

Self-esteem and English oral proficiency level of junior high school students in the Philippines

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Abstract

This study intended to determine if there is a significant relationship between self-esteem and the English oral proficiency level of junior high school students in a private school in Manolo Fortich, Bukidnon. A descriptive-correlational design was employed to describe the relationship between self-esteem and oral proficiency level. Through a simplified random sampling procedure, 99 grade 7 students were identified as respondents of the study. They first answered to the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSES) to identify their level of self-esteem. After answering the survey, each respondent delivered a 2–3-minute extemporaneous speech about a specific topic. The data gathered from this study were analysed through frequency count, Pearson *r*, *t*-test, and ANOVA. Results showed that the computed Pearson *r* value between self-esteem and English oral proficiency level was 0.445 which means that there was a moderate positive correlation between the variables. Hence, the development of self-esteem should be given consideration in speech intervention or enhancement programs. English classrooms must be safe spaces for students to be open about what they feel. Furthermore, teachers must promote the culture of praise to establish a positive self-esteem among their students.

Keywords: English oral proficiency, language education, second language, self-esteem, language development

1. Introduction

English Language Education (ELE) has been one of the focuses of the K-12 Curriculum in the Philippines. Recent regional and international thrusts in economy and education have led the Philippine government to review the ELE curriculum to address concerns in English language competencies among Filipino students. The curriculum is designed such that it exposes the students in English both inside the classroom and in social interaction. Nonetheless, Santos et al. (2022) reports that there is a decline in English proficiency among Filipinos. They added that the rank of the Philippines in the annual English Proficiency Index report by Education First has been declining since 2015. In addition, Education First (2022) reports that, along with China, the Philippines is the main driver in the decline of English proficiency in Asia. As a matter of fact, despite the

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continuous review and revisions in the curriculum, many English language teachers still report major problems in oral language. One of their common observations is that many learners find it difficult to express their thoughts in English. Most of them are still hesitant to speak English in oral recitation and in social interactions. They seem to have fear of expressing their thoughts using the language. As a result, their academic performance in English as a subject is affected. This provides a reason to examine the effect of self-esteem towards oral proficiency.

To investigate this matter, it should be understood that language proficiency is perceived to be affected not just by classroom instruction and academic curriculum but also by affective factors. In Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition (SLA), he proposed the affective filter hypothesis which identifies motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety as filters that affect language acquisition. These filters, which are indicators of self-esteem, play a facilitative role in the acquisition of language. Moreover, these filters are also indicators of self-esteem.

Madokhail et al. (2018) posits that self-esteem is an essential factor in developing second language (L2) in the classroom. He believes that if self-esteem is not considered as a factor in an L2 classroom, "no successful cognitive and affective performance could be yielded." In addition to this, Alrabai (2018) asserts that students with low self-esteem do not take risks in achieving communicative competence. This leads to lower achievement towards L2 learning and acquisition.

As previously mentioned, the Department of Education's K-12 Curriculum considers English as a major subject. However, most English teachers in the locale have observed that students tend to feel anxious when speaking in English. With the findings of previous studies about the variables show a possible relationship, this study intends to add literature to these findings by investigating if there is a significant relationship between self-esteem and the oral proficiency level of the respondents. This is to further confirm if self-esteem can be considered a factor in the L2 classroom.

1.1 Self-esteem

Self-esteem is defined as a person's overall self-evaluation of their value. It is an individual's assessment of self-worth that is either expressed positively or negatively (Minev et al., 2018). It describes how confident a person is about their skills and attributes (Cherry, 2022). Together with self-image and the ideal self, it comprises a broader term called self-concept which is a person's overall view of themselves.

Various research has been conducted to describe how self-esteem is developed. Orth et al. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of existing longitudinal studies in the development of self-esteem. In the said study, they have analyzed the development of self-esteem among respondents aged 4 to 94. It can be gleaned from the results that there is a rise in the level of self-esteem from childhood which peaks at age 60 and remains constant until 70. This rise is not continuous, however, as there is an observed stability at the age 11 to 15. After reaching its peak, self-esteem slightly decrease until 90 and significantly after the age of 94. Overall, the findings

show that self-esteem develops across a person's lifespan. It eventually reaches its peak point then starts to decline after.

