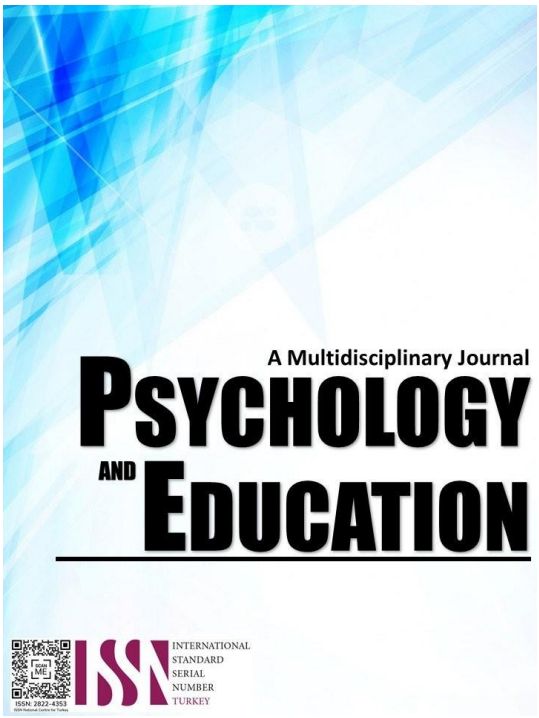
IMPROVING ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH TECHNOLOGY



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Research Article

Improving English Speaking Skills through Technology

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Abstract

Speaking is fundamental to human communication. Being able to communicate effectively is an integral life skill. The rapid advancement of digital technology has offered huge benefits in second or foreign language learning. Employing the quantitative experimental research design, this study sought to find out if the use of technology could enhance the speaking skills of the students. The study utilized an adapted speaking modules focusing on the speaking skills of the Grade 11 students. A speaking activity was used in a form of board game before the pre-test; the intervention and the post-test were given. The implementation of the modules was a scenario of read – listen – watch – think and speak. Each student was given a time to speak in different speaking activities in an effective and interactive way. The result revealed that the use of technology contributed to the improvement of the speaking skills of the students. There was a distinction if students experienced the use of technology by themselves. It was not only the speaking skills that were developed in them but their technology literacy as well. The study concluded that the use of technology could improve the speaking skills of the students.

Keywords: *oral communication, speaking skills, digital technology, experimental research*

Introduction

Speaking is a fundamental skill that is required to communicate one's thoughts, needs and feelings. People speak primarily to be able to get a message across a target receiver, to be heard and to be understood. Through speaking people get clarified on things that confuse them. It is also through oral communication that people are able to build a good relationship with their family and the community they live in. Thus, this vocalized form of language is essential in performing most of one's day-to-day activities. However, there is more to speaking than how we normally see it. In English language it is a skill along with four others – reading, writing, viewing and listening – that every English language learner has to develop to himself.

Qureshi (2016) in her study emphasized that in-order to become a well-rounded communicator one needs to be proficient in each of the four language skills, but the ability to speak skillfully, provides the speaker with several distinct advantages. The capacity to express one's thoughts, opinions and feelings, in the form of words put together in a meaningful way, provides the speaker with these advantages.

The goal of teaching speaking is to develop communicative efficiency among students. Real life communicative environment and interactive, student - centered classrooms where teachers should use authentic activities and meaningful tasks can sustain the students' capabilities.

Similarly, oral discussions can make students share ideas, contribute equally to achieve the task purpose and this can be reinforced by such things as stimulations or realistic items, pictures, and stories, which widen the students` imagination and encourage them to speak more (Kayi, 2006).

However, in as much as the learners wish to develop their English oral communication skills, there are different factors that hinder them from doing so. The common problem that the students often encounter when asked to speak using a foreign language is inhibition. This inhibition often stems from the lack of confidence and that fear of committing mistakes and being criticized.

Many students find it difficult to respond too when the teachers ask them to say something in a foreign language because they might have little ideas to say, which vocabulary to use or how to use the grammar correctly (Baker & Westrup, 2003).

This case is especially true to most of the Grade 11 students in Assumption Academy of Compostela. At their grade level, most of them are still poor in English language speaking. They do understand the uttered words and some materials read but could barely speak using the language.

