

University Students' Endeavors in Oral Midterm and Final Examinations

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ABSTRACT: *Oral exams are oftentimes a dilemma for some students despite enough training. In this paper, student participants were asked how they performed in weekly speaking-based activities and oral exams, what specific difficulties they encountered, and what ways they could develop fluency by using a Likert-based survey method with quantitative and qualitative results. It was found that the students performed moderately well. However, the professor's 1) class activity management and 2. feedback and students' 3) self-awareness, 4) oral exam challenges, and 5) speaking fluency improvement need a revisit for quality teaching and learning. The results would provide the vehicle for understanding some issues in teaching and learning which require compensatory techniques to increase their oral exam performances to an excellent rating among these factors. This paper also offers insights to guide professors or teachers in developing materials and teaching techniques so that students can further improve their fluency in the target language.*

KEYWORDS: Intentionality, incidental learning, speech, test,

INTRODUCTION

An oral exam – be it a classroom, university entrance, or standardized exam (e.g. IELTS, TOEIC, TOEFL, etc.) – have been great chaos for all students or any test-takers to deal with. Issues in terms of sentence construction, pronunciation, diction, fluency, and meaningful delivery of message are the top burdens Korean learners encounter when speaking English (see Ramos, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2020; Ramos & Camarena, 2021; Ramos & Thorkelson, 2022). In addition, any difficulties encountered by students when speaking English are rooted in fear of mistakes, shyness, anxiety, and lack of confidence (Al Nakhalah, 2016). Regardless of how much they study or train themselves for a specific purpose, they can still encounter nervousness, anxiety, uncertainty, and other emotional baggage that would change their points of view from a downfall.

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To eliminate those difficulties, there should be an awareness of lessening the speaking struggles during classroom activities to strengthen language learning efficiency and techniques (e.g. warm-up activities, group work, and conversation practice) and this should be imposed to boost the students' confidence during the oral exams. In support, the data collected from Korean in-service teachers shows that there is "a strong need for a focus on developing effective classroom English, and this is something that should be considered from the very beginning of language teacher education" (Whitehead, et. al, 2019, p. 188).

In this paper, students' weekly oral activities and oral midterm and final exams have been observed based on preparation, process, and output stages. Although students are introduced to the content and objectives of speaking-based exams at the beginning which they perform during class activities, they still feel the lack of necessary test-taking skills due to some factors such as time constraints of exams, nervousness, study habits, and less meaningful learning experiences. They are also aware of the criteria of the speaking exam such as grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, comprehension, background knowledge, and fluency which they regularly process during various speaking activities before the exams.

However, the professor's observations indicate that students can produce proper organization of thoughts as they are given time to write down their ideas and opinions before the oral delivery of their answers, which is different during the exams. Before the exams were conducted, they were given training to outline their thoughts though by having keywords for the 1- to 2-minute preparation before the 2-minute talk. Thus, the areas that were investigated in this paper include the effectiveness of weekly speaking activities and performance levels of professor's oral exam training and students' actual oral exams with the following questions:

- 1) What specific difficulties did the students encounter during the oral midterm and final examinations?
- 2) What ways would come out to develop students' much more fluency during the oral exams?

The anticipated outcome of this study was to gain pedagogical insights that can guide teachers and students more effectively and efficiently in achieving their goals and objectives in their speaking-based exams.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Consciousness in Language Acquisition and Learning

Both adults and children undergo the process of L1 (mother tongue) acquisition and L2 (target language) acquisition and learning. Processing L1 is an implicit effort to acquire a language through exposure or actual immersion in a natural communicative environment. L2, on the other hand, takes a process of implicitly acquiring a language by immersion or explicitly learning a language by consciously studying grammar rules, vocabulary,

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expressions, slang, idioms, etc.

In short, there is a crucial process of how a mother tongue (L1) and a target language (L2) collide or smoothly swing together to deliver messages in trying to form correct sentence construction and diction. For L2 adult learners, there is a translation process going on in their minds at some point while speaking to other communicators.

With the above-mentioned distinction, Richard Schmidt (cited in Ellis, 1997) points out the consciousness of acquisition and learning. He mentions that consciousness can be 'intentionality' which "refers to whether a learner makes a conscious and deliberate decision to learn some L2 knowledge" (p. 55); while it can be 'incidental learning' which "takes place when learners pick up L2 knowledge through exposure" (p. 55). He argues that both of them involve conscious attention to linguistic features in the input to affect the output.

However, it is noted that amid the L1-L2 process, learners can predict failure or success in language learning or acquisition depending on their experience which is grounded in some characteristics such as intelligence, aptitude, learning styles, personality, motivation and attitudes, identity and ethnic group affiliation, learner beliefs, and age of acquisition and the critical period hypothesis (Lightbown & Spada, 2012, pp. 54-74).

In Korea, materials with activity questions and speaking rubrics are well provided for students to practice speaking. However, "one reason why students were confused despite all the relevant materials available proved to be a lack of organizational skills and content internalization" (Ramos, 2020, p. 87), and this could hinder speaking fluency. Completing such a task could be tricky for them because, in general observation, most Korean students are not normally comfortable handling and exploring multiple complicated issues, thus easily giving up when these are not substantiated or solved immediately (Ostermiller, 2014).