In this study, self-esteem was examined through self-confidence and self-deprecation. Blanco et al. (2020) defines self-confidence is being aware of one's capabilities and maximizing these to perform their best. This means that having self-confidence is being able to utilize the skills the person has in the performance of certain tasks. Moreover, this definition proposes that people who have high self-confidence consequently develop various skills easily. This is because they are willing to engage in certain activities for learning because they are aware of their own potentials. Akbari and Sahibzada (2020) assert that students with high self-confidence tend to develop high interest in the lesson and participate in the learning experience.

On the other hand, self-deprecation is defined as a form of self-talk that usually characterize low self-esteem (Speer, 2019). People who self-deprecate talks negatively about themselves. Owens et al. (2006 in Speers, 2019) assert that self-deprecating tendencies are associated with depression. It is a form of negative self-evaluation and generally is the opposite of self-confidence. In their study, Teng and Song (2019) found out that self-deprecation is negatively correlated with academic performance. Contrary to those with high self-confidence or positive self-esteem, student who have self-deprecating tendencies have a feeling of loneliness as well as low feelings of self-worth.

Overall, self-esteem is one crucial aspect in the achievement of one's own potential. A high self-esteem consequently leads to overall success.

Several factors have been identified by various researchers to affect self-esteem. At some instances, these studies are focused on specific demographic profiles and conditions. For instance, Oh et al. (2017) investigated the relationship between Body Mass Index (BMI), body image, and self-esteem among patients diagnosed with schizophrenia. The results showed that there is a significant relationship between self-esteem and body image. Nonetheless, such relationship does not exist with BMI and any of the variables. It was concluded in the said study, however, that body image and BMI both influence the self-image of patients with schizophrenia.

A longitudinal study was also conducted by Orth (2018) to describe the effects of the family environment in early childhood in the individual differences of self-esteem among people. In the said study, 8, 711 US citizens aged 8 to 27 reported biannually on their self-esteem. A biannual assessment of their mothers was also conducted to gather information on the family environment the respondents grew up with. Results showed that the family environment significantly predicted the self-esteem of the respondents. Hence, early childhood family environment is a key factor on the long-term development of self-esteem.

1.2 Oral Proficiency

The Center for Applied Linguistics (2017) defines oral proficiency as the ability to use a language in real-life settings. This means that a person who is orally proficient can use language accurately and fluently on social context. Moreover, the British Council Indonesia Foundation (2022) adds that oral proficiency is characterized by fluency and accuracy. Fluency refers

to the ability to speak a language smoothly with few to no hesitations. On the other hand, accuracy is the ability to use a language correctly based on its accepted standards.

Various literatures have identified different aspects of oral proficiency. For the context of the present study, pronunciation, phrasing, intonation, non-verbal cues, language use, content, and organization are considered.

Pronunciation is the production of sounds to make meaning (Rahmania & Mandasari, 2021). It has been one of the important aspects of communication discussed and studied. According to Gilakhani (2017), it is important that English language teachers give focus on teaching pronunciation as it serves as a link to other communicative skills such as listening and vocabulary. Moreover, Pratiwi (2021) assert that pronunciation is a basic requirement for language competence as good pronunciation also makes it easy for the learner to understand the language being learned. When sounds are clearly realized in spoken language, articulation is achieved (Alderete, 2021). Articulation particularly involves the speech organ as the sounds are executed in corresponding motor plans (Basilakos et al., 2018). Proper production of sounds using an articulation network in the brain lead to better understanding of the message delivered orally.

Phrasing, particularly known as prosodic phrasing, are word groupings in a sentence. These word groupings, also known as intonational units (IU), are distinguished through pauses that interrupt the rhythmic delivery. Himmelman (2022) posits that there are two types of prosodic phrasing namely, prosodic groupings and IU-bounded constructions. Prosodic groupings are composed of two or more prosodic phrases while IU-bounded constructions are the basic requirement that all constituents of the phrase be included in a single IU.