From the beginning of an English class, these students have been oriented and constantly reminded about the use of the English language all throughout the class in answering questions asked by the teacher, in posing queries, in clarifying or whenever they want to be heard. These supposed language classroom rule however, affect the performance of the students in terms of participation.

Classroom activities such as group discussion, reporting and presentations are carried out through the use of the vernacular most of the time. This is primarily because they lack the essential speaking skills such as the use of appropriate vocabulary, correct pronunciation of the word(s), and the articulation itself. The only time they can use the language is when they read what they are presenting but when it comes to giving details and explanation, they would switch back to using the native language.

This speaking inability of the students is also observed by other English language teachers in the school who happen to have the same

frustration. They too would want to correct the problem but there are few factors that prevent them from doing so such as the failure of some teachers whose subject taught is supposed to use the English language in delivering instruction, the poor implementation of English speaking zones around the school campus and still, the seemingly sad but true occurrence of bullying. Although to some students, laughing and teasing might not necessarily mean bullying but all still boils down to that fear of being laughed at. Instead of speaking their mind out, students prefer to stay quiet on their seats. They seem to melt away if not frightened every time the teacher walks around the class and start asking questions or soliciting ideas. They would rather listen than speak - making it frustrating for an English language teacher – in this case, the researcher.

To validate the decision of whether to pursue the study or not, the researcher conducted a quick survey to all Grade 11 students in Assumption Academy of Compostela. The question asked is "Which among the four macro-skills in English language (reading, writing, listening and speaking) you find the most difficult to develop? Most students chose speaking as the most difficult skill. And to understand further, the researcher also solicited explanations from the students as to why they find speaking difficult.

While the researcher believes that technology is the language of today's generation, she is convinced that through it the problem of the students' inability to speak using the English language can be addressed.

Research Questions

The main objective of this study was to improve the English language speaking skills of the Grade 11 (HUMSS and ICT strand) students through the use of technology – aided teaching strategies. Specifically, this study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of English speaking skills of the students in the pre-test?
2. What is the level of English speaking skills of the students in the post-test?
3. What is the significant gain of the student's level of English Oral Communication skills before and after the implementation of the Communicative Language teaching in terms of the following speaking tasks:
    3.1. read a text aloud;
    3.2. saying geographical names the english way;
    3.3. image story;
    3.4. describe a picture;
    3.5. propose a solution;
    3.6. making a statement and getting a reaction; and
    3.7. express an opinion?
4. Is there a significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test results of the students?

Methodology

Research Design

The study was quasi-experimental research wherein all sixty (60) subjects participated as one group in the form of pre-test and post-test. This translates to every participant of the study having an equal chance of being in the experimental group. Prior to the experiment, the subjects are measured in their speaking ability by using a pre-test. Then post-test is given to each participant after all of them utilized the technology-mediated activities. In addition the subjects of the study express their reactions on how the integration of technology in teaching speaking significantly improve their speaking ability.

Respondents

The subjects of the study were the 60 Grade 11 students (18 from ICT and 42 from HUMSS) of the Senior High School Department of Assumption Academy of Compostela in the second semester of the school year 2016 – 2017. The students from these strands were heterogeneous in composition making them perfect subject of the study.

Instrument

The study used an adapted pre-test and post-test module on speaking skills. The module was based on the following speaking micro skills: pronunciation, fluency and facial expressions. It aimed to test the speaking ability of the students on the following skills: read a text aloud, saying geographical names the English way, image story, describe a picture, propose a solution, listening to a statement and getting a reaction and express an opinion.

Before taking the test, the students performed a warm up activity in a form of a board game which they have played in one big group. The materials used were taken from the Teachers' Training attended by the researcher entitled: Blended Learning and the Flipped Classroom conducted by the US Embassy Manila, Philippines Public Affair Section. The purpose of using warm up activity is to set the mood of the students and to promote free speaking environment for easy acquisition and learning of the language. The game helps the students to get motivated to learn English in an experiential way. It was carried out as a whole-class activity with the researcher.

After the game, the pre-test was conducted. The materials used were images, internet files, overhead projector, and computer. The modules were adapted from TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) Speaking and Writing Tests and Speaking

Activities for the Classroom compiled by David Holmes. The instruments used were validated by the experts. Students also provided a spoken evaluation on the material used after the experiment.

