

The English-Speaking Skills of the Meranaw Students Coming from a Mono-Cultural Community vs. a Multicultural Community

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.906000445>

Received: 13 June 2025; Accepted: 16 June 2025; Published: 23 July 2025

ABSTRACT

This study explores the speaking skills of Meranaw students enrolled in the Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English program at Mindanao State University–Lanao del Norte Agricultural College (MSU-LNAC), with a particular focus on the influence of their community exposure. The study compares students from mono-cultural Meranaw communities and multi-cultural communities to determine whether their speaking proficiency—measured in terms of enunciation, diction, fluency, and grammar—differs significantly based on their environment. The research utilizes a descriptive-correlational design, with 30 purposively selected Meranaw student respondents. Data were collected through survey questionnaires and performance assessments in poem reading, storytelling, and extemporaneous speech. Findings show that students from multi-cultural communities demonstrated significantly higher speaking proficiency across all categories. The study identifies years of residence, language exposure, and linguistic input as factors significantly affecting speaking performance. Anchored in theories such as Bandura’s Social Learning Theory and Hymes’ Communicative Competence, the study reveals that environmental diversity enriches linguistic capabilities and communicative competence. These findings carry implications for educational policy, classroom inclusivity, and culturally responsive pedagogy. The study recommends tailored instructional strategies to enhance the speaking skills of Meranaw students, particularly those from mono-cultural backgrounds, to bridge language performance gaps and support equitable language development in multicultural academic settings.

Keywords: Meranaw, Speaking skills, mono/multi-cultural community

INTRODUCTION

Meranaw speaking skills are assumed to be easily differentiated from other ethnic groups due to their typical strong accent. When asked to describe a Meranaw, many people often mention their accent as a distinguishing characteristic during everyday conversations. The predominant challenge for Meranaws lies in their speaking skills, which are heavily influenced by their native dialect and accustomed style of speaking. Compared to other speakers, Meranaws face difficulties in English-speaking proficiency due to limited exposure to English conversations as per observation. This lack of exposure often leads to unsatisfactory speaking performance and low success in any speaking engagement (Balignasay et al., 2024). Speaking skills encompass proper pronunciation, diction, and enunciation that are crucial in every speaking activity to be understood clearly by the listeners.

Meranaws originated in Lanao del Sur (Racman & Lulu, 2021) and with the progression of civilization, Meranaws migrated to various places to establish permanent settlements. In areas predominantly inhabited by Meranaws, they traditionally speak the Meranaw language and tend to develop a strong accent due to continuous exposure to their native language. Meanwhile, those who migrated to other areas not dominated by Meranaws begin to adopt other dialects or languages which are not part of their native tongue.

Possessing strong speaking skills enables individuals to effectively communicate with others, as communication is a fundamental aspect of integrating into society and accessing diverse opportunities in life. Additionally, strong speaking skills facilitate the establishment of connections, friendships, relationships, and bonds that contribute

positively to various endeavors. While Meranaws are often perceived as having a strong personality and distinct way of speaking, possessing good speaking skills can help dispel stereotypes that suggest uniformity in Meranaw accents and speaking ability.

Language is traditionally said to be a tool for interaction or communication, a way to express or transmit ideas, concepts, emotions, or even feelings (Rabiah, 2018). Every individual needs to communicate verbally to interact and engage with others in their social environment. Social interaction becomes feasible only when it satisfies two prerequisites: social contact and communication (Avitsari et al., 2023). Therefore, when socialization occurs and communication takes place, the language used varies depending on the person we are talking to.

This study is anchored in several interrelated theoretical frameworks that illuminate the multifaceted development of speaking skills. Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1997) posits that individuals learn behaviors—including speech—through observation, imitation, and modeling within their social environments. This is especially relevant in understanding how Meranaw learners might unconsciously adopt or resist new linguistic patterns depending on their peers and societal interactions. Exposure to diverse language models enhances opportunities for imitation and feedback, thereby strengthening fluency and accuracy.

Complementing this is John Berry's Acculturation Model (1980), which explains how individuals navigate cultural integration when immersed in a new sociocultural milieu. Berry's model outlines four strategies—assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization—that individuals may employ. In the context of this study, a Meranaw student who integrates successfully within a multi-cultural community may exhibit more flexible and adaptive speaking styles compared to one who remains linguistically and culturally isolated in a mono-cultural setting.