Intonation was also included as a feature of oral proficiency of this study. Nolan (2020) defined intonation as a “means of conveying information in speech independently of the words.” It involves the rise and fall of pitch when speaking. It depends on timing, loudness, and sometimes, voice quality. It also plays a critical role on intelligibility of the speech as the rise and fall of pitch also conveys a message. Alsmadi et al. (2020) noted that various studies have pointed out to intonation as a cause of certain communication problems. Failure to use proper intonation may lead to the overlooking of some critical words that bring the full meaning of the statement. Emphasis, as one key element for intonation, refers to the ability to give emphasis on important words. Tang et al. (2017) asserts that when emphasizing, speakers of any human language use intonational pitch when speaking. Being able to know when and what words to emphasize makes the delivery of message clear.

Non-verbal cues was also examined in this study as a feature of oral proficiency. Gozalova et al. (2016), posits that “non-verbal expressions play a great role in the dialogue.” They added that people tend to believe more what they see than what they hear. In other words, people pay more attention to how the message are spoken rather than the words. Moreover, non-verbal cues complement verbal communication in terms of conveying a message.

Furthermore, this study included content and organization as features of oral proficiency. The content is the core of the speaking task. What the

speaker says will depend on how much knowledge they have towards the subject. In this study, the content will be examined by how much the speaker is able to say about the topic. Suryani et al. (2020) posits that speaking is not only a way to communicate but “it has intention and message”. Hence, the content, which is the content of the speaking task, is a relevant feature of oral proficiency. It must also be noted that the content of the speaking task must be well organized to ensure clear delivery of the message. Thus, the inclusion of organization as a feature of oral proficiency. The Department of Communication at the University of Pittsburgh (2023) proposed that speeches must be organized in three main parts: the introduction, body, and conclusion. Being able to present a speaking task with these parts helps improve clarity and effectivity of the speech. This way, the delivery of content of the speech becomes systematic.

In the Philippines, the K-12 curriculum emphasizes speaking as a macro-skill that is developed in the English subject. This focus on the subject started during the American colonization and continues up to this day (Mardunio et al., 2016). As a result, the Philippines has become one of the largest English-speaking countries in the world (Santos et al., 2022; Dadulla and Potane, 2022). This puts the Philippines at the advantage as the ASEAN integration in 2015 places a demand on learning English among the countries in Southeast Asia. In fact, with this advantage, the country can become a center for English language education and teacher training in the region (Mardunio et al., 2016). However, results from international tests and inventories reveal that there is a decline in the English proficiency among Filipinos (Santos et al., 2022). In the recent 2022 English Proficiency Index (EPI) ranking by Education First, the Philippines ranked 22nd among 111 nations. Education First still considers the Philippines as highly proficient. However, it also reports that the Philippines, along with China, is a main driver of the declining regional EPI in Asia. Moreover, this rank is notably behind the previous ranks of the Philippines. In fact, in 2017, the country ranked 15th in the same ranking.

There are several factors that affect oral proficiency. Various studies have been conducted to investigate on these factors to better understand language learning and better improve the quality of English language education (ELE).

In the study of Pangket (2019), other factors like “motivation, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar” were determined as factors that affect the oral proficiency of grade 5 pupils in an elementary school in the Philippines. Notably, the teaching strategies and the curriculum were identified as contributory factors that affect oral proficiency. Hence, emphasizing the crucial role of teachers and the curriculum in the development of speaking skills. Looking into the state of ELE in the Philippines, Madrunio et al. (2016) posits that it still faces problems especially in terms of alignment of curriculum and assessment. Despite recent educational reforms, other concerns such as teacher training must still be addressed.

In another study, Jun-jie and Ying-liang (2022) examined the effects affective factors in L2 acquisition. In the said study, attitude, inhibition, and teacher-student empathy were found to affect L2 acquisition among high

school students. They further assert, based on their findings, that “affective factors exert a major impact on second language acquisition”. This finding is further supported by the finding of Dadulla and Potane (2022) in their study which showed psychological factors such as anxiety and motivation predicts oral proficiency. Both these findings are consistent with the affective filter hypothesis proposed by Krashen in his SLA theory.

