

Beyond eyesight: communicative competence of senior high school student with visual impairment

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ABSTRACT

Research on the performance of students with visual impairment based on educational setting has not been conducted. It was the purpose of this paper to find out the communicative competence of senior high school student with visual impairment. This student including his mother, teacher, classmate and schoolmate participated in the research undertaking. Case study was the mode of inquiry in this study. It utilized triangulation method such as classroom observation, interview and review of available documents. As a result of this study, it was found out that the student has high communicative competence. This means that he is competent communicator in the context in public, meeting, and group or dyad to strangers, acquaintances or friends. It was also suggested that further studies should assess the differential impact of a variety of courses on students' communication competencies in diverse contexts and describe a communication approach to develop communicative competency of student with visual impairment.

Keywords: *communicative competence, visual impairment, senior high school*

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication as foundation for learning for students has been impeded due to the impact of their disability. With that developing communicative competence to learners with disabilities is crucial not only to the educators but to their families and other service providers as well.

According to World Health Organization (2014) that approximately 314 million people worldwide live with visual impairment wherein 45 million people are blind and 269 million are low vision (<http://www.who.int/mediacentre>).

Based on Census 2010 from Department of Health, of the 92.1 million household's population in the Philippines, 1443 thousand persons or 1.57 percent had disability. About 16 per thousand of country's population had disability. The most common forms are hearing and visual impairment

In the Philippines, the Department of Health estimated that about 592, 000 are the number of blind people. Two million people are with moderate or severe visual impairment (<http://www.doh.gov.ph>).

In Region XI, particularly in Davao City the one largest and performing public secondary school is Daniel R. Aguinaldo National High School (DRANHS). The institution has enrolled student with visual impairment rostered from Resources for the Blind, Inc. (2015), a non-government organization which is the frontier in education for students with visual impairment in the country.

2. THEORITICAL FOUNDATION

The ability to communicate in life is one of the most important skills which are part of one's success. However, visual impairment affects all round development, the primary area affected is communication (Orr & Rogers, 2002). Moreover, there is a need to address the importance of developing communicative competence for students with visual impairment in an inclusive education.

Communicative competence is important to all learners to effectively learn and communicate (Kleinert, Holman, McSheehan, and Kearns, 2010). According to NCLRC (2003) it is one's the ability to use the language to accomplish communication goals correctly and appropriately and the capacity to communicate competently. As Canary and Cody (2000) provided criteria for communication competence which include, but are not limited to, perceived appropriateness and effectiveness. This includes adaptability, conversational involvement, conversational management, empathy, effectiveness, and appropriateness. As Saleh (2013) pointed out effective communication necessitates understanding of linguistic, sociolinguistic and socio-cultural aspects of the language that is achieved through effective and appropriate interaction (Lanes, 2009).

There is a low-incidence of researchers on the students with visual impairment communication competency often limits the understanding of their skills. Students with disabilities are the accountability of the education system in the Philippines, as an educator it is my role to research which to draw best practices as pointed out by Wild and Allen (2009) not only is it necessary to increase the number of researchers who study visual impairments, but the assistance of educators and other related service providers to students with visual impairments.

Hence, it is the purpose of this paper to determine the communicative competence of the student with visual impairment in Senior High School who is one of pioneering batch of the implementation of K-12 education in the country's history.

3. METHOD

Participants and Setting

This study was conducted at the Senior High School (SHS) program of Daniel R. Aguinaldo National High School, Davao City School Year 2016-2017 with the population of 296 students.

This study targeted only one student diagnosed with visual impairment specifically low vision type and with Marfan syndrome, involving the parents particularly his mother, and his teacher, his classmate and schoolmate as research participants in a public secondary school setting practicing inclusive education.

Procedure of the Study

The participant of the study was the SHS student with visual impairment as diagnosed from an ophthalmologist. Parents' particularly his mother's permission was obtained for this study as well his teacher, classmate and schoolmate were notified and interviewed. School Records of the student was reviewed and the researcher utilized Communication Competency Scales and validated Interview Guide Question. Moreover, the name of the student was changed for confidentiality. He was named as Tom Prior. The role of the researcher was to observe and analyze as a participant observer. Class observations were conducted for 2-3 days and the Day's Lesson Plan was used as a guide during class observation as well Communication Competence Scale.

