of possible word choices of speakers.

Without sufficient knowledge of words that have numerous meanings in various contexts, ESL students are especially unable to discern and properly use new words, meanings, pronunciation, and other related skills, impeding their capability for language learning (Afzal, 2019). Vocabulary is an important aspect of oral proficiency as a high knowledge of different lexis can provide ESL students with different ways to effectively communicate themselves in local and foreign contexts.

Keeping in mind the aforementioned aspects that make up oral proficiency, it is vital to determine the environmental and psychological factors that affect the acquisition of relevant skills. The first topic that will be discussed is the learning environment. The learning environment of language instruction refers to the psychosocial environment to which students are exposed during language learning (Li, 2022). These environments can take form based on a variety of conditions and locations, such as traditional classrooms, online learning, laboratory classrooms, and many more. Because of its direct proximity, it can impact the oral proficiency of ESL students depending on the amount of exposure or language input provided by the learning environment (Huo, 2019). In addition to written language input through textbooks and course materials, sound teaching and learning to practice English orally is important for the improvement of oral proficiency and speech production (Cheng, 2019). Therefore, the learning environment has a role in the development of the oral proficiency of ESL students.

The next factor to be assessed is the topic of interest. Topics are considered to be the subjects of discourse that refer to the background knowledge of the speaker, which has a substantial effect on the speaking performance (Ngyen & Le-Thi, 2018). As it is based on the knowledge of the speakers, topics of interest that ESL students are knowledgeable about may spark confidence and motivation that can develop oral proficiency. Otherwise, the lack of information about a subject matter becomes one of the speaking problems that ESL students encounter due to their disinterest in a topic in as they lack sufficient information to participate in a conversation (Doufene et al., 2018). It

is recommended that teachers provide ESL students with the appropriate topics that learners are very well versed in, alongside the freedom of topic choice to encourage comfortable and confident speaking performances among learners (Leong & Ahmadi, 2016).

Emphasizing the usage of English as a second language, the use of the mother tongue is another environmental factor that can impact the oral proficiency of ESL students. The mother tongue is the first language that ESL speakers are exposed to through their lingual environment, making it the first language one can develop in childhood (Guedjali & Mahimoud, 2021). Many researchers are conflicted about its importance among ESL and EFL learners because of the positives and negatives regarding the use of the mother tongue during English language instruction. The use of a language that is associated with familiarity can help ESL students be more comfortable and motivated to practice English, but too much use of the mother tongue may result in inaccurate pronunciations and grammatical errors as the first language heavily influences the word and sentence structures of ESL students (Rahmatullah, 2020). Teachers are generally advised to balance mother tongue use and English oral practice to create a friendly environment that aids ESL learners in acquiring their second language.

Aside from the environmental factors, psychological factors within ESL students should be given attention as they can greatly impact their oral proficiency. Shame and anxiety are both psychological aspects that are widely examined because of their almost universal status as hindrances in second language learning. Shame is referred to as the painful emotion that makes learners feel worthless or small when they encounter transgression or failure, inclining the learners to avoid becoming the negative center of attention again (Teimouri, 2016). In relation to second language learning, they can experience inferiority, self-criticism, and many other emotions that affect their motivational behaviors on learning English and, therefore, developing their oral proficiency. As for anxiety, it is the attack of unpleasant sensations that leads students to have negative assumptions or nervousness, which makes them demotivated

to practice their speaking skills in the classroom (Choompunuch et al., 2021). This feeling hinders language learning, which can contribute to more negative feelings and emotions, such as stress and shyness, that ESL students may begin to relate to language learning. Shame and anxiety are both related phenomena that, if not monitored and resolved, can result in detrimental effects on the development of ESL students' oral proficiency.

Lastly, as part of the psychological factors, orientation, motivation, and confidence are other mental and emotional aspects that teachers utilize to improve the oral proficiency of students. Orientation is the reason behind a student's drive for learning a language, which can determine the level of effort that ESL learners will expend to reach full proficiency (Gilmore, 2016). Depending on the degree of orientation, motivation can largely affect the amount of work that ESL students will put into: 1) becoming the person they would ideally like to be, gathering the traits one would need to accomplish a goal, and experiencing the learning environment, or 2) integrating oneself to identify with the cultural group that falls under the second language learned (de Smet, 2016). Finally, confidence is an individual's self-awareness and recognition of one's abilities that lies in the belief and trust that one can perform certain tasks or actions (Waluyo & Rofiah, 2021). Inner confidence, ideas that reflect delight and satisfaction with themselves, and outer confidence, emphasis on controlling their feelings, are instrumental in building the foundation for oral proficiency of ESL students. These three psychological factors have been the subject of education research because of their relationships with the development of oral proficiency skills, which necessitate their inclusion in this paper. Overall, the environmental and psychological factors elaborated on in this review are used to describe the determinants surrounding the oral proficiency of tertiary ESL students as the basis for possible pedagogical interventions.