Struggles in Speaking Activities

It is inevitable that both high proficient and low proficient students encounter struggles in oral exams or any speaking activities. Brown (2007) comments that "[n]eglecting phonological practice now may be at the expense of later fluency" (p. 119). In relation to this, Language Policy Division (2002) argues that "the difficulty of an item cannot be assumed to be a simple result of the linguistic relationship of the text and the answer. Both stimulus and response have their own linguistic features, and the task that bridges them may involve some cognitive complexity in addition to the demands of the language" (p. 24).

Ramos' (2014d) study in Korea revealed that any test difficulties may be directed to students' poor study habits and less interest in classroom challenges. He pointed out that in the end, students viewed the tests as difficult; while others assertively complained about the content of the exam as higher grades are essential in their job seeking. At some point, they just studied harder when they expected positive emotion over the result (i.e. good scores). In fact, they (not all though) sought more oral practice to develop competence. In other words,

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK students get more motivated to study or practice communicative activities whenever their scores are good; if not, they show no enthusiasm for improving further.

To improve their study habits (e.g. speaking practice for the exams), Language Policy Division (2002) points out that "the most important criterion for measuring the value of an item type is its appropriateness for use in testing language in a particular situation and for a specified purpose. The item type which provides the most direct means of measuring the desired learning outcome tends to be the best item type to choose" (p. 29).

Speaking Tests

There are many views about speaking concerning testing. Luoma (2009) sees speaking as this: "Speech can be considered to consist of idea units, which are short phrases and clauses connected with *and*, *or*, *but* or *that*, or not joined by conjunctions at all but simply spoken next to each other, with possibly a short pause between them" (p. 12). As speaking is a part of testing, Bachman (1995) defines a test as "a measurement instrument designed to elicit a specific sample of an individual's behavior" (p. 20).

Moreover, the goal of testing is always to arrive at intelligent decisions as expounded:

"sometimes, these decisions affect only the future design of the use of the tests themselves, in which case we are dealing with solely experimental uses of tests. Sometimes, the decisions have to do with the retention or alteration of courses of training as when one decides that poor test results are due to ineffective training. Most often, the decisions have to do with the management of the educational careers of individuals." (Carroll, 1961, p. 314).

Nam's (2008) study indicated that in studying English, many Korean students' primary objectives are not to build up English communicative prowess in them but rather to obtain a high grade for entry at a prestigious university in South Korea. This is also supported by Kroeker's (2009) study in a South Korean University indicating that the main point of attending English conversation classes is not to harness their communicative competence.

According to Brown (2007), "[t]he flow of language is important to establish, from the beginning, in reasonably short segments. Attention to accuracy should center on the particular grammatical, phonological, or discourse elements that are being practiced" (p. 119). In conclusion, accuracy and fluency should be intertwined in the process to achieve productivity and competence.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Both qualitative and quantitative methods are used in this research. A qualitative method allows open-ended questions in which the participants may provide further explanations in

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the questionnaire. According to Dörnyei (2007), "[t]he open responses can offer graphic examples, illustrative quotes, and can also lead us to identify issues not previously anticipated" (p. 107). The quantitative data provide the figures of students' oral midterm and final exam performances in two semesters.

Description of Participants

The study was conducted with the participation of sophomore and junior English majors who attended speaking-based courses such as Practical English 01, Debate 01, and Topic Discussion 01 at the Department of English Language and Literature at the College of Humanities of a South Korean university. Specifically, there were 55 student participants in the survey, whose participation was completely voluntary. They were also informed that non-participation would not affect their grades.

Data Collection Procedures

Google Form where the questionnaire was answered by students was used for the data collection. The questionnaire has three aspects concerning students' opinions about speaking activities and oral exams. Each question was marked following the 5 points Likert scale ((i.e. excellent (5), good (4), average (3), fair (2), and poor (1)) and was accompanied by a qualitative question from which the participants could elaborate their opinions. Other questions seek to rank specific difficulties they encountered in the oral midterm and final exams and ways to develop much fluency in the said exams. A qualitative question was also provided for each question so that they may provide explanations. To ensure confidentiality, 55 participants were labeled from A to CB and their opinions were not edited to see the value of their communicative skill authenticity.

Data Analysis

The frequency count to determine the number of responses in the survey questionnaire was calculated by the percentage formula in Excel (The Smart Method, 2018). The three tables in the survey questionnaire were arranged as follows: (1) students' opinions on speaking activities and oral exams, (2) specific difficulties students encountered in the oral midterm and final exams, and (3) ways to develop much more fluency for oral exams. The quantitative survey results were interpreted in light of the qualitative results from the students' reasons.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the results of students' opinions on speaking activities and oral examinations.

Table 1. Students' opinions on speaking activities and oral exams

	V P	%	P	%	A	%	G	%	VG	%
effectiveness of weekly speaking activities	2	4	0	0	9	16	23	42	21	38
the performance level of professor's oral exam training	1	2	0	0	4	7	18	33	32	58
the performance level of students' actual oral exams	4	7	7	13	27	49	13	24	4	7

Note. VP - very poor; P - poor; A - adequate; G - good; VG - very good

Effectiveness of Weekly Speaking Activities

In reporting how effectively the students managed their weekly speaking activities, about two-thirds of the students rated themselves as good and very good: Of the 55 participants, 42% perceived that they were good, and 38% felt that they were very good. On the other hand, about one-fourth of them (16% and 4%) rated themselves as adequate and very poor, respectively. None of them were poor at it though.

