

Verbal Outcomes Improvement Through Competency Enhancement (VOICE) Learning Program

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Abstract – Educational innovations are continually developed to address challenges of improving learning. One which is put into test in this study is the Verbal Outcomes Improvement through Competency Enhancement (VOICE) learning program which is structured on the perspectives of design thinking, task-based and collaborative learning. Involving graduate students of a state university located in Cagayan Valley, Philippines, this experimental study divulged the performance of the students using Quality Point Index along the components of the learning program as pair work (1.73), digital activity (1.72), both qualitatively categorized as very good; while along oral examination (2.17), action research (2.15) and forum (2.07), good. The study further proved that the learning program is effective in improving students' oral language proficiency along pragmatic and strategic competence yielding computed p-values less than the set level of significance of 0.05, except along organizational competence with computed p-value of 0.5177. The results handed substantial standpoints on assessing oral language skills, developing and utilization of the VOICE learning program in language subjects and management of communication in an organization.

Keywords - competency enhancement, learning program, oral language proficiency, verbal outcomes

INTRODUCTION

Transporting thoughts into a genre of either verbal or nonverbal communication entails a prodigious process and practice before reaching a remarkable level of spontaneity. The benefit of the mastery of the language though is enormous as it proffers reduced misunderstanding and conflict, more opportunities for borderless learning, enhanced organizational and professional services and better human relations.

Communication consists of three inseparable factors: the people, the messages and the medium [1]. Before the sender or receiver absorbs the message in a communicative encounter, it passes through context (constraints, objectives, role and timing), culture (presuppositions and rules) and channel (images, voice, written form and body). In this light, communication is a challenging human activity whose requisites are paramount in delivering thoughts in various human social encounters.

Communication effectiveness according to Chambers [2] extends the concept of communication to require that transmitted content is received and understood by someone in the way it was intended. To point out the importance of communication effectiveness to educational managers, Chambers [2] averred that there is a close relationship between communication skills and personal, professional and intellectual growth.

In pedagogy, communication among learners is honed through different educational innovations explored by the language teacher. Improved communication skills and effectiveness are sought to render facility of the English language to the learners that provides enormous opportunities in carrying out tasks in a chosen profession. Language skills open a broader horizon to the learners especially in this age of borderless communication.

One of the methods through which communication effectiveness could be honed is the leveling up of language proficiency into a considerable extent that an educational leader may efficiently deliver information, standpoints and even attitudes to the whole organization. Among those language constructs that could be put into scrutiny is oral language proficiency.

Motivated to improve communication management skills, the researcher designed a learning program in improving oral communication skills among graduate students of a state university in Cagayan Valley, Philippines. To ascertain the effectiveness of the program, this study embarked into the effectiveness of the Verbal Outcomes Improvement through Competency Enhancement (VOICE) learning program which is an offshoot of an empirical framework abstracted by the researcher.

This study is based on the theories of design thinking skills, task-based learning (TBL) and collaborative learning whose basic assumption lies on facilitating learning through an array of well-designed tasks which involve individual and group activities geared toward improving spoken language proficiency.

Design thinking is a human-centered problem solving approach with an emphasis on collaboration, empathy and co-creation to unlock creativity and innovation. The key to the process is empathizing with the learners' needs to solve a problem [3].

On the other hand, Nunan [4] defines task-based language approach as an approach to the design of language courses in which the point of departure is not an ordered list of linguistic items, but a collection of tasks. It reflects the experiential and humanistic traditions, as well as the changing conceptions of language itself.

Further, cooperative learning enhances social interaction, which is essential to meet the needs of at-risk students [5]. Within the framework of cooperative learning groups, students learn how to interact with their peers and increase involvement with the school community. Positive interactions do not always occur naturally and social skills instruction must precede and concur with the cooperative learning strategies. Social skills encompass communicating, building and maintaining trust, providing leadership, and managing conflicts [6].

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed in general at ascertaining if oral language proficiency of graduate students of a state university in Cagayan Valley, Philippines, under the Master of Arts in Education (MAEd) program, could be improved through a learning program.

To realize such aim, it unveiled realities on the level of oral language proficiency of the respondents before and after undergoing the Verbal Outcomes Improvement through Competency Enhancement (VOICE) learning program along organizational, pragmatic and strategic competence.