Related Studies about Interventions

Many researchers have proposed various pedagogical interventions to resolve different issues in diverse classrooms because of the importance of oral proficiency among ESL

students. Mekala et al. (2017) utilized oral communicative tasks as intervention tools to provide engineering students with opportunities to practice English and overcome inhibitions and constraints in speaking the language. As the students experienced a lack of oral proficiency beforehand, the intervention was successful in helping the students score passing marks on the test and prepare them for the expectations within the engineering industry. Sambath & Sethuraman (2017) also used the task-based pedagogical design to address the problems of engineering students with speaking skills. The results emphasized the role of the freedom of task selection in encouraging ESL students to speak in the target language. Grobler & Smits (2016) focused on designing a learning and teaching intervention for beginner learners of a different language, French. Based on Diana Laurillard's Conversational Framework, the digital pedagogical pattern formulated by the researchers provided insights into several issues of concern that must be considered in future studies related to computer-assisted language learning. In the Filipino context, Serrania & Mendoza (2018) examined the effects of inquiry-based and content-focused approaches on the speaking ability of students. Students exposed to the inquiry-based approach showed more improvement compared to the group with the content-based approach, implying that inquiry-based learning is more effective in improving oral proficiency and communicative competence than content-based methods. Lastly, Pontillas (2020) introduced Popsispeak, an outcomes-based teaching and learning strategy conceptualized for dealing with speaking anxiety. The novel intervention, rooted in behavioral and Pavlovian theories, was found to reinforce the motivation and confidence of the students, which reduced anxiety and increased oral skills. These papers are only part of a wide array of literature that tackles different strategies and techniques, old and new, that aim to cater to the different needs of ESL students to improve their oral proficiency in English.

Research Objectives

This study, therefore, explored the perceived oral proficiency of tertiary students,

specifically freshmen students in a state university in Region 3, Philippines. The results were then presented to ESL teachers to formulate a basis for proposing possible interventions to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning oral English skills.

Specifically, this study sought answers to the following sub-questions:

1. How may the oral proficiency of the respondents be described in terms of:
 - 1.1 Pronunciation;
 - 1.2 English Speaking Performance;
 - 1.3 Listening Skills; and,
 - 1.4 Vocabulary?
2. What are the perceptions of students regarding the factors of oral proficiency, such as:
 - 2.1. Learning Environment;
 - 2.2. Topics of Interest;
 - 2.3. Use of Mother Tongue;
 - 2.4. Shame;
 - 2.5. Anxiety;
 - 2.6. Orientation;
 - 2.7. Motivation; and
 - 2.8. Confidence?
3. What implications do ESL teachers observe from the results regarding:
 - 3.1 Oral Proficiency Skills; and,
 - 3.2. Factors of Oral Proficiency?
4. What pedagogical interventions can be recommended to improve the English oral proficiency of students?

Methods

Research Design

The research used a mixed-methods design, specifically the sequential explanatory design. According to Creswell (2009), it is characterized by quantitative data collection and analysis, followed by qualitative data that builds on initial quantitative results. This design is typically used to interpret and explain quantitative data through detailed qualitative results. The mixed-methods design proved helpful in quantifying the perceptions regarding oral proficiency and its factors of ESL students while describing the results through the perspectives of ESL teachers to provide implications for pedagogical intervention.

The study utilized a descriptive research design, which is a type of quantitative research.

Descriptive studies are used to describe individuals, events, or conditions by studying variables as they are in nature (Siedlecki, 2020). A descriptive study can explore one or multiple variables to observe the characteristics of a population, identify the problems that exist, or find differences between the characteristics of different populations. This research design was purely descriptive as the researcher did not manipulate any of the variables but only described trends and patterns from the data. As such, descriptive research is the best design to answer the first two questions of the study.

For the qualitative part, phenomenology is a qualitative method that attempts to find meaning from the lived experiences of the participants as they perceive different phenomena (Chamberlain, 2009). A phenomenological design can describe a phenomenon or a variable as it is experienced by the participants, which will provide detailed information about the phenomenon, albeit subjectively and differently in some cases. The results were compiled and categorized into themes to efficiently and effectively describe the phenomenon. This design is compatible with the third question of the study, which requires qualitative data from ESL teachers from their perspectives as they analyze quantitative results from the first phase.

Participants/Respondents/Subjects

The study used simple random sampling to pick the respondents among tertiary students, specifically freshmen students in a state university in Region 3, Philippines. Simple random sampling is a sampling technique that provides every case of a population with an equal probability of being included in the sample (Taherdoost, 2016). Due to the large population of freshmen students in the university, this technique allows for fewer considerations compared to other sampling techniques, allowing for more flexibility in gathering larger amounts of data. From the estimated 40,000 students enrolled in the university, 15,000 of whom are freshmen, Cochran's (1977) formula, with a 5% margin of error, 50% estimated population proportion, and a z-score of 1.96 from the margin of error, a sample size of 385 was calculated to be enough to represent a large population. The sampling method gathered a total of 434

random respondents who answered the online quantitative survey questionnaire.

After collecting data from students, the researcher then used convenience sampling to choose at least ten (10) ESL teachers with active occupations in tertiary-level institutions in Region 3, Philippines, and with at least a master's degree to answer the supplementary open-ended questions based on the results of the initial quantitative description of students' oral proficiency. Etikan et al. (2016) define the method as nonprobability sampling based on practical criteria such as accessibility, geographical proximity, availability, and willingness to participate. The main advantage of this sampling technique is the readily available subjects that allow for easier collection of data. This allowed the researcher to supplement the quantitative results from contactable and accessible participants.

Instruments

The study gathered data through online survey questionnaires based on Thi & Hoang's (2020) indicators of oral proficiency. Surveys through questionnaires are a popular data collection technique used in different fields, but with the increasing usage of the Internet, online surveys have become an alternative to traditional methods of distributing questionnaires because of their potential to collect numerous respondents efficiently, economically, and quickly (Regmi et al., 2016). The researcher utilized Google Forms to transmit the adapted questionnaire to the target population.

