ASSESSING SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' ORAL PROFICIENCY SKILLS IN THE *NEW NORMAL*

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ABSTRACT- *This study investigates the expanse to which a set of criteria in oral proficiency skills was tested among the Senior High School (SHS) students in this time of the pandemic. The organization, topic knowledge, language use, and delivery are the main criteria in assessing the SHS students' oral proficiency skills. Data were collected from 60 non-native senior high school students who are enrolled in Oral Communication subject. Speaking tests were conducted to determine their oral proficiency skills. Based on the data gathered, the study found out that SHS students lacked transitional words to connect their ideas and also coherence seemed to be another concern for the Organization criteria while for Topic knowledge and Language use, students are having problems in elaborating their ideas for they cannot directly supply apt words and thoughts; And for their Delivery, minimal eye-to-eye contact with the audience was observed, low tones, pronunciation, and articulation of words are not that good. The study recommends that teachers and school administrators may develop a suitable compendium of activities in order for these students to practice better in harnessing their oral skills. Moreover, teachers can give them drills and exercises geared toward mastering these skills for them not just to be equipped but to be able to communicate effectively and attain academic success.*

Keywords – Oral proficiency, Senior High School students, oral communication, new normal

1. INTRODUCTION

In this age of educational technology, macro skills are the targeted language considerations in teaching. Gomez & Javier [1] posit that English is a global language and that speaking skill is the most important; one that students need to master as the main objective of language teaching is communication. Moreover, academicians and scholars attribute speaking as a primordial concern. Al-Sobhi, Saeed, Preece, & Shakour [2] testify that among the four English language skills, speaking possesses a superior status. Accordingly, it should be given high priority in teaching. Several researchers also acknowledge that its dominance is superior to any other language. An important portion of the world's population is able to use English for communication. However, acquiring the skill is not easy; especially for students who learn English as a second language. Teaching this skill entails a crucial role. Modern techniques and methods must be employed in the process. More learners want to use the language spontaneously for education, communication, and business [3].

In the Philippines, it is a necessity for Filipinos to communicate in English. It is not only the language of commerce and law but the primary medium of instruction in the academe. Furthermore, proficiency in the language is a strength as it drives the economy. In a study conducted by Del Villar [4] on the Filipino Students' Communication Performance, it was found out that learner development depends on language awareness which not only focuses on language itself but also a cognitive reflection upon language functions. She further stressed that language awareness can be fostered by giving learners various choices in learning activities. This research takes on a similar direction. It considers the role of various activities in the development to enhance students' speaking skills.

With the advent of the coronavirus or Covid-19 pandemic, the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) [5] continues to carry on its vision and mission. DepEd

Secretary, Leonor Magtolis Briones stated in the South East Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) Ministerial Policy e-Forum on June 18, 2020, *"the first principle that we adhered to and which we are committed to, in compliance with the President's directive is to protect the safety, health, and well-being of our learners, teachers, and personnel and to prevent further transmission of COVID-19. But at the same time, we want to ensure learning continuity. Our battle cry is learning must continue* [6]." A concerted effort in the Education department gave birth to a bigger framework known as the Learning Continuity Plan that will serve as the guiding principles of the whole K12 Educational System. This educational framework is composed of different important pillars which include the Teaching and Learning Modalities and Assessment centered on the Development of the Most Essential Skills and Values of the learners. DepEd adopted four teaching-learning modalities such as face-to-face; blended learning; distance learning; and home-schooling.

Since learning should not halt, different countries worldwide have introduced various answers during the pandemic to continue the education process - the introduction of distance learning. Relatively, the British Council [7] noted that every teacher needs to plan the class according to students' capacities and needs. In that way, the activities included will fit students' needs. On the other hand, when teachers develop activities or lessons, there are 3 areas of knowledge that speaking needs to consider: mechanics, which refers to those parts that make possible speaking and include pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and word order; functions, which describes the speaking use; social/cultural rules and norms, which refers those subtle cultural values, such as turn-taking, social norms, roles of participants, etiquette and social register, etc.

