

ADDRESSING COMMUNICATION REQUIREMENTS IN THE TECHNICAL-VOCATIONAL-LIVELIHOOD TRACK: AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT TOOL AS GUIDE TO COMMUNICATION INSTRUCTION

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Abstract

This study aimed to come up with appropriate assessment tools parallel to the communication requirements in the Technical-Vocational-Livelihood track. This study sought to design useful tools which may help teachers and learners in achieving best results in authentic tasks.

The study made use of descriptive research method for the researcher to gather information about strategies to enhance the skills of learners using authentic language assessments. This method was used to describe a situation as it exists at the time of the study and explore causes of a particular phenomenon. Purposive sampling was used in selecting the TVL students as respondents. As research instrument, the researcher developed a questionnaire whose contents were patterned after the list of target competencies set by the Department of Education for the TVL specializations. For qualitative inputs, the researcher interviewed industry partners, a competency assessor, and TVL and English teachers of Norzagaray National High School.

Results showed that in the housekeeping specialization, respondents were found lacking a number of speaking competencies. The language competencies that the industry needs in prospective employees are the very same language competencies needed by the learners as well. During the need's analysis, the competencies in the curriculum guide for Housekeeping and Food and Beverages Services were used to directly assess the skills of the TVL learners. To assess the learners' speaking skills, the researcher developed analytic rubrics. Communication teachers must always incorporate TVL-related skills in the interest of authentic instruction and assessment. The researcher deemed it highly significant to rely on the curriculum guide to ensure that materials and tools to be developed are congruent with the target competencies. In addition, instruction must cater to the needs of TVL students. Integration of real-life problems related to TVL can be adopted by communication teachers to help students enhance their TVL and communication skills.

Based on findings of the study, the researcher humbly offers the following recommendations: (1) Learners in the TVL track should continuously improve their speaking skills to better serve the labor sector and receive good compensation in the future. For this, they have to communicate in English in school and outside if situations warrant; (2) Regardless of the needs spelled out in work immersion and by industry partners, TVL students should master all competencies taught by their teachers; (3) The analytic rubrics should be used to confirm their validity and reliability in the classroom setting and remedy defects if any; (4) Teachers should ascertain the fit between available instructional materials and the validated analytic rubrics for possible modification of the latter if warranted; (5) English teachers should include industry-based communication lessons to strengthen the language and work skills of learners; and (6) TVL teachers are advised to use the tools in teaching the competencies with utmost clarity and precision. As a result, students will know what is expected of them and act accordingly.

Brief Introduction

With the implementation of the K to 12 in the Philippines, every 21st century teacher is called upon to adopt a stance consistent with an old Chinese proverb from Confucius, “*I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.*” The curriculum is framed with challenging contents that learners should learn on their way to achieving the target competency. Thus, teachers must be deeply aware of a felt need for knowledge directly tailored to the diversity of learners in class.

To be sure, teachers want nothing from their students except to achieve the finest possible gains in the process of teaching and learning. As for the K to 12 framework, part of the curriculum calls for exposure to students’ chosen nature of work. Through the collaboration of the Department of Education (DepEd) with different partners and stakeholders, learners have the opportunity to immerse themselves in real-life scenario.

Work Immersion is a course requirement that students have to comply with in order to graduate. Learners have to render hours of actual service in an establishment aligned with their postsecondary track and strand. As stated in curriculum guide, the requirement seeks to strengthen the competencies taught in school and afford students’ opportunities to develop relevant work skills that will improve their technical knowledge. They will also be equipped with real-life competencies since they are supervised by work experts who will make them realize that skill application is only a part of the training because attitude towards work, appreciation, and good traits are significantly developed as well. As for the language aspect, work immersion also aims to cultivate communication and human relations skills, which Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) classes must develop. Sadly, teachers and students tend to neglect this skill, which is just unfortunate because communication is a 21st century skill that students aspiring to hold an NC, Level 1 or 2, must acquire. This skill is crucial to adapt to the changing needs of the 21st century and to cope with the trends of the working environment. Nucum (2018) affirms that communication skill is one of the basic requirements to succeed in the TVL track. This, according to him, is essential not just for the student himself but also for his clients/customers and fellow workers.