As for the content of the questionnaire, it contained two sections that gathered information for the study. The first section included demographic information items that provided the researcher with the courses of the respondents to define the gathered sample. The section also introduced the title of the study and its aims to inform respondents about the study in which they participated. After the demographic section, the second section was then divided into twelve (12) sets of questions that referred to the indicators of oral proficiency as laid out by Thi & Hoang (2020). Each indicator contained three (3) to five (5) questions, which totalled to forty-two (42) items. Every question used a five-point Likert scale to gauge the

reactions of the respondents towards given statements, with 1 (Strongly Disagree) being the lowest and 5 (Strongly Agree) being the highest. Due to the original questionnaire's original form and its type of responses collected, the instrument measured the students' perceived self-efficacy and self-concept regarding their oral proficiency skills and the influencing environmental and psychological factors.

After the collection and descriptive analysis of the factors that affect oral proficiency, these became the basis for an additional four (4) open-ended questions directed to ESL teachers. The data results were presented to ESL teachers, and they were asked for their interpretations and the possible implications of the results. The questions were required to be answered with at least three (3) to five (5) sentences for a more detailed response from the participants.

Procedures

In gathering the data, the researcher carried out the following procedures:

Firstly, the quantitative and qualitative questions were validated by three (3) experts on teaching English as a second language. The questionnaires underwent extensive editing according to the validators' criticisms, suggestions, and recommendations to improve the validity and reliability of the questionnaires.

Secondly, possible respondents and informants were given a letter of consent to ensure the careful handling of their responses and prevent leakage of important information. Assuring the confidentiality and privacy of their responses was also included to invoke a sense of confidence and ease within the respondents and informants for less worried participation during the research.

Thirdly, after confirming consent from the respondents, the quantitative questionnaire was provided through Google Forms. The respondents answered the questionnaires online without any physical meetings needed. The researcher then received their responses. Next, for the qualitative portion, also through Google Forms, the researcher contacted reachable ESL teachers as informants. The participants were contacted beforehand to provide awareness of

the objectives and instructions of the survey. The results of the students' quantitative questionnaires were provided as an informational background for their answers.

Finally, the researcher collected the questionnaires from the respondents and informants and checked if all the items were answered religiously for the conduct of the study. The security of personal information and questionnaire responses was achieved through a thorough containment of online files and documents that only the researcher and relevant persons can access.

Data Analysis

The descriptive analysis method was used to treat the statistical data because of its descriptive design. Descriptive analysis identifies the patterns in data to answer questions about the characteristics of the population that are relevant to the specific research or policy questions (Loeb et al., 2017). This method of analysis was informative for clarifying the basic understanding of the key aspects of a phenomenon, which is the oral proficiency of tertiary students in this case. Since it is suggested to rely on low-inference and low-assumption methods that require low to no statistical adjustments, measures of central tendency and variation were used to calculate the responses for description. The means of each question were categorized based on the following: 1.00 - 1.80 as Strongly Disagree, 1.81 - 2.60 as Disagree, 2.61 - 3.40 as Neutral, 3.41 - 4.20 as Agree, and 4.21 - 5.00 as Strongly Agree, calculated from this formula: distance = (Maximum - Minimum)/n = (5 - 1)/5 = 0.8.

Thematic analysis, on the other hand, was applied to analyze the responses of the ESL

teachers. It is a method of analysis that identifies, analyzes, and interprets patterns of data or themes within qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2015). The main aim of thematic analysis is to organize codes, small units of data that refer to interesting and relevant pieces of information, into themes, larger patterns of meaning interconnected with each other through a core idea. This was useful for the interpretation of the ESL teachers' responses to discover central ideas about possible interventions for the oral proficiency of tertiary students.

Ethical Considerations

During the conduct of the research, several ethical considerations were taken into account. The safety and security of the participants and informants involved in the proponents' study were taken into account. The respondents obtained informed consent from the researcher to ensure full understanding of the purpose and procedures used in the study. The letter of consent also informed the students of their anonymity, safeguarding the confidentiality of the participants to warrant and secure their privacy. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that the collected data was used solely for academic purposes and not for any harmful intent. Lastly, transparent communication about the voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw at any point was maintained throughout the study to uphold the principles of ethical research conduct. Regarding the participants of the study, no potential conflicts of interest were present during data collection, particularly with the conveniently sampled teachers. On funding sources, the researcher relied on personal capacity to complete the study.

Results And Discussion

Students' Oral Proficiency Skills

Table 1. Perceptions of Oral Proficiency of Respondents

No.	Questionnaire Items	Mean	SD	Descriptive Rating
Indicator 1: Pronunciation				
1	You notice your ability to pronounce is pretty good.	3.58	0.77	Agree
2	You can pronounce vowels and consonants in English.	3.93	0.90	Agree
3	Your pronunciation is good enough for the listener to understand what you mean.	3.76	0.86	Agree