Procedure

The study is divided into four phases: The first phase was a warm up speaking activity in a form of a board game. The second phase was a pre-test to test students' existing knowledge on speaking skills. The third phase was the conduct of the intervention. The fourth phase was to examine the level of improvement in speaking skills through the conducted posttest.

The following steps were observed before the implementation of the study. In a letter, the researcher asked for an approval for the conduct of the study from the Principal of the High School department of Assumption Academy of Compostela to determine the level of the speaking skills of the respondents.

After the approval and before the conduct of the pre-test, board games to practice speaking was introduced and played by the research subjects. The goal of the activity is to let the learners express themselves freely about the different topics. The game was played for one hour class duration.

After the practice, the pre-test was conducted in seven sessions inside the classroom. One to two hours is allocated for each session. The following speaking activities were used by the researcher during the pretest to determine the level of the speaking skills of the research subjects: Read a Text Aloud, Saying Geographical Names the English Way, Image Story, Describe a Picture, Propose a Solution, Listening to a Statement and Getting a Reaction, and Express and Opinion.

After the pre-test, the researcher gave an intervention which was conducted during their English classes. The intervention activities were in a form of technology- driven teaching strategies namely: Click a Picture, Modified Dubsmash and Advertisement Task. All activities were done at the Computer Laboratory of the school where technological tools that the researcher desired to use are installed. All ICT and HUMSS students had the intervention which was started around the second quarter of the second semester. It was conducted within one week.

Before employing the intervention activities, the researcher gave session on Speaking as a productive skill in the field of communication. This was to orient the students on the importance of developing such speaking skills in their academic goals and daily life activities. The session focused on the kinds of speaking situations that we usually find ourselves in and the issues encountered in speaking. Following the intervention is the conduct of the post-test using the same instruments used in the pre- test. The researcher observed about the same time frame and utilized the same classrooms in conducting the post-test.

After all the instruments were conducted, the researcher gathered the results which includes the students' scores in ever speaking task, the students' pre and post- test scores in every speaking skill, the students' total score in pre-test and the students' total score in post-test. All scores given were based on the corresponding rubrics prepared by the researcher for each speaking task.

In gathering the data, the researcher noticed a surprising result of a few students who could have scored differently if not for their absences during the conduct of some of the activities. For some reasons, five (5) out of sixty (60) respondents missed five out of seven activities, six (6) missed four activities, four (4) students missed three activities, five (5) students missed two activities and thirteen (13) students missed one activity. While these students may have valid reasons for missing the class, the results of the gathered data would have not been the same.

Data Analysis

The t – test for correlated data is used to test the significant gain between the pretest and posttest mean scores of the respective skills in the null hypothesis.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the analysis and interpretation of the gathered data from the experiment. The level of the speaking skills of the students before and after the experiment is presented below.

Table 1. *Level of Students' English Speaking Skills (Pre-test)*

Parameter/Test	*Grade 11 (ICT and HUMSS)*
N	60
HPS	50
Mean	26
CP	52%
Df	59
Interpretation	Nearing Mastery

Table 1 reveals that the level of the speaking skills of the Grade 11 students during the pretest is interpreted as nearing mastery with 52% class proficiency. This level means the students has the capability to improve their speaking skills should they be given enough

time and the right venue to nurture the skill.

The student is the most important person in the classroom. The teachers are there to give the needs of the students. Their need in a language classroom is to develop the four basic skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking in such a way that makes them learn to develop personal responsibility, think independently, be creative, learn to communicate and how to continue to develop the said skills in a way that will make them successful. "Learn is something the student does for himself/herself, while "Teach" is something the teacher does to the students (Holmes, 2004).

Table 2. *Level of Student's English Speaking Skills (Post-test)*

Parameter/Test	*Grade 11 (ICT and HUMSS)*
N	60
HPS	50
Mean	31.4
CP	63%
Df	59
Interpretation	Nearing Mastery

Table 2 reveals that the level of speaking skills of the Grade 11 students during the post-test is interpreted as nearing mastery still, however, this time with a raise in terms of proficiency percentage which totaled to 63%. The class proficiency of the students therefore, has increased by 11% after the implementation of the intervention module. This significant difference shows that technology aided the students to improve their speaking skills.

