

Oral Proficiency Challenges among First-Year English Major Students: Basis for Intervention Program

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ABSTRACT

Oral proficiency is a key indicator of English language mastery, particularly for students majoring in English. It has been observed that English has the strongest position as a second or foreign language across the globe (Somroo, 2022). However, many first-year English major students struggle with speaking, which negatively impacts their academic performance and confidence. This qualitative-phenomenological study aimed to explore the common challenges that hinder the oral communication skills of first-year English major students at Monkayo College of Arts, Sciences, and Technology (MonCAST). Drawing on the principles of Communicative Competence Theory (Canale & Swain, 1980), the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982), Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1981) and Kurt Lewin's Action Research Framework (Lewin, 1946), it specifically aimed to identify the difficulties students face in speaking English and to use these insights to guide the design of a targeted intervention. Fourteen participants who experienced difficulties in oral presentations were selected based on academic performance and teacher recommendations. According to Armea et al. (2022), it is essential for education students—especially English majors—to acquire strong linguistic skills and attain advanced proficiency at the tertiary level, as this serves as a foundation for academic success and future teaching careers. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the study identified recurring barriers to oral proficiency, including fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, low self-esteem, and lack of speaking practice. The findings serve as the basis for designing an intervention program called *Journey to the West*, tailored to address students' specific needs and enhance their oral communication skills. This study highlights the importance of supportive teaching strategies and learner-centered approaches in improving oral proficiency among English majors.

Keywords: Journey to the West, first-year English major students, oral proficiency, qualitative-descriptive study, MonCAST, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

English major students are expected to demonstrate strong oral proficiency, yet many struggle with effective communication. Speaking is one of the most essential yet most challenging skills in second language learning (Labad, 2024). In language education, students develop four fundamental skills: listening, speaking, writing, and reading, all crucial for language proficiency. Among these, speaking is often regarded as the primary indicator of language learning success (Jaya et al., 2022). Several factors contribute to speaking difficulties, including lack of general knowledge, insufficient practice, fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary and grammar, low motivation, minimal participation, shyness, nervousness, fear of criticism, and difficulty pronouncing unfamiliar words (Jaya et al., 2022).

English has the strongest position as a second or foreign language worldwide (Somroo, 2022), yet disparities in proficiency persist. For instance, China ranked 82nd out of 113 countries in English proficiency, indicating a low level (British Council, 2024). Teaching practices that emphasize grammar and reading over speaking and

listening contribute to students' reluctance to engage in oral communication (Yang, 2020). Oral language skills serve as a foundation for academic success, as students with limited proficiency often struggle with comprehension and self-expression, leading to lower achievement and confidence (Chand, 2021).

In the Philippines, a gap exists between comprehension and speaking ability: while many understand spoken English, fewer can speak it fluently. Concerns have been raised about students' oral communication skills, as many struggle to construct basic sentences. Poor oral proficiency limits students' ability to comprehend and articulate complex ideas and affects vocabulary, syntax, and grammar development (Frontiers in Education, 2024; Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2022). These difficulties are often linked to limited vocabulary, lack of grammatical coherence, and infrequent use of English (Separa, 2020).

Students who lack knowledge of grammar, pronunciation, and meaning often experience anxiety and low self-confidence in speaking (Pabro-Maquidato, 2021). While self-confidence significantly impacts oral proficiency, it can be improved through proper support and interventions (Armila et al., 2023). As the demand for English skills increases, educators must adopt innovative approaches to develop learners' oral communication and participation in diverse contexts (Rivera & Guttler, 2024). Speaking remains a key indicator of linguistic competence (Chand, 2021).

At Monkayo College of Arts, Sciences, and Technology (MonCAST), 42.42% (14 out of 33) of first-year English majors struggled with oral presentations. Interviews with teachers revealed that students rely heavily on memorization, while low self-esteem, limited exposure to English, and insufficient practice hinder their proficiency. Oral communication is a critical skill for English learners (Albogami & Algethami, 2022), yet no study has specifically examined first-year English majors at MonCAST, highlighting a gap in context and population. As future professionals, English majors must attain strong linguistic competence (Armea, 2022).

Research Questions

This qualitative descriptive study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the common challenges and difficulties faced by students in oral communication?
2. What factors influence the oral proficiency of first-year English major students?
3. What strategies or interventions can be designed to improve their oral proficiency?

Theoretical Lens

This study is grounded in several theoretical frameworks that explain the development of oral proficiency among first-year English major students. These include the Communicative Competence Theory (Canale & Swain, 1980), Affective Filter Hypothesis (Long, 1981), and Kurt Lewin's Action Research Framework (Lewin, 1946). These theories collectively emphasize that language learning is a complex process influenced by cognitive, social, emotional, and interactive factors.