No.	Questionnaire Items	Mean	SD	Descriptive Rating
Indicator 2: English Speaking Performance				
1	You find yourself speaking English better than others.	2.94	0.81	Neutral
2	You can express quite well a simple problem quite well in English.	3.53	0.78	Agree
3	You can speak English with little preparation time.	3.59	0.79	Agree
4	You are satisfied with your ability to speak English	3.18	0.97	Neutral
5	With your English-speaking ability, you think you will have many opportunities to find suitable jobs.	3.52	0.87	Agree
Indicator 3: Listening Skills				
1	Your listening skills are quite good.	3.85	0.84	Agree
2	You can hear the basic communication situations.	4.03	0.77	Agree
3	When teachers ask questions in English, you can understand.	4.03	0.86	Agree
Indicator 4: Vocabulary				
1	Your English vocabulary is quite rich.	3.10	0.75	Neutral
2	You have no trouble communicating with your current vocabulary.	3.33	0.86	Neutral
3	When necessary, you can find English words to speak appropriately to the context.	3.54	0.78	Agree

The table presents the perceived oral proficiency of students categorized into four indicators: pronunciation, English speaking performance, listening skills, and vocabulary. Tertiary students generally agree that they have good pronunciation. They are most confident with pronouncing vowels and consonants ($M = 3.93$), while they are least likely to agree that they notice their ability to pronounce words well ($M = 3.58$). All three items are described as Agree ($3.41 - 4.20$). Next, their perception of their English-speaking performance is seen positively by the respondents. Many believe that they can speak English when given little preparation time ($M = 3.59$). Opposite of this is their neutral confidence in being better English speakers than their peers (2.94). Two items are labeled as Neutral ($2.61 - 3.40$) and three items as Agree ($3.41 - 4.20$). Third, their listening skills are seen slightly more positively by participants. Understanding teachers who speak English and hearing basic communication situations are both agreed to be observed ($M = 4.03$). On the other hand, their general

perception of their listening skills is positive, albeit lower ($M = 3.85$). All items are described as Agree ($3.41 - 4.20$). Lastly, vocabulary is assessed to be neutral. Respondents can find appropriate English words in a given context ($M = 3.54$) but are less confident in agreeing that their vocabulary is rich ($M = 3.10$). Two items are Neutral ($2.61 - 3.40$), and one item is Agree ($3.41 - 4.20$).

Overall, the perceptions of tertiary ESL students toward their oral proficiency are generally positive, but with a difference between perceived assessments of their input and output skills. Given items all hold an average to above-average approval among respondents. However, questions under English speaking performance and vocabulary received more Neutral ratings than pronunciation and listening skills. The results suggest that students are aware of their oral proficiency to some degree, to the point that they acknowledge limitations on their linguistic prowess despite satisfactory perceptions given the Neutral to Agree ratings. This goes in line with the results of Lanuza et al.

(2024), which investigated oral proficiency across course specializations in research. Math, Science, and English majors met expectations through the assessment of their oral defense presentation of theses, with the variance be-

tween satisfaction and neutrality in some aspects of oral proficiency skills parallel with the English majors' satisfactory but relatively lesser performance in three of five given attributes.

Factors of Students' Oral Proficiency

Table 2. Perceptions of Factors Affecting Oral Proficiency of Respondents

No.	Questionnaire Items	Mean	SD	Descriptive Rating
Indicator 5: Learning Environment				
1	You are given enough time to practice speaking in English class.	3.67	0.78	Agree
2	You have enough time to prepare speaking exercises before presenting	3.71	0.74	Agree
3	Listeners (teachers, friends) are patient, they understand and support you when you speak English.	3.97	0.76	Agree
4	Instructors often help you correct mistakes made when you speak English.	3.98	0.77	Agree
5	Instructors always use English while teaching.	3.93	0.86	Agree
Indicator 6: Topic Of Interest				
1	When you speak English on a topic that you are familiar with or interested in, you speak better.	3.89	0.85	Agree
2	You like to learn English speaking skills with interesting topics.	4.18	0.80	Agree
3	You found that the topics covered in the English class of the school are attractive.	3.76	0.76	Agree
Indicator 7: Use Of Mother Tongue				
1	You still use Tagalog in English classes.	3.72	0.92	Agree
2	When you have to talk about something in English, you often think in Tagalog.	3.66	0.92	Agree
3	Teachers sometimes still use Tagalog in English classes.	3.64	0.89	Agree
Indicator 8: Shame				
1	You feel nervous about making mistakes while speaking English.	4.03	0.97	Agree
2	You feel ashamed of not speaking English well.	3.66	1.03	Agree
3	Feeling ashamed makes you dare not to speak English.	3.42	1.12	Agree
4	You feel afraid of being criticized or losing face when you don't speak English well.	3.64	1.09	Agree
Indicator 9: Anxiety				
1	You feel pressured to speak English before class.	3.57	1.03	Agree
2	Sometimes you forget words and ideas when you are speaking because of anxiety.	3.88	0.97	Agree
3	You often slur while speaking English because of stress.	3.63	0.95	Agree

No.	Questionnaire Items	Mean	SD	Descriptive Rating
Indicator 10: Orientation				
1	You think the goal of learning to speak English is to speak fluently rather than to get good grades in the exam.	3.67	1.03	Agree
2	You think the purpose of learning English is to communicate effectively.	4.20	0.81	Agree
3	You believe that speaking English well will help you get better job opportunities.	4.24	0.82	Strongly Agree
Indicator 11: Motivation				
1	You feel happy when speaking English.	3.75	0.85	Agree
2	You would love to speak English in English class.	3.74	0.82	Agree
3	You often practice speaking English outside of class time.	3.71	0.92	Agree
4	You think that speaking English well is necessary for future work.	4.21	0.84	Strongly Agree
Indicator 12: Confidence				
1	You believe that you can speak English fluently	3.35	0.83	Neutral
2	You feel confident speaking English in class.	3.17	0.83	Neutral
3	In your opinion, confidence is essential to speak English well.	4.17	0.88	Agree