These results manifest the following qualitative statements. For example, student M commented: "[s]haring my ideas with other students was a good chance to learn how to communicate in English." In support, student N stated: "[i]n my class, every one should speak and professor usually separated the students to discuss about the topic. I think that's the one thing that effected well in the class because it helped me to share my opinion and make a comparison but also I can maybe disagree with someone's opinion. It's one of the good things that improved my speaking skill (helping each other and sharing the thoughts). I can tell that because sometimes when I speak with my classmates they have their own opinion so it makes my brain thinks more wide and open-minded which is really good." (sic)

Moreover, student KA elaborated: "[t]hrough speaking activities, I learned how to speak using many slangs and idioms. Moreover, through role-play, I also learned how to respond to my counterpart's words." Still, student FA commented: "I think this class was very effective. I talked in English every week and practiced how to think in English. And, I also learned from what other friends said. I learned from their pronunciation and ability to construct stories. These were helpful to me."

However, a few students may be disappointed at some point. For instance, student JA expressed by saying: "[t]his class sometimes is not very efficient, when some students are not willing to answer, can selectively skip, should not waste time." Despite some

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difficulties, Student WA said: “[m]y weekly activities are not very good because I am not good at English but I have tried my best to study fully without missing a session.”

Performance Level of the Professor's Oral Exam Training

In finding out what the professor's pieces of oral exam training were like for the students, a little over one-half of the 55 participants (58%) labeled his expertise level as very good, and about half (33%) rated him as good. Further, about one-fourth of them (7% and 2%) rated him as adequate and very poor, respectively. No one rated him as poor.

These results are supported by the following qualitative claims. For instance, student YA mentioned that “[h]e created an environment in which we could talk about a variety of topics every hour. Through role-playing, we can talk about each other's opinions and approach the topic from various perspectives. Also, it was good to know many expressions, slang, and idioms.” Student U also mentioned: “[h]e listened to our opinions very carefully. Also, if someone's talk is a little bit short or insufficient, he encouraged him and helped to replenish it. I got more confident from the professor's encouragement.” (sic) Student DA also commented: “I really like his teaching styles. He explained every part very clearly and used uncommon techniques to share knowledge.” Student WA concluded: “I find that the professor teaches very well, very enthusiastic and psychologically for the students.” (sic)

Moreover, student FA said: “[h]e made me practice conversation every class. And the professor gave me feedback after talking with a partner in class. And the week before the test, he gave tips for the test. He taught me how to devise content in detail. And, it was actually helpful to me.” Further, student N elaborated this: “[h]e always gives us feedback after we made a discussion and present our thoughts which made me feel so good because if he wouldn't tell me something and just say you are good, I couldn't learn by myself. So I think that's the good thing about my professor to give student the feedback and give the opportunity to speak up, especially every time he showed us how to organize our thoughts before the exam week. I really liked that and he helped me a lot.” (sic)

Additionally, student RA concluded: “[t]he speaking test was very embarrassing and I was very worried that I couldn't speak. However, I was able to take the test with a stable mind because the professor kindly guided me on the test questions. Thank you.” Student X also spoke up: “[m]y professor treated me well so I wasn't nervous, and able to take the exam comfortably. In the middle of my speech, the professor said “Ummm”, and this sympathy relieved my tension and gave me a lot of strength.”

Performance Level of the Students' Actual Oral Exams

In revealing how effectively the students performed in the actual oral midterm and final exams, about one-half of them (49%) felt that they were adequate. About one-fourth of them were in the following performance levels: 24% - good; 13% - poor; 7% - very good; and, another 7% - very poor.

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These results are supported by the following qualitative testimonies: For instance, student N shared her experience: “[b]ased on my English background and my speaking skills, I think I performed well because I know how to organize my thoughts, and also I tried to contact with my professor like eyes to eyes. But one of the things that I couldn't tell that I am very well is I speak a little fast and it made me nervous but at least I think I delivered my opinion and my experience well.” (sic) In connection to this, student FA said: “I think I did well. Because I got better during the final exam. I lacked confidence and couldn't speak right away during the midterm. But I practiced hard. And I tried not to be nervous thinking about midterms. And I was able to speak better with confidence than on the midterm exam. There are still many shortcomings, but I am so proud that I spoke without being nervous. To survive in the struggle, student EA said: “I tried to use the words I learned and I tried to give many examples.”

However, there were vivid shortcomings experienced by other students. For instance, student VA recalled: “[t]o be honest, I was completely dissatisfied with my speaking exam. Those questions weren't difficult, but I don't know why I couldn't think of anything to answer at the time. I know I can do better than that.” Likewise, student X mentioned: “[t]hanks to the professor, I was able to answer the question, but I couldn't remember what to say about the question, and the pressure on the exam made me nervous. I couldn't say various words in the exam so I feel the lack it.” Furthermore, student BA remembered: “[t]here were times when I couldn't think of a few words, but I tried to convey my opinion.” To show disappointment, student S said: “[m]y speaking was not neat and stuttered little by little, but it was good that the professor nodded and listened to me well.” And finally, student Z made a self-assessment: “I think I could give an answer and supportive reasons. However, it would be better if I could give more logical examples and make my opinions organized.” Similarly, student RA mentioned: “[t]he test questions are well understood, but I think we still need more grammar, choice of words, or speaking fluently.”

Table 2 presents the specific difficulties students encountered in the oral midterm and final examinations.