Communicative Competence Theory (Canale & Swain, 1980) asserts that effective communication extends beyond grammatical knowledge and includes sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies. Learners must not only understand language structures but also apply them appropriately in various social contexts. In relation to this, the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982) highlights the significant role of emotional variables such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence in language acquisition. A high affective filter can hinder oral participation, while a supportive and low-anxiety environment enhances students' willingness to communicate.

Furthermore, Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) underscores the importance of social interaction and cultural context in developing language skills. Through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), learners improve their oral proficiency with the guidance of teachers and collaboration with peers. Similarly, the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1981) emphasizes that meaningful interaction and negotiation of meaning during

conversations facilitate language development by allowing learners to receive feedback and refine their speaking abilities.

This theoretical foundation is supported by Kurt Lewin's Action Research Framework (1946), which provides a systematic and reflective process of planning, action, observation, and reflection. This framework enables educators to design, implement, and evaluate targeted interventions that address students' oral communication challenges. Collectively, these theories justify the use of interactive, learner-centered, and reflective strategies to enhance oral proficiency among first-year English major students.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design, which focused on understanding feelings, ideas, and experiences (StatPearls, 2022). Since the study aimed to explore the challenges that influenced the oral proficiency of first-year English major students at Monkayo College of Arts, Sciences, and Technology (MonCAST), a qualitative approach was appropriate. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the researchers examined the participants' real-life struggles with English speaking, including confidence, vocabulary, and classroom-related issues.

Using a descriptive approach, the study explored the lived experiences of first-year English major students at MonCAST in relation to their oral proficiency challenges. This method focused on providing a rich, straightforward summary of participants' experiences in their own words (Turale, 2020). It was grounded in naturalistic inquiry and was particularly suitable for studies that aimed to describe rather than interpret phenomena (Doyle et al., 2020). Qualitative description was ideal when the goal was to present findings with minimal inference and maximum clarity, making it accessible and useful for applied research settings (Villamin et al., 2024). In this design, it allowed the researchers to stay close to the data and authentically represent the students' perspectives and challenges.

Research Participants

The participants in this research consisted of first year students enrolled in Bachelor of Secondary Education Major in English at Monkayo College of Arts, Sciences and Technology. The purposive sampling method was used in choosing the participants of the study. According to Nyimbili Friday and Nyimbili Leah (2024), purposive sampling procedures are used in most research papers because they are found in any research paradigm and help in ensuring that quality sample is located without biases so as to increase the reliability and trustworthiness of the findings. Thus, the selected participants suit to these criteria.

A total of fourteen English major students participated in the study. Seven for In-Depth Interview (IDI) and seven for Focus Group Discussion (FGD), constituting 42.42% of the study sample. They are either male or female, and in addition, willing to participate in the study. Their participation contributed valuable insights to the discussion into investigating the challenges that impedes their oral communication. Moreover, to ensure participant's anonymity, pseudonyms (e.g., Chomsky, Hymes, Krashen, Gee, Halliday, Jakobson, Labov, Piaget, Whorf, Searle, Tannin, Cummins, Austin, Vygotsky) were assigned to all interviewees.

Research Instruments

The research employed two primary qualitative instruments—a semi-structured interview guide for In-Depth Interviews (IDI) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) protocols to explore the oral proficiency challenges and lived experiences of the participants. The researchers utilized an interview guide questions that had been validated, reviewed and approved by the panelists and advisor.

For the in-depth interviews, a semi-structured interview guide was used with open-ended questions that aligned with the research objectives. According to Naz (2022), the use of semi-structured interviews was preferred over standardized interviews because it allowed the interviewer to explore the opinions and ideas of the interviewees, as well as probe deeper into their answers for additional information and clarification, especially when dealing with complex or sensitive subject matter. Additionally, the focus group interview gathered a group of individuals

who commonly shared characteristics such as sex, age, and educational status, to discuss a specific study field. This method was used to discover human behavior, attitudes, and respondents' views on a particular concept (Taherdoost, 2022). Moreover, the researchers also secured an audio recorder to accurately document their answers.