Further, it is geared toward divulging the students' performances in the components of the program: pair work, digital activity, oral examination, action research and forum.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

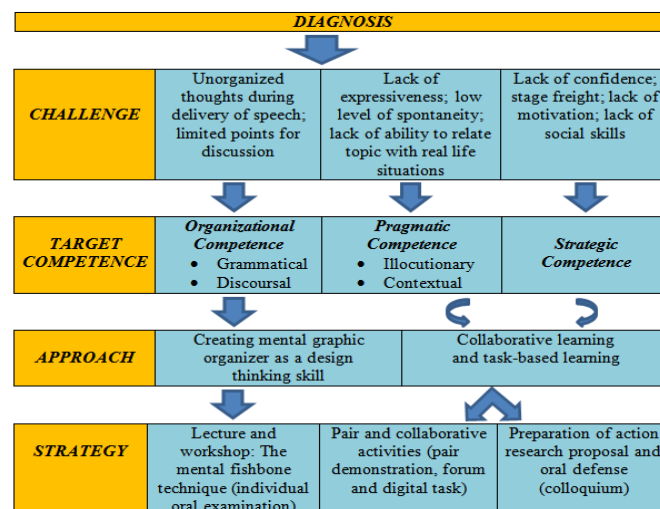
The study employed the descriptive research design to aptly characterize the oral language proficiency of the

respondents along organizational, pragmatic and strategic competencies. The experimental approach was used to divulge significance of difference between the performance of the respondents before and after undergoing the learning program.

The study which was conducted at the graduate school of a state university in Cagayan Valley, Philippines, during the first semester of SY 2016-2017, involved 34 randomly selected respondents representing 53.25% of the enrolled MAEd students of the said academic unit, satisfying the provisions of the central limit theorem that 15 respondents could suffice an experimental study. [add]

The VOICE learning program before administered to the MAEd class has undergone expert validation by teacher education faculty members and administrators who are either a master's or doctorate degree holder in the field of education.

The succeeding figure shows the conceptual flow of the program:



Diagnosis served as the fountainhead of the research which revealed the challenges of oral communication among the MAEd students of the said research setting. Target competences were set based on the issues revealed by empirical data. Such competences were derived from the theories of Bachman [7] and Lin [8]. Down the line, approaches which include graphic organizer making based on design thinking skill, collaborative and task-based learning were espoused that eventually paved into the determination of tasks including pair demonstration, forum, performance in a student-developed digital language activity, individual oral examination and research colloquium.

Specifically, data were gathered from the respondents through an oral pretest and posttest using analytic rubrics with the following general and specific components: organizational competence (grammatical and discoursal), 30%; pragmatic competence (illocutionary and contextual), 50% and strategic competence, 20%. The criteria are extracted from a Likert-scale communicative competence rating scale based on the standards set on organizational competence (grammatical and discoursal) and pragmatic competence (sociolinguistic and illocutionary) by Bachman [7] and on strategic competence (learning and paralinguistic) by Lin [8]. The expert validated assessment tool was further subjected to analysis of internal validity under the Classical Test Theory using the Kuder-Richardson Formula 20, or K-R20 [9].

Scores were converted into the Quality Point Index (QPI) as follows: 1.00-1.25, excellent; 1.50-1.75, very good; 2.00-2.25, good; 3.00, passing; and 5.00, failing.

Statistical tools used to unveil answers to the research questions were means, percentages and dependent t-test using 5.00% level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After careful handling of the data collected pertinent to the preceding research problems, the following results were derived.

Table 1. Level of oral language proficiency of the respondents in the pretest along organizational, pragmatic and strategic competence

Competence	Mean	Grade (QPI)	Qualitative Category
Organizational	23.5259	2.00	Good
Pragmatic	35.6499	2.25	Good
Strategic	14.1653	2.25	Good
Total	73.3401	2.25	Good

Legend: QPI=Quality Point Index

To ascertain the level of oral language proficiency of the subjects in the experimentation, an oral pretest was administered. Means, grades and qualitative categories are presented in table 1 to sufficiently address the first research question.

The students garnered an average score of 73.3401 (over 100) in the pretest corresponding to a grade of 2.25 or qualitatively described as good. This mean is attributed by their mean score of 23.5259 in organizational competence with a grade of 2.00 or good;

35.6499 in pragmatic competence, 2.25 or good; and 14.1653 in strategic competence, 2.25 or good.