An article from the Naga City Guide (2016) explained why so much opportunity awaits students who take up the TVL track. Graduates are employable right after they graduate from senior high school (SHS). They are assumed to possess skills and competency of a work-ready individual. Another compelling reason is that not every SHS graduate can go to college. As a research finding states, only 14 out of 100 Grade 1 pupils are able to go to college and finish their course of choice. Since parents consider the additional two years in high school a financial burden for the family, they deem it practical and wise for their children to find employment rather than go to college. Furthermore, there is huge opportunity to work overseas once they are armed with a COC or an NC. TVL graduates are very much in demand in the country and abroad, and as the country produces graduates year after year, sufficient and skilled workers can well seize opportunities for TVL placement.

In every senior high school classroom, especially in TVL classes, authentic assessment applies very well for K to 12 curriculum, which is based on outcomes. Teachers can use authentic materials in teaching and for measuring the performance of each learner. What hinders them is the difficulty in crafting such materials and in insuring that the assessment applies to what the workplace requires.

One best feature of authenticity is open-endedness, which means that problems can be solved through multiple approaches. For one thing, memorization can be explicitly removed in the process of learning. For another, learners can employ their creativity in demonstrating a competency learned. They will be encouraged to use creative thinking to finish tasks through multiple modes of expression, making them responsible for their own learning. The pressure of having to perform well in a paper-and-pencil test will be eradicated/minimized because it is complemented by authentic assessment.

In the Philippine setting, most students enrolled in TVL classes wish to enter the workforce right away. These students should definitely acquire the needed communication skills. Santos-Syjuco (2016) emphasized that students need to build “rapport and connections” to be able to communicate with others, a skill clearly useful in formal and informal relationships. Knowing the English language is important to a student, but language use is deemed inadequate to develop competent speakers. In today’s classroom, students are hardly engaged in speaking activities, no wonder their speaking skill is low.

Considering the aforementioned premises, the researcher felt it imperative to conduct this study, aimed to create appropriate instructional and assessment tools that will fulfill the intention of the newly-introduced curriculum to prepare graduates in terms of technical, vocational, and communication skills. This study hoped to design useful tools which may help teachers and learners in achieving best results from authentic tasks. Not only the school will benefit from this; industry partners can be assured of the completers’ skills. Through the results of this study, conclusions and recommendations can be drawn as base data and references in dealing with the appropriate form of instruction and assessment called for.

Statement of the Problem

The general problem of the study was: “How may language instruction in the TVL track be enriched to meet the requirements of the TVL industry?”

Specifically, the study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What TVL-related speaking skills must be developed among TVL students to meet requirements in the workplace?
2. What are the communication requirements in TVL practice?
3. What rubrics may be crafted to assess learners’ speaking skills to guide existing instructional content?
4. What guidelines may be crafted to aid teachers in incorporating TVL-related skills to communication instruction?

Integrated Review of Related Literature and Studies

According to Wiggins, cited in Frey, (2012), authentic assessments or those which mirror the real-world context are the most effective ways of measuring skills acquired by learners through products and performances. He argued that in order to develop higher order thinking skills among learners, traditional assessment should be put aside for they do not measure the skill required for each lesson. In the same light, Oosterhof (2013) stated that all authentic assessments can be considered performance assessments, the kinds of student response to be examined. In this case, the students perform or complete the desired task or output a teacher wants to assess. It is almost the same case with authentic assessment; the only difference is that students perform or complete the desired task or

output a teacher wants to measure but in the context of the world outside. Authentic assessment is heavily related to the context in which response is made through performance task.

Mishan (2005) claimed that ICT integration in school, specifically in giving assessments to learners, has been widely used overtime. What a teacher needs is at his fingertips and a computer device with an internet connection is ever handy, useful, and reliable. With this, teacher and learners, have access to various assessments that can be employed in the classroom based on their authenticity. Judging authenticity is upon discretion of the teacher, analyzing carefully the congruency of the assessments to the learning competency/ies.