The table above presents the perception of ESL students regarding the various factors that can affect oral proficiency. Beginning with the learning environment, patient teachers and friends who understand and support respondents when speaking English are observed the most ($M = 3.98$). The item least rated but perceived in a similar degree is enough preparation time for practicing English speaking during class ($M = 3.67$). All five items are given an Agree rating (3.41 - 4.20). With the environment, the topic of interest is also of concern. Learning English speaking skills with interesting topics is perceived as the highest ($M = 4.18$). They also agree that the topics covered in English classes are attractive, but to a lesser degree ($M = 3.76$). Three items are described as Agree (3.41 - 4.20). The use of the mother tongue is another factor considered in oral proficiency. Participants generally agree that they still use Tagalog during English classes ($M = 3.72$). It is agreed as well that its use is prevalent among teachers, but not as much ($M = 3.64$). All three items garnered a descriptive rating of Agree (3.41 - 4.20). Next among the factors of oral proficiency is shame. Respondents agree that they feel nervous about making mistakes while

speaking English ($M = 4.03$), but this feeling of shame does not greatly stop them from doing so ($M = 3.66$). All items under the indicator are rated as Agree (3.41 - 4.20). Related to shame is anxiety. It is generally agreed upon that anxiety leads to forgetting words and ideas when speaking English ($M = 3.88$). Meanwhile, a lesser degree of agreement is observed with feeling pressured in speaking in front of the class ($M = 3.57$). Three items for the indicator are described as Agree (3.41 - 4.20). Opposite to shame and anxiety, orientation is one of the positive psychological factors included. Participants strongly agree that speaking English helps with getting better job opportunities ($M = 4.24$). In contrast, they do not agree as much that the goal of speaking English is its mastery rather than obtaining good grades in exams ($M = 3.67$). One item is rated as Strongly Agree (4.21 - 5.00) while two items are rated as Agree (3.41 - 4.20). Complementary to orientation is motivation. They greatly emphasize that speaking English is necessary for future work ($M = 4.21$), but a lesser degree of agreement is perceived with practicing English outside of class ($M = 3.71$). Three items are designated the Agree (3.41 - 4.20) rating, and one with

Strongly Agree (4.21 – 5.00). Lastly, confidence is quantified among participants. It is agreed upon that confidence is essential in speaking English well ($M = 4.17$), but respondents are neutral when it comes to feeling confident when speaking ($M = 3.17$). Two items are labeled Neutral (2.61 - 3.40), and one is labeled Agree (3.41 – 4.20).

In totality, all factors are generally observed by the respondents. Environmental indicators such as the learning environment, the topic of interest, and the use of the mother tongue in English classes are very much noticed by respondents concerning their oral proficiency. Although not neutral, their presence is not that great either. In addition, with special attention to the use of mother tongue, students expressed positive attitudes towards its use in developing oral proficiency skills, something that other teachers would fairly agree with (De Guzman & De Vera, 2018). However, the educational controversy around Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) still presents a sociopolitical struggle between a preference for pure English teaching and the acceptance of integrating native languages in second language teaching (Cansino, 2023). When it comes to psychological factors, both positive and negative determinants have relatively higher ratings. Results in items under shame and anxiety suggest a slightly higher prevalence among tertiary ESL students, while orientation, motivation, and confidence are much higher, specifically in items that presuppose English proficiency as a necessary tool in future work. It can be inferred that all these factors are at work within English classes and are noticed to affect the oral proficiency of students to some degree. Malik et al. (2024) added social background, teacher qualification, classroom teaching practices, and availability of resources as part of the possible factors that affected the oral proficiency of students. They were assessed alongside motivation levels, anxiety, and pressure to perform well in speaking, all of which were also present and actively recognized among their student respondents.

Implications According to Teachers

Oral Proficiency Skills

Satisfactory Skills. The informants identified students to have positive self-assessments regarding their oral proficiency skills. The students reported a decent amount of self-confidence in listening skills and pronunciation. With listening skills, they believed in their strong understanding of basic communication and classroom questions. On pronunciation, the students must be aware of their pronunciation skills and be able to constantly evaluate them when in use. This is opposite to Jawaid et al.'s (2024) findings, where most students only occasionally practiced this skill and, thus, struggled with basic phonetic sounds required in English. Their pronunciation was supplemented by media that presented native speakers whom the students would imitate and repeat throughout. According to the teachers, the results imply a need for possible methods to reinforce these strong oral proficiency skills.

"The results suggest that students perceive their pronunciation, listening skills, and English speaking performance as generally good." (Teacher 4)

Lack of Self-Assurance. The informants noticed that students had a contrary lack of self-assurance about their skills despite previous perceptions. Unlike with listening skills and pronunciation, neutral ratings were more associated with vocabulary and speaking performance. The students were less confident in the richness of their vocabulary, possibly due to fear of miscommunication. This is evident in their relatively low assessment of speaking performance such as the Neutral (2.61 - 3.40) ratings on self-confidence in speaking English better than peers and self-satisfaction with speaking performance, which suggests hesitance in spontaneous and competitive communication. This does not fare well with Nurkhofifah et al.'s (2023) conclusions that assessing speaking performance directly or with different structures were the most prevalent methods of oral proficiency assessments. Despite their neutral observations of their English-speaking performance and vocabulary, students must expect activities that demand

these skills, such as public speaking, short-answer, and collaborative peer assessments. According to the teachers, the results imply a need for real-time practice and engagement to support these weak areas.

