

Attitude of Grade 12 SHS Academic Tracks Students Towards Speaking in English

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Abstract

The matter of learner's attitude is acknowledged as one of the most important factors that impact on learning language. Hence, this study aimed to determine the attitude of students toward speaking in English as it employed descriptive-correlational method to describe their profile and their attitude. It also ascertained the relationship between the students' attitude towards speaking in English and their profile variables and the difference of their attitude when grouped by strand and by sex. The data were collected from Grade 12 Senior High School Academic Track students with the use of the English Speaking Attitude Questionnaire (ESAQ). Results show that both HumSS and ABM strand students have positive attitude towards speaking in English and that speaking in English is important to them in general. Interestingly, however, these students admitted that they do not speak English well, are worried about making mistakes when they speak English and are afraid of being laughed at when they make mistakes in speaking. The students also believe that they need to learn speaking in English because they might need it in their future job and that practicing it will make them better speakers of English. The study found no significant difference in the attitude of the students towards speaking in English when grouped according to strand and sex. The implication of these results redounds to the emphasis on the importance of classroom motivation to improve students' attitude towards speaking in English.

Keywords: attitude towards speaking in English, academic track, Senior high school, HumSS, ABM

Introduction

English as the global language has undoubtedly dignified its standing in global communication essentially targeting both oral and written skills. In the Philippines however, as observed by the researcher, speaking in English seems to be very difficult most especially to students in the secondary level.

There are various factors that affect the learning of speaking in English, one of which is attitude. Attitude is determined by the individual's beliefs about outcomes or attributes of performing the behaviors (behavioral beliefs), weighted by evaluations of those outcomes or attributes. The concern on the learners' attitudes towards the target language was emphasized by Gardner (1985). He stated that the learners' attitudes towards learning another language play a key role in enhancing and motivating them to learn that language.

Kara (2009) as cited by Abidin (2012) stated that attitudes towards learning besides opinions and beliefs have an obvious influence on students' behaviors and consequently on their performance. It is argued that those students who possess positive beliefs about language learning have a tendency to increase more positive attitudes towards language learning. Attitude is considered as an essential factor influencing language performance and received considerable attention from both first and second and language researchers.

There are many reasons why student's attitude toward language learning is important. Attitude is one of the factors that influence foreign language learning because how much effort students put into language learning depends partly on attitude (Gardner, Lanlonde and Moorcroft, 1985). Thus, it can be inferred that learners with positive attitude towards speaking English will be more involved in speaking activities and may try to make use of more strategies that help them deal with their difficulties in the course of conversation; and learners with negative attitude will be less willing to participate in speaking activities. Conversely, negative beliefs may lead to class anxiety, low cognitive achievement, and negative attitudes (Victori & Lockhart, 1995).

Moreover, gender has been an important perspective under second language learning investigations; highlighting females to execute more interests, positive behaviors and performances, in comparison to the males (Keller, 1983; Aacken, 1999; Dornyei & Shoaib, 2005). These gender differences are due to students' unlike levels of motivation, attitudes and anxiety towards language learning, further influenced by their learning characteristics and styles, lesson content and teaching strategies, social environment and supportive mechanisms, family influences and peer pressures, cognition levels, and so forth (Williams, Burden & Lanvers, 2002). Thus, investigating affective aspects have become vitally important, especially under the gender perspective in order to enhance students' interests and outcomes in second language learning.

Furthermore, in the study concluded by Cabansag (2013) titled "The Attitudinal Propensity of Students towards strategies in English Language Learning" it was found out that positive attitude towards English may lead to awareness of the importance of English and learn it as a compulsory subject. Attitude concept is considered as an essential component in language learning. So, a positive attitude should be the umbrella of the language learning. It is so

important to study learner's personalities. For that reason, the effective perspective, especially attitude, should be considered in language research.

Senior High School students are expected to have better English language proficiency, especially their oral communication ability. However, as an ESL teacher that implements "Speak in English" policy inside the classroom, it was observed that most students find it hard to keep up with the class rule, thus the researcher is bounded in discovering the attitude of the students towards speaking in English.

This study looks into the concept of attitude as one of the major affective factors for success in speaking the English language amongst students. More specifically, it investigates senior high school students' attitudes towards speaking in English, taking into consideration their profile variables such as gender and strand.