Further grounding the study is the Language Contact Theory of Labov and Weinreich (1953), which investigates the outcomes of sustained interaction between speakers of different linguistic systems. This theory underscores processes such as code-switching, language borrowing, and contact-induced language change, all of which are observable in Meranaw students who encounter multiple languages and dialects in day-to-day communication. These interactions may enrich linguistic input and lead to improved diction, enunciation, and grammatical structure.

Finally, the study draws from Dell Hymes' Communicative Competence Theory (1972), which expands the definition of language proficiency beyond mere grammatical accuracy to include sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. In multicultural academic environments, Meranaw learners are required not only to speak correctly but also appropriately—adapting their language based on the context, audience, and communicative purpose. As such, communicative competence is both a goal and a lens through which to assess speaking skill development.

The Philippines is a diverse country where various ethnic groups reside. Most Filipinos tend to identify themselves based on their ethnic background or the language they speak, with Meranaw being one of these languages (Clariza, 2019). It is common for Meranaw individuals to engage in socializing and interacting with other people from different ethnic backgrounds. Some may even have lived among them, leading to language acquisition, and potentially adopting aspects of their way of speaking.

Engaging in conversations with individuals from different groups is important to consider in adapting one's way of speaking. Developing communication skills involves considering aspects such as speaking properly and accurately in everyday interactions (Avitsari et al., 2023). Meranaw individuals who have been raised within the same ethnic group and environment are less likely to adapt the way of speaking of others. They may not feel compelled to correct their accent, even if it sounds different, as they are accustomed to speaking in the same manner as those around them. However, the situation changes when it comes to speaking in English, which is considered our second language. Gaining proficiency in speaking is essential to learning a second language. A common objective of studying English as a Foreign or Second Language (EFL/ESL) is to become proficient in spoken English (Ghafar et al., 2023).

It is commonly assumed that Meranaw people struggle with English, but there is not enough research to

understand why this is the case. Existing studies focus on the reasons why people might have trouble speaking English, like poverty or lack of access to education. However, they do not explore the stories of individual Meranaw people who have good English-speaking skills, especially those who have moved to other places. This lack of research leaves a gap in understanding what might help Meranaw individuals become good speakers.

The aim of this study is to investigate the level of speaking skills among Meranaw respondents and determine whether there is a distinction in the speaking skills of Meranaws residing in exclusively Meranaw communities compared to those living in communities where other ethnic groups, such as Cebuanos and other cultural groups, exist.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a descriptive-correlational research design to examine the relationship between the type of community that the respondents were exposed to and their level of speaking skills. This involves the collection of data to answer the questions concerning the study and attempts to establish the relationships of the dependent and independent variables. Descriptive method was employed in this study as it determines the type of community that the respondents were exposed and how this exposure affects their speaking skills.

Instrumentation

The researchers used a questionnaire and a speaking performance rating tool to gather the information needed for the study. The questionnaire was composed of a checklist and a Likert scale type of questions. It is divided into three parts. Part 1 is the duration in living the community; Part 2 is on exposure to other languages; and Part 3 is the different linguistic inputs.

To measure the speaking skills of the respondents, the researchers used set of rubrics. These were used during three speaking activities particularly: Poem Reading, Storytelling, and Extemporaneous Speech. This set of rubrics provides a comprehensive framework for evaluating key components of speaking performance: diction, fluency, grammar, and enunciation. A score of 10–12 (Excellent) across these criteria reflects a speaker who uses precise and appropriate word choices, speaks fluently with no hesitations, demonstrates strong grammatical accuracy, and articulates words clearly and effectively. A rating of 7–9 (Very Good) indicates overall strong performance, with only minor lapses such as occasional fillers, slight grammar mistakes, or subtle pronunciation issues that do not hinder comprehension. Scores within the 4–6 (Good) range reveal more noticeable weaknesses—such as inconsistent word choice, frequent hesitations, grammatical errors, or unclear pronunciation—that may disrupt the clarity or flow of speech. Meanwhile, a score of 1–3 (Fair) suggests significant deficiencies in all areas, including poor diction, frequent pauses, major grammar mistakes, and mispronunciations that severely limit understanding and audience engagement. Together, these rubrics serve as a valuable tool for assessing and improving a speaker's overall oral communication skills.