Learners at all proficiency levels can communicate, and they appreciate being encouraged and challenged to further their skills. They participate in interactive, communicative activities in all facets of the class. This is especially true where there is a strong classroom community that supports natural language production.

Ross-Feldman (2003) shared some tips to maximizing the effectiveness of communicative activities. Such tips include keeping teacher talk to a minimum. The more learners are working independently, in pairs or in small groups, the more successful the class will be. It is also a must to give credit to highly competent individuals. These are individuals who have weathered difficulties in learning. Lastly, have fun. Communicative activities are designed to be lively, interactive, and fun. When people are comfortable they are likely to learn more. An active, cooperative class is a class where a great deal of learning—social, cultural, and linguistic—is evident.

Analysis on the Skills in Speaking

The analysis of the speaking skills of the students in every speaking task is presented below.

Table 3. *Level of Students' Skills for Read a Text Aloud*

	Pre-test	*Post-test*
N	60	60
HPS	5	5
Mean	3.269	3.519
CP	65%	70%
Df	51	
L	.05	
TV	2.66	
CV	3.623	
Dr	Significant	

There is a significant difference in scores between the pre-test and post-test in task number one, Read a Text Aloud. It implies that students are able to read a text aloud better in post-test than in pre-test. It further indicates that the use of technology is effective in enhancing the reading skill of the students.

The interpretation of the class proficiency of the students in the first task is in the level of nearing mastery. Anderson (2003) implies that to achieve success, readers should take the active role in strategic reading, learning how to use a range of reading strategies that serve their purposes.

Reading a text aloud is employed in developing reading skills of the students. During this activity it has been observed that most of the students are able to fairly read a text aloud. They just do not pay attention to pronunciation and other reading competencies such as the enunciation, intonation and projecting facial expressions. Teaching materials such as video clips and short films has undeniably influence the development of the students' pronunciation. Such improvement was apparent in the students after they have watched the 30-second commercials during the intervention phase. They have observed how native speakers use the language. One student even wished she could speak the way they do.

Table 4. *Level of Students' Skills for Saying Geographical Names the English Way*

Parameter/Test	*Pre-test*	*Post-test*
N	60	60
HPS	20	20
Mean	12.837	14.347
CP	64%	72%
Df	48	
L	.05	
TV	2.66	
CV	4.29	
Dr	Significant	

There is a significant difference in scores between the pre-test and post-test in task number two, Saying Geographical Names the English Way. It implies that students are able to say geographical names the English way better in post-test than in pre-test. The activity was something new to the students. Although they find it entertaining to learn how geographical names are supposed to be pronounced correctly, the task challenged them in a good way. Some of the students utilized their smart phones to look for some of the words after their turn.

The spoken transcription after the conduct of the task contributed to the improvement of the students' ability to read geographical names the English way in the post-test. The interpretation of the class proficiency of the students in the second task is in the level of nearing mastery.

Most of us teachers want that our students will be able to speak with good pronunciation – an intelligible one says (Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin, 2010) in such a way that most listeners, both native and non-native speakers can understand without too much effort and confusion.

Geographical names are part of the historical, cultural and linguistic heritage of the nation, which is more desirable to preserve.

Table 5. *Level of Students' Skills for Image Story*

Parameter/Test	*Pre-test*	*Post-test*
N	60	60
HPS	5	5
mean	2.558	2.926
CP	51%	58%
Df	51	
L	.05	
TV	2.66	
CV	3.8	
Dr	Significant	

There is a significant difference in scores between the pre-test and post-test in task number three, Image Story. In other words the students are able to tell a story out of an image shown better in post-test than in pre-test. The interpretation of the class proficiency of the students in the third task is in the level of nearing mastery.

Many of the students find this activity difficult because generally in an English language classroom, and even in other discipline's classroom setting, students are too used to be given time - and the way they define preparation time for any assigned activity means an hour if not a day. Example of this is when students are asked to portray a role in a drama presentation or when they are asked to perform big tasks which require a thorough preparation. However, in this particular task, students were only given 60 seconds to look at the image and to conceptualize a story. To most of them it was arduous. It challenges their imagination and their ability to organize ideas. Although few of the students performed fairly well in the activity, it shows that many or majority of them are still not used to speaking inside the classroom.