Objectives of the Study

The present study aimed at investigating the attitude of the students toward speaking in English, examining whether the attitude of the students towards speaking in English significantly differs according to their profile variables such as their academic track strand and sex.

Methodology

Respondents

The method of data collection employed for the present study was the stratified random sampling. There were two groups under the Academic Track, the HumSS and the ABM. The purposive sampling method was also adopted. As a result, only 47 students were selected from the two groups (30 from the HumSS and 17 from ABM) with a total of 18 males and 29 females.

Instruments

As the present study's context is the same with that of Bui and Intaraprasert (2013), their English Speaking Attitude Questionnaire (ESAQ) was used. It was constructed on the basis of the Language Learning Attitude Questionnaire (2004) and Okert's (2010) language learning questionnaire. The statements in the ESAQ specifically pertains to their feelings towards speaking in English, reasons why they speak in English, reasons why English is important to them as well as their perceived English speaking capability.

Moreover, to ensure that the respondents knew the purpose of investigation and answered the questionnaire with less fear and honesty, which, as stated by Intaraprasert (2000), is very important, the questionnaires' general instruction followed Dörnyei's (2003) suggestion. This involved providing

information on the purpose, the importance of the study, and the organization responsible for conducting the study, stating there is no right or wrong answer, requesting honest answers, promising confidentiality, and expressing appreciation.

Procedure

The ESAQ was administered to students from the two different strands (HumSS and ABM). The researchers themselves carried out the process strictly following the sampling plan so as to achieve the desired number and qualified responses.

Results and Discussion

The data collected were analyzed in quantitative method such that the (1) information about the students’ profile which includes strand were coded with numbers; (2) information about the students’ attitude towards speaking in English were coded with numbers; (3) the data about how the attitude of the students towards speaking in English significantly differs according to strand were processed using T-Test; and (4) the data about determining the relationship between the attitude of the students towards speaking in English and their academic strand were processed through Spearman-rho .

As shown in table 1, 63.8 percent of the respondents are from the HumSS strand while 36.2 of the remaining respondents are from the ABM strand. This is because in the school where the researchers conducted the study, the population of HumSS students is three times the population of ABM students.

Table 1. Profile of the respondents when grouped according to strand.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
HUMMS	30	63.8	63.8	63.8
Valid ABM	17	36.2	36.2	100.0
Total	47	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 shows that 38.3 percent of the total number of respondents are male while 61.7 percent of the remaining number of respondents are female. Accordingly, there are relatively more female than male students in the two strands.

Table 2. Profile of the respondents when grouped according to sex.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	18	38.3	38.3	38.3
Valid Female	29	61.7	61.7	100.0
Total	47	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 presents the attitude of the students towards speaking in English. As gleaned from the table, statements 11 and 17 received the highest mean. Students believe that speaking English is important because they might need it later for their job as suggested in statement number 11. In general, speaking in English is important to the students.

More so, they think that if they put much effort in practicing, they can speak English well. However, findings also indicate that the students are worried about making mistakes when speaking in English. Along this line, Batang and Temporal (2018) opined that the negative attitude of students could be ascribed to their inhibitions in using the English language especially when they are with people who speak English well. They would rather not speak than commit mistakes and be laughed at by their interlocutors. Students' feeling of intimidation could also be spelled from the worries and discomfort they experience both in and out of the classroom.

Many other studies have been conducted to explore the nature of students' attitudes towards learning foreign language in general and EFL in particular, compared with the studies concerning the attitudes towards speaking in English.

For instance, Shams (2008) conducted a study attempting to investigate students' attitudes, motivation and anxiety towards the learning of English. The findings underlined that the students had affirmative attitudes and high enthusiasm towards English. This also highlighted that most of them showed positive attitudes towards English language and its learning which, in turn, emphasized the value of English language efficiency in the daily life.

The findings of study by Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009) on Petroleum Engineering students' motivation and attitudes towards learning English revealed that they had positive attitudes towards the use of English in the Yemeni social and educational contexts. They also showed affirmative attitude towards the culture of the English-speaking world.