Table 2. Specific difficulties students in the oral midterm and final exams

	number	percent	rank
high vocabulary	22	40	1
fluency	16	29	2
grammar	9	16	3
background knowledge	4	7	4
pronunciation	2	4	5
forgetfulness	1	2	6
no idea	1	2	6
comprehension	0	0	7
total	55	100	

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Of the 55 participants who specified difficulties in the oral midterm and final examinations, about one-half (40%) ranked the use of high vocabulary as the first difficulty, and 29% rated fluency as the second rank. However, one-fourth of them ranked the following aspects: 16% - grammar (third); 7% - background knowledge (fourth); 4% - pronunciation (fifth); and 2% - forgetfulness, and another 2% for no idea (which must be accounted for sixth). No one rated comprehension as difficult though.

Use of High Vocabulary

In this aspect, most students expressed their weaknesses in the following comments. For instance, student DA said: "I had ideas about the topic what I spoke, but I didn't have a good vocabulary power to express my ideas during my exams." (sic) While student J reasoned out: "[b]ecause it is a little difficult to come up with using of sentence for short time" [sic], student CB made mentioned that it is "[b]ecause thinking immediately from Korean to English is very difficult to me." Due to some reason, student UA stated: "I couldn't think of diverse vocabularies." In connection, student AA opened up: "[s]ince I don't know the vocabulary well, I have to think for a long time to find an alternative word when I have a sentence I want to say, so I take a lot of time."

Fluency

In this regard, some students manifested their frustrations as follows. Student L expressed: "I think I lack fluency because I couldn't think of English vocabulary well or I couldn't think of which expression is right at once." In support of this, student Z said: "I was feeling I'm stuck in somewhere while I speak about my arguments. Also, I was not sure if I comprehend a question correctly in the final exam." Student FA stated: "[i]t was hard for me to say what I thought in English right away. I was frustrated because I couldn't speak English as I thought. So, I thought it was important to know a lot of words so that I could say them right away. And I also thought the practice was important. Further, student X mentioned: "I was so nervous that I didn't know what to say. And I had no idea what to say, also It was difficult due to time pressure (It was more difficult because I didn't know how many minutes I was talking.)" However, despite the frustrations, others feel that there are benefits to the type of oral exams. For example, student KA clarified: "I had difficulty speaking English fluently because I didn't have many opportunities to speak English. However, the exam was really meaningful time for me. This is because it influenced me to build confidence in speaking and improve my speaking skills." Likewise, student YA said: "I had a hard time speaking English fluently because I didn't have many opportunities to speak before. However, it was good because it influenced the development of confidence in speaking and the improvement of speaking skills through the test."

Grammar

In this matter, other students expressed their difficulties. For example, student A said: "[i]t was hard to say the sentence that I wanted to say in English right away. Until now, I was not used to speaking because I was educated in writing and reading rather than speaking in English. I think English conversation was a little difficult apart from English grades."

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Student Y thought: "I think I need more practice because 1 minute for preparation is too short for me." In short, "[g]rammar was the most difficult" according to student ZA. However, student R manifested the benefit: "[i]n fact, I always had a vague fear of English grammar, so I couldn't speak properly because I was always concerned, but this debate lecture and exam gave me an opportunity to overcome it well."

Background Knowledge or Content

In this part, students clarified their points. For instance, student N said: "I could speak so many things about my own life or my experience because that's based on my background of the story but it takes a lot of times to think about some current issue or issue that has been talking over and over again (such as presidential election, globalization, being a foreigners in Korea). It makes me nervous first time and I don't know how to organize them for example when it comes to the serious topic I think so deeply that I can't even remember what was the question. So, I think I should notice and learn more about background knowledge before making the conversation." (sic) Another hindrance is that student M mentioned: "I was so nervous since I have to record my voice and send it to the professor. I was worrying that if it wasn't recorded correctly. I really like that only professor was in the exam room. There was no other distraction." (sic)

Pronunciation and Other Aspects

At this point, the rest of the students assessed themselves in terms of pronunciation, comprehension, no idea, and comprehension. Student WA spoke up: "I did not do well in the midterm and final exams because my English was not good -- low vocabulary and incorrect pronunciation. While student VA made mentioned: "[s]ometimes when I get a question, even if I understand the question, I can't think of anything. My head is completely empty," student AB reasoned out: "[b]ecause it takes some time to change what comes to mind in Korean to English when speaking." In the end, student NA released a statement: "[o]verall, it was a moderate level of difficulty and it's a form of an interview, so I think it'll be helpful for future job interviews."

Table 3 presents ways to develop much more fluency for oral exams.

Table 3. Ways to develop much more fluency for the oral exams

	number	percent	rank
having regular communicative activities with people who speak English	20	36	1
watching movies, Youtube, or TV	15	27	2
joining language exchange activities with foreigners	14	25	3
attending English classes	4	7	4
reading books	2	5	5
listening to music or podcasts	0	0	6
total	55	100	

Of the 55 participants, about one-half (36%) believed that having regular communicative

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK activities with people who speak English should be the first rank in developing much more fluency for the oral exams. Still, about one-half (27%) labeled watching movies, Youtube, or TV as the second in line, while one-fourth (25%) felt that joining language exchange activities with foreigners should be the third priority. Also, the following means were ranked by the rest of them: attending English classes (fourth by 7%) and reading books (fifth by 5%). No one felt that listening to music or podcasts should be a priority.