Storytelling is a unique art form and medium of communication. It fosters creative thinking. In their study, Hwang et. al. (2016) suggested that storytelling learning activities supported by the Web-based multimedia system and implementing them in EFL learning classroom can be beneficial for facilitating speaking skills. Students can remember new vocabulary better, practice speaking skills more frequently, become competent in speaking target language, and improve learning performance.

The same interests were shown by the students being tested. With the presence of technology in doing task number three, students displayed more interest and excitement. Having them engaged in the class therefore, is so much easier for teachers if technology-driven teaching strategy is employed.

Additionally, digital storytelling is a powerful technology tool in education which integrates computer technologies and the art of telling stories together. It combines texts, images, and audios into creative media of storytelling. Digital storytelling can be used as a multimedia tool in language learning to help students improve their English speaking skills by using technology to tell the story in their own words and voice (Somdee & Suppasetseree, 2013).

Table 6. *Level of Students' Skills for Describe a Picture*

Parameter/Test	*Pre-test*	*Post-test*
N	60	60
HPS	5	5
mean	2.936	3.234
CP	59%	65%
Df	46	
L	.05	
TV	2.66	
CV	4.03	
Dr	Significant	

There is a significant difference in scores between the pre-test and post-test in task number four. It implies that students are able to describe a picture better in post- test than in pre-test. The interpretation of the class proficiency of the students in the fourth task is in the level of nearing mastery.

The Click a Picture, one of the activities in the intervention module is about similar to Describe a Picture task. The experience in performing the task using the technology has greatly helped in improving the imaginative and narrative skills of the students.

Kayi (2012) some points to remember in teaching speaking: Indicate positive signs when commenting on a student's response. Do not correct students' pronunciation mistakes very often while they are speaking. Correction should not distract student from his or her speech. Diagnose problems faced by students who have difficulty in expressing themselves in the target language and provide more opportunities to practice the spoken language.

It is essential that a language teacher must pay great attention to teaching speaking. Rather than leading students to pure memorization, providing a rich environment where meaningful communication takes place is desired.

Table 7. *Level of Students' Skills for Propose a Solution*

Parameter/Test	*Pre-test*	*Post-test*
N	60	60
HPS	5	5
mean	2.633	3.388
CP	53%	68%
Df	48	
L	.05	
TV	2.66	
CV	8.88	
Dr	Significant	

There is a significant difference in scores between the pre-test and post-test in task number five, Propose a Solution. It entails that students are able to propose a solution to a problem or dilemma situation better in post-test than in pre-test. It further indicates that the intervention activities performed by the students using technology is effective in enhancing the critical thinking and speaking skills of the students. The interpretation of the class proficiency of the students in the fifth task is in the level of nearing mastery.

In employing a speaking activity like this in a classroom, it is important for a teacher to provide immediate feedback on the student's performance. However, each performance must be dealt individually. In addition, it is highly suggested that the teachers should always correct the students' mistakes positively and with encouragement (Baker & Westrup, 2003).

Table 8 shows that there is a significant difference in scores between the pre-test and post-test in task number six, Listening to a Statement and Giving a Reaction. It reveals that students are able to perform better in the post-test than in the pre-test. It further implies that the Modified Dubsmash, one of the intervention activities performed by the students has improved their listening skill and therefore able to react accordingly to the statement listened to. The interpretation of the class proficiency of the students in the sixth task is in the level of nearing mastery.

Listening and speaking skills complement each other (Jack & Richards, 2008). Approaches to both the teaching of listening and speaking have changed considerably in recent years as insights from research and theory have prompted a rethinking of the processes involved in second language listening, the nature of oral interaction in a second or foreign language, and a reconsideration

of what it means to teach these important components of second language proficiency.

