Reflective Thinking and English-Speaking Ability of Freshmen Education Students

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the levels of reflective thinking and English-speaking ability among 109 freshmen education students at a private college institution in Davao del Sur, Philippines, and to examine the relationship between these two variables. It used a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design and applied a stratified random sampling technique in gathering data. Findings revealed that the level of reflective thinking among freshmen education students was high, while their English-speaking ability was moderate. Additionally, the relationship between reflective thinking and English-speaking ability was found insignificant and non-correlational, suggesting that other factors might more significantly influence English-speaking skills. These findings indicated the need for targeted interventions to enhance English-speaking abilities alongside promoting reflective thinking practices. Educational administrators and teachers may focus on improving language teaching pedagogies and in creating supportive learning environments that foster these skills. Future research may explore these dynamics to better understand and support student development.

Keywords: *Descriptive Correlational Design; English-Speaking Ability; English Language; Reflective Thinking; Quantitative Method.*

INTRODUCTION

Freshmen education students embarking on their teaching journey face the challenge of developing robust English-speaking skills, a vital competency in the 21st-century education landscape. As pre-service teachers, their ability to effectively communicate in English is integral to their future interactions with learners in a globalized world. Wahyuningsih (2021) emphasized that addressing this issue is crucial for fostering a multilingual and globally competitive society, highlighting the significant role of English as the medium of instruction in education.

Language serves as the primary tool for communication, facilitating the expression of ideas, opinions, and emotions. In educational settings, proficiency in English-speaking skills holds paramount importance. Rofi'i (2019) explained that these skills are essential for ensuring effective communication in the workplace, especially in educational contexts. Studies reveal that English-speaking competence remains a persistent challenge for freshmen education students. For instance, Jiwandono (2021) found that 75% of freshmen in the English Education Department at Universitas

Nasional Karangturi in Indonesia exhibited low English-speaking proficiency due to limited practice opportunities and their beginner-level status as language learners. Similarly, Humaira (2023) identified various obstacles in Vietnam, including traditional learning habits and insufficient opportunities to practice oral communication, which adversely affect English-speaking performance. Both Dang (2022) and Uyen (2023) observed similar issues in Vietnam, where English-major freshmen faced challenges in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary.

In the Philippine context, research has identified unique factors influencing English-speaking proficiency. Rivera (2023) documented how students in Ozamiz City encountered difficulties in oral activities and struggled to use English as a communication medium, citing linguistic barriers as a significant challenge. Separa (2020) observed that education students at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines faced difficulties stemming from limited linguistic competence and psycho-social fears, affecting their performance across diverse communication tasks. Sandigan (2018) argued that the convergence of grammar, vocabulary, and rhetoric in oral production is vital, while social and cultural factors play a significant role in shaping oral communication abilities.

Reflective practice emerges as a transformative approach to addressing these challenges. Nurkhalis (2018) demonstrated that reflective practices significantly improve students' speaking proficiency. Additionally, Korpas (2021) highlighted that learners perceive reflective practices as motivational tools, encouraging critical thinking and improving speaking performance. Similarly, Tai (2022) emphasized that fostering convergent thinking abilities facilitates the enhancement of speaking skills.

Grounded in Dewey's Reflective Practice Theory, first proposed in 1933, this study is predicated on the idea that reflective experiences facilitate growth and skill development. Dewey argued that meaningful and relevant experiences foster change and improvement. Applying this theoretical framework, this study explores how reflective thinking can enhance the English-speaking ability of freshmen education students by encouraging them to evaluate their successes and challenges, identify areas for improvement, and develop targeted strategies.

This research examined the practices and experiences of freshmen education students enrolled in the Interactive Listening and Speaking course at a private college institution in Davao del Sur. Specifically, the study seeks to determine (1) the level of reflective thinking among freshmen education students in terms of habitual action, understanding, reflection, and critical reflection, (2) the level of English-speaking ability among freshmen education students in terms of vocabulary, grammar structures, pronunciation, fluency, and content, and (3) whether there is a significant relationship between reflective thinking and English-speaking ability among freshmen education students.