Pandemic destroys the normal setting of the lives of the people, not only in the Philippines but in the entire world. Education in this new normal, especially in the Philippines

has been innovated from traditional into a modern one. Considering the aforementioned pandemic and the critical role of English-speaking skill in the academic life of the students, the assessment of the speaking proficiency of the students was conducted.

Further, the study determined the oral proficiency skills of senior high school students. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions: What are the student respondents' oral proficiency skills in the organization; topic knowledge; language use (verbal effectiveness); and delivery (non-verbal effectiveness)?

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Research Design, Setting & Participants
This study employed a descriptive method. The descriptive method aims to accurately and systematically describe a population, situation or phenomenon. Also, the study employed a qualitative method. This study was conducted at Alubijid National Comprehensive High School located in Alubijid, Misamis Oriental. The school got a below standard rating in the achievement test particularly in English subjects for the past three consecutive school years- 2016-2017, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. The school administration has directed the teachers to design programs and remedial instructions to enhance students' speaking skills. Senior High School students enrolled in Alubijid National Comprehensive High School for the school year 2020-2021 are the respondents. The study had a total of 60 students from the 3 sections.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Table 1. ORGANIZATION

Respondent	Difficulties encountered	Challenges	Area for improvement
R1	-Ideas lack focus		
R2	-Organizational structures need to be strengthened		
R3	-Ideas lack focus or development		
R4	-Ideas lack focus		
R5	-Ideas lack focus or development		
R6	-Ideas lack focus or development		
R7	-Organizational structures need to be strengthened		
R8	-Ideas lack of focus		
R9	-Ideas lack of focus		
R10	-Ideas lack of focus		
R11	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R12	-Ideas not clearly stated		
R13	-Ideas not focus or development- Main purpose is not clear		
R14	-Ideas lack of focus or development -Introduction is undeveloped		
R15	-Ideas lack focus or development		
R16	-Ideas lack focus or development		
R17	-Ideas lack focus or development -Transitions may be needed		
R18	-Ideas lack focus or development		
R19	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R20	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R21	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R22	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R23	-Transitions may be needed		
R24	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R25	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R26	-Ideas lack of focus or development- The purpose is not clear		
R27	-Ideas not focus or developed -Main purpose is not clear	-No focus on ideas/not clearly stated -Lack of development of ideas -Less transitions -Organizational structures Need to be strengthened	-No sequence of information
R28	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R29	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R30	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R31	-Ideas lack of focus		
R32	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R33	-Organizational structures need to be strengthened		
R34	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R35	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R36	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R37	-Organizational structures need to be strengthened		
R38	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R39	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R40	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R41	-Ideas not focus or development -Main purpose is not clear		
R42	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R43	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R44	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R45	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R46	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R47	-Ideas not focus or development		
R48	-Ideas not focus or development		
R49	-Ideas not focus or development -Main purpose is not clear		
R50	-Ideas not focus or development		
R51	-Ideas not focus or development		
R52	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R53	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R54	-Ideas lack of focus or development		
R55	-Main purpose is not clear		
R56	-Ideas not focus or development		
R57	-Ideas not focus or development		
R58	-Main purpose is not clear		
R59	-Main purpose is not clear		
R60	-Organizational structures need to be strengthened		

Table 1 presents the first criterion of evaluating Senior High School students' oral proficiency skills. The data showcase that respondents' oral proficiency skills speaking are

attributed to their skills in organization of thoughts, the development of ideas, the transitions, and the manifested point of views. Findings include that these student-respondents have *no focus on ideas as these are not clearly stated, lack of development of ideas* also became evident; *fewer transitions* were utilized by these students and *organizational structures need to be strengthened.* Out of these results, these were further extracted to get the main idea, which yielded *no sequence of information*.