Population and Sampling Technique of the Study

The population of the study is composed of 30 Meranaw students officially enrolled in the Bachelor of Secondary Education Major in English at Mindanao State University – Lanao del Norte Agricultural College (MSU-LNAC) during the first semester of the academic year 2024-2025. The researchers selected 15 students coming from mono-cultural community and 15 students from multi-cultural community. The respondents were Meranaw students coming from the areas of Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Zamboanga del Sur, Marawi City, and other neighboring provinces. Selection of the respondent was done purposively to ensure that the comparison between the two groups would yield relevant and reliable results.

The conduct of the study started with the approval of Ethics Committee and informed consent to the respondents. Distribution of the questionnaire was done after the approval and proceeds to the assessment of their speaking skills. The speaking skills assessment comprise of three activities: Poem Reading (Sonnet 18, Sonnet 106, and Sonnet 116 by William Shakespeare), Storytelling (The Boy who cried wolf by Aesop), and Extemporaneous

Speech (Theme: Global Conflict: Understanding and Advocating for Peace), (Theme: Jeepney Modernization: Striking a Balance Between Progress and Tradition), (Theme: Arranged Marriage: Exploring the Intersection of Tradition and Personal Choice). An English teacher together with the researchers rated the performance of the respondents using rubrics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Speaking skills refer to the abilities involved in effectively conveying thoughts, ideas, and emotions through spoken language. Table I compares the speaking skills of the respondents in mono-cultural and multi-cultural communities across four key categories: diction, enunciation, fluency, and grammar. These elements ensure effective communication by enabling one to express ideas clearly, choose appropriate words, speak without hesitation, and follow proper communication rules.

Table 1 Level Of Speaking Skills Of The Respondents

	Mono-cultural		Multi-cultural	
Key Categories	Mean	Verbal interpretation	Mean	Verbal interpretation
Diction	7.20	Very good	10.51	Excellent
Enunciation	7.42	Very good	10.38	Excellent
Fluency	7.20	Very good	10.44	Excellent
Grammar	7.73	Very good	10.43	Excellent

The result reveals that the two groups performed well in all key categories given that they have very good and excellent mean scores for mono-cultural and multicultural community respectively. Clear pronunciation is crucial for effective communication, as many researchers have noted. (Levis, 2018) explains how well a listener can understand a speaker—known as intelligibility—relies greatly on clear articulation of sounds, proper stress, and intonation. Moreover, (Thomson and Derwing, 2020) states that clarity in speech improves through practice and plays a crucial role in enhancing enunciation skills.

Evaluating speech fluency, which includes elements like speed, rhythm, and pauses, is crucial for effective communication. Some studies highlighted the importance of fluency in learning a second language and how it can be measured through aspects like speech rate, frequency of pauses, and overall smoothness. Tavakoli and Wright (2020), examine the timing and musical qualities of fluency, such as tone and emphasis, showing their importance in teaching second languages. Similarly, Suzuki and Kormos (2021) look at the mental processes behind fluency, connecting vocabulary knowledge to how quickly and smoothly someone speaks. Moreover, Madina et al. (2024), found a strong link between grammar skills and speaking abilities among ninth-grade students, suggesting that those with better grammar tend to perform better in speaking tasks. Similarly, Garcia-Ponce and Tavakoli (2022), studied the connection between mastering grammar and proficiency in both speaking and writing. They concluded that a solid understanding of English grammar is essential for developing good speaking skills.