"The data reveal that students perceive their pronunciation, listening skills, and some aspects of vocabulary as adequate, with room for improvement in vocabulary richness and speaking confidence. Neutral ratings in English-speaking performance suggest a lack of self-assurance in spontaneous and competitive communication." (Teacher 3)

Need for Targeted Support. The informants found a need for targeted support to address the individual needs of the students. This is in line with the conflicting perceptions of students regarding their overall oral proficiency skills, with some confident in their pronunciation and listening skills, while others lack in vocabulary and English-speaking performance. Without compromising one or the other, individualized and targeted interventions were deemed to be the best course of action. Bone et al. (2019) recommended similarly, emphasizing that students themselves appreciated this approach to learning oral proficiency skills. Task-based approaches that utilized individualized activities were not just perceived to be effective but also conducive to finding personal ways to practice these skills. According to teachers, this approach can strengthen weak areas while reinforcing existing competencies.

"Overall, these perceptions suggest that while students are comfortable with certain aspects of oral proficiency (listening, basic pronunciation), there is a need for more targeted support in vocabulary expansion, fluency, and confidence in complex speaking situations. This could guide educators in developing more personalized, skill-focused instructional strategies." (Teacher 1)

Oral Proficiency Factors

Confused Self-Concept. The informants raised concerns about the conflicting positive and negative self-concepts that students had. Compared to the relatively decent ratings of

their oral proficiency skills, students' perceptions of factors, especially shame and anxiety, were oriented negatively. Students previously perceived their pronunciation, English speaking performance, listening skills, and vocabulary with satisfaction, but they then admitted to feeling inadequate in these aspects as they practiced them. Zakaria et al. (2023) also gathered that students acknowledged the importance of oral presentation skills but experienced linguistic and psychological challenges. Although there were attempts to resolve these problems, students reported still being hindered by these factors. According to teachers, there is a need for practical experience to improve student confidence.

"Finally, students do not seem to exude confidence in their skills, despite their relatively good assessments of their skills. Maybe this indicates a confusing self-concept in regards to English proficiency, as their perceived skills conflict with practice." (Teacher 9)

Extrinsic Motivation. The informants had mixed reactions to the primarily extrinsic motivations of students for learning English. For teachers who perceived it positively, this type of motivation, which reflected real-life goals like communication and career opportunities, was a welcome psychological factor for English language learning. On the other hand, since their motivation is not intrinsic, it can be seen that their motives for learning are inauthentic. In relation to personality, Liang & Kelsen (2018) found that extraversion, which favored social interactions, made up for low English speaking ability, indicating that intrinsic motivations supplemented oral proficiency. Paired with extrinsic factors manifested by the nature of activities, both types of motivations were important in developing oral proficiency skills. According to teachers, in whichever case, students have a set goal and a willingness to use the language properly.

"The environment clearly describes learners whose knowledge and use of English is as a second language—English is a second language with vocabulary to learn, grammar rules to master, and meaning to

convey. The motivation to use the language is not intrinsic; hence, it is inauthentic.” (Teacher 5)

“Psychological factors such as anxiety and shame impact students’ willingness to speak, but motivation tied to real-life goals like communication and career opportunities drives their efforts. Building confidence is essential, as students recognize its role in their oral proficiency.” (Teacher 7)

Importance of Environment. The informants highlighted the role of the learning environment itself in influencing the interrelated factors of oral proficiency. Although students had high agreement in experiencing negative psychological factors, it is worth noting that they also had an appreciation for their learning environment. Teachers were gracious enough to provide enough time for speaking practice and support during performances and activities. Bicha (2016) concluded that the learning environment had a crucial role in developing the individual oral proficiencies of learners. Interaction within the classroom allowed for free flow of communication without unnecessary criticism and judgment, an atmosphere that simulated the outside environment, which demanded much of oral proficiency. According to the teachers, this must be kept up for a more positive development of the students’ oral proficiency skills.

“Student perceptions reveal that both environmental and psychological factors significantly impact their oral proficiency. A supportive learning environment, engaging topics, and the mindful use of the mother tongue can encourage participation, while negative emotions such as shame and anxiety can hinder performance.” (Teacher 10)

Possible Pedagogical Interventions *For Oral Proficiency Skills*

Speech Practice and Integration. The informants suggested speech integration through explicit phonetic drills and implicit word inclusion during lessons to specifically enhance pronunciation and vocabulary for smoother conversations. To continually improve these skills

that students already perceive to be satisfactory, practicing vowel and consonant sounds, stress, and intonation, minimal pair drills, and traditional repetition can build on the existing proficiency of the students. Introducing words during discussions can also be paired so that while a lesson is underway, students are familiarized with the words and their pronunciations. Akpotoghogho & Chika (2025) confirmed the effectiveness of phonetic training to improve pronunciation accuracy, while He & Godfroid (2018) enumerated frequency of use, usefulness in context, and difficulty of meaning as primary criteria for choosing word inclusions in different learning resources.