Moreover, Flemming [8] pointed out that in the real world, many texts contain sections and passages that combine two or more patterns of organization. In this case, with the help of transitional words, the sequence of information will be laid down properly and easy to understand the message of the speaker. Additionally, it was also emphasized that patterns of organization show the relationships between supporting details in paragraphs, essays, and chapters. Thus, the organization of the supporting details helps people to understand how an author thinks and helps people remember what they read.

Results shown above entail that the respondents' level or organization of ideas/thoughts would still need much coherence which data has resulted in their improper sequence of information. Hence, students still need many transitional devices in order for their thoughts to flow freely and they can speak with ease and deliver apt substance.

2. TOPIC KNOWLEDGE

Respondent	Difficulties encountered	Challenges	Area for improvement
R1	-Cannot answer questions about subject matter		
R2	-Supporting materials may lack in originality and failed to elaborate		
R3	-No grasp of information and no sources cited		
R4	-Cannot answer questions about subject matter and grasps only superficial information		
R5	-Cannot answer questions about subject matter		
R6	-Cannot answer questions about subject matter and grasps only superficial information		
R7	-Failed to elaborate		
R8	-Grasps only superficial information		
R9	-Grasps only superficial information		
R10	-Cannot answer questions about subject matter		
R11	-Cannot answer questions about subject matter and grasps only superficial information		
R12	-Grasps only superficial information		
R13	-Cannot answer questions about subject matter and no sources cited		
R14	-Grasps only superficial information		
R15	-Lack in originality		
R16	-Grasps only superficial information		
R17	-Grasps only superficial information		
R18	-Cannot answer questions about subject matter		
R19	-Does not have grasps of information and cannot answer questions about subject matter		
R20	-Grasps only superficial information		
R21	-Grasps only superficial information		
R22	-Does not have grasps of information and cannot answer questions about subject matter		
R23	-Grasps only superficial information		
R24	-Does not have grasps of information and cannot answer questions about subject matter		
R25	-Cannot answer questions about subject matter	-Cannot answer questions -Lack of supporting details -Fail to elaborate -No grasp of information -No sources cited -Lack of originality -Does not have grasp of information	-No grasp of information
R26	-Grasps only superficial information		
R27	-Cannot answer questions about subject matter and no sources cited		
R28	-Failed to elaborate		
R29	-Cannot answer questions about subject matter and no sources cited		
R30	-Grasps only superficial information		
R31	-Grasps only superficial information		
R32	-Grasps only superficial information		
R33	-Cannot answer questions about subject matter and no sources cited		
R34	-Cannot answer questions about subject matter and no sources cited		
R35	-Grasps only superficial information		
R36	-Grasps only superficial information		
R37	-Grasps only superficial information		
R38	-Grasps only superficial information		
R39	-Grasps only superficial information		
R40	-Cannot answer questions about subject matter - No sources cited		
R41	-Cannot answer questions about subject matter and no sources cited		
R42	-Grasps only superficial information		
R43	-Grasps only superficial information		
R44	-Grasps only superficial information		
R45	-Failed to elaborate		
R46	-Grasps only superficial information and no sources cited		
R47	-No sources cited and failed to elaborate		
R48	-Failed to elaborate and grasps only superficial information		
R49	-failed to elaborate and grasps only superficial information		
R50	-Cannot answer questions about subject matter and no sources cited		
R51	-Grasps only superficial information		
R52	-Grasps only superficial information and failed to elaborate		
R53	-Cannot answer questions about subject matter and no sources cited		
R54	-No sources cited and ailed to elaborate		
R55	-Cannot answer questions about subject matter and no sources cited		
R56	-Failed to elaborate		
R57	-Cannot answer questions about subject matter and no sources cited		
R58	-Cannot answer questions about subject matter and no sources cited		
R59	-Grasps only superficial information and no sources cited		
R60	-No sources cited and failed to elaborate		

Table 2 shows the second criterion of evaluating Senior High School students' oral proficiency skills. The data showcase that student respondents' oral proficiency speaking skills are attributed to their skills in the citation of sources, elaboration

of the topic, and their knowledge of the topic. The overall results include that these student-respondents have *no citation of sources*, *failed to elaborate their answers, no originality, and cannot answer questions* that existed also in the study; *less idea about the topic* is utilized by these students and *topic knowledge* needs improvement. Out of these results, these were further extracted to get the main idea, which yielded *no grasp of the information*. Hence, less idea about the certain topic makes the speaker speak inaudibly, others may not speak.