Table 8. *Level of Students' Skills for Listening to a Statement and Giving a Reaction*

Parameter/Test	*Pre-test*	*Post-test*
N	60	60
HPS	5	5
mean	2.683	3.341
CP	54%	67%
Df	40	
L	.05	
TV	2.66	
CV	5.772	
Dr	Significant	

Effective approaches to teaching listening need to make a clear distinction between teaching and testing, and provide learners with guided practice in using relevant listening skills for specific listening purposes depending on their needs and their proficiency level. Approaches to the teaching of speaking have also been able to draw on a better understanding of the nature of spoken language and of the characteristics of different types of spoken discourse (interactional, transactional, and

Performance - based). The challenge for teachers and material developers is to find strategies that help learners develop fluency, accuracy, as well as appropriateness of language use. A combination of teaching methods is appropriate depending on whether the focus of an activity is accuracy, fluency, or appropriateness (Richards, 2008).

Table 9. *Level of Students' Skills for Express and Opinion*

Parameter/Test	*Pre-test*	*Post-test*
N	60	60
HPS	5	5
Mean	2.906	3.377
CP	58%	68%
Df	52	
L	.05	
TV	2.66	
CV	11.23	
Dr	Significant	

There is a significant difference in scores between the pre-test and post-test in task number seven, Express an Opinion. It signifies that students are able to perform better in post-test than in pre-test. It further implies that the intervention activities have significantly contributed to the improvement of the speaking skills of the students.

The interpretation of the class proficiency of the students in the seventh task is in the level of nearing mastery. Expressing an opinion is not new to the students. They use it in their social media discussions with peers but not at all times in the target language. So when they were asked to express their opinion on a presented topic, many of them were confronted with a dilemma in terms of articulation and fluency.

According to Fillmore (1989), a speaker is judged to be fluent if he is able to fill the time with talk, have appropriate things to say in a wide range of contexts, talk in coherent, reasoned sentences, and be creative and imaginative in language use.

Table 10. *The Difference Between the Pretest and the Post-test Scores of the Students*

Parameter/Test	*Pre-test*	*Post-test*
Number of Students	60	60
Highest Possible Score	50	50
Mean	26	31.4
Class Proficiency (CP)	52%	63%
Degree of Freedom (Df)	59	
Alpha Level (L)	.05	
Tabular Value (TV)	2.66	
Cumulative Value (CV)	9.64	
Decision Rule (Dr)	Significant	
Overall Class Proficiency	Nearing Mastery	

Table 10 shows that there is a significant difference in scores between the pre-test and the post-test. Therefore, the use of technology in the intervention activities has improved the results of the students' performance in all speaking tasks.

The overall class proficiency of the Grade 11 students in all speaking activities is in the level of nearing mastery. It implies that mastering the skills is within reach. Klancar (2006) in her study discussed that young learners in the communicative classroom should get as many speaking opportunities as possible and their speaking time should slowly but steadily rise so as to prepare them for various communicative situations.

In addition, Brown and Yule (1983) believe that speaking is the skill that the students will be judged upon most in real-life situations. It is an important part of everyday interaction and most often the first impression of a person is based on his/her ability to speak fluently and comprehensively. So, teachers have a responsibility to prepare the students as much as possible to be able to speak in English in the real world outside the classroom.

In the fast developing 21st century various innovative technologies are being introduced to teach speaking skill in the classrooms. Technology is the vehicle to get access with this modernized world. More than the process of communication, trade and transactions, today technology is widely used in educational sectors. Technological tools have been regarded as ways of helping students improve language skills such as speaking skill (Bahadorfar & Omidvar, 2014).

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the level of English speaking skills of the students has improved in terms of its proficiency percentage after the implementation of the intervention activities using the technology. This improvement is evident with the increased post-test scores of the students. However, all skills need to be strengthened. Students need more time and venue to practice and master the skills.

The following recommendations are hereby presented:

The use of technology-driven teaching strategies to improve the speaking skills of the students. Students nowadays are technology oriented and many of them expressed that they prefer lessons presented using the technology than the conventional way.

The provision of technological tools, specifically computers and a smart board in each classroom which aids in integrating technology-driven teaching strategies. The frequent exposure of the students to this facility gives more scope to learn language in effective interactive approach and develops interest on learning. And as it attracts interest, it then gives students a good venue to practice and develop their communicative skill.

The language teachers to strengthen the speaking skills which are not mastered by the students.

The inclusion of teaching speaking using technology in language teaching along with the other prominent skills not only to Grade 11 students but to all grade levels as well.. Speaking is not an isolated skill; hence, it must be taught along with the other macro skills in English.

Strict implementation on the use of English language as a medium of instruction.

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