

SPEAKING PROFICIENCY AND LEXICAL COMPETENCE AMONG SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, LOON DISTRICTS, LOON, BOHOL

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ABSTRACT

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This study examined the speaking ability and lexical competence of senior high school students in Bohol's Loon North and South Districts during the 2022-2023 school year. Although the research offered valuable insights, focusing solely on these districts may limit the extent to which the results apply. Researchers used a quantitative correlational method and randomly selected 277 students from 985 enrolled in public secondary schools. Data was collected using two tools: a Speaking Proficiency assessment that measured content, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency, and a researcher-made lexical competency test focused on collocations and word associations. The study followed ethical standards, including informed consent, confidentiality, and proper data management. The results showed that students had low levels of speaking ability and lexical competence, highlighting the need for more language development activities in schools. Most respondents were female



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and enrolled in the Academic Track, mainly in the General Academic Strand. Students generally struggled with speaking skills and lexical competence, especially with collocations and word associations. Speaking proficiency was linked to sex, grade level, track, and strand, but lexical competence was not. There were apparent differences in speaking proficiency and lexical competence by gender, grade level (Grade 11 or 12), and track (Academic or Technical-Vocational-Livelihood). The analysis also found notable differences in these skills among the various senior high school strands.

INTRODUCTION

In this era of modernization, the world has become a global village, and people communicate in a common language — English. The English language is spoken worldwide. It is considered the primary language used in different fields such as business, law, research, education, banking, entertainment, information technology, travel, and tourism. The impact of the English language in today's society seriously challenges individuals to master it to succeed in various fields.

When the four language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) are used appropriately, communication can be successful. Of the four macro skills in English, speaking is considered the most relevant for effective communication, as most communication occurs through speech. There is no doubt that to become a well-rounded communicator, individuals must acquire proficiency in all these skills, but the ability to speak effectively sets the parameters for communicative competence.

According to Rao (2019), “everything in today's world is connected to speaking skills. One who excels in speaking can rule the entire world because effective communication is the key to better employment opportunities.” As individuals compete globally to fulfill their desires and secure better career opportunities, they all need to acquire proficiency in English to survive in this global market. Speaking proficiency is the ability to use language accurately to convey meaning in both production and comprehension. It is a strength that leads the country toward further economic progress and social development.

Lexical competence is an essential element in building speaking proficiency in English. Mastery of vocabulary gives individuals the confidence to think, write, learn, and communicate their ideas. This skill is fundamental to the overall development of language learners, as one's vocabulary competence influences one's ability to speak and comprehend the subject. In honing speaking skills, the student's vocabulary mastery is a primary consideration we need to emphasize. Thus, the quality and quantity of a person's vocabulary affect their speaking proficiency.

Based on the researcher's observations, the senior high school students' speaking proficiency appears inadequate given the two-year absence of face-to-face interaction during the COVID-19 pandemic. When given various

speaking tasks in English classes, they experience anxiety and avoid delivering complex ideas using the English language. They display a lack of confidence in performing activities that involve speaking. Many factors have contributed to the educational dilemma, including a lack of lexical competence. When students face difficulties building sentences due to limited vocabulary, they show slow progress in developing their speaking skills.

Given the above reality regarding the decline in students' speaking ability, this study is conducted to measure speaking proficiency and lexical competence among Senior High School students in Loon Districts and to examine the correlation between the two language skills. The findings of this study may serve as input for a proposed enhancement program intended to help teachers develop strategies to enrich learners' speaking proficiency and lexical competence. This will also benefit educational institutions that aim to improve the quality of English language teaching and the curriculum developers who create innovative English proficiency learning materials.

Related Literature. Teaching speaking is a difficult task for language teachers. On the other hand, attaining proficiency in the said language skill is challenging for learners. If teachers want to help learners overcome difficulties in learning to speak, they should identify factors that influence their speaking performance. Riyaz and Mullick (2016) stated that at least two factors hinder students' speaking proficiency. First, the lack of enough time to practice speaking. Many researchers say that if students have more time to speak, they can speak with greater confidence and fluency. In addition, students found it difficult to express their ideas and points of view because they spent more time with teachers' explanations and materials. After all, classroom learning is typically teacher-centered (Hosni, 2014). He said that teachers could not give everyone a chance to talk in a classroom either. Second, the students' short vocabulary may also challenge their speaking proficiency. English learners must remember sufficient words.