Data Collection

The data collection process commenced with the approval from the dean; the Research Development and Extension Office through the Office of Research Publication; and the faculty administration was granted to the researchers to conduct this study. Additionally, the researchers also submitted interview guide questions, which were validated by the panelists. After the approval was granted, the informed consent was secured from the selected students. They were informed that their participation would not affect their academic standing and were assured that the research tools were validated and that the interview guide questions had been reviewed and approved by the panelists and advisor. Following this, the necessary materials and instruments for data collection were prepared—a semi-structured interview guide for In-Depth Interviews (IDI) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) protocols. We then conducted the interviews in a conversational manner, ensuring that participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives. Probing techniques, such as asking clarifying or follow-up questions, were used to encourage participants to elaborate on their responses. Finally, the participants' responses were recorded with their consent, and all documentation was securely stored in a computer or cloud storage for analysis.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, we followed the thematic analysis process as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), as cited by Christou (2023). The first step was familiarization with the data. This involved actively reading and re-reading transcripts, written responses, and other qualitative data sources, as well as transcribing audio recordings and taking initial notes on recurring patterns. The second step was the generation of initial codes. This involved carefully examining the data, highlighting significant segments of text, images, or other qualitative materials, and assigning short labels or codes that described their content. The third step was generating themes. In this stage, we reviewed the codes we had developed, identified patterns among them, and began grouping related codes into broader themes. The fourth step was defining and refining themes. This phase went beyond labeling themes; it involved articulating the story each theme told and its contribution to the broader research narrative. The final step was producing the report. At this stage, we synthesized our findings into a logical, coherent, and concise account that accurately reflected the story the information told across the established themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part presented the major findings gathered from in-depth interviews conducted to the English major students, their challenges and factors in their oral proficiency in English. Further, the results and findings of Oral Proficiency Among English Major Students: Basis for Intervention Program were presented and discussed based on the order of questions found in the interview guide.

Research Question No:1 What are the common challenges and difficulties faced by students in oral communication?

During the in-depth interviews and focus group discussion, the following questions were asked in order to generate a wide-ranging discussion for the above research problem; How do linguistic factors (vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency) affect your oral communication skills? How does the lack of speaking practice create challenges for you in developing your oral communication skills? How do difficulties in organizing thoughts and ideas affect your oral communication skills? There were six major themes emerged from the data collected on the insights of the study participants as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Essential Themes and Core Ideas of Oral Proficiency Challenges Among First-Year English Major Students: Basis for Intervention Program

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Limited Vocabulary	<p>Inadequate word bank Difficulty retrieving terms Limited expression of thoughts due to limited vocabulary Learners struggle to find appropriate words. Learners produce vague and unclear communication due to lack of vocabulary. Learners fail to express complex ideas effectively. Limited vocabulary lowers the confidence of learners in speaking</p>
Grammar and Pronunciation Issues	<p>Frequent grammatical lapses Mispronunciation of words Disrupted sentence structure Incorrect grammar changes the intended meaning of learners. Mispronounced words create confusion for the listener. Poor structure makes speech delivery unclear. Errors in grammar reduce the effectiveness of learners' communication.</p>
Fluency Struggles	<p>Frequent stammering and pauses Disrupted speech flow Mental blocking while speaking Students often stop mid-sentence. Students struggle to maintain coherence. Speech delivery appears unnatural for students. Ideas of learners fail to come out smoothly.</p>
Limited Practice	<p>Minimal exposure to oral English Absence of regular practice Limited real-life application Students are unaccustomed to speaking in English. Students lack opportunities to develop fluency. Without practice, learners' skills remain stagnant. Learners fail to express themselves with ease.</p>
Fear of Speaking	<p>Fear of making mistakes Pressure from peers and instructors Low self-confidence Students worry about being judged while speaking. Learners feel embarrassed when expressing themselves. Anxiety causes hesitation in speaking. Fear impacts the overall communication performance of learners.</p>
Poor Organization	<p>Poor sequencing of ideas Incoherent message delivery Lack of thought logical flow Students express thoughts in a scattered manner. Ideas of learners often go off-topic. Main points become unclear or missing. Listeners struggle to follow the thoughts of learners.</p>

Table 1 summarizes the key themes related to oral proficiency challenges among first-year English major students. Identified issues include limited vocabulary, grammatical and pronunciation difficulties, lack of

fluency, inadequate practice, anxiety, and disorganized ideas. These findings inform the development of a targeted intervention program.

Limited Vocabulary. The participants find it hard to share their thoughts because they do not know many words. As Searle explained:

“I struggle to express what you want to say. For example, you have an idea in mind, but you do not know how to say it because your vocabulary is lacking.”

Searle also added:

“If you do not have enough vocabulary, it is hard to communicate effectively.”

Reflecting these experiences, vocabulary plays a crucial role in effective communication, as it refers to a person's understanding of words, phrases, and idiomatic expressions (Henok, 2023). However, when participants want to say something, they often cannot find the right words to use, which makes it hard for others to understand what they mean. Because their ideas remain simple and they cannot explain more difficult or deep thoughts, they often feel shy or unsure when speaking and do not join in conversations. This lived reality demonstrates how a lack of vocabulary hinders their ability to express thoughts clearly; although the ideas are present in their minds, they often struggle to find the right words to communicate them effectively.

Grammar and Pronunciation Issues. As to the communication challenges faced by the learners, it revealed that their struggles with grammar and pronunciation significantly affect the clarity of their speech. Hymes shared that:

“With pronunciation, it is also awkward—especially if the person you are talking to knows the correct pronunciation and you end up mispronouncing the word.”

Hymes further shared:

“Like in my case, I often get scolded because my grammar is wrong. It affects you because you get bothered once you realize you have said something wrong.”