“The teacher can introduce new words during discussions. This strategy may not necessarily involve forming a lesson for a specific set of words, instead introducing the words through usage while discussing a separate or non-relevant topic. This method ingrains the words in the students’ minds alongside the lesson topic, making the words easily recalled during recitations, academic writing, or oral recitations.” (Teacher 7)

Interactive Activities. The informants suggested interactive activities to practice different elements of oral proficiency and increase confidence. The quantitative results implied a relatively low confidence level regarding speaking performance, while there were good perceptions on listening skills. To pair the two oral proficiency skills, interactive activities that put vocabulary and pronunciation into practice to overcome difficulties in speaking performance were proposed. Role-play, debates, and active listening tasks were some of the activities that could be done. Adizovna (2025) even found that technology can be used to formulate immersive and interactive learning activities. Technology-assisted language learning methods such as online video-conferencing, language learning apps, and artificial intelligence-powered speech evaluators.

“Vocabulary and speaking confidence can be enhanced through interactive activities like debates, role-playing, and integrating context-specific words into daily practice, while listening skills benefit from

exposure to diverse accents and authentic English materials.” (Teacher 5)

Real-World Experience. The informants suggested real-world experience as a major instrument to improve the oral proficiency skills of students. As a whole, students’ oral proficiency skills need to be practiced through spontaneous communicative situations only available with events outside the classroom. Pronunciation and listening skills can only be reinforced through direct application, and vocabulary and pronunciation can only be imbued through impromptu usage. Almashy (2025) shared the experiences of Saudi EFL learners in using English in out-of-the-classroom situations, which challenged their initially lenient opinions on the subject. It was the practical and intensive experiences outside of the academic setting that awoke their intrinsic desire to learn English as a worldwide bridge for communication.

“Encourage immersion through exposure to English media, participation in language clubs, or conversations with native speakers, both inside and outside the classroom. The more students engage with English, the more natural and confident they will feel.” (Teacher 1)

“Provision of real-world simulations might be helpful for students. Providing them opportunities to experience practical applications where language will be used is necessary.” (Teacher 2)

For Factors of Oral Proficiency

Motivating Experiences. The informants suggested the use of motivating experiences to diversify the reasons for learning English among students. Because of their primarily extrinsic reasons, students might become demotivated once their confidence in achieving their career goals and objectives plummets. Activities that spark intrinsic enjoyment in learning English and student-centered approaches that make students feel rewarded may imbibe learners with motivations beyond material ends. Namaziandost et al. (2019) investigated cooperative learning, a student-centered approach, in teaching as a way to improve motivation for oral proficiency through grouping

students to solve a problem or other purposes. Intrinsic motivation, which was the type of motivation commonly favored by the informants more than extrinsic motivation, was the most affected after assessing the oral proficiency of students.

“Make speaking activities enjoyable and aligned with students’ personal interests. Games, simulations, and interactive activities (like debates, role-plays, and presentations) can make speaking English feel less like a chore and more like a fun, collaborative experience.” (Teacher 1)

Acceptance of Mistakes. The informants suggested that teachers reassure students that oral mistakes are natural when learning English as a second language. Usually, students are hindered from progressing further in their oral proficiencies because of inhibitions around mistakes. They are afraid of mispronunciations or mental blocks that often lead to miscommunication. However, learners can instead be led to recognize that mistakes are natural and that they must be seen as indications for improvement rather than marks of incompetence. This is similar to Badiridinova’s (2025) conclusion that instead of seeing mistakes as signs of failure on the part of students, they must be seen as learning opportunities for the future.

“When analyzed as a whole, there is a surface-level contradiction between their agreeing stances with their oral proficiency skills and their neutral confidence in them. How can students who positively assess their skills at the same negatively assess their performance? Possibly, an approach that embodies the common saying of ‘learning from mistakes’ may be applied.” (Teacher 8).

Safe Learning Environment. The informants suggested the maintenance of a safe learning environment that nurtures oral proficiency in a critical and gentle manner. In relation to implementing motivating experiences and learning from mistakes, the classroom that welcomes both of these and more is integral for pedagogical interventions to truly be applied. The students are to be provided with enough freedom to practice at their own pace and

interact with peers who have the same learning needs for their oral proficiency skills. Hijra et al. (2024) recommended a supportive and non-judgmental classroom environment after enumerating the possible inhibitions in oral proficiency found among students. Peer support and positive reinforcement from teachers can replace the fear of ridicule from classmates and shame from disappointing their teachers.

"Building a 'safe space' orientation for the class can help in minimizing these psychological concerns. Having exercises in smaller groups or within peer groups might also help lessen students' anxiety before they practice with a larger group. Individual practice, like voice recording with only the teacher, can also provide students assess their individual strengths before a bigger crowd." (Teacher 4)

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The research study explored the perceived oral proficiency of tertiary students, specifically freshmen students of a state university in Region 3, Philippines. The results were presented to ESL teachers to formulate a basis for proposing possible interventions to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning oral English skills. The research used a mixed-methods design, specifically the sequential explanatory design, which mixed descriptive and phenomenology designs for the quantitative and qualitative aspects, respectively. The study used simple random sampling to pick the respondents among tertiary students to answer online survey questionnaires, and convenience sampling for ESL teachers to answer the supplementary open-ended questions based on the results of the initial quantitative description of students' oral proficiency. The descriptive analysis and thematic analysis were used to treat the data. Thus, the following conclusions were gathered:

1. The oral proficiency of respondents is satisfactory. Students are satisfied with their pronunciation of English words and their listening skills in comprehending English conversations. On the other hand, students are less inclined to be satisfied with their English speaking performance when

communicating and using vocabulary during impromptu conversations.