Generally, Grade 12 Academic Track SHS students have positive attitude towards speaking in English as Speaking in English is important to them. These students are on their last year in the Senior High School and are candidates either for employment or further studies in college, thus they already realized the

importance of being able to speak in English for their future careers. Attitude is a very significant factor that could tell the success of learning something but it must not end there. As suggested by Rastegar and Gohari, 2016, improving the positive attitude of the students towards a particular academic subject may increase their desire to learn it and an ability to apply what they have been taught. The academic subject is much like Speaking in English.

According to Ellis (1985), language teachers should foster a high positive attitude in the learners by paying a lot of attention to the way the learners find their way throughout learning the language and should provide the lively and dynamic class environments where can help students learn the language as best through the creation of a positive attitude towards the language being learnt and towards the environments in which it can be learnt.

Also, the respondents admitted that they are worried about making mistakes when speaking in English and therefore afraid of being laughed at when they make mistakes at speaking in English although they are willing to learn speaking in English. It might be one of the factors why despite the “Speak in English” rule applied by the researcher inside the class, the students find it hard to keep up with the rule. This is actually not new anymore, in fact, getting students to respond in the classroom is a problem that most ESL teachers face. Tsui (1996) found that students’ reticence is attributed to students’ lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes and being laughed at. Consequently, the students were reluctant to answer in front of the whole class, and when called on by their teacher spoke in a barely audible voice.

In general, Tsui’s (1996) findings have been supported by a number of other studies of foreign-language classroom situations (including content-based contexts) either in Hong Kong (Flowerdew et al., 2000; Jackson, 2001, 2003; Liu & Littlewood, 1997), Mainland China (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Zou, 2004), or Thailand (Thein, 1994). In Jackson’s (1999) and Liu and Littlewood’s studies, the students expressed willingness to participate in classroom discussions in the target language, but remained reticent and passive in class. Some students in Jackson’s (2002) study even perceived themselves as active in class just by listening to others.

Interestingly, although speaking English is important to them, they admit that they do not speak English well but with practice, they can improve their speaking in English. In a research done by Goktepe (2013), it was found out that the students, who were 9th grade public high school learners commonly believed that they could not speak English fluently. Therefore, these results gave us some reasons to think the students were aware of the problem.

Table 3. Attitude of the respondents towards speaking in English.

Statements	Mean	Description
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1) You enjoy speaking English.	1.94	Agree
2) Speaking English is fun.	1.91	Agree
3) Being able to speak English often makes you happy.	1.91	Agree
4) Being able to speak English gives you a feeling of success.	1.81	Agree
5) Speaking English is important to you in general.	1.72	Strongly Agree
6) You speak English because it will make your parents or your teacher proud of you.	2.40	Agree
7) You speak English because you want to do well on oral tests.	2.02	Agree
8) You speak English because you want to communicate with foreigners.	2.40	Agree
9) Speaking English is important to you because you want to make friends with foreigners.	2.28	Agree
10) Speaking English is important to you because you might study overseas.	2.17	Agree
11) Speaking English is important to you because you might need it later for your job.	1.30	Strongly Agree
12) You speak English because all educated people can do that.	2.21	Agree
13) You speak English because you have to do it.	1.98	Agree
14) You think you speak English well.	2.60	Disagree
15) You like to mimic other people's accents.	2.32	Agree
16) You can mimic other accents well	2.40	Agree
17) You think if you put much effort in practicing, you can speak English well.	1.51	Strongly Agree
18) At school, if you didn't know how to give an answer in English for sure, you'd still answer out loud in class anyway.	2.38	Agree
19) You are not worried about making mistakes when you speak English.	2.64	Disagree
20) You are not afraid of being laughed at when you make mistakes in speaking.	2.58	Disagree
Category Mean	2.13	Agree

Table 4 shows the T-test result on the difference on attitude when grouped according to strand and sex. With P-values more than 0.01 and 0.05, the hypotheses are accepted.

This study similarly pictures the study of Dennison (2006) who looked into the effects of gender stereotypes in language on attitudes toward speakers which made use of 58 women and 30 men and considered the differences and relationships of their sex to their attitude.

It was found out in this study that there is no statistically significant difference on the attitude of students towards speaking in English and their sex although females have higher mean than males.