These personal accounts align with the findings of Basri et al. (2020), who notes that the causes of anxiety can come from things such as fear of wrong grammar, incorrect pronunciation, fear of being laughed at by friends, and even their vocabulary being still very little to be able to speak English. As what the participant shared, mistakes in pronunciation and grammar can be embarrassing, especially when speaking with someone more proficient. Frequent grammatical lapses often change the intended meaning of their messages, while mispronounced words create confusion for listeners. This demonstrates that pronunciation heavily influences how others understand speech, as mispronouncing words can lead to confusion or misinterpretation. Furthermore, grammar is fundamental to clarity, as incorrect structure can distort the intended meaning of the message, often leading to self-consciousness and distraction that ultimately lowers one's confidence in communication.

Fluency Struggles. As to the speaking performance of the learners, it revealed that difficulty in sustaining fluency and smooth delivery greatly impacts their ability to express ideas clearly. Chomsky stated that:

“It can affect because when reporting and using English, the vocabulary is lacking, and with pronunciation, if the words are not pronounced well, the delivery changes and it becomes different.”

Krashen also added that:

“With fluency, you get distracted and have a harder time. For example, when reporting, you suddenly stop because you are making things up as you go along, and then realize it was wrong.”

These responses highlight a significant gap between written competence and oral delivery. According to Ngoc & Dung (2020), communication without hesitation and interruptions that would create barriers or events in conversation can be characterized as fluency. However, as observed in the participants, it is common for students to delay and speak in fragments due to their inability to gather lexical words, encode their message's grammatical form, and combine their own words. Frequent stammering and pauses, along with mental blocks, often cause them to stop mid-sentence, disrupting the natural flow of speech. This suggests that effective communication is challenging for many learners due to the need for appropriate language. The inability to maintain contact may be due to an inadequate strategy and communication competency, as represented by Emirza & Sahril (2021).

Limited Practice. The participants shared that not practicing regularly makes it hard for them to become confident and ready in communication tasks. Gee stated:

“If you lack practice, then you really will not be able to say what you want to say. Like for me, back in Senior High, I was asked to deliver a speech. And I did not practice what I wrote, so when I delivered it, it was all “uhm, uhm”—I could not express clearly what I really wanted to tell the audience.”

Whorf also added that:

“My ideas get all jumbled up. Like, you are not able to organize or outline your thoughts well because of that lack of practice. And the way I speak—it affects my confidence too. I get nervous because I do not feel prepared.”

These experiences illustrate how the lack of speaking practice significantly hinders students' fluency and accuracy, leading to hesitation, grammatical errors, and a restricted vocabulary range (Wang et al., 2024). As the participants noted, when they do not practice, their performance in speeches and reporting suffers; they tend to forget what to say, get nervous, and lose confidence. Their thoughts become disorganized, and they cannot clearly express their ideas. This lack of preparation is a major factor in communication barriers, as insufficient speaking practice contributes to increased anxiety, reduced confidence, and poor pronunciation—ultimately impeding fluency (Oktavia, 2020). Moreover, students struggle with fluency and feel stuck at the same speaking level. This lack of practice makes oral communication especially challenging in college, particularly in an English-focused course, where the fear of being judged by others further complicates the situation.

Fear of Speaking. The participants shared that fear and anxiety often stop them from expressing themselves clearly during oral communication. Hymes highlighted:

“So, it is really difficult because I felt peer pressure from my surroundings, from my classmates. I feel like if I am not fluent or not that knowledgeable, I might be left behind.”

Halliday also stated:

“When I am practicing alone, I can manage. However, when it is already in public, it becomes difficult because I tend to forget or experience mental blocks.”

This shows that students feel a lot of pressure when they have to use English in front of others. This nervousness leads to "stuttering" and "mental blocks" that make it hard to organize thoughts. In the world of research, this is known as "communication apprehension." According to Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 127), this happens because students are afraid of being judged by their peers or not meeting high expectations. Also, a participant pointed out that even if a student knows the words, the fear of making a mistake creates a "cycle of embarrassment." As a result, the pressure to stay fluent actually makes the student less fluent. This matches what MacIntyre (2017) describes as the "anxiety-interference" model, where the brain is so busy worrying about the audience that it forgets the language rules.

Poor Organization. Many participants shared that they struggle to speak clearly when their thoughts are not well-organized. Chomsky mentioned:

“Well, I find it hard to communicate because, for me, I am better at chatting or writing. But when it comes to speaking, like voicing it out, I stutter. I struggle to organize my thoughts. My grammar and fluency are okay—but only in writing or typing.”

Piaget also shared:

“For me, when your thoughts are not organized, based on my own experience, I tend to have a lot of pauses. I also stutter and get really nervous. Then my ideas start going in different directions because I panic, since things are no longer organized.”