Among the three areas tested, organizational competence surfaced as the strength of the respondents with a mean of 23.5259 (over 30 points) which is equivalent to a grade of 2.00 qualitatively categorized as good. This domain includes the grammatical and organizational competence of the students [7].

Grammatical competence involves the capability of the student to analyze words, sentences, paragraphs and the whole composition as to their structure to be able to correctly use them in communication activities. It includes correct usage, subject-verb agreement, word forms, sentence structures and patterns, and the like.

On the other hand, discoursal competence refers to the skill of the student to construct lengthy paragraphs or dialogues given a theme. It involves the skill of mental outlining which gives specific direction of the speaker in relatively protracted discourses.

Table 2. Level of performance of the respondents in the VOICE learning program

Area	Mean (QPI)	Qualitative Description
Pair work	1.73	Very Good
Forum	2.07	Good
Digital Activity	1.72	Very Good
Oral Exam	2.17	Good
Action Research	2.15	Good

Legend: QPI=Quality Point Index

To convey performance of the subjects in the learning program activities or exercises, frequencies and percentages are divulged in table 2. All scores were converted into their equivalent grades based on QPI and qualitative categories that render a more plausible presentation of the data.

The program was designed to address the empirical data presented by the researcher in the conceptual matrix of the learning program (Figure 1) along the challenges of oral communication among the MAEd students of the research setting.

The subjects performed utmost in the pair work and digital activity posting mean grades of 1.73 and 1.72, both qualitatively categorized as very good. Conversely, they performed least in the oral examination and action research with mean grades of 2.17 and 2.15, both qualitatively categorized as good. And they obtained a mean grade of 2.07 in the forum, described as good.

Taking into account the activities where the subjects excelled, the common description is that they were administered in a collaborative learning atmosphere.

This finds support in the assertion of Goodwin [6] that positive results are gained through cooperative learning strategies that concur with social skills education which encompasses communicating, building and maintaining trust, providing leadership, and managing conflicts.

The oral examination which was conducted individually and action research where most learners find difficulty because of its technicality, lack of allotted time and resources, were areas in which the students performed the least. Both of which however registered a qualitative category of good.

Table 3. Level of oral language proficiency of the respondents in the posttest along organizational, pragmatic and strategic competence

Competence	Mean	Grade (QPI)	Qualitative Category
Organizational	23.2721	2.00	Good
Pragmatic	37.7831	2.00	Good
Strategic	15.0846	2.00	Good
Total	76.1398	2.00	Good

Legend: QPI=Quality Point Index

To unveil the level of oral language proficiency of the subjects after the intervention, an oral posttest was administered. Means, grades and qualitative categories are presented in table 2 to appropriately address this research question.

The students obtained an average score of 76.1398 (over 100) in the posttest with an equivalent grade of 2.00 compared to the pretest with a grade of 2.25. Both are qualitatively described as good however. This mean is attributed by their mean score of 23.2721 in organizational competence with a grade of 2.00 or good; 37.7831 in pragmatic competence, 2.00 or good; and 15.0846 in strategic competence, 2.00 or good.

The improvement in the posttest performance could be accounted on increase in the grades of both pragmatic and strategic competences which is 2.00, higher by 0.25 in the pretest means of both domains. The performance of the subjects along organizational competence remained under the same qualitative category of good with a mean grade of 2.00.

The areas in which the students progressed cover pragmatic and strategic competences. Further, the contextual and illocutionary skills of the respondents were observed as indicators of their pragmatic competence. Sociolinguistic skills refer to how an individual uses language considering the effect of any and all aspects of society, including cultural norms, expectations, and context, on the way language is used,

and the effects of language use on society while illocutionary skills are according to Austin's [10] original exposition in *How to Do Things with Words*, refer to how well an act is done by one who must make it clear to some other person that the act is performed, and the performance of which involves the production of what Austin calls "conventional consequences", e.g., rights, commitments, or obligations.

Lastly, strategies have been found to be of critical importance, so much so that strategic competence has been suggested as a major component of communicative competence. Strategies are commonly divided into learning strategies and communicative strategies[8] which in this study refer to learning and paralinguistic competence. Learning strategies are techniques used to improve learning, such as mnemonics or using a dictionary. Paralinguistic competence involves strategies that a learner uses to convey meaning even when he does not have access to the correct form, such as using pro-forms like thing, or using non-verbal means such as gestures.