According to Nakhalah (2016), many students lack the vocabulary needed to convey their ideas, so the information they provide is misinterpreted. Several factors influence learners' speaking performance, including lexical competence (Tuan & Mai, 2015). Lexical competence has been suggested to be a cluster of knowledge (form, meaning, and use) of a lexical item, skills, and abilities that a person develops and deploys across different contexts (Caro, 2017). It is the capacity to comprehend, acquire, retrieve, and recall vocabulary items with relative success, which serves as the foundation of language acquisition and a key consideration in learning a second language. Learners can deal with the English language if they have sufficient lexical knowledge and competence, since vocabulary acquisition is fundamental for language literacy.

To further explain the concept of lexical competence, Jazmin Villa et al. (2018) emphasized that lexical competence is the capacity to draw on one's mental lexicon and use it appropriately based on communicative intention. In addition, integrating this competence with the pragmatic and sociolinguistic

competencies is just as important as knowing many words in various dimensions. Furthermore, Tanaka (2016) explained that a person is lexically competent when they have stored specific information about a word in their brain.

Khan et al. (2018) reaffirmed the importance of vocabulary knowledge in teaching and learning any foreign language. Numerous EFL teachers and researchers have recognized the significance of vocabulary in language acquisition. Most people learn EFL with the primary goal of improving their communication skills. Alharthi (2020) also noted that a person's vocabulary, or ability to use language, is an essential component of language knowledge for effective communication. In addition, he also presumed that vocabulary knowledge specifically aids second language (L2) readers and listeners in decoding various contextual information.

Knowledge of collocation primarily influences lexical competence. Collocation is a term used to address the possibility of the occurrence of two or more words in lexical or syntactic relations. Although it may sound like a recent and fashionable term in the linguistic literature, the importance of collocation for foreign language learners has long predated other linguistic components and terms (Demir, 2017). In simple words, collocations refer to a language-specific phenomenon in which two or more words frequently occur together. Some word combinations are acceptable (e.g., strong tea) while others are not (e.g., strong tea). El-Dakhs (2015) stated that for varied reasons, collocation competence is a crucial part of learning a second language. One reason is that they make up 70% of everything we say, hear, read, or write. Their high frequency in discourse is another reason. Another is that they make language processing easier. Understanding frequent collocations in their parts makes language production and comprehension easier. Additionally, collocations aid in comprehending word meanings.

Another aspect of lexical competence that needs consideration is word association. To demonstrate their vocabulary knowledge, students must know the core words associated with a particular lexical item. It is important to remember that lexical items are learned "associatively, not mechanically as little packets of meaning". A student is required to use all pertinent words associated with a keyword or concept to achieve a complete understanding of the concept (Ali & Mohideen, 2012).

Related Studies. Many studies have shown that a large, rich vocabulary can improve a learner's communication skills. In Indonesia, few research studies asserted that lexical competence and speaking proficiency correlate with each other. Taslim et al. (2019) conducted a study titled "Correlation Between Students' Vocabulary Mastery And Speaking Skill" to determine whether vocabulary correlates with students' English speaking ability. As a result, the data from vocabulary and speaking tests showed that students' mastery of English vocabulary and speaking ability are significantly positively correlated.

A similar correlational study, entitled “The Correlation between Students’ Vocabulary Mastery and Speaking Ability at Grade 8 of Junior High School,” was conducted by Putri and Refnaldi (2020) and used a sample of 30 students selected through cluster sampling. The language learners accomplished both the vocabulary and speaking tests. The results showed that students’ speaking skills strongly correlate with their vocabulary knowledge. Anova et al. (2015) also gained the same findings in the study, “The Correlation between Students’ Vocabulary Mastery and Speaking Skill at Fifth Semester of English Study Program in Pasir Pengaraian University”. Moreover, the study suggested that teachers need to give particular attention to students’ ability to master vocabulary because communication requires this skill to convey ideas, messages, or thoughts. Students with strong vocabulary mastery can be sure that communication will be easier.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The respondents of this study were the Senior High School Students of the four (4) public secondary schools in Loon South and North Districts. The respondents must be enrolled in one of the three schools in the said Districts for the school year 2022-2023 and must be in grade 11 or 12. Additionally, students who were transferees from other schools and Districts were not included in the study. Furthermore, the researcher used simple random sampling with a 95% confidence level and a 0.05 margin of error to select the study’s respondents. From a population of 985 Senior High School students, the researcher identified 277 respondents.