By addressing these inquiries, the study aims to fill the research gap in understanding the influence of reflective thinking on English-speaking proficiency. Additionally, this study aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by promoting inclusive and equitable quality education, as noted in the United Nations'

(2015) SDG 4, enhancing employability and communication skills for decent work (SDG 8, 2015), and reducing inequalities in access to education and opportunities (SDG 10, 2015). The findings aim to benefit various stakeholders, including students, teachers, administrators, curriculum designers, and policymakers, by offering insights and recommendations for integrating reflective practices in language education.

METHOD

In this section, the researchers outline the research design, respondents, instruments, data collection and data analysis.

Research Design

The study utilized a quantitative descriptive correlational research design. Sharma (2019) explained that the descriptive design is used to systematically observe and describe behaviors in relation to situational variables. Creswell (2017) and Hassan (2023) emphasized that correlational research involves examining statistical relationships between variables without manipulating external factors. This approach allowed the researchers to evaluate students' English-speaking skills and reflective thinking and analyze their relationship.

Research Respondents

The respondents consisted of one hundred nine (109) freshmen education students at a private college institution in Davao del Sur, enrolled in the Interactive Listening and Speaking course. The population included forty-five (45) Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) students major in English, thirty-six (36) major in General Science, and twenty-eight (28) students from the Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd) program.

Research Instruments

The researchers used instruments adapted from established sources. Kember et al. (2000) developed the reflective thinking questionnaire, which includes four indicators: habitual action, understanding, reflection, and critical reflection. Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale. The analytic scoring rubric adapted from iRubric (n.d.) assessed English-speaking ability based on vocabulary, grammar structures, pronunciation, fluency, and content. These instruments were chosen for their reliability and alignment with the study's objectives.

Data Collection

A class observation was conducted in coordination with the course instructor to ensure compatibility with the schedule and performance tasks. Signed informed consent forms confirmed voluntary participation and ensured respondents understood their rights. Statistical tools were applied to analyze the collected data. The mean was

used to determine average levels of reflective thinking and English-speaking ability among respondents. To assess variability, the standard deviation quantified the dispersion of scores for English-speaking ability. Pearson's correlation coefficient was applied to evaluate the strength and direction of the relationship between reflective thinking and English-speaking ability.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Level of Reflective Thinking of Freshmen Education Students

The results in Table 1 shows that reflective thinking is *high*, with a mean score of 3.83 and a standard deviation 0.884, indicating that reflective thinking is *often manifested*. The data suggest that freshmen education students think critically in their respective English classes. They demonstrate awareness of their actions, performances, and how they carry out specific activities to achieve good outcomes which are highlighted by Salido (2019). Also, Muttungal (2024) revealed that reflective thinking is a key to reflection and considered as a useful learning strategy to fostering academic excellence among learners.

Reflective thinking among students was found to be high across various indicators, with the highest being understanding (M=4.06, SD=0.851), enabling students to comprehend and respond effectively to tasks, as supported by Separa (2020). Critical reflection ranked second (M=3.97, SD=0.844), highlighting its role in transformative learning and bridging critical thinking, as seen in Indrasiene et al. (2023). Reflection (M=3.93, SD=0.879) followed, emphasizing self-awareness and progress tracking, consistent with Salido and Dasari (2019) and Titus and Muttungal (2024). Habitual action ranked lowest (M=3.37, SD=0.962), indicating variability in students' strategies and adaptability, which aligns with Loka et al. (2019). Overall, reflective thinking enhances academic performance, problem-solving, and self-awareness, as argued by Titus and Muttungal (2024). However, its development may vary among students, influenced by engagement and learning environments.

Table 1. Level of Reflective Thinking of Freshmen Education Students

Indicators	SD	Mean	Descriptive Level
Habitual Action	.962	3.37	Moderate
Understanding	.851	4.06	High
Reflection	.879	3.93	High
Critical reflection	.844	3.97	High
Overall	.844	3.83	High

Level of English-Speaking Ability of Freshmen Education Students

Table 2 presents the level of English-speaking ability among freshmen education students. Overall, English-speaking ability has a mean score of 3.06 and a standard deviation 0.532, indicating that all indicators can be described as *moderate*. This finding means that the English-speaking ability of the freshmen education students is *sometimes manifested*. Hasibuan (2019) revealed that freshmen education students manifested average level of English-speaking ability in specific English classes and can use the language at a moderate level of proficiency.