Having regular communicative activities with people who speak English

The following qualitative statements were claimed by some students. For instance, student U mentioned that “I felt it in this class that participating in person is really important. So I want to join another talking activity again. And I think the frequency is also important thing so regular English speaking activity is a good way to develop my skill.” Concerning this, student X added: “[w]hen I was in elementary school, I overcame my fear of English by talking to people in English in the Philippines, but because I didn’t speak English in Korea, I became afraid of English again. If I communicate with others in English regularly, I think I will be able to speak English well. People who are familiar with English will be able to speak English better.” Further, student A emphasized: “[i]n order to be good at English conversation, it seems more important to speak directly than to listen. If I communicate with people in English and consciously use English in my daily life, I think my skills will improve.” In conclusion, student V mentioned that “[i]n communication, speaking is essential. It involves having the ability to express your thoughts adequately in a language. Speaking includes having the range of vocabulary needed to say what you want but also knowing which tone of voice to use depending on the situation.”

Watching movies, Youtube, or TV

In this aspect, some students revealed their views. For instance, student LA made a comparison: “[m]emorizing words and internalizing grammar is one of the good way in order to achieve proficiency, but it can be boring if it last too long. Watching clips can be more effective because one can accept information from both sides, vision, and hearing.” (sic) In line with that, student VA saw the practicality of it by saying: “I think learning English through movies is an interesting and effective method of learning. The lines in the movie are often derived from real life situations that can happen. Therefore, when you pay attention to listen to the dialogues of the characters, you are also training your ears to get used to the sounds and English words closest to real life.” (sic) Additionally, student NA stated that “[m]ost of my knowledge of English is obtained from videos on YouTube. And most of the conversations they have had are everyday conversations, so I can get knowledge of everyday conversations.” In agreement and conclusion, student W felt this way: “I think watching movies or shows on tv or Youtube will help improve speaking skills. On the other hand, I think I need to work harder myself.”

Joining language exchange activities with foreigners

In this matter, the following statements were expressed by several students. To glimpse, student MA said: “[i]n fact, just as a person who has lived in an English-speaking country

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is good at English, it will be fun to communicate with someone who can communicate in English around me and I will be able to communicate a lot in English without any burden. As for student S, she mentioned that “[i]t would be helpful to meet foreigners and listen to their English expressions or pronunciation. In addition, student N emphasized that “... [t]he thing is that when people hear something of different languages first time it's weird but when you keep listening and listening it will be stacked up in your brain and can make your own impression. So I think the most important of learning language is meeting people from different countries and say something even if it's going to be awkward situation.” (sic) In a nutshell, student BA reiterated: “I don't think there's anything more definite than communicating directly with foreigners.”

Attending English classes and reading books

In this regard, a few students expressed the importance of the traditional ways of mastering English. As for attending English classes, student TA said that “[b]efore being good speaker I have to study more and practice then I think i can be good at English.” (sic) On the other hand, reading books also gain benefits. For instance, student ZA said: “I think reading a book in English is very helpful for taking the speaking test.” In support, student PA mentioned: “I think reading books is helpful because I can learn English grammar and vocabulary more.” (sic)

Overall, the advantages or benefits of speaking exams clearly indicate that students have come to reflect on the factors of their oral exam challenges. For instance, student commented: “I gained confidence even if my English was wrong, and I realized that I needed to improve my English.” Student M added, “I could use lots of things that I had learned during the class by speaking it out loud again. By talking to the professor, it helped me to have a proper conversation in a better way.” Moreover, student R expressed her thoughts: “[t]he speaking test seems to have given me an opportunity to further develop my sense of English because I speak a topic chosen randomly.” Finally, student DA concluded: “[i]t helped to improve my thinking power and I got an experience on how to use my English knowledge according to situations. One day, that experience will help my job interviews and it will help my IELTS speaking test because I hope to face the IELTS exam soon.”

DISCUSSION

Based on the results, the themes are categorized in processing the discussion, and these are class activity management from the effectiveness of weekly speaking activities; feedback from the performance level of the professor's oral exam training; self-awareness from the performance level of the students' actual oral exams; oral exam challenges from the ranks of difficulties in communicative/linguistic skills; and speaking fluency improvement from the ways to develop much more fluency for oral exams.

Class Activity Management

Designing and managing class activities from the teachers' end is a constructive tool for

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK students to exercise their communicative skills (e.g. sharing ideas or opinions with others and making a comparison) and develop positive emotional learning that helps students' abilities to apply a good amount of slang, idioms, and useful expressions found in the learning material and to construct their own stories. Crawford (2002) believes that "[a] textbook also serves as a useful map or plan of what is intended and expected, thus allowing participants to see where a lesson fits into the wider context of the language program" (p. 83). In the course of weekly speaking activities, students can potentially practice their academic skills before taking oral speaking exams. In effect, students would become more open-minded to other people's thoughts, interactive by questioning each other and independently expressing themselves, and skillful in pronunciation as the learning is more meaningful to them. In other words, missing class sessions or skipping activities during classes would bring out slow learning.