As cited by Gumartifa & Syahri [9], the identified several factors that influence students' difficulty in speaking English including the following: students who are inhibited or worried about making mistakes or have a fear of making mistakes, are criticized for making mistakes or are simply nervous; those who do not have anything to say about it, students have no duty to speak up; there is a lack of or uneven participation because of the major classes and the lack of motivation of some students; and the issue of mother tongue. Also, students prefer to use their mother tongue because it is simpler and more recognizable. It is hard on the part of the speaker to speak if they have those above-mentioned factors in oral speaking.

As shown in Table 2, the student-respondents have commonalities; cannot answer questions, grasps only superficial information, and failed to elaborate due to limited ideas of a certain topic. According to Jabbarova, [10] learners who are studying English in a non-English-speaking setting is very important to experience a real communicative situation in which they learn to express their own views and attitudes, and in which they are taken seriously as people. In the study conducted by Zivkovic, [11] it was found out that students are aware of the fact that knowledge is not enough to be successful in today's world, they are given the chance to promote creativity and innovation by giving oral presentations, they are also allowed to explore different perspectives and ways of looking at problems. Therefore, the future generation should develop the mentioned skills to cope with the problems that they will face in the future.

Table 3 manifests the Language Use (verbal) of the student-respondents. The table shows the overall result summarized to inappropriate language usage. Thompson and Millington [12] stipulated that speaking English in the Language of learning is created in a certain way such as vocabulary exposure, affirmation, and educational opportunities. Such claim supports the results shown above, thus, the speakers have no enough background on vocabulary, grammar, and verbal communication skills, they will have the difficulty in oral speaking.

Moreover, Milton [13] claimed that researchers agree on the fact that vocabulary is a central component of language proficiency and, accordingly, that vocabulary development is important in a language learning program. In addition, the speakers have limited vocabulary or limited word choices, full of slang or jargon, too complex, or too dull have the least speaking skills, and struggle to express their thoughts and ideas to the audience.
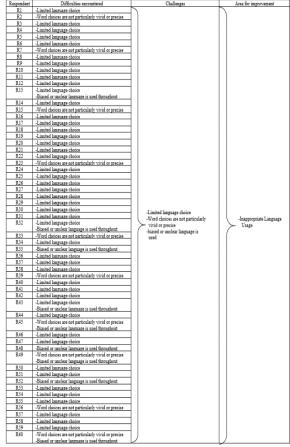
Table 3 Language Use (Verbal)