The researcher used two (2) instruments in conducting the study. To assess respondents’ speaking proficiency, the researcher administered the Test of Speaking Proficiency (TSP). The speaking test consisted of three (3) speaking tasks: Task A (Self Introduction), Task B (Picture Analysis), and Task C (Impromptu Speaking), which were administered in three (3) separate sessions, each lasting 1-2 minutes per student. Five aspects of the students’ speaking ability (Content, Grammar, Vocabulary, Pronunciation, and Fluency) were assessed using a set of criteria adapted from Ningrum’s (2017) instrument. Students were to obtain scores ranging from 5 to 20 for each aspect and a maximum score (100) if their oral presentation fulfilled all of the speaking aspects perfectly. To identify the student’s speaking proficiency level, the following scale was used:

Rating	Description	Interpretation
90-100	Outstanding	The speaker can express himself fluently and spontaneously on a wide range of contexts; can pronounce the words correctly, and has no grammatical errors.
85-89	Very Satisfactory	The speaker can communicate spontaneously in various contexts but shows occasional difficulty in pronunciation and very few, almost unnoticeable, grammatical errors.
80-84	Moderately Satisfactory	The speaker can communicate well but may have difficulty expressing all their thoughts due to a restricted vocabulary and a limited command of language structure. Students at this level speak in simple sentences, frequently marked by few grammatical errors.
75-79	Fairly Satisfactory	Speakers can communicate limited information in simple phrases and sentences, with many grammatical and pronunciation errors. Students hesitate to express their ideas.
Below 75	Did not meet expectations	The speaker shows poor communicative capacity

The second tool for this study was a researcher-made questionnaire used to measure respondents' lexical competence. It consisted of two parts: a constructed questionnaire on respondents' profiles in the first part, and 40 questions on lexical competence (20 on collocations and 20 on word association) in the second. This was administered in three (3) sets, with a total of 60 items per part. The following were the parameters for assessing students' lexical competence.

Legend	Score	Interpretation
90-100% correct answers	50-60 correct items	Very High Competence
85-89% correct answers	46-49 correct items	High Competence
80-84% correct answers	41-45 correct items	Moderate Competence
75-79% correct answers	36- 40 correct items	Less Competence
Below 75 % correct answers	Below 36 correct items	No Competence

The interpretation of scores was based on the Department of Education's transmutation of grades as reflected in DepEd Order No.8, s. 2015

The researcher asked for endorsement from the Vice-President for Academics of the University of Bohol and from the Dean of the Graduate School and Professional Studies. Then, the researcher also asked for permission to conduct the study from the Schools Division Superintendent of Bohol, the district supervisors of the Loon South and North districts, and the school heads of the four public secondary schools.

After securing permission, the researcher explained the purpose of the study to the senior high school advisers and subject teachers and oriented

the respondents. To ensure coordination and partnership with parents, parental consent forms were distributed. Assent forms were also distributed to respondents under 18 years old. Face validity and pilot testing of the questionnaire on lexical competence were conducted to ensure its validity, and the results of the pilot testing were subjected to a reliability test.

During the study, the researcher administered two tests to the respondents. To assess respondents' speaking proficiency, a Test of Speaking Proficiency was administered and evaluated against a set of criteria or rubrics. The speaking test consisted of three (3) speaking tasks: Task A (Self-Introduction), Task B (Picture Analysis), and Task C (Impromptu Speaking), which were administered in three (3) separate sessions. Each student was given 1-2 minutes to answer the questions or complete the speaking task, which was assessed using a set of criteria patterned after Ningrum (2017). Then, a Lexical Competence Test Questionnaire was distributed to the respondents. The test was administered in three meetings, with respondents answering one (1) set of 40 questions per session. The participants were given 15-20 minutes to complete the lexical competence test. Moreover, the researcher informed them that the results will be confidential.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Respondents. Most of the respondents were female. Out of 277 Senior High School students surveyed, 164 (59.21%) were female, and 113 (40.79%) were male. This higher number of female students aligns with the usual enrollment trends in Senior High Schools.