Research Design

Case study research design was the mode of inquiry. The triangular approach of participant observation, interview and documents and records review was used. It was chosen because of the unique characteristics of the subject under study and a detailed, in-depth information was needed in order to enhance objectivity to answer specific research questions and which seeks a range of different kind of evidence; evidence which is there in the case setting and, which has to be abstracted and collated to get the best possible answers of the communicative competence.

Data Sources and Analysis

The information collected from the tools and provided from multiple sources were used to generate two major products: communication competency profile and communication skills list from Communication Competency and Self-Perceived Communication Competency Scale, and Interview Guide Question. These serves a framework for analyzing the level of communicative competence of the subject of the study. It was through observation, interview of mother, teacher, peers (i.e. classmate and schoolmate). The use of videotape or audiotape was also be considered aside from pictures.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As students with disabilities are to be in the accountability system of schools, there is a need to know how students with disabilities are performing. The purpose of this paper was to find out the communicative competence of student with visual impairment specifically in senior high school in public school setting. The student participating in the study was exposed to Philippine Secondary Education Curriculum. He was taught using the K-12 education curriculum.

Below is the table of the results of the communication competency of Tom Prior according to his teacher, schoolmate, classmate and mother.

Tom Prior's Communication Competency	Teacher	Schoolmate	Classmate	Mother
	125	132	153	154

This result showed that his communication competency is above 108. Their mean is 141.

Tom Prior's results is presented below:

Communication Competency	153
Self-Perceived Communication Competency	100

The table above showed that Tom Prior had score higher than 108 which he has the average score of 141 from his teacher, schoolmate, classmate and mother as well Tom Prior's score with himself is 153. This means that Tom Prior is generally more sensitive, flexible and assertive communicators.

Tom Prior's Communication Competency results was high. This means that he is a competent communicator. His self-perceived communication competence was very high. This means that he is competent communicator in the context in public, meeting, and group or dyad to strangers, acquaintances or friends.

As cited by Kleinert, Holman, McSheehan, and Kearns (2010) that through communicative competence this they would be able learners to learn effectively and become effective communicators. As NCLRC (2003) underscored it is one's ability to communicate competently.

Furthermore, the gathered information from multiple sources through participants observation, interview and documents and records review the following were generated:

Communication Competency Profile

People skills

Tom Prior engages in conversation where he listens, contributes, builds relationships. He stated that "*I can answer questions about my activities and experiences. I listen intently and get along with others*"

His teacher, mother, and peers described Tom as follows that he is an/a

- active listener- in Tom's statements like *I listen to what people say to me; I pay attention to the conversation; and I am interested of what others have to say; and*
- supportive of others – *I find it easy to get along with others.*

Information skills

Tom inquiries into topics that interest him, and topics related to their school studies. He presents for many purposes and various audience; he uses media and technology such as netbook with a software Job Access with Speech.

Tom statements such as "*I organize my thoughts in my head before speaking.*

I understand and share basic information about topics that are important to me; and

I participate in conversations to connect, help, be friendly, learn or share. I think about how others might interpret what I say.

I think about the consequences of what I say.

I use the software Job Access with Speech in my netbook for my schoolwork and many other things.”

As his mother, teacher and peers further confirmed that

“Tom let others know he understands what they mean;

He makes sure he understands what another person is saying before he responds; and

He rephrases or repeats what another person said, to make sure that he understands them.”

Collaborative skills

Tom works to accomplish goals, either face to face, or through digital media.

Tom said that *“I contribute positively to discussions and collaborations, and help to organize and monitor the work; “I offer both leadership and support.”*

His mother, teacher and peers all agreed that

“Tom likes to interact with various people and he deals with others effectively in doing group task.”

Conversation Skills

Tom tells about his experiences—especially his learning experiences—and reflects, and shares what he learned.

Tom stated that *“I have visual impairment but my disability is NOT a hindrance for me to succeed in life – to become a competent communicator.” I can articulate a keen awareness of my strengths, my dreams and myself. I am able to represent my learning, and connect it to my experiences and efforts. I give and receive constructive feedback too.*

As his mother, teacher and peers further mentioned that

“Tom generally knows how other feels and he is an effective conversationalist.”

Communication Skills List

This part of the paper will present the communication skills for the student based on the classroom observations, interview with the student, his mother, and interview with his senior high

school teacher, interview with his classmate and schoolmate, and student portfolio. The discussion into skills needed to use effective communication practices.

Communicative competence which include, but are not limited to adaptability, conversational involvement, conversational management, empathy, effectiveness, and appropriateness (Canary & Cody, 2000).