Organizing thoughts effectively is a cornerstone of clear oral communication, yet it remains a significant hurdle for many learners. Interestingly, even students who can write with relative fluency often find their speaking abilities hampered when ideas begin to jumble. Wahyuningsih and Afandi (2020) noted that students with weak grammar and vocabulary skills often fail to connect ideas logically, resulting in disorganized speech. This essentially means that while a student might have a clear concept in mind, the actual transition to speech is often marked by stuttering and long, awkward pauses. When this lack of structure takes over, speakers lose their train of thought or present information out of sequence. The ultimate cost is a breakdown in listener comprehension, which frequently leaves the speaker feeling discouraged or even embarrassed.

Research Question No:2 What factors influence the oral proficiency of first-year English major students in oral communication?

The following questions were asked during the in- depth interview and focus group discussion to find out the struggles experienced by the first-year English major students; What strategies do you use to overcome fluency challenges in oral communication? What methods or resources do you use to improve your grammar and pronunciation for better oral proficiency? How do you expand your vocabulary to enhance your spoken English proficiency?

From the data collected using the above questions, six essential themes came out from the responses as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Essential Themes and Core Ideas of Factors affecting Oral Proficiency Among First-Year English Major Students

Themes	Core Ideas
Digital Immersion	Vocabulary expands through engaging content. Repetition through media reinforces word use Context-rich media promotes better retention Watching shows builds vocabulary. Searching meanings clarifies usage. Subtitles enhance understanding. Games and digital texts boost word recall.
Self Correction	AI confirms pronunciation accuracy Grammar tools correct sentence use Mimicry of models refines delivery Recording voice improves fluency. AI validates correct pronunciation. Vlogs enhance articulation. Grammar tools assist clarity.
Frequent Use of English	Daily speaking develops ease Low-pressure talk reduces fear Personal outlets provide practice Talking with pets boosts comfort. Voice messages encourage spontaneity.

	Boarding house chats build fluency. Casual speaking promotes growth.
Emotional Barriers	Fear of mistakes limits speaking Judgment causes anxiety Self-doubt discourages participation Nervousness affects pronunciation. Fear of judgment causes silence. Avoiding public talk feels safer. Negative feedback decreases confidence.
Planning Helps Delivery	Idea organization improves flow Prepared examples aid clarity Pre-speaking routines ease tension Brainstorming supports structure. Giving examples adds depth. Pausing helps realign thoughts. Planning reduces on-the-spot stress.
Interest Drives Effort	Enjoyment promotes consistent exposure Passion enhances learning drive Entertainment creates learning moments Watching anime sparks curiosity. Reading Wattpad motivates word search. Gaming sustains learning routines. Enjoyment encourages consistency.

Table 2 outlines key factors influencing oral proficiency among first-year English major students. Positive factors include digital immersion, online self-monitoring tools, casual English use, thoughtful planning, and interest-driven motivation. In contrast, emotional barriers hinder confidence and performance. These insights serve as a basis for designing an effective intervention program.

Digital Immersion. For this theme, participants usually experience challenges and difficulties in their speaking fluency. They use technology like watching anime and watching vlogs of American vloggers to enhance and develop their English-speaking skills. Austin stated:

“I watch anime a lot, and in the subtitles, there are unfamiliar words, so I look them up in the dictionary to understand what they mean. I write them down in a notebook or on paper, then I use them in a sentence — that is it.”

Whorf also shared:

“What I’ve noticed is that my English improved because I often watch foreign vlogs — like American vlogs — that’s where I noticed some improvement in how I speak English. I’m not really into reading English books because I mostly read Filipino or Tagalog.”

The participants’ experiences are supported by the research on Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) conducted by Lee and Sylvester (2021). In their study, “*The role of informal digital learning of English in Korean and Hong Kong university students’ language learning*,” the researchers examined how students use “extramural” (outside of school) digital tools to overcome speaking anxiety and lack of fluency. The study found that learners who frequently watched subtitled media and YouTube vlogs developed higher lexical diversity and benefited from authentic linguistic input that traditional textbooks often lack. In the context of integrated schools in the Philippines, where exposure to native English speakers may be limited, these digital platforms serve as a primary source of authentic phonetic and lexical models.

Frequent Use of English. This theme highlights how every day, low-pressure interactions in English contribute significantly to improving oral proficiency. Participants shared that speaking casually with friends, pets, or even through voice messages allows them to practice without fear of judgment.

Vygotsky shared:

“Like in my boarding house, I keep speaking in English. My roommate gets annoyed because I talk to them in English. [laughs] Then when someone chats with me or asks me something, I reply in English.”

Lamboy also described a personal strategy:

“I’m different now because I usually just send voice messages to myself... I simply practice speaking in English correctly on my own.”