1.3 Self-Esteem and Oral Proficiency

This study intends to add literature to existing studies regarding the relationship between self-esteem and oral proficiency. Bao and Liu (2021) have identified self-esteem as one of the affective factors that affect oral proficiency. They emphasized that cognitive and affective activities cannot be fully successful without some degree of self-esteem. Furthermore, the researchers assert that student with high self-esteem become more confident and less anxious in language learning. Such assertion supports the affective filter hypothesis proposed by Krashen which identifies motivation and self-confidence as affective filters in language learning.

Some studies have been conducted to further support this hypothesis. For instance, Satriani (2019) found in her study that there is a high positive correlation of the variables in terms of learning EFL. The researcher conducted a speaking test which includes role plays and administered the adult version of the Coopersmith Self-esteem Inventory. The correlation coefficient obtained from the study is 0.731 indicating a high positive correlation. This means that as self-esteem rises the level of speaking skills of the respondents also rises.

Another study conducted on this relationship was conducted by Madokhail et al. (2018). In the study, non-participant-controlled observation was conducted to gather data on the level of oral proficiency of the respondents. A rubric was used to identify their level of oral proficiency. To collect data on their level of self-esteem, the respondents accomplished the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale. Results were consistent with that of Satriani (2019). There was a significant positive correlation between the variables. The authors added that this finding supported the Affective filter hypothesis of Krashen.

In a similar study, Alrabai (2017) also found a strong positive correlation between self-esteem and oral proficiency. Aside from showing a positive correlation between the variables, it can be gleaned from his findings that male and female students do not significantly differ in their perception towards self-esteem in language learning. The researcher further suggest that self-esteem must be given focus in the language classroom. Students must develop a high positive self-esteem to acquire the language easily.

2. Methodology

This study used a descriptive-correlational research design to describe the relationship between the level of self-esteem and oral proficiency of the respondents. The researcher believed that this design would help reveal and analyze the relationship of the variables of the study. The method used in this study was the survey and speech delivery method. The researcher used

a questionnaire and an extemporaneous speaking activity to identify respondents' level of self-esteem and oral proficiency, respectively.

2.1. Participants

Ninety-nine Grade 7 junior high school students were chosen as respondents of this study. These respondents have completed their elementary education from various schools around the locality. All of them have grown up using English as a second language. They were chosen by the researcher because they were being taught under the basic education program of the K-12 Curriculum and were at the first year of the junior high school program. As mentioned by their English teachers and evidenced by their academic performance, it has been observed that many of them were still not proficient in the use of the English language. Whenever a speaking task is given to them, the students are not fluent in using the English language. The researcher aims to provide information on their oral proficiency by investigating its relationship with self-esteem. The results can then be used as a basis in crafting a speech development program.

2.2. Data collection and processing

Before the conduct of the study, the respondents and their parents signed consent forms for ethical consideration. After signing, the respondents answered the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSES) to identify their level of self-esteem. The scale is a 10-item scale which measures global self-esteem through self-confidence and self-deprecation. The said scale was pilot tested and obtained a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.77, signifying that it is reliable. Moreover, its Content Validity Index is 1.0. After answering the survey, each respondent delivered a 2–3-minute extemporaneous speech about a specific topic. They picked their topic from a fishbowl and were given 1 minute to prepare. Their speech was rated by three (3) experienced teachers based on the following aspects: pronunciation, intonation, phrasing, non-verbal cues, vocabulary, content, and organization. The rubric was based on the instrument used by Rayla and Sonsona (2021). To determine the level of self-esteem of the respondents, their responses in the RSES were scored from 1 to 4 with the negatively stated items scored inversely. It was then correlated with their scores in the extemporaneous speech.

2.3. Data Analysis

To accurately interpret and analyze the data, quantitative methods were used. The level of self-esteem of the respondents in the two indicators was identified through the total cumulative scores from the survey questionnaire. A measure of central tendency, specifically the computation of mean was used to get an overall view of the results. For the level of oral proficiency, the total cumulative scores the respondents received from the raters in the components will be computed. The mean between all three raters was

identified and interpreted in the scoring procedure mentioned previously. Finally, the relationship between the self-esteem and oral proficiency level will be determined using the Pearson r formula.