Respondent	Difficulties encountered	Challenges	Area for improvement
R1	-Limited language choice		
R2	-Word choices are not particularly vivid or precise		
R3	-Limited language choice		
R4	-Limited language choice		
R5	-Limited language choice		
R6	-Limited language choice		
R7	-Word choices are not particularly vivid or precise		
R8	-Limited language choice		
R9	-Limited language choice		
R10	-Limited language choice		
R11	-Limited language choice		
R12	-Limited language choice		
R13	-Limited language choice / -Biased or unclear language is used throughout		
R14	-Limited language choice		
R15	-Word choices are not particularly vivid or precise		
R16	-Limited language choice		
R17	-Limited language choice		
R18	-Limited language choice		
R19	-Limited language choice		
R20	-Limited language choice		
R21	-Limited language choice		
R22	-Limited language choice		
R23	-Word choices are not particularly vivid or precise		
R24	-Limited language choice		
R25	-Limited language choice		
R26	-Limited language choice		
R27	-Limited language choice		
R28	-Limited language choice		
R29	-Limited language choice		
R30	-Limited language choice		
R31	-Limited language choice	-Limited language choice / -Word choices are not particularly vivid or precise / -biased or unclear language is used	-Inappropriate Language Usage
R32	-Limited language choice / -Biased or unclear language is used throughout		
R33	-Word choices are not particularly vivid or precise		
R34	-Limited language choice		
R35	-Biased or unclear language is used throughout		
R36	-Limited language choice		
R37	-Limited language choice		
R38	-Limited language choice		
R39	-Word choices are not particularly vivid or precise		
R40	-Limited language choice		
R41	-Limited language choice		
R42	-Limited language choice		
R43	-Limited language choice / -Biased or unclear language is used throughout		
R44	-Limited language choice		
R45	-Word choices are not particularly vivid or precise / -Biased or unclear language is used throughout		
R46	-Limited language choice		
R47	-Limited language choice		
R48	-Biased or unclear language is used throughout		
R49	-Word choices are not particularly vivid or precise / -Biased or unclear language is used throughout		
R50	-Limited language choice		
R51	-Limited language choice		
R52	-Biased or unclear language is used throughout		
R53	-Limited language choice		
R54	-Limited language choice		
R55	-Limited language choice		
R56	-Word choices are not particularly vivid or precise		
R57	-Limited language choice		
R58	-Limited language choice		
R59	-Limited language choice		
R60	-Word choices are not particularly vivid or precise / -Biased or unclear language is used throughout		

Table 4. DELIVERY (NON-VERBAL)

Respondent	Difficulties encountered	Challenges	Area for improvement
R1	-Articulation and pronunciation tend to be sloppy		
R2	-No consistency in eye-to-eye contact		
R3	-The delivery may appear inconsistent and non-fluencies are used excessively		
R4	-Articulation and pronunciation tend to be sloppy		
R5	-Articulation and pronunciation tend to be sloppy and audience has difficulty hearing presentation		
R6	-Some of the non-influences are observed		
R7	-Articulation and pronunciation tend to be sloppy		
R8	-Non-fluencies are used excessively		
R9	-Non-fluencies are used excessively and articulation and pronunciation tend to be sloppy		
R10	-Non-fluencies are used excessively		
R11	-Non-fluencies are used excessively and articulation and pronunciation tend to be sloppy		
R12	-Gestures and movement maybe jerky or excessive		
R13	-The eye-to-eye contact is limited		
R14	-Some of the non-influences are observed		
R15	-No consistency in eye-to-eye contact		
R16	-No consistency in eye-to-eye contact		
R17	-Non-fluencies are used excessively		
R18	-Non-fluencies are used excessively / -Articulation and pronunciation tend to be sloppy		
R19	-The eye-to-eye contact is limited and the delivery is inconsistent with the message		
R20	-Articulation and pronunciation tend to be sloppy		
R21	-Articulation and pronunciation tend to be sloppy		
R22	-Non-fluencies are used excessively		
R23	-Audience has difficulty hearing presentation		
R24	-Articulation and pronunciation tend to be sloppy		
R25	-Non-fluencies are used excessively		
R26	-Non-fluencies are used excessively and articulation and pronunciation tend to be sloppy		
R27	-Non-fluencies are used excessively	-Articulation & Pronunciation tend to be sloppy / -No eye-to-eye contact / -Non-fluencies excessive use of fillers / -Gestures & movements maybe jerky	-Articulation -Pronunciation -Non-fluencies -Ineffective Body Language
R28	-Non-fluencies are used excessively		
R29	-Articulation and pronunciation tend to be sloppy		
R30	-Some of the non-influences are observed		
R31	-The eye-to-eye contact is limited		
R32	-Some of the non-influences are observed		
R33	-Some of the non-influences are observed and the eye-to-eye contact is limited		
R34	-Non-fluencies are used excessively		
R35	-Articulation and pronunciation tend to be sloppy and non-fluencies are used excessively		
R36	-The eye-to-eye contact is limited		
R37	-Articulation and pronunciation tend to be sloppy		
R38	-Non-fluencies are used excessively and the eye-to-eye contact is limited		
R39	-Non-fluencies are used excessively		
R40	-Articulation and pronunciation tend to be sloppy and some of the non-influences are observed		
R41	-Non-fluencies are used excessively		
R42	-Some of the non-influences are observed		
R43	-Non-fluencies are used excessively and the eye-to-eye contact is limited		
R44	-The eye-to-eye contact is limited and non-influences are observed		
R45	-The delivery is inconsistent with the message		
R46	-Articulation and pronunciation tend to be sloppy		
R47	-Non-fluencies are used excessively		
R48	-Gestures and movement maybe jerky or excessive		
R49	-Some of the non-influences are observed		
R50	-The delivery is inconsistent with the message		
R51	-Articulation and pronunciation tend to be sloppy		
R52	-Some of the non-influences are observed		
R53	-Non-fluencies are used excessively and the eye-to-eye contact is limited		
R54	-Non-fluencies are used excessively		
R55	-Non-fluencies are used excessively		
R56	-Non-fluencies are used excessively		
R57	-The eye-to-eye contact is limited		
R58	-Some of the non-influences are observed		
R59	-Non-fluencies are used excessively		