But just what is authentic assessment? Many have given their definitions of authentic assessment. According to Hart and Torrance, cited in Gulikers, Bastiaens & Kirschner, (2004), the concept is similar with performance assessment, while Herrington and Herrington, cited in Gulikers et al., (2004) claimed that it “puts a special emphasis on the realistic value of the task and the context.” Real-life roles are assigned to students in completing this real-life tasks. One beneficial finding about authenticity is that it makes academic subjects more engaging and relevant to students. They are pulled away from the usual one-way flow of communication wherein the teacher feeds them ideas about a certain lesson and all they do is listen to it at all. They will learn how to apply abstract concepts and theories in the real-world setting. In the similar study, a five-dimensional framework was illustrated to distinguish what task is authentic and what is not, namely: “(a) the assessment task, (b) the physical context, (c) the social context, (d) the assessment result or form, and (e) the assessment criteria.”

Assessment tasks given to students resemble problems in the professional setting. In solving problems, students should incorporate the knowledge learned, the skills acquired, and the attitudes possessed. The physical context of an authentic task should strictly follow criteria based on the environment, resources and time constraints in which it operates. Fidelity of the task to the real environment is important and should be considered in dealing with authenticity. The same with the resources that people employ in the workplace. Depriving students with appropriate resources used in the corresponding fields will result to less authentic assessment.

Mueller (2005) argues that multiple choice test can stimulate a learner’s critical thinking skills, but guessing the answers, which is likely, will lead to less valid and less accurate data. These notions confirm the limitation and flaws in benchmark assessments. Now is the time for authentic assessment to enter the picture. Most authentic assessments are performance-based where students perform tasks to show if they really have attained a certain skill or not. What’s good about the process is the wide choices of delivery of the students’ dissimilar mode of expression. The most relevant key feature of authenticity is that it provides teachers relevant insight about students’ skills and level of progress, definitely useful in accessing more suitable materials.

In the 21st century, rubrics are widely used in every school in assessing the performances of students. It is a guide listing specific criteria for grading or scoring academic papers, projects, tests, or performances. Using a rubric, teachers can certainly recognize and tell the difference between excellent and mediocre work. A rubric is most useful its role once a teacher provides an open-ended task where students should employ higher order thinking strategies in presenting reasonable and probable answers and

solution. They will also be exposed to authentic learning when there are no right and wrong answers to the question/s posed- that there are shades of gray to a single question. Authentic learning also takes place when learners are inquisitive regarding what the instructor wants to see or hear. They will be more capable of coming up with solutions to real-world problems in a benchmark higher and better than others (Lombardi, 2008). Mueller (2008) explained that this scoring guideline provides teachers valuable data where they can alter instructions to suit the students' needs and institute learning goals.

As a result of authentic assessments, classroom teachers can identify what the students know about a subject matter instead of what they do not know. Compared to a traditional test, students are given the chance to draw wide-ranging answers to a question instead of choosing an answer in a list of options. Some authentic assessments may ask students to produce an output. Therefore, with the use of a rubric, they will be evaluated according to the whole package of the output and not with specific and singular criteria only. These outputs can also be shown to future students under the same specialization. The varied categories of authentic assessments require students to use more complex thinking, thus develop their higher order thinking and problem-solving skills. Most importantly, assessments which are authentic reflect the individual differences of learners in terms of their personal, educational, social, and cultural backgrounds. If the teacher adopts an authentic assessment tool, the expected outcomes are the following: 1. The teacher can evaluate higher order cognitive skills not discernible in written test; 2. Learning task can motivate the students because they are involved in developing the assessment criteria; 3. Students can become aware of their learning process and student achievements will be improved since they place the curriculum content in context.

In another light, Naranjo (2014) averred that authentic materials can be used to identify students with "learning disabilities and language acquisition difficulties" because teachers are able to collect relevant students' data as they learn. For this purpose, classroom teachers can design their own tools and materials targeting the skills that students lack. Similarly, teachers are advised to employ assessment techniques which are not well-used in an ordinary classroom set-up. Results of authentic assessments will be accurate and reliable as students learn how to solve problems in the real world through their macro skills. Although utilization of authentic materials is time consuming, teachers have to make time because it is worth it. Replacing traditional activities like lecture is one way of providing meaningful activities that develops every aspect of the learner. Most importantly these activities will give learners the opportunity to show outputs through production, creation, and performance.

As for the Philippine setting, authentic assessments are technically suitable to every Filipino classroom adapting the constructivist learning approach in producing learners who are inquiry-based, collaborative, reflective, and integrative.