Feedback

It is very essential for a professor (or a teacher) to carefully and enthusiastically listen to students' ideas or opinions (e.g. role-playing where students approach the topics from various perspectives) and help them replenish their communicative skills and acknowledge their insights in the event that they fall short of clear sentences and vocabulary. Hunt and Beglar (2012) suggest using fluency-building activities as a scaffolding tool. They explain that "[f]luency-building activities recycle already known words in familiar grammatical and organizational patterns so that students can focus on recognizing or using words without hesitation" (261). Moreover, it is also important to note that a professor should learn how to psychologically devise the content in detail (e.g. using uncommon techniques to share knowledge) and explain every part very clearly. Meticulous, yet constructive feedback after students present their thoughts every single time would give them a useful venue to reflect on how to organize their insights and emotions, especially before and during the major oral exams. In this way, they would develop more confidence and self-esteem from the professor's constant encouragement and reduce their tensions in the oral exam challenges.

Self-awareness

Organizing thoughts well with proper eye contact during the oral exams would mean high credibility that is driven by students' meaningful language learning experiences, especially when speaking fast while managing nervousness gracefully. One strategy is by giving logical examples or personal stories that would substantiate the delivery of ideas or opinions as they are more personal, authentic, and heart-driven. However, there are instances when students were lost for words or ideas even if the questions were not difficult, but they tried to convey their thoughts to finish the line. In their perceptions, they could do better than that. This is because of pressure that makes them nervous; however, more grammar skills, choice of words, or fluency would help them recover from nervousness or failure. According to Hall (2002), "[e]ssential to the construction and organisation of individual language knowledge are the distribution and frequency with which sequences of actions and their specific linguistic components are encountered in these communicative activities" (p.56).

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It is also important that professors should scaffold students' struggles in carrying out their thoughts during the exams by having a professor' nod, a gesture of listening to students well, and other forms of non-verbal encouragement. DeCapua and Wintergerst (2010) remind us that "in Korean culture, the art of nonverbal communication is such an integral part of the language and culture that there is an actual term, *nunch'i*, that translates with the body and eyes" p. 151). In effect, students would be more delighted regardless of how they perform in their oral exams and weekly speaking activities, and this would lead them to continue learning with active class participation.

Oral Exam Challenges

As for the use of high vocabulary, the students at a moderate proficiency level were groping for better words to suit the delivery of their thoughts. Nation (2002) explains that [i]t is necessary to use sensitive tests of vocabulary knowledge to show any learning at all. However, it is likely to be cumulative if there are repeated opportunities to meet the partially learned vocabulary again" (pp. 267-268). He concludes that a direct link between the volume and variety of meaning-focused input and vocabulary development will be regarded as fundamental.

Also, time constraints would hamper the students from thinking of proper words and expressing them with relevance, correctness, and coherence because they lack constant practice. In this case, language-focused instruction is needed. Nation (2002) also mentions that "[l]anguage-focused instruction thus includes focusing on the pronunciation and spelling of words; deliberately learning the meanings of a word; memorizing collocations, phrases, and sentences containing a word; and being corrected for incorrect use of a word" (p. 270). At some point, students would have to mentally translate their ideas or opinions from Korean to English words, which shows a decrease in fluency as it is the general case of second language learners who have not fully immersed themselves in daily, authentic, and native English-speaking communities.

In the case of fluency, lack of vocabulary, language expressions, and practice are key issues that make students entangled in the middle of the oral exams. Because of time pressure again, students were worried about how much they had spoken and what they had been talking about, which led them to think about how much effort and learning they have invested since time immemorial. However, for better students, the time-constraint oral exam further motivated them to build up their confidence in speaking and improve their speaking prowess.

In the aspect of grammar, students had difficulty in applying it in the actual oral exams as they were basically taught writing and reading where grammar rules are explicitly taught. It is believed that implicit teaching of grammar through various speaking activities and practice with proper organization is more efficient and effective. Other students encountered vague fear of English grammar as they were always concerned about their communicative performances, but the professor's input and this type of oral exam provided an opportunity

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to overcome it well.

In terms of background knowledge or content, personal stories or authentic experiences of life which are embedded in the human senses would be more manageable to express than current events which require plenty of time to remember and organize into words and structures. Another factor is whether recording a student's exam voice is properly done or not, which raises nervousness as it is sent to the professor afterward. This is when students care so much about grades but less about communicative productivity which may actually help them in carrying out their future job-seeking or at the workplace. However, no other distractions could interrupt a student's concentration if it is only an examinee and an examiner are present at the exam venue while others are waiting outside the venue. This is when students do not want to be criticized for their oral exam performances by other listeners, which can be considered a measurement of their emotions and intellectual ability.

In terms of pronunciation and other aspects, another factor of unsuccessful oral exams is a consciousness of incorrect pronunciation even if the questions are easy to understand. This is because students were fully aware of the content and objectives of the syllabi. Nation (2002) mentions that ... "the most exciting findings of recent research on vocabulary learning have revealed how spoken production of vocabulary items helps to learn and how teachers and course designers can influence this spoken production" (pp. 268-269). Overall, however, the exam procedures or mechanics which were at a moderate level of difficulty are in the form of an interview that is helpful for students' future job undertakings. Other factors such as forgetfulness, no idea, and comprehension did not have any reports in relation to students' struggles.

Speaking Fluency Improvement

As for communicative activities with people who speak English, the amount or frequency of class participation in talking/speaking activities is essential in developing communicative skills. Speaking English regularly and consciously and expressing thoughts in that language is more beneficial to keep the feeling of it and get rid of the fear of losing its acquired proficiency. Having a range of vocabulary and knowing which tone of voice to use depending on the situation are carried over in the process.