The lived experiences of these participants find strong academic backing in the qualitative research of MacIntyre, Burns, and Jessome (2011), who explored the underlying elements that shape a student's Willingness to Communicate (WTC). Their work indicates that "informal social support"—specifically the act of speaking in settings where one is not being evaluated—serves as a vital catalyst for lowering the Affective Filter. Once the weight of formal grading is removed, learners often feel a natural inclination toward spontaneous speech production. Much like the participants who utilized pets and voice messages as "safe" audiences, MacIntyre’s study emphasizes that these low-stakes exchanges are what truly drive linguistic automaticity. This process enables speakers to articulate thoughts in English directly, bypassing the slow and exhausting cycle of mental translation. In the final analysis, the research confirms that making English a daily, low-pressure habit is a more reliable predictor of long-term fluency than traditional classroom instruction alone.

Self-Correction. For this theme, students shared that using online tools helps them notice and fix their own mistakes in English. Many said that grammar checkers, pronunciation apps, and translation tools make it easier to identify errors in their writing and speaking.

Halliday said:

“I record myself, I practice, then I try to ask AI if my pronunciation is okay. Also, with sentence grammar—if I said something wrong.”

Tanen also shared:

“I ask if my grammar is okay, or I request it to correct my grammar — I ask it to show me the right version of what I want to say. That is how ChatGPT helps me with what I want to improve.”

The participants' tendency toward self-repair is strongly supported by the research of Kormos (1999) regarding the cognitive mechanics of speech. Kormos’s research identifies that self-correction is a sign of advanced cognitive processing. She argues that when a learner self-corrects, they are actively using their "Monitor"—an internal system that compares what they said with what they know to be correct. Self-repair suggests that the ability to identify and rectify one's own linguistic slips is a clear indicator of developing metacognitive awareness. Rather than seeing these pauses as a lack of fluency, Kormos argues they represent an active internal feedback loop where the learner compares their output against their stored grammatical knowledge. For these participants, the act of self-repair serves as a crucial tool for maintaining communicative competence, allowing them to manage their own oral performance and reduce the anxiety associated with external judgment.

Emotional Barriers. The participants emphasized that practicing English on their own helps improve their confidence and skills in speaking. Many of them prefer to practice privately by sending voice messages to themselves, watching videos to correct pronunciation, and using apps like ChatGPT for grammar guidance. Vygotsky said:

“I am different now because I usually just send voice messages to myself. I prefer not to share them with others because, as we know, people can be quick to judge. So for now, I choose not to share that part. I simply practice speaking in English correctly on my own. If I can not pronounce a word properly, I search for the correct pronunciation online.”

Vygotsky added:

“I also used to ask my teachers back in high school, like, “Ma’am, is this correct grammar? Did I say this properly?” So they would correct me and say what was wrong and how to fix it. That is how I try to improve both my grammar and pronunciation — so that when I am in a conversation, I can clearly express what I mean without miscommunication. Because sometimes, when your pronunciation is off, people might misunderstand you.”

The reliance on private, self-directed practice observed in this study finds significant support in the research of Hurd and Xiao (2006), who explored the intersection of affective strategies and proficiency development. Their investigation revealed that for a vast number of language learners, emotional barriers—particularly the fear of “losing face”—represent the most formidable obstacles to oral communication. To navigate these challenges, students frequently adopt “affective strategies” such as solitary rehearsal and internal self-talk.

The study further suggests that integrating technology into this process—much like the participants’ use of voice messages and AI tools—provides a necessary “psychological buffer.” This buffer enables the learner to lower their Affective Filter, a mental block that often stifles language acquisition during moments of high stress. Rather than viewing these autonomous activities as mere avoidance behaviors, Hurd and Xiao argue they are essential scaffolding techniques that transform linguistic apprehension into the self-assurance required for successful real-world communication.

Planning Helps Delivery. Some participants shared that they use different strategies to prepare before speaking in class or during reports. These include outlining their ideas, brainstorming, and even pretending to talk in front of imaginary students to rehearse. Halliday explained:

“I try to create a strategy by outlining what I need to do. But when I go off-topic, I attempt to recover it, though I often cannot manage to do so fully. Instead, I just give a brief or superficial explanation so I can deliver the message properly.”

Tannen also shared:

“Just studying. Just reading, I keep repeating what I’m going to report. I read it over and over, whatever I need to say in front. I avoid fillers so I can train myself.”

The participants’ reliance on preparatory strategies like outlining and rehearsal is a recognized cognitive maneuver in second language acquisition. As explored by Ellis (2005), this form of Strategic Planning serves to alleviate the heavy cognitive demand placed on a learner during oral reports. By brainstorming and structuring ideas prior to the actual performance, individuals are able to ‘pre-load’ their vocabulary and logical flow, a process that directly enhances speaking fluency. Furthermore, the habit of rehearsing in front of an imaginary audience acts as a vital psychological bridge; it allows the speaker to automate specific linguistic structures in a low-pressure environment. Moreover, when the actual delivery occurs, the learner can shift their focus from basic word-retrieval toward a more confident and coherent presentation of their ideas.