Adaptability

Tom claimed: *“I am a good listener; I can talk in or present a talk in a large meeting or small group of friends, acquaintances or strangers.*

When I first enter a new situation, I watch, who is talking to whom; I try to size up the event; and I think about what I am going to talk about.”

In his social experiences he has adaptability or flexibility in his composure and articulation. In the words of his teacher, mother and peers like his classmate and schoolmate stated that

“Tom is flexible; he adapts to changing situations; and he easily gets along with others.”

Conversational involvement and management

Tom’s said that:

“Before the conversation, I think about what people might be talking about; during the conversation, I am aware of when a topic is going nowhere. And after the conversation, I think about what the other person thought of me.”

“I pay attention to how others are reacting to what I am saying.”

“I am aware of when it is time to change the topic.”

“I generally know what type of behavior is appropriate in any given situation.”

In an interaction it entails the ability to respond, perceive and attend. As his teacher, mother and peers said that *he listens and pays attention to conversation*. They further mentioned that:

“Tom listens to what people say to him;

“He knows what type of behavior is appropriate in any given situation.”

“He is relaxed and comfortable when speaking to familiar people and with a new acquaintances or strangers; and he treats people as individuals.”

Practicing empathy

In Tom’s statements: *Generally, I study people. I think about how what I say may affect others and I think about the effects of my communication.*

He has the ability to view others perspective as his own. As what his teacher, his mother said that as well his peers:

“Tom can put himself in another person’s shoes; he is sensitive to others needs of the moment.”

Effectiveness and appropriateness

As Lanes (2009) stated communication competence is achieved when there is an effective and appropriate interaction.

Tom said *“I mentally practice what I’m going to say. I think about what I could have said; and I thinks about what I have said to improve for the next conversation.*

He further emphasized:

“Disability is not a reason to give up but a challenge to strive hard for excellence,” nothing can hinder us, no one can stop us as long as we believe.”

Tom Prior has interpersonal competence such as assertiveness, expressiveness, self-esteem, and self-confidence. He has intrapersonal skills as well for he has the ability to choose an appropriate and effective communicative behavior for a given situation. He has also skills in critical thinking, language, and oral communication. As a result, he tends to like classroom situations in which they would be called upon to share their thoughts or argue a given point. This supports Saleh (2013) statement that to effectively communicate it is necessary to understand linguistic, sociolinguistic and socio-cultural aspects of the language.

5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to find out the communicative competence of senior high school student with visual impairment, particularly in Daniel R. Aguinaldo National High School, Davao City. This paper presented a case study of only one student enrolled in the school. Results showed that the student had high communicative competence. This further means that he is an effective, adaptable, and empathetic. He demonstrates conversational involvement and management skills. He has the ability to think about a situation from many perspectives and adjust accordingly in different context.

Visual impairment may cause difficulties with both the interactive and the conceptual aspects of communication. Many researchers found that children with visual impairment learning experiences have to be structured to provide them with opportunities to ensure inclusion. Communication competency hence provides a bridge between students’ learning, their personal and social identity and relationships, and the world in which they interact. Having communicative competence may be hard to achieve all learners but with practice and determination, it would be possible. He believes in himself and has clear vision of his future.

Other Findings

As with all atypical learners, students with visual impairment ability to effectively communicate in life is one of the most important skills which is not different from those of the sighted learners. It is important emphasize his abilities instead of his disabilities which based on the tenet that he can succeed

in terms of abilities despite his limitations and he is more like a seeing student than he is different. The communication curriculum as well focused on a wide range of communication topics such as intrapersonal communication, verbal and nonverbal communication, listening, interpersonal communication, interviewing, small-group communication, and public speaking to develop communicative competence to All students in order to maximize educational opportunities.

Recommendations

As a result of the research, the following recommendations are made:

Further studies should assess the differential impact of a variety of courses on students' communication competencies in diverse contexts and describe a communication approaches to develop communicative competency.

Reflection

The focus on competent communication must be effective and appropriate interaction. It is determined within or across various context to accurately assess situations and successfully builds relationship. As an educator, developing communicative plays an important role in students learning. Undoubtedly, it creates opportunities for inclusion and social interaction.

Acknowledgements: The researcher would like to thank the student, their families especially his mother, his teacher, classmate and schoolmate agreed to take part in this endeavor. As well with the Sir Chito R. Napito for spearheading this institutional research writing.

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