In the case of watching movies, Youtube, or TV, watching video clips on any platform can be more effective and efficient in harnessing proficiency as there are both visual and hearing involved, in comparison with memorizing words and internalizing grammar which can be boring if it lasts too long. Learning English through movies is an interesting and effective method of learning because the storylines or interactions in movies are happening in real life as one gets used to the English phonetics but this requires effort.

In terms of joining language exchange activities with foreigners, interacting with people who have immersed themselves in a native English community provides a good opportunity to further improve their communicative skills without any hassle. So, meeting foreigners

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK would help replenish the English expressions or pronunciation. It might be tiring to keep on listening to them talk but the benefit is that what can be heard through conversations can be stuck in the brain which produces learning and spontaneous interaction in the long run.

With regard to attending English classes and reading books, it is inevitable that students should formally learn linguistic and communicative components of the English language as guided instructions and skills building are processed and assessed by teachers in improving teaching and learning and that materials and teaching strategies can be revised or improved further. In the process, students can develop better study habits and absorb by practicing all necessary skills for oral communication (e.g. oral exam). Furthermore, reading books implicitly transfers vocabulary, language expressions, idioms, slang, and grammar rules into students' schema and develops fluency in the long run for academic and professional purposes.

IMPLICATIONS TO RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

This study implies that although students generally acquire enough fluency and accuracy in the target language during the oral exams, there should be more students' oral training to be imposed by teachers or professors that are congruent with the speaking-based courses. In effect, the oral exam training guide should be created and followed as shown below.

Description: The oral exam training guide helps teachers to facilitate oral exams at various levels and improves students' ability to quickly take notes after they randomly choose questions to answer. The training guide goes around with a general statement (GS, hereafter) and a specific statement (SS, hereafter) as the introduction. GS mentions the keyword(s) of a question in a full sentence while SS provides a direct answer to the question. The main points (MPs, hereafter) provide details to the SS with relevant examples, personal stories, discussion, explanation, etc. Finally, the conclusion offers a summary of ideas or opinions mentioned in MPs and a prediction to draw out a final thought.

Objectives: Students will be able to quickly brainstorm ideas or opinions for delivery, to fluently speak the ideas and opinions in full sentences with appropriate transition markers in a given time, and to become emotionally and physically confident with relevant gestures and acceptable mannerisms.

Procedure: Teachers may prepare 3 questions for each unit, but students are free to randomly choose only 1 question without looking at it. Students are given 2 minutes to organize their thoughts and another 2 minutes to deliver their ideas or opinions. Students are allowed to bring paper and a pen to jot down their insights. Finally, it is their responsibility to record their voices during the oral exams and send them to teachers' emails. Their voice record files will be highly confidential and be kept for student identity and academic purposes. On the students' end, they could evaluate themselves by listening to their performances.

Variation: Depending on the level of students' ability, class size, or exam goals, teachers could decide on the number of questions with difficulty level, time restriction, speaking rubrics, and format. Students may pick 1 or 2 questions for them to answer orally. Time restrictions may also vary ((i.e. 2 min for the preparation (note-taking/brainstorming) and another 2 min to orally deliver the insights or 1 min for the preparation and 2 min to speak)). Additionally, oral exam rubrics may be dependent on the purpose or objective. Finally, students may decide which format to consider: the paragraph format (but should be longer) or the essay format (but a shorter version) in organizing and delivering their thoughts during the oral exams.

Sample: It would be better if a question is short but with a sense of difficulty levels. For instance, a student picks this question. Question #3: Is there a necessity for equal holidays for working people? Why or why not?

Note-taking/Brainstorming (2 minutes)	Sample of oral exam delivery (2 minutes)
GS: holiday, working people SS: Yes	Over the last few decades, as the community develops, holidays have received growing attention in modern society. While some people argue that the amount of holiday should be different depending on the job, I beg to differ. In this exam, I would like to talk about the need for equal holidays for working people regardless of what job they have.
MP1: To benefit comfort – relieve stress, enjoy with family, enough rest MP2: Quality of life – good health condition, manage schedules well, not suffer	To begin with, one of the numerous reasons why working people should be treated fairly regardless of job position is that all workers have the right to benefit from comfort. One is the right to relieve their stress, which is caused by tasks, in any possible way. For instance, vacation is really a useful way to enjoy life with family. After enough rest on vacation, they are able to efficiently concentrate on the tasks at work and happily do some household chores with family at home. More importantly, the quality of life should be a top priority for all workers. They may have good health if they are able to manage their schedule well. For instance, if someone works hard with enough rest at

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<p>from illnesses (e.g. nervous breakdown, chronic headache)</p>	<p>the workplace, the person will tend not to suffer from nervous breakdowns and chronic headaches. As a result, our society will not be weakened due to overwork.</p>
<p>Conclusion: apply equal vacation, remarkable benefits, government helping improve quality and prevent unforeseen problems</p>	<p>To conclude, I absolutely advocate that equal vacation should be applied to all workers. This practice could offer plenty of remarkable benefits rather than drawbacks. With this in mind, I do hope that the government exerts its utmost effort in order to improve the quality of life and prevent unforeseen problems.</p>

CONCLUSION

In the five factors of students' oral midterm and final exam performances (i.e. teachers' 1. class activity management and 2. feedback and students' 3. self-awareness, 4. oral exam challenges, and 5. speaking fluency improvement), they performed moderately well. However, the professor-researcher in this study should still consider students' comments in reshaping the oral exam training as an avenue in developing compensatory techniques to increase their oral exam performances to an excellent rating among the said factors.