As people live and interact with one another every day, they speak. They want to speak because they have to voice out thoughts and feelings and because they also want to give suggestions which may be helpful in solving a dilemma. They need to speak to ask others about their opinion about what good movie to watch or about what to wear in a particular occasion. They do not speak mundane matters such as because they just have to practice a language, but they speak because they want to and they need to. In a typical conversation, two elements are present: the sender and the receiver. For a communication

to be successful, one has to take note of the utterances and reactions of the interlocutors to give an appropriate and correct response.

But in a language class, students sometimes fail to meet the standards and requirements of a subject due to some reasons. First, students tend to be inhibited when they are to speak in class. They always think that the audience will be mindful of the words they will utter, and that they will commit grammar mistakes. Others just lack self-confidence to speak before a group. In times, it is also due to personal issues like cultural reasons that they have this what we call regional accents, which they are afraid to be heard by the audience. Last of all, there are times that they lack motivation to speak, so that whenever asked by the teacher about something, they will just reply that they have no idea, leading to the point that they lose the interest in the subject matter. In the presence of these problems, the teacher has to play her major role in creating a relaxing ambiance. Learners should be comfortable while speaking and at the same time, enjoying a conversation without doubts and inhibition in their minds. Once successful, language classes will be filled with more learner talk, less for the teacher, and majority of the class participate in class discussion (Dendrinis, 2015). A related opinion from TESS-India (n.d.) held that to build students' drive in speaking, teachers must choose topics that stimulate students' interest, helping them reach the needed level of skill in order to successfully speak, and giving positive criticisms.

As early as this time, it is not just the teachers who can give feedback to students but also actual experts on the field who can correct mistakes and misconceptions about a certain concept regarding the task performed. This is a very strong attribute of authenticity as most of the curriculum is principally designed to prepare students for the world of business and work.

Methodology

The study made use of descriptive survey method to help the researcher gather information about strategies to enhance skills of learners using authentic language assessments. This method was used as it aims to describe the nature of a situation as it exists at the time of the study and explore causes of particular phenomena, precisely the drift of the present work. According to Perez (2002), descriptive method of research seeks familiarity with the subject, portrays selected characteristics of the subject accurately, and provides the necessary background to formulate of a more precise problem, crafts a more specific study and develops hypotheses.

Purposive sampling was used in selecting the TVL students tapped as the respondents of the study. This type of sampling is used when the objective of the study requires a particular sample. In selecting the respondents, total enumeration or universal sampling was used. All grade 12 TVL-Home Economics students enrolled in NNHS participated in the survey process. The respondents of the study were from three TVL sections, two of which specialize in Housekeeping and the other one in Food and Beverage Services. Housekeeping A is composed of 44 students, Housekeeping B with 57 students, and Food and Beverage Services A with 54 students, with a total number of 155 respondents.

The study used a questionnaire as research instrument. The researcher developed its content by drafting a tool guided by the list of competencies set by the Department of

Education for the specializations indicated. He fielded a set of carefully prepared and logically sequenced questions.

The questionnaire is divided into two parts. The first part pertains to the personal information about the respondents. The second part dealt with speaking skills required of learners relative to the curriculum guide for Housekeeping and Food and Beverage Services. The Likert scale was used to express and interpret the answers of respondents considering five options with corresponding rating:

Assigned Weight	Verbal Interpretation
5	Very much needed
4	Needed
3	Moderately needed
2	Slightly needed
1	Not needed

To supplement the data from the questionnaire, unstructured interviews and observation were conducted among the student respondents, teachers and industry partners to clarify the questionnaire responses and to gather more information relative to the study.

The researcher sought permission from the school's division superintendent to conduct his study in Norzagaray National High School, SHS Department. Validation of the questionnaire followed.

After the validation process with the research critic and adviser, the researcher distributed the questionnaires. Appointments with the industry partners were also secured for the interview process and collection of qualitative data. The response frequencies were tallied for analysis and interpretation.

Construction of the rubrics was the next step. All competencies had corresponding rubrics which were validated by the research adviser. Another appointment was set with the industry partners for further validation of the same rubrics. The NNHS TVL and English teachers and a TESDA competency assessor also checked the output.

The data from the interviews were collated and carefully sorted to present accurate result of the oral consultation. These were treated comprehensively to design appropriate rubrics.