Fakeye (2010) investigated the correlation between attitude and achievement in English among 400 senior secondary students selected randomly from five secondary schools. The findings revealed that there was a significant relationship between attitude and achievement. Additionally, it was explored that students' attitude is not gender-related. Thus, there was not a statistically significant difference in the attitudes of male and female students. However, the descriptive results show that the attitudes of female secondary school students towards English are slightly higher than that of male ones.

Table 4. T-test result on the difference on attitude when grouped according to strand and sex.

Independent Variable	T-value	Prob. value	Decision
Strand	-.007	.995	Accept H ₀
Sex	-.299	.667	Accept H ₀

Conclusion

The study concludes that Grade 12 senior high school academic track students have positive attitude towards speaking in English and that they view speaking in English as important in general. However, speaking in English is feared by most students because they are afraid of being laughed at when committing mistakes in speaking. They may not like to speak the language because they lack self-confidence on their conversational ability. Nevertheless, they think that they can speak English well if provided opportunities to practice.

Pedagogical Implication

The present study has contributed more knowledge to the field of attitude as a factor in the success of language learning specifically of speaking in English. It suggests that attitude is again proven as an inevitable element language learning and thus should be given importance by language teachers. Indeed, a positive attitude should be the umbrella of language learning. The implication of these results redounds to the emphasis on the importance of classroom motivation to improve students' attitude towards speaking in English.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings of this study, it is recommended that language teachers should maintain the positive attitude of the students towards speaking in

English. The students are already aware of the problem of why they stop speaking in English, it is because of their fear of committing mistakes and being laughed at. Learners need encouragement and they need to know when they are making mistakes that might cause other people not to understand or misunderstand them. Language teachers should therefore provide these students ample opportunity to speak with the imposition of it's alright to commit mistakes. Being aware of the importance of students' attitudes might help language curriculum and instruction designers to invent language teaching programs that generate the positive attitudes which lead to having more successful language learners (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Additionally, it can assist material writers in inventing and instructors in picking up tasks that tackle students' attitudes (Midraj, O'Neill, & Sellami, 2008).

In connection, material writers should provide more speaking tasks in the Grade 12 Academic Track curriculum since the students said that they can speak English well through practice. When speaking activities are incorporated into the curriculum, there is no way that these students will not improve their speaking skills. Also, what should be provided are meaningful tasks, create situations in class where students have real-life communication, activities related to their daily life and meaningful tasks that give them the chance to practice oral language.

Lastly, the Speak in English policy inside the class must be done not only by English teachers but by other subject teachers as well. It is still one way to increase students' chance of practicing to speak in English. Besides, every teacher is expectedly a language teacher.

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Appendix

ESAQ (English Speaking Attitude Questionnaire)

Instructions: To what extent do you agree with the following items? The following items ask about your attitudes towards speaking in English. Remember there is no right or wrong answers; just answer as accurately as possible. Please read the statements below carefully and tick the appropriate choices that reflect your attitudes and perceptions towards English language.

Use the scale below to answer the questionnaire items.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly Disagree

Note: Tick (✓) only one option for each item in the questionnaire.

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1) You enjoy speaking English.				
2) Speaking English is fun.				
3) Being able to speak English often makes you happy.				
4) Being able to speak English gives you a feeling of success.				
5) Speaking English is important to you in general.				
6) You speak English because it will make your parents or your teacher proud of you.				
7) You speak English because you want to do well on oral tests.				
8) You speak English because you want to communicate with foreigners.				
9) Speaking English is important to you because you want to make friends with foreigners.				

10) Speaking English is important to you because you might study overseas.				
11) Speaking English is important to you because you might need it later for your job.				
12) You speak English because all educated people can do that.				
13) You speak English because you have to do it.				
14) You think you speak English well.				
15) You like to mimic other people's accents.				
16) You can mimic other accents well.				
17) You think if you put much effort in practicing, you can speak English well.				
18) At school, if you didn't know how to give an answer in English for sure, you'd still answer out loud in class anyway.				
19) You are not worried about making mistakes when you speak English.				
20) You are not afraid of being laughed at when you make mistakes in speaking.				

Thank you for your cooperation.

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