2. The respondents' perception of the environmental factors is positive, but negative on the psychological factors. Students held favorable opinions on the learning environment, topics of interest, and use of mother tongue as they felt interested and welcome in learning English. However, they experienced shame, anxiety, and low confidence whenever they were tasked to use their oral proficiency skills. Regarding orientation and motivation, students were more extrinsic than intrinsic in their drive for English learning.
3. ESL teachers observed that the students' oral proficiency skills should be either reinforced or improved. Pronunciation and listening skills must be reinforced to maintain these satisfactory skills, while English speaking performance and vocabulary must be improved to meet the standards of students. ESL teachers also observed the factors of oral proficiency to be continually supportive and critical. Environmental and motivational factors must be dealt with to mitigate the ongoing presence of negative psychological factors among students.
4. ESL teachers suggested student-centered approaches to improve the oral proficiency skills of students. Motivating experiences were to add to the primarily extrinsic motivations of students, acceptance of mistakes to address the shame, anxiety, and low confidence that students experience, and real-world experiences to synthesize their oral proficiency skills in relation to their environmental and psychological factors.

Recommendations

From the results and conclusions of the study, the researcher recommends the following:

1. Identify the specific oral proficiency skills that are deficient in every individual in the classroom to improve them and to avoid too much emphasis on skills already mastered. Acknowledging their strong and weak oral proficiency skills must be achieved to correspond to their abilities in

- communicative situations that demand them.
2. Integrate a model that directly implements the possible pedagogical interventions pro-

posed in the study while taking into consideration the environmental and psychological factors that may affect these intervention strategies.

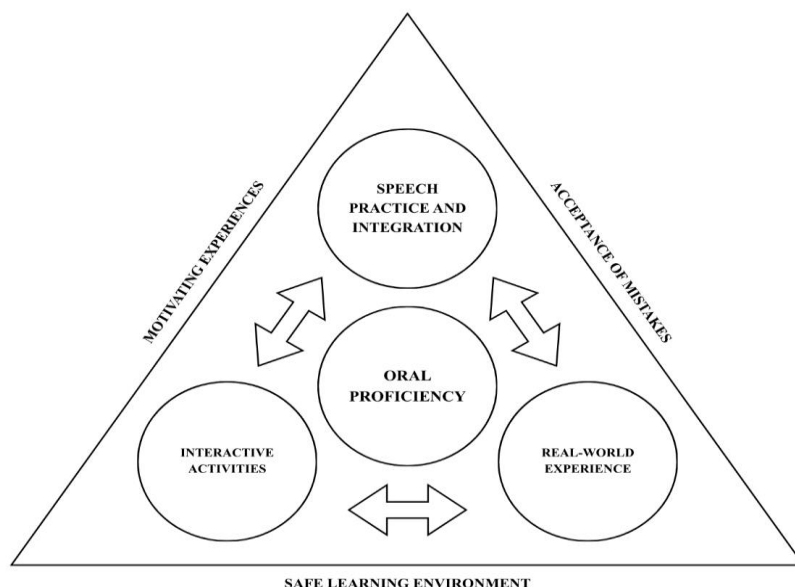


Figure 1. Inscribed Intervention Model for Oral Proficiency

A possible model for intervention is the Inscribed Intervention Model for Oral Proficiency, where the themes gathered from teacher responses are arranged according to their appropriate relationships to one another for a structured basis for pedagogical interventions.

The model includes three types of activities that can be assigned to students. First, speech practice and integration may involve phonetic drills, vocabulary integration, and other techniques that address the fundamental elements of oral proficiency. Second, interactive activities may follow to support speech practice, such as collaborative assignments, debates, and other social activities, since clear and proper communication is the primary objective of developing oral proficiency. Third, real-world experience is needed to cement the skills learned within the classroom from both speech practice and interactive activities such as project making, research writing, and other

In relation to the environmental and psychological factors, the three types of activities are inscribed within the three possible ways to mitigate or utilize these factors for a more

effective implementation of the activities. The teacher may maintain the supportive atmosphere of the learning environment as the students continue to learn English as a second language. Many of the activities, techniques, and methods can hinge on how open and comfortable the learners are in participating, which reflects how open and comfortable the teacher allows them to be. The teacher may also implement an approach to the activities that attempts to minimize pessimistic reactions to failure. After demonstrating how to address emotions and accept mistakes, teachers can then scaffold activities that build upon previous ones to give students the opportunities to apply realizations from past failures. Finally, it is important for the teacher to ground the students in the reality of English speaking through exposing them to different real-world stimuli that require varied applications of oral proficiency skills. Experience outside of the classroom prevents learners from being sheltered and unable to practice the learned skills, signs that oral proficiency skills were ineffectively taught and are essentially useless to the students.

3. Expand the possible scope of aspects that structure and variables that affect oral proficiency skills of ESL students, more than what is presented in the paper. For example, researchers may establish at least a correlative relationship between oral proficiency and factors to justify or criticize the decision to revolve around them. Another possible direction is an experimental or quasi-experimental study to assess the effectiveness of the proposed intervention model in different contexts and environments, which may push for a finer definition of the model that properly addresses the nuances of oral proficiency development in students. Different perspectives and approaches in this field of research can answer the different contradictions that arose, one of such is the students' self-perception of skills and low overall confidence in speaking performance.

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