Table 4 showcases the delivery of speech of the participants which resulted in a lack of articulation, the excessive use of fillers, and inappropriate body language. Ivanova, et. al. [9] posted that good performance of public speaking involves the skills in managing voice, gestures, and facial expressions during the speech. The proper way of pronouncing the word and the clear pronunciation are essentials to improve speaking skills using the English language. Since pronunciation is not the major objective of the curriculum, the learners should learn it

autonomously. This supports the claim of Suwartono, et. al [14] that pronunciation might be the most marginalized in the teaching and learning of English in spite of a key role this language aspect plays in spoken communication. Furthermore, it is elaborated that the neglect for teaching pronunciation may be due to the apparent complexity of English pronunciation and a misconception about what the content of a pronunciation course should be and about the way pronunciation should be taught.

In the delivery, there are a lot of disturbances that the student-respondents may have. The eye contact was limited; the respondents looked at the floor, mumbled, spoke inaudibly, and lot of unnecessary things they did to conquer their fear in speaking. Aliyu, Korau, & Basiru [15] relates in their study's findings that the speaking anxiety is mostly due to fear of negative evaluation and social-environmental factor. This was elaborated that the concept of self refers to excessive self-confidence in one's subjective assessment, skill, strength, and so strong self-confidence stems from a self-centered concentration (self-consciousness), and many distinct components, such as feelings of guilt, shy feelings, and lack of self-confidence can be made up the unreasonable aspirations of perfection, a sense of false modesty, fear of transition, turned inward, failure of making mistakes, depression, etc. [16]. More so, Safaa [17] testified that the highly self-confident learners were ready to try to speak in front of others, lack of general self-confidence, on the other hand, resulted in a lack of rest to strive for high-quality oral performance, less confident learners were not certain of their abilities, they tended to try less which in turn led to low level of achievement. Also, it was further emphasized that the general self-confidence among language learners in order to develop their oral proficiency. Henceforth, the development of self-confidence is needed to enhance the oral speaking skills, and that without self-confidence, the speaker cannot deliver his message to the audience.

4. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the gathered data, the study found out that SHS students lacked transitional words to connect their ideas, and also coherence seemed to be another concern for the Organization criteria while for Topic knowledge and Language use, students are having problems in elaborating their ideas for they cannot directly supply apt words and thoughts; And for their Delivery, minimal eye-to-eye contact with the audience was observed, low tones, pronunciation, and articulation of words are not that good. The study recommends that teachers and school administrators may develop a suitable compendium of activities in order for these students to practice better in harnessing their oral skills. This

paper also recommends that students may make use of the educational content of YouTube videos as there are many speaking-related videos they can not only watch but also imitate [Sonsona, 18]. Moreover, teachers can give them drills and exercises geared toward mastering these skills for them not just to be equipped but to be able to communicate effectively and attain academic success. Development of teaching material/compendium of activities would facilitate the teachers in aiding students in developing their oral proficiency skills.

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