The findings indicate that content/accuracy is the highest indicator of English-speaking ability (ESA), with M=3.28 and SD=0.530, showing moderate levels of meaningful idea construction in English classes, which supports the study of Jiwandono (2021) and Ortega-Auquilla et al. (2021). Pronunciation (M=3.07, SD=0.468) ranks second, playing a crucial role in developing ESA, this corroborates the study of Yusriati and Hasibuan (2019) and Shafwati (2022). Grammar follows (M=3.01, SD=0.574), with studies by Normawati and Nugrahaeni (2024) and Sahid (2019) highlighting its influence on ESA. Vocabulary (M=3.00, SD=0.549) ranks second lowest, emphasizing basic vocabulary's importance, which supports Suryanto et al. (2021) and Sindhuandra (2024). Fluency (M=2.96, SD=0.538) is the lowest, reflecting challenges in consistent speech delivery, as shown in studies by Sendi et al. (2021), Hussein (2020), Riadil (2020), and Rullu and Daburan (2020). Overall, psychological factors and limited practice impact ESA development, as highlighted by Jiwandono (2021).

Table 2. Level of English- Speaking Ability of Freshmen Education Students

Indicators	SD	Mean	Descriptive Level
Vocabulary	.549	3.00	Moderate
Grammar	.574	3.01	Moderate
Pronunciation	.468	3.07	Moderate
Fluency	.538	2.96	Moderate
Content/Accuracy	.530	3.28	Moderate
Overall	.532	3.06	Moderate

Significance on the relationship between Reflective Thinking and English-Speaking Ability

Table 3 shows the significant relationship between reflective thinking (RT) and English-speaking ability (ESA). It presents no significant relationship between RT and ESA, r (103) =0.02, p=0.812. Since the p-value is more than the 0.05 significance level, this quantitative finding indicates that a significant relationship between the variables is not evident. Consequently, the obtained results mean that the null hypothesis (Ho) is accepted, and the alternative hypothesis (Ha) is rejected. This result

parallels to the findings of Asakereh and Yousofi (2018) which suggests that RT does not influence higher ESA scores throughout, and RT has no significant relationship with ESA or academic performance.

This claim is incongruent to the study of Humaira (2023) which found out that 79.4% of ESA is affected by RT and is found to be significant and correlational. The findings challenge the claims of Rahman et al. (2023) that reflective thinking (RT) is significant and correlated to English-speaking ability (ESA) which implies that only 3.3% of English-speaking ability is affected by reflective thinking. Additionally, a study of Rahman et al. (2013) found a negative correlation between RT and ESA, particularly in fluency, suggesting that lower RT levels correspond to higher ESA scores.

Table 3. Significance on the relationship between Reflective Thinking and English-Speaking Ability

Pair of Variables	r-value	df	P-value	Decision
RT and ESA	.024	103	.812	Not Significant

*p-value > 0.05, thus signifies no significant correlation

CONCLUSION

The level of reflective thinking of the freshmen education students was at a high level, while the level of English-speaking ability of the freshmen education students was at a moderate level, and the relationship between reflective thinking and English-speaking ability was found insignificant and not correlational.

Freshmen education students are adept at reflective thinking, particularly regarding understanding, reflection, and critical reflection. These students often exhibit high levels of these reflective skills, which is encouraging. However, habitual action, though still present, is less strongly manifested than the other domains. This finding suggests that while students are good at thinking about their learning and actions, they may only sometimes apply these reflections to their everyday tasks. Regarding English-speaking ability, the findings show that students' proficiency is moderate across areas. This finding means that while they can manage vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and content/accuracy, they often need help to achieve higher proficiency levels. Notably, content/accuracy was the strongest area, indicating that students can express their ideas meaningfully, albeit with some limitations. Conversely, fluency could have been better, reflecting the struggle many students face in speaking English fluidly and coherently.

The relationship between reflective thinking and English-speaking ability was found to be weakly positive, meaning that while there is some connection, it needs to be more robust to draw definitive conclusions. This claim suggests that improving reflective thinking alone may not significantly boost English-speaking skills, and other factors likely play a more critical role. Additionally, the study found no single domain

of reflective thinking that stood out as the best predictor of English-speaking ability, highlighting the complex nature of these skills and how they interact.

In essence, while we celebrate our students' strengths in reflective thinking, there is a clear pathway for enhancing their English-speaking skills through targeted support and continuous practice. By working together-administrators, teachers, students, and researchers can create a more conducive learning environment that nurtures these essential skills.

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