Interest Drives Efforts. Participants also talked about how they learn English through watching anime, K-dramas, and videos with subtitles. These forms of entertainment expose them to new vocabulary, sentence structures, and pronunciation in a natural way. Tannen expressed:

“For me, back during quarantine, I kept watching K-dramas. You know... they have subtitles? So, I thought, “Oh, my English improved a bit” — not perfect, but it got better. Because I kept watching, I would also say the words out loud. It helped improve my pronunciation, structure, and vocabulary. Something like that.”

Searle also shared:

“Actually, English tests online help a lot — especially with pronunciation, because you can correct yourself. And it helps you improve how you read, too. Sometimes there are choices in the tests, and you get challenged like, “Wait, what was that again?” And when you get the right answer, it feels good. It feels nice to know your skills are improving.”

The way these participants use shows like anime and K-drama to learn English shows that interest is a powerful reason to keep trying. According to Montero Perez, Peters, and Desmet (2014), watching videos with subtitles helps students pick up language skills without even realizing it. Their study found that when a student really likes a story, they focus much more on the words and sounds. For the students in this study, using these entertainment platforms creates a comfortable space where they can learn new vocabulary and how to say words correctly. In the end, because they are driven to understand the plot, they end up practicing English more often and with more energy.

Research Question No.3: What strategies or interventions can be designed to improve their oral proficiency?

Table 3. The Intervention Program Action Plan Using Kurt Lewin’s Action Research Design (1946)

INTERVENTION PROGRAM ACTION PLAN					
PLANNING	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Based on the findings of the study, several key problems were identified that first-year English major students are facing, specifically in vocabulary-building, grammar, fluency, and pronunciation. 2. To confirm and further assess these needs, a pre-test will be administered to the students. 3. Using the findings from the study and pre-test results, a concept will be developed as the core activity of the intervention program. 4. The intervention program will be called “Journey to the West”, a gamified activity designed to address the identified language problems and improve students' oral proficiency and self-esteem. 5. Specific activities will be tailored by browsing the internet for possible games to adapt or by crafting new ones aligned with the intervention goals. 6. A list of all possible games and activities under the “Journey to the West” concept will be compiled. 7. The flow of the Journey to the West activities will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tongue Twister Relay ● Guess and Express ● Explain the Process ● Collective Grammar Activities 8. Prior to the implementation of each game-based session, a discussion will take place using innovative instructional materials to ensure foundational understanding. 9. The intervention program will run for four weeks, with two sessions per week, following Kurt Lewin’s action plan model to address each problem systematically. 10. Weekly plans will be developed to target each specific language skill and problem area per cycle. <p>FLOW OF INTERVENTION PROGRAM</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 50%; text-align: center;">1st Session (1ST WEEK)</th> <th style="width: 50%; text-align: center;">2nd Session (1ST WEEK)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Orientation ● Pretest ● Giving of Consent form </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 4-3-2 ● Discussion: Grammar 5 Basic sentence Structures Cohesive Devices ● JTTW (Supported by IPA transcription) ● Cool Down (Assessment) </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	1 st Session (1 ST WEEK)	2 nd Session (1 ST WEEK)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Orientation ● Pretest ● Giving of Consent form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 4-3-2 ● Discussion: Grammar 5 Basic sentence Structures Cohesive Devices ● JTTW (Supported by IPA transcription) ● Cool Down (Assessment)
1 st Session (1 ST WEEK)	2 nd Session (1 ST WEEK)				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Orientation ● Pretest ● Giving of Consent form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 4-3-2 ● Discussion: Grammar 5 Basic sentence Structures Cohesive Devices ● JTTW (Supported by IPA transcription) ● Cool Down (Assessment) 				

	<p>3rd Session (2nd WEEK)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 4-3-2 ● Discussion: Fluency Tips to become fluent ● JTTW ● Cool down (Assessment) 	<p>4th Session (2nd WEEK)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 4-3-2 ● Discussion: Grammar Conjunctions Preposition ● JTTW ● Cool down (Assessment)
	<p>5th Session (3rd WEEK)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 4-3-2 ● Discussion: Pronunciation Review of IPA ● JTTW ● Cool Down (Assessment) 	<p>6th Session (3rd WEEK)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 4-3-2 ● Discussion: Grammar 12 Tenses ● JTTW ● Cool Down (Assessment)
	<p>7th Session (4th WEEK)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 4-3-2 ● Discussion: Grammar Modals ● JTTW ● Cool down (Assessment) 	<p>8th Session (4th WEEK)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 4-3-2 ● JTTW ● Post test
ACTING	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The games identified during the planning phase will serve as strategic tools to develop the oral proficiency of the students. 2. At the start of each session, students will be informed that rewards will be given to winners to promote friendly competition and increase motivation. 3. Each session will follow a consistent activity cycle, and at the end of every session, an oral reflection will be administered by the moderators to monitor student progress. 	
OBSERVING	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The moderators will use a journal to note the following observations: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 The students' improvements in each session, starting from the implementation of the intervention program. 1.2 The extent to which students use English in their responses during each activity under the intervention. 1.3 The students' behavior during the activities, particularly how they interact with their classmates. 	
REFLECTING	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The moderators will administer a post-test to determine whether the students have improved as a result of the intervention. In addition, the moderators may use the observations recorded in their journals to support and validate the results. 	