The respondents were almost evenly split between Grades 11 and 12. There were 143 Grade 12 students (51.62%) and 134 Grade 11 students (48.38%). This balance gives a good mix of both new and graduating Senior High School students.

Most of the respondents, 222 students (80.14%), were in the Academic Track, while 55 students (19.86%) were in the Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) Track. This means there are more academically focused students, which could affect the learning preferences and outcomes studied here.

A smaller proportion of respondents were from the Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) strands. Shielded Metal Arc Welding (SMAW) accounted for 22 students (7.94%). Both Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM) and Garments strands had 10 students each (3.61%). Information and Communications Technology (ICT) included nine students (3.25%), while Home Economics (HE) and Electrical Installation and Maintenance (EIM) each had seven students (2.53%). The Tailoring strand was represented by only one student (0.36%).

Senior High School Students' Level of Speaking Proficiency. The average score for respondents' overall speaking skills was 74.09, which was

not satisfactory. These results reveal that, as a group, the students had trouble speaking clearly, fluently, and accurately during the activities tested.

The results suggest that a significant number of Senior High School students have not attained the anticipated level of English speaking competency. This study aligns with Saeed et al. (2019), who indicated that many learners, despite extensive exposure to English instruction, continue to face challenges with fluent, precise oral communication. The continued lack of proficiency in speaking at the secondary level shows that we need more targeted, long-term instruction to improve oral communication skills. Language teachers are still quite concerned about these gaps, since speaking well is important for doing well in school and communicating effectively.

Senior High School Students' Level of Lexical Competence. Lexical Competence in Terms of Collocation and Word Association

Results for respondents' lexical competence are presented in this section, with an emphasis on collocations and word associations—two essential elements of vocabulary knowledge that directly impact students' capacity to use language correctly and meaningfully.

Lexical Competence in Terms of Collocation

Collocation is the term for the way that some words seem to go together in a language naturally. Table 7 shows how well the students did on the collocation tests in all three sets. The results show that Set A had the best average score ($M = 10.55$), followed by Set C ($M = 10.09$). Set B had the lowest average score ($M = 9.75$). Even with minimal differences between the sets, the overall performance remained poor. The composite mean of 50.47 falls within the descriptive category of "No Competence," indicating that students need to improve their use of collocational patterns to enhance their language skills.

This conclusion shows that even while students may know what each word means, they have trouble putting them together in ways that seem natural or make sense in the context. This problem can cause people to say or write things that do not make sense or seem awkward, especially when they talk or write for a long time. These findings asserted that second-language learners' capacity for self-expression is constrained by their insufficient understanding of collocations. To augment lexical competence, subsequent studies should investigate effective pedagogical interventions and exposure strategies that are essential for educators seeking to boost students' linguistic accuracy and fluency in academic settings.

Lexical Competence in Terms of Word Association

Word association refers to the semantic relationships among words that help learners understand meaning in phrases and sentences. Table 8 presents the respondents' performance in this area.

Set A had the highest mean score ($M = 11.68$) of the three sets, followed by Set B ($M = 11.23$) and Set C ($M = 9.62$). Even though Set A performed better overall, the composite mean of 54.21 was still considered “No Competence.” This shows that most of the people who answered had weak semantic associations between words. The results indicate that students find it hard to understand links such as synonymy, antonymy, and conceptual linkages, which are important for understanding and using language meaningfully. Students who do not have strong word-association skills may have trouble determining word meanings, understanding texts, and writing clear responses. This shows how important it is to focus on vocabulary growth. This result is consistent with Kaur’s (2013) study, which revealed that many tertiary-level learners possess lexical competence below the minimum threshold required for higher education. These restrictions have significant consequences for academic achievement, as lexical knowledge is fundamental to reading comprehension, writing proficiency, and spoken communication, highlighting the necessity for targeted vocabulary education.