3. Findings

3.1. Level of Self-esteem of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the overall self-esteem of the respondents based from their scores in the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale.

Table 1

Level of Self-esteem of the Respondents based on Self-confidence and Self-deprecation

Domain	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Self-confidence	2.83	0.37	High
Self-deprecation	2.15	0.54	High
Overall Self-esteem	2.48	3.52	Low

From the findings presented in Table 1 for self-confidence, it can be said that the respondents are highly satisfied with themselves. They mostly agree with the positively stated items leading to an overall interpretation of high self-confidence. Moreover, it can be implied from the results of this study that the respondents have a high feeling of self-worth. In other words, the respondents somehow have a positive disposition of themselves despite the generally medium self-confidence in the other items. Moreover, it can be gleaned from the findings for self-deprecation that many respondents feel that they are not good in doing various tasks or exhibiting different skills. Despite the high feeling of self-confidence as revealed by items stated positively, the respondents still tend to self-deprecate. Furthermore, they feel that they have nothing to be proud of themselves. When asked, the respondents said that they think they do not have enough skills and capabilities. It can be gleaned from this finding that many of the respondents do not have respect for themselves. Lastly, it can be implied from the findings that they are not satisfied with their achievements or they could highlight more of their failures.

3.2 English Oral Proficiency Level of the Respondents

Table 2 shows the English Oral proficiency of the respondents based on their scores in the extemporaneous speaking activity.

Table 2
Mean Scores in English Oral Proficiency of the Respondents

Domain	Mean	SD	Description
Pronunciation	2.72	0.77	Approaching proficiency
Intonation	2.53	0.74	Developing
Phrasing	2.50	0.74	Developing
Non-verbal cues	2.09	0.68	Developing
Language Use	2.49	0.75	Developing
Content	2.48	0.75	Developing
Organization	2.21	0.65	Developing
Overall	2.43	0.73	Developing

The finding in table 2 implies that the respondents of the study generally are not proficient in the English language when it comes to speaking. Moreover, the close examination of the results that of all the criteria, the respondents are at an average level only on pronunciation. There is a need to improve on other criteria such as intonation, phrasing, non-verbal cues, vocabulary, content, and organization.

3.3 Relationship between Self-esteem and English oral Proficiency Level

The data collected from the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale and the extemporaneous speaking activity were correlated and results are shown in the table.

Table 3
Pearson r Correlation Test Result between the Level of Self-esteem and English Oral Proficiency Level (OPL)

	r	p	Interpretation
Self-esteem and OPL	0.445***	0.000	Significant

***p<0.001

From the table 3, the Pearson r correlation test result have shown the Pearson r value of 0.45 and a p-value of 0.000 which means that there is a significant relationship between self-esteem and English oral proficiency. Akoglu (2018) further describes this value as a moderate positive correlation between the variables.

4. Discussion

It can be gleaned from the findings presented in Table 1 that the respondents have generally low self-esteem. These respondents do not feel valued and competent. They also find it difficult to face challenges in their lives and may feel incompetent and inadequate in the performance of various tasks. In other words, they are not self-confident which then means that they are not fully aware of their capabilities and that they are able to use this to maximize their potential (Blanco et al., 2020). Akbari & Sahibzada (2020) assert that people or students with high self-esteem tend to develop interest in the lesson and expose themselves to opportunities of learning. Hence, since the respondents have low self-esteem, this interest in learning

may not be developed among them. This may consequently lead to the failure of acquiring certain competencies and skills like oral proficiency skills.