The data collected from students were subjected to statistical treatments. The data were coded, tallied, and tabulated for a clear presentation of results. The statistical method used in analyzing the data was mean or average. Mean is the commonly used technique in central tendency while averaging is simply taking the sum of all the answers divided by the total number of those who answered. The research problems were answered through the qualitative and quantitative data from networking with industry partners, interview of teachers and competency assessor, and students' responses in the survey.

Significant Findings

The following findings were obtained after completing the data-gathering process:

1. Regarding speaking competency, a number of competencies were found needed by respondents such as: providing guest orientation on house rules and use of hotel tools, materials, equipment, and other amenities; giving minor and major hotel room defects and repair; discussing the implementing Hotel Codes, rules and regulations; and explaining ideal standards of packaging and storing of laundry items, with total mean ratings of 3.9, 3.8, 3.7, and 3.6, respectively. In FBS, the speaking skills required are:

welcoming customers upon arrival in accordance with customer service standards; answering customers' questions on menu items courteously; and presenting menu and drink lists to customers obtained the highest mean rating of 4.5, 4.4, and 4.3, respectively. The other speaking competencies are: bidding goodbye to guests courteously and resetting table appointments; attending to telephone calls promptly and courteously in accordance with customer service standards equally; and advising guests of approximate time of delivery obtained the mean rating of 4.2, while offering and recommending suitable combinations of food and beverages when appropriate obtained a mean rating of 4.1. These ratings indicate that the skills are indeed needed in the workplace.

2. What TVL-related speaking skills must be developed among TVL students to meet requirements in the workplace?

Skills that the industry sector needs in students are the language competencies deemed needed by the learners as well. Responses to this effect could be accurately evaluated since the respondents were doing work immersion during the conduct of the study. The industry sectors in Housekeeping are Prince Kevin Hills Resort, Agila Resort, and Falcon Crest Resort while the industry partners in FBS are M.T. Maningas Kitchenette, J.L. Jamie's Restaurant, Red Bucks, and Kangay Restaurant. These are the work immersion partners of Norzagaray National High School.

3. What are the communication requirements in TVL practice?

During the need's analysis, the competencies spelled out in the curriculum guide for Housekeeping and FBS were used to directly assess the skills of TVL learners. What the learners thought to be not useful were actually useful. The competency assessor emphasized the needs for all the speaking competencies. The assessment tools developed as output of the study would help equip students with speaking skills required in the workplace.

4. What rubrics may be crafted to assess learners' speaking skills to guide existing instructional content?

The rubrics crafted to assess learners' speaking skills are analytic rubrics. This type of rubrics is made up of columns and rows reflecting levels of achievement and assessment criteria.

5. What guidelines may be crafted to aid teachers in incorporating TVL-related skills to communication instruction?

Authentic assessments must always be practiced by communication teachers so they can always incorporate TVL-related skills in instruction.

Conclusions

Based on the foregoing findings of the study, the following conclusions were formulated:

1. TVL students need to acquire speaking skills in preparation for the world of work.
2. The needs of learners in their specialization are the very same competencies they can use in work immersion.
3. Since the curriculum guide directs teachers on what speaking skills to equip students, it is important that they stick to the curriculum guide to ensure that the materials and tools they develop will be congruent with desired competencies.

4. Since current instruction in communication does not include TVL competencies, it now must be enriched to meet the needs of TVL students for which the validated tools are deemed useful.
5. Communication teachers can well integrate TVL issues and concerns to enhance TVL and communication skills at the same time.

Recommendations

In light of the aforementioned conclusions, the following recommendations were made:

1. Learners in the TVL track should continuously improve their speaking skills to be more marketable and better serve the labor sector in the future. They have to communicate in English regularly.
2. In keeping with the requirements in Work Immersion and of industry partners, TVL students should master all competencies taught by their teachers.
3. The researcher-crafted analytic rubrics should be used to test their validity and reliability for modification if necessary.
4. Teachers should ascertain the fit between instructional materials and the validated analytic rubrics for possible modification of the latter if warranted.
5. English teachers should include industry-based communication lessons to strengthen the language and employability skills of learners.
6. TVL teachers are advised to use the tools in teaching and assessing the competencies. As a result, students will know what is expected of them and act accordingly.

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