Degree of Relationship between the Respondents’ Profile and Speaking Proficiency. This section presents a statistical analysis of the relationship between selected respondent profile variables and students’ speaking proficiency. Specifically, it examines whether there is a significant association between sex and speaking proficiency among Senior High School students.

Table 10 demonstrates that the relationship between sex and students’ speaking proficiency is statistically significant. The Pearson Chi-square test yielded $\chi^2(4, N = 277) = 11.085, p = .026$, which is below the established significance level ($\alpha = .05$). This finding supports the rejection of the null hypothesis. It indicates that sex is significantly associated with students’ speaking proficiency.

The significant Linear-by-Linear Association ($p = .008$) indicates a notable trend in the distribution of speaking proficiency levels across sex categories. These findings suggest that sex-related factors may influence differences in speaking proficiency among respondents.

Table 10. *Relationship between Sex and Students’ Speaking Proficiency (n = 277)*

Pearson Chi-Square	11.085	4	.026*
Likelihood Ratio	11.221	4	.024*
Linear-by-Linear Association	7.124	1	.008*
Number of Valid Cases	277	—	—

Significant at $\alpha = .05$

This result contrasts with Sijali's (2016) findings, which reported no statistically significant relationship between sex and English language proficiency among ELT students. The discrepancy may be attributed to differences in research context, educational level, assessment tools, or sociolinguistic environments. In the present study, variations in classroom interaction patterns, confidence in oral communication, and exposure to speaking opportunities may have contributed to the observed association.

Overall, these findings underscore the importance of considering learner characteristics, such as sex, when designing instructional strategies to improve speaking proficiency. Language educators should adopt more inclusive and differentiated approaches to promote the equitable development of students' oral communication skills.

Relationship between Grade Level and Students' Speaking Proficiency. The chi-square test results in Table 1 indicate an association between grade level and speech skills. Recognizing this pattern helps teachers and speech-language pathologists use targeted tactics, boosting their confidence in meeting the needs of children with speech development issues.

Table 11. *Relationship Between Grade Level and Students' Speaking Proficiency (n = 277)*

Test	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.921	4	.042*
Likelihood Ratio	10.192	4	.037*
Linear-by-Linear Association	7.765	1	.005**
N of Valid Cases	277		
<i>Note.</i> $p < .05$; $p < .01$.			

The Likelihood Ratio test ($p = .037$) supports this connection. The significant Linear-by-Linear Association, $\chi^2(1, N = 277) = 7.765, p = .005$, demonstrates that speaking proficiency increases with grade level, demonstrating a persistent developmental trend. Teachers can see how strong and beneficial these outcomes are in speech programs if they make this relationship apparent. These results are consistent with Rudd and Honkiss (2020), who found a strong link between grade level and English proficiency. However, a child's speech development may also be affected by disparities in their curriculum or family income. When teachers and speech-language pathologists are aware of these confusing variables, they may be able to interpret results better and develop treatments that account for other factors affecting the situation.

Relationship between SHS Track and Students' Speaking Proficiency. Teachers and academics need to understand how SHS Track affects students' speaking skills. Table 12 illustrates a substantial correlation between senior high

school track and students' speaking skills. The Pearson Chi-square value of 15.198 and the p-value of .004 indicate that the students' track profiles are associated with differences in their speaking skills. So, the null hypothesis is not valid. This research indicates that instructional characteristics, exposure to language use, and learning expectations across different tracks may influence disparities in students' oral communication competencies. Tracks that focus more on presentations, discussions, and performance-based tasks may give you more chances to practice speaking than those that focus more on technical or written work. Understanding these distinctions can encourage teachers to change their methods to help students improve their speaking skills across all tracks.