Table 3 presents the flow of the Action Plan for the Intervention Program, addressing vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and pronunciation challenges among first-year English major students at Monkayo College of Arts Sciences and Technology. It outlines a four-week, gamified program called “Journey to the West,” with sessions that include discussions, activities, and assessments following Kurt Lewin’s action model. The plan progresses through planning, acting, observing, and reflecting phases to monitor and improve students’ oral proficiency and self-esteem.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn.

This study shows that many first-year English major students struggle with speaking English due to difficulties in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency. These linguistic challenges often make their messages

unclear and reduce their confidence, especially when speaking in front of others. As a result, students find it hard to express themselves effectively and may hesitate to participate in oral communication tasks.

Beyond language issues, students also face emotional and psychological barriers such as nervousness, shyness, and fear of being judged. Limited opportunities to practice English in real-life situations further weaken their confidence, while difficulty organizing thoughts leads to disorganized speech. However, improvement is possible through consistent exposure and practice. Activities like watching English media, using AI tools, engaging in conversations, and preparing for speaking tasks help students build vocabulary, improve fluency, and gain confidence. In this regard, the regular and consistent use of English is essential. Without continuous practice over the years, students may reach higher levels, such as fourth year in college, without becoming fully comfortable or proficient in using the language.

The study emphasizes that classroom support plays a crucial role in developing oral communication skills. Teachers should create a supportive and non-intimidating environment, encourage regular practice, and provide constructive feedback. Starting English-speaking practice early in the program and gradually increasing expectations can help students adapt more effectively. Since speaking is identified as a critical skill for English majors, it is especially important to focus on students at the beginning of their academic journey. First-year students serve as a key point for identifying which areas require intervention, and the findings of this study clearly highlight the specific difficulties that need to be addressed. With proper guidance, consistent practice, and a positive learning atmosphere, students can become more confident and proficient in speaking English.

Implications For Practice

This study provides practical implications based on the findings derived from the data analysis and in-depth interviews. The results highlight the need to address students' difficulties in oral communication, particularly in terms of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and speaking confidence. These findings suggest that targeted instructional strategies and supportive classroom environments are essential in fostering students' communicative competence.

Instructor. The findings indicate that instructors play a crucial role in improving students' speaking performance. It is recommended that teachers implement task-based language activities such as structured role-plays, guided group discussions, and oral presentations. These activities should be conducted at least 2–3 times per week to ensure consistent practice. In addition, teachers may apply scaffolded speaking tasks, beginning with controlled practice (e.g., sentence completion, dialogue modeling) and progressing to more open-ended communication tasks, such as storytelling or debates, where students generate their own ideas and responses in English. To reduce speaking anxiety, instructors should provide constructive and delayed feedback, focusing on key errors without interrupting fluency. Creating a supportive and low-anxiety classroom environment is also essential. This can be achieved through peer collaboration, positive reinforcement, and encouraging risk-taking in language use. These strategies can gradually enhance students' confidence, fluency, and accuracy in speaking.

English Major Students. The results suggest that students should actively engage in regular and purposeful speaking practice to improve their oral communication skills. Students are encouraged to participate in peer interactions such as pair work and small-group discussions, which provide a less intimidating environment for speaking. They may also adopt independent learning strategies, such as recording their speech, practicing pronunciation using online tools, and engaging in self-reflection. Participating in English-related activities, such as language clubs or informal conversations, can further enhance fluency and confidence. Importantly, students should view errors as part of the learning process and focus on gradual improvement in grammar, pronunciation, and coherence.

MonCAST. The findings of this study have important implications for MonCAST in enhancing its English language programs. The institution may consider integrating speaking-intensive tasks into the curriculum, such as task-based modules, oral assessments, and interactive classroom activities. Additionally, MonCAST can implement intervention programs targeting students with low speaking proficiency, including workshops on pronunciation, grammar, and communication strategies. Providing professional development training for

instructors on effective ELT strategies, such as task-based learning and communicative approaches, is also recommended. These initiatives can contribute to producing graduates who are not only academically competent but also equipped with effective communication skills required in global contexts.

Implications for Future Researchers. Future researchers are encouraged to further investigate effective strategies for improving students' oral communication skills. Action research studies may be conducted to examine the impact of specific interventions, such as task-based learning, pronunciation training, or confidence-building activities. Moreover, future studies may explore additional variables such as motivation, classroom environment, and the use of technology in language learning. Expanding the sample size and using mixed-method approaches can also provide more comprehensive and generalizable findings.

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