In terms of their oral proficiency, the findings in Table 2 reveal that the respondents are at a developing level. They are only at the approaching proficiency level in terms of pronunciation. Nonetheless, other domains remain at the developing level. This consequently resulted in an overall level of developing. This finding supports the assertion of Santos et al. (2022) that there is a decline in English proficiency among Filipinos. Accordingly, the rank of the Philippines in the annual English Proficiency Index report by Education First has been declining since 2015. Consequently, Education First (2022) reports that, along with China, the Philippines is the main driver in the decline of English proficiency in Asia. In addition, the findings also imply that there is a need to improve the quality of English Language Education (ELE) in the country. It can be recalled that Madrunio (2016) asserted that ELE in the Philippines still faces problems despite its position in quality among its Southeast Asian neighbors. There is a need to offer more teachers training, improve the curriculum and to provide more crucial facilities for language learning. Moreover, the improvement of ELE should be started with an assessment of the situation of English classes in the Philippines (Santos et al., 2022). Hence, these problems, addressed so the Philippines, will not continue to lag behind in the region when it comes to English proficiency.

Overall, the data from the findings reveal that there is indeed a relationship between the variables in this study. The positive result implies that this relationship is directly proportional. In other words, once self-esteem, as the independent variable, increases, the English oral proficiency level of the respondents or the dependent variable also increases. The level of self-esteem is low, hence, the result of the oral proficiency level remains low. Thus, more improvement on self-esteem may be needed to further improve the proficiency level.

This finding affirms the studies of Alrabai (2017), Madokhail et al. (2018), and Satriani (2019) in the context of Filipino students. In the study of Alrabai (2017), there was a strong positive correlation between students' self-esteem and their achievement in English as a foreign language. The present study supports this finding by showing that oral proficiency, as an indicator of achievement in English is positively correlated with the level of self-esteem. Hence, self-esteem significantly affects the level of English oral proficiency of the respondents. However, it must be noted that Alrabai used the term "English as a Foreign Language" (EFL) learners as his respondents.

Meanwhile, Madokhail et al. (2018) had a more relevant finding in relation to the present study. In their study, they have investigated the impact self-esteem to the oral proficiency of Pakistani English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. It is important to note that the Philippines consider English as a second language due to the provision of its constitution. They also used the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale in their study. They found out that the Pearson r value of the relationship between the variables was 0.5 which is a positive moderate correlation. Similarly, the present study also showed a positive moderate correlation value of 0.445. This is slightly lower

than the relationship revealed in the study of Madokhail et al. (2018) but both results have the same interpretation.

On the other hand, a more recent study of Satriani (2019) among Indonesia's EFL learners revealed a similar result. In her study, a highly significant correlation value of 0.731 was revealed among her respondents. This finding also proved the existing relationship between self-esteem and oral proficiency.

The studies previously mentioned have provided information on the relationship between self-esteem and oral proficiency among Saudi, Pakistani, and Indonesian learners of English. The present study has further proven this relationship among Filipino learners of English as a second language. This shows that the self-esteem of Filipino students affects their oral proficiency. The positive Pearson r value also confirms the direct relationship of the variables. Thus, the higher is the self-esteem, the higher is the oral proficiency level.

5. Conclusion

This study reveals that self-esteem and oral proficiency are directly related. Students who have high self-esteem tend to be better at using English in speaking tasks. On the other hand, students who tend to self-deprecate have low levels of oral proficiency. Thus, improving the self-esteem of the students will help them achieve oral proficiency in English as a second language. Since overall interpretations of self-esteem and oral proficiency are low and developing is revealed, a speech intervention program is necessary.

Furthermore, it is recommended that the development of self-esteem should be given consideration in speech intervention or enhancement programs. English classrooms must be safe spaces for students to be open about what they feel and to be more comfortable in making opinions. Furthermore, teachers in the classroom should promote the culture of praise to establish a positive self-esteem among their students. They should focus more on the accomplishments of the students rather than their failures. When the student fails, the teacher should use this opportunity to provide encouraging words for the student to get motivation and enhance their self-esteem.

In addition, everyone surrounding the learner must be involved in the speech intervention or enhancement program, at least on the aspect of self-esteem improvement. This can be achieved by providing learning opportunities to the stakeholders for them to understand how self-esteem is developed. The context that they establish surrounding the learner could be a factor that affects their level of self-esteem. Hence, they, too, must provide spaces for learners to develop self-esteem by encouraging positive mindsets and interpersonal relationships.

Overall, self-esteem is one of the foundations of oral proficiency. Their relationship should not be neglected. Instead, it should be given careful attention and should be considered in the development of English language curricula.

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