Table 12. *Relationship between SHS Track and Students' Speaking Proficiency*
n = 277

Test	Value	df	p-value
Pearson Chi-Square	15.198	4	0.004
Likelihood Ratio	17.607	4	0.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	11.564	1	0.001

However, this result contrasts with Magcamit (2016), who found no significant relationship between Senior High School (SHS) track and speaking proficiency, suggesting that English learning experiences are consistent across tracks and prepare students equally for the four career pathways. The disparity could be due to differences in how the curriculum is implemented, how teachers teach, or how schools are set up. This difference shows how important it is for scholars and students interested in educational strategy to conduct further research and critical analysis.

Relationship between strand and students' speaking proficiency.
Relationship between SHS Strand and Students' Speaking Proficiency.
 Table 13 demonstrates a substantial correlation between the senior high school strand and students' speaking proficiency. The Pearson Chi-square result ($\chi^2 = 87.315, p < .001$) shows that pupils' speaking skills are very different between strands.

Table 13. *Relationship between Strand and Students' Speaking Proficiency*
n = 277

Test	Value	df	p-value
Pearson Chi-Square	87.315	36	.000
Likelihood Ratio	94.703	36	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.969	1	.325

Future studies may explore causal relationships and track temporal variations to deepen understanding of how curricular emphasis influences speaking development.

Furthermore, this study suggests that differences in curriculum emphasis, instructional approaches, and communicative expectations across segments may influence students' development of oral language skills. Some strands may offer more opportunities to practice speaking because they require many presentations, conversations, and group work. Other strands may focus more on writing or technical skills.

Interestingly, the non-significant linear-by-linear association implies that proficiency does not increase or decrease in a simple, ordered manner across strands. Instead, variations are shaped by the unique learning activities and language exposure within each specialization, acknowledging the complexity of language development.

The results highlight the need to strengthen speaking-oriented activities across all SHS strands to ensure more balanced development of communicative competence among learners, regardless of academic specialization. This presents an opportunity for educators and policymakers to make impactful changes that can enhance students' language skills and confidence.

Correlation between Students' Speaking Proficiency and Lexical Competence. Table 18 shows a significant positive correlation between students' speaking ability and lexical competence ($r = .313, p < .001$). This result highlights the importance of vocabulary for speaking. As shown in Table 18, there is a strong positive correlation between students' lexical competence and their ability to speak ($r = .313, p < .001$). This supports modern teaching methods and shows how important vocabulary is for speaking skills. Even though the correlation is weak, the null hypothesis should be thrown out because it is important.

Table 14. *Correlation between Students' Speaking Proficiency and Lexical Competence* $n = 277$

Variables	Speaking Proficiency	Lexical Competence
Speaking Proficiency	1.000	.313**
Lexical Competence	.313**	1.000
<i>p-value (2-tailed)</i>		< .001

Note. ** $p < .01$ (2-tailed).

The outcome suggests that oral communication requires a strong vocabulary. Students with a broader vocabulary can reply, express themselves, and carry on discussions with clarity.

This result is consistent with earlier studies that found vocabulary has a significant impact on speaking skills. Uzer (2017) found a similar relationship between secondary students' vocabulary and their ability to speak English, underscoring the importance of vocabulary for communication. Echoing these findings, Alharthi (2020) and Anova et al. (2015) both emphasize the importance of language and focused education for communication. Overall, the results show that speaking proficiency and lexical competence develop simultaneously. Teachers can enhance their students' spoken language proficiency, communication skills, and professional efficacy by incorporating vocabulary training, particularly through contextual and communicative exercises.

Difference in the Levels of Speaking Proficiency and Lexical Competence between Male and Female Students. Table 19 illustrates that men and women have very different levels of speaking and vocabulary skills. The average speaking score for female students ($M = 76.33$) was higher than that for male students ($M = 70.85$), and this difference was statistically significant ($p < .001$). Females also had higher lexical competency scores ($p = .005$), indicating that these differences are noteworthy and warrant consideration.

These findings provide valuable information for teachers and academics. In general, girls are better at speaking and language than boys. Learning about these characteristics can help teachers make their lessons more inclusive and effective.