The findings that address this research problem are leaned on the principle of communicative competence as defined by Rush [11] that communication could be best supported not only by proficiency in grammar and discourses but more importantly by how an individual establishes rapport and understanding in practical situations through nonverbal language and the language of empathy.

Table 4. Analysis of difference in the pretest and posttest mean scores of the respondents

Variable	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	t-value	p-value
Organizational Competence	23.5259	23.2721	0.6504	0.5177
Pragmatic Competence	35.6499	37.7831	-3.1219*	0.0013
Strategic Competence	14.1653	15.0846	-3.8493*	0.0003
Overall	73.3401 (2.1471)	76.1398 (1.9779)	3.0021*	0.0038

*Significant at 0.05 level

The mean scores in the oral language proficiency pretest and posttest were compared using the dependent t-test. The t-values and corresponding p-values are divulged in table 4.

Overall, the MAEd students pegged a pretest mean score of 73.3401 and a posttest mean score of 76.1398 with QPI equal to 2.1471 and 1.9779 respectively. The

comparative analysis yielded a t-value of 3.0021 corresponding to p -value of 0.0038. Hence, the null hypothesis along this domain is not accepted, meaning, there is a significant difference in the pretest and posttest overall mean scores of the students. This eventually proves that the VOICE learning program is an effective tool in improving the oral language proficiency of the students.

Putting details into a closer look, the oral language proficiency pretest and posttest mean scores of the MAEd students along organizational competence are 23.5259 and 23.2721 respectively with a mean difference of 0.2538. The computed t-value after analysis of the mean difference is 0.6504 with p -value equivalent to 0.5177. Since the p -value is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis along this domain is accepted. Hence, there is no significant difference between the two mean scores. This further means that there is no significant improvement in the students' proficiency in organizational competence which is indicated by grammatical and discoursal competence. Improving grammar and discourse skills takes considerable time and tasks to hone proficiency in organizing thoughts before it is transported into an oral form [12].

Along pragmatic competence, the students obtained pretest and posttest mean scores of 35.6499 and 37.7831 respectively yielding a t-value of -3.1219 with a p -value of 0.0013 which is less than the level of significance of 0.05. This means that the null hypothesis along this question is not accepted. Thus, the VOICE learning program is effective in improving the oral language proficiency of the students in terms of sociolinguistic and illocutionary skills.

Moreover, the students obtained pretest and posttest mean scores of 14.1653 and 15.0846 respectively resulting to a t-value of -3.8493 with a p -value of 0.0003 which is less than the level of significance of 0.05. This implies that the null hypothesis along this question is not accepted. Hence, the VOICE learning program is effective in improving the oral language proficiency of the students in terms of learning and paralinguistic skills.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

With the salient findings of the study, the following conclusions were derived to address in summary the research questions investigated in this study.

1. The level of oral language proficiency of the MAEd students of NVSU-Bambang along organizational competence, pragmatic competence and

strategic competence before undergoing the VOICE learning program is good.

2. The level of performance of the students in the VOICE learning program along pair work and digital activity is very good, while along oral examination, action research and forum, good.

3. The level of oral language proficiency of the students along organizational competence, pragmatic competence and strategic competence after undergoing the VOICE learning program is good.

4. There is a significant difference in the pretest and posttest overall mean scores of the students which proves that the VOICE learning program is an effective tool in improving the oral language proficiency of the students.

With the foregoing conclusions, the following recommendations are offered:

Assessing Oral Language Proficiency. Assessment of student language learning may be based on auspices of design thinking skills, task-based learning and collaborative learning which are inclined to the principle of authentic learning. These learning standpoints were considered in the design of the learning program used in this study which proved to be effective in oral language learning.

The VOICE Learning Program. Since the program is effective in improving the oral language proficiency of the learners, it is recommended for utilization in other subjects/courses which aim at improving spoken communication skills along organizational, pragmatic and strategic competence.

Communication in Management. The competencies that the graduate school students develop will likewise be applied in their respective organizations not only as a member but also as future leaders. As such, they are equipped with awareness that oral language proficiency would also proffer them a better mechanism to manage quality of communication in their organization by developing desirable skills in language.

Other Researches. This study may serve as motivation to other researchers in exploring other educational innovations that make the school a borderless environment in terms of opportunities in improving learning.

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