Firstly, teachers' class activity management scaffolds the curriculum and materials design and development in students' speaking-based courses by emphasizing the act of sharing ideas or opinions with classmates and making a comparison and constructing their own stories in the given activities. This is very essential because the teacher's manipulation of the type of activities would result in further language inputs and eventually, achieving a good amount of communicative competence can take place successfully.

Secondly, a teacher's tactful and timely feedback in any activity psychologically turns out students' open minds or perspectives as they are quickly and regularly guided with accurate sentence construction and vocabulary building in harnessing speaking fluency, especially during oral midterm and final exams.

Thirdly, students' self-awareness of non-verbal communication (e.g. eye contact) would efficiently attract organized thoughts in delivering logical examples or personal stories while they could be flexible with grammar skills, choice of words, and fluency despite the nervousness or the difficulty level of questions. And, this should be congruent with a professor's effort on non-verbal strategies (e.g. nodding, while listening to students well, and other forms of non-verbal encouragement) so that students' continuous learning with active class participation could be maintained or further developed in carrying out fluency and confidence.

Fourthly, the findings of the students' oral exam challenges would strengthen their urge to achieve another step of competencies. Meaning-focused input and vocabulary development are recommended to carry out messages that include higher synonyms of a word. In addition, constant practice in using high vocabulary in context is a must to show relevance, correctness, and coherence and to minimize the L1-L2 translation. Another challenge is fluency. For better students, the time-constraint oral exam further motivated them to build up more efficiency in brainstorming and improve their speaking prowess. However, some students encountered grammar difficulty in the actual oral exams as implicit teaching of grammar through various weekly speaking activities and practice with proper organization is not well implemented. For the remedial therapy, the professor's training for this type of oral exam would set a stepping stone to overcome such difficulty. Other important factors which are the creation and delivery of personal stories or authentic experiences of life would foster speaking fluency and accuracy as those ways could guide them to organize their thoughts and to avoid direct criticism that may hurt their emotions and intellectual ability. Finally, a consciousness of incorrect pronunciation even if the questions are easy to understand can be a factor in unsuccessful oral exams. Regardless, this type of oral exam would still be helpful for students' future job undertakings.

Lastly, speaking fluency improvement could be processed in casual conversation activities where learners could freely interact with others at their own paces, emotional value, and intellectual capacity without being pressured with explicit learning.

Future Research

Based on the insights gained in the implication of this research and practice as well as the conclusion, professors or curriculum developers could adopt the oral exam model of this paper to their classes in further investigating its usefulness or drawbacks. We would like to see the outcome of this oral exam speaking model across cultures, intelligence, personality, attitude, age, etc. in a wider range.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Oral Exam Rubrics

Source: adopted from RCampus, <https://www.rcampus.com/rubricshowc.cfm?code=Q4W568&sp=true>

				
Category	Needs Improvement 1 pts	Satisfactory 2 pts	Good 3 pts	Excellent 4 pts
Grammar	Needs Improvement Student was difficult to understand and had a hard time communicating their ideas and responses because of grammar mistakes.	Satisfactory Student was able to express their ideas and responses adequately but often displayed inconsistencies with their sentence structure and tenses.	Good Student was able to express their ideas and responses fairly well but makes mistakes with their tenses, however is able to correct themselves.	Excellent Student was able to express their ideas and responses with ease in proper sentence structure and tenses.
Pronunciation	Needs Improvement Student was difficult to understand, quiet in speaking, unclear in pronunciation.	Satisfactory Student was slightly unclear with pronunciation at times, but generally is fair.	Good Pronunciation was good and did not interfere with communication	Excellent Pronunciation was very clear and easy to understand.
Vocabulary	Needs Improvement Student had inadequate vocabulary words to express his/her ideas properly, which hindered the students in responding.	Satisfactory Student was able to use broad vocabulary words but was lacking, making him/her repetitive and cannot expand on his/her ideas.	Good Student utilized the words learned in class, in an accurate manner for the situation given.	Excellent Rich, precise and impressive usage of vocabulary words learned in and beyond of class.
Comprehension	Needs Improvement Student had difficulty understanding the questions and topics that were being discussed.	Satisfactory Student fairly grasped some of the questions and topics that were being discussed.	Good Student was able to comprehend and respond to most of the questions and topics that were being discussed.	Excellent Student was able to comprehend and respond to all of the questions and the topics that were being discussed with ease.
Background Knowledge	Needs Improvement Student was lacking in background knowledge which hindered his/her responses to the questions regarding class materials.	Satisfactory Student showed decent background knowledge of class material, making his/her responses incomplete.	Good Student displayed well knowledge of class information and topics.	Excellent Student presented excellent background knowledge from class topics and was able to add more information in their response.
Fluency	Needs Improvement Speech is very slow, stumbling, nervous, and uncertain with response, except for short or memorized expressions. Difficult for a listener to understand	Satisfactory Speech is slow and often hesitant and irregular. Sentences may be left uncompleted, but the student is able to continue.	Good Speech is mostly smooth but with some hesitation and unevenness caused primarily by rephrasing and groping for words.	Excellent Speech is effortless and smooth with speed that comes close to that of a native speaker.

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