Table 19. *Differences in Speaking Proficiency and Lexical Competence between Male and Female Students*

$n = 277$

Variable	Sex	n	Mean	SD
Speaking Proficiency	Male	113	70.85	13.76
	Female	164	76.33	11.58
Lexical Competence	Male	113	49.26	16.82
	Female	164	54.46	13.82

Variable	Levene's p	t	df	p (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Speaking Proficiency	0.173	-3.58	275	< .001	-5.48
Lexical Competence	0.003	-2.82	275	0.005	-5.21

These findings confirm earlier research suggesting that gender affects second language acquisition. Zoghi et al. (2013) found that gender-related emotional factors may affect language outcomes, whereas Zafar and Meenakshi (2012) identified disparities in learning methods and language use between males and females.

While these differences are not permanent, they underscore why gender-responsive teaching strategies are important for supporting all students and providing equal learning opportunities.

Difference in the Levels of Speaking Proficiency and Lexical Competence between Grade 11 and Grade 12 Students. Table 20 shows that students in grades 11 and 12 have very different speaking and vocabulary skills. There was a statistically significant difference in speaking proficiency ($p = .002$) between Grade 12 students ($M = 76.43$) and Grade 11 students ($M = 71.60$). The difference in lexical proficiency was more noticeable, with Grade 12 students doing better than Grade 11 students ($p < .001$). These results show how important it is to use specific teaching methods to help students learn new languages at all grade levels, thereby improving their performance. These results highlight the need for ongoing participation in language-focused activities and heightened exposure to educational settings to promote language advancement.

Table 20. *Differences in Speaking Proficiency and Lexical Competence between Grade 11 and Grade 12 Students $n = 277$*

Variable	Grade Level	n	Mean	SD	
Speaking Proficiency	Grade 11	134	71.6	12.59	
	Grade 12	143	76.43	12.55	
Lexical Competence	Grade 11	134	46.95	15.06	
	Grade 12	143	57.39	13.77	
Variable	Levene's p	t	df	p (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Speaking Proficiency	0.824	-3.19	275	0.002	-4.82
Lexical Competence	0.176	-6.03	275	< .001	-10.44

Students will likely have to read increasingly complex materials, take part in more debates, and engage in more performance activities as they progress through senior high school. This helps them learn new words and speak better, and it shows how continuous educational support can have a significant impact.

All things considered, these findings demonstrate the cumulative nature

of language development and stress the value of consistent grade-level instructional support in vocabulary and speaking, providing teachers with the confidence that their work is essential to students’ continued communicative ability.

Difference in the Levels of Speaking Proficiency and Lexical Competence between Academic and TVL Tracks. Table 21 illustrates the degree of difference in speaking proficiency and lexical competence between the Academic and TVL Tracks.

Table 21. *Difference in Speaking Proficiency and Lexical Competence between Academic and TVL Tracks (n=277)*

Grade Level		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Average Speaking Performance	Grade 11	134	71.6045	12.59216	1.08780
	Grade 12	143	76.4286	12.55134	1.04960
Average Lexical Competence	Grade 11	134	46.9468	15.05813	1.30082
	Grade 12	143	57.3894	13.77045	1.15154

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Average Speaking Performance	Equal variances assumed	.265	.607	4.628	275	.000	8.59585	1.85723	4.93966	12.25204
	Equal variances not assumed.			4.702	84.455	.000	8.59585	1.82828	4.96039	12.23131
Average Lexical Competence	Equal variances assumed	.014	.907	5.583	275	.000	12.21806	2.18830	7.91010	16.52601
	Equal variances not assumed.			5.821	87.363	.000	12.21806	2.09882	8.04667	16.38944

Table 21 demonstrates the degree of difference in speaking proficiency and lexical competence between the Academic and TVL tracks. For speaking proficiency, the obtained P-value of 0.000 is less than the level of significance at 0.05; hence, significant. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies a

significant difference in speaking proficiency between the Academic and TVL tracks.

This result underscores the importance of curricular changes and instructional emphasis across senior high school tracks, leading educators and policymakers to believe their decisions affect students' oral communication abilities. Meniado (2019) found that students in academic programs tended to have stronger English skills, particularly in speaking, than those in skills-based or vocational programs. In academic classes, students participate in more language-intensive activities such as conversations, presentations, and analytical work, which help them develop their speaking skills. On the other hand, technical-vocational paths emphasize hands-on, performance-based work, which means there are fewer opportunities to use spoken language for extended periods.

Moreover, in lexical competence, the obtained P-value of 0.000 is lower than the level of significance at 0.05; hence, significant. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates a significant difference in lexical competence between the Academic and TVL tracks. The results also revealed that GAS students acquired higher levels of lexical skills with a mean of 57.39, while respondents from the Tech-Voc strand obtained a mean of 46.95

Degree of Variance in the Levels of Speaking Proficiency and Lexical Competence among the SHS Strands. Table 22 shows the results of an ANOVA comparing students' speaking and vocabulary skills across different senior high school strands. The results are important because they show significant variations between strands for both speaking proficiency ($F = 6.680, p < .001$) and lexical competence ($F = 8.620, p < .001$). These findings highlight the necessity of incorporating strand differences in curriculum design to facilitate equitable language development. These discrepancies may be due to different approaches to teaching and learning in the classroom, with strands that focus on oral activities helping students learn and use more words. On the other hand, people who work in technical or written activities give others fewer opportunities to use their spoken language.

Table 22. *Variance in the Levels of Speaking Proficiency and Lexical Competence Among the Senior High School Strands (n=277)*

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Average Speaking Performance	Between Groups	8283.269	9	920.363	6.680	.000
	Within Groups	36785.547	267	137.774		
	Total	45068.816	276			
Average Lexical Competence	Between Groups	14550.666	9	1616.741	8.620	.000
	Within Groups	50077.058	267	187.555		
	Total	64627.724	276			

*Level of Speaking Proficiency:**p-value = 0.000**Result: Significant**Decision: Reject Ho**Level of Lexical Competence:**p-value = 0.000**Decision: Reject Ho*

However, you should be wary when considering these outcomes. Macado and Diano (2021) say that strand affiliation does not affect a student's ability to communicate, which also depends on motivation and exposure. The results show that it is important to plan curricula that include speaking and vocabulary-building activities in all senior high school strands. If we work to fix differences between strands, all students will be able to communicate well, no matter what subject they are studying.

CONCLUSIONS

The study found that most respondents were female and enrolled in the Academic Track, particularly in the General Academic Strand. In addition, results showed that students exhibited low levels of speaking proficiency and lexical competence, as indicated by the computed mean scores.

The study showed that students' sex, year level, track, and strand were substantially associated with how well they could talk, but not with how well they knew words. Lexical competence, on the other hand, was strongly linked to speaking proficiency, underscoring the importance of language abilities for speaking. There were also disparities in speaking skills and vocabulary knowledge by sex, grade level, and Senior High School track.

Based on these connections, these results suggest that we need teaching methods that focus on vocabulary growth and speaking practice in all subject areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To improve their speaking proficiency, the students have to enrich their lexical/vocabulary skills because lexical competence contributes to speaking proficiency.
2. To foster desirable changes, students are encouraged to speak the language regularly, especially within the school premises. Thus, the school should promote advocacy for speaking English on campus.
3. The students should also allocate time for reading since extensive reading helps to widen one's vocabulary and lexical knowledge. They must also set learning goals to develop their speaking prowess through constant practice.
4. Language teachers must integrate more interactive and meaningful activities to help students develop their speaking proficiency and lexical knowledge.
5. Language teachers should nurture a positive and motivating environment where all students are encouraged to participate in speaking activities. Positive reinforcement and feedback must also be regularly given to students to help build confidence in their ability to speak English.
6. Schools should send language teachers to seminars and trainings to enhance their professional development and to acquire new learnings and strategies for developing students' speaking proficiency and lexical competence.
7. The teachers are encouraged to coordinate with parents in tracking the performance of each student. They shall regularly conduct PTA Meetings and provide parents with the necessary feedback on their child's performance.
8. Parents should also motivate and support their children to express their thoughts and ideas. They may encourage them by praising their efforts and achievements to help them build self-esteem and confidence to accomplish tasks.
9. The proposed Enhancement Program should be implemented by the language teachers of the four secondary schools in Loon South and North Districts.
10. Other researchers are also encouraged to go into a holistic investigation of related ideas and aspects of the study.

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