The level of speaking skills are significantly different (Table II) between mono-cultural and multicultural communities. This indicates that respondents living in multi-cultural community tend to perform better in all key categories compared to mono-cultural community. This suggest that multicultural community tend to have diverse linguistic exposure contributed to better and enhanced speaking skills. Some research supports the idea that exposure to multi-cultural community can enhance diction and communication skills. (Byram, 2020), argues that multi-cultural education improves language fluency and enhances communication across cultural contexts by fostering a deeper understanding of diverse linguistic expressions and perspectives Furthermore, the clear diction of the multi-cultural community may be attributed to their familiarity with diverse linguistic structures. On the other hand, mono-cultural community, while demonstrating strong language abilities, may face more limitations in diction precision due to less exposure to varied linguistic patterns. This idea aligns with the findings

of Huang (2023), who highlighted that language proficiency in multi-cultural settings is often superior due to a broader range of linguistic interactions. These studies collectively justify the observed difference in diction scores, with the multi-cultural community benefiting from the cognitive and linguistic flexibility afforded by their diverse backgrounds.

Table II Difference Of The Level Of Speaking Skills Between The Two Communities

Speaking Skills	p-value	Degrees of Freedom	Interpretation
Enunciation	0.001	13	Significant
Diction	0.001	13	Significant
Fluency	0.001	13	Significant
Grammar	0.001	13	Significant

Level of Significance 0.05

The length of time spent in a community has a huge impact on how exposed people are to culture and, in turn, how well they can communicate. Long-term engagement with a community enables people to encounter and absorb its communication methods, cultural norms, and values. The way language is utilized in different social circumstances, including vocabulary, idioms, and

nonverbal communication cues, is influenced by this kind of exposure. Table III shows the length of time they lived in their community. Result showed that most the respondents from mono-cultural communities have lived in the Meranaw community for 16–20 years, indicating long-term immersion in a monoculture, though they still encounter other languages. In contrast, students from multi-cultural communities have consistently lived in linguistically diverse environments, suggesting broader cultural exposure. Regarding exposure to other languages, both groups have had significant contact, but those in multi-cultural communities were exposed to different languages since birth, while those in mono-cultural communities gained such exposure later. This earlier exposure among multi-cultural individuals likely contributes to greater ease in switching between languages. In terms of linguistic input, respondents from multi-cultural communities demonstrated a stronger grasp of Cebuano and English vocabularies, while both groups were similarly proficient in Tagalog. These results imply that earlier and richer linguistic exposure supports stronger speaking skills, aligning with findings by Soto & Gottlieb (2020), Kieffer (2020), and Rasman & Margana (2022), who emphasize that multilingual environments and early language contact enhance fluency, vocabulary development, and cognitive flexibility. This affirms that individuals in multi-cultural settings, through their consistent exposure to diverse languages and interactions, acquire better speaking skills and adaptability, as supported by the justification of the authors who cited that sustained engagement with multiple languages improves linguistic abilities and cognitive processes necessary for fluent and effective communication.

Table III Number Of Years Living In The Community

	Mono-cultural		Multi-cultural	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
21 and above	2	13.3	1	6.6
16-20 yrs	10	66.7	13	86.8
11- 15yrs	2	13.3	1	6.6
6-10 yrs	0	0	0	0
1-5 yrs	1	6.6	0	0

In mono-cultural community, "Cebuano & Tagalog" are the languages commonly heard and spoken accounting

to the highest frequency and percentage 13 (86.6%) (Table IV). Moreover, for multi-cultural community, the respondents are all exposed to different languages such as Cebuano, Tagalog, and English. The results suggest that the respondents in multi-cultural community have more opportunities to develop diverse speaking skills because they are exposed to several languages and communication styles. This constant interaction with different languages helps them become more adaptable and confident speakers. Learning more than one language helps improve how well we can think and adapt our communication. Cohen et al. (2024) stated that kids who grow up with two languages often become better at speaking because they get to use different languages, even if they don't use each language equally.

Table IV Exposure To Other Languages

Language	Mono-cultural		Multi-cultural	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Cebuano	0	0	2	13.4
Tagalog	0	0	0	0
English	1	6.7	0	0
Cebuano & Tagalog	13	86.6	1	6.6
Tagalog & English	1	6.7	3	20
Cebuano, Tagalog & English	0	0	9	60

Linguistic input refers to all the language an individual comes across, including spoken language from conversations, lectures, and media, as well as written language from books, articles, and other texts. The diversity and richness of these inputs are vital for developing language acquisition and proficiency, especially in speaking skills. In table V, different linguistic inputs of the respondent are shown. In mono-cultural community, only 26.7% understood and spoke 100 above Cebuano words while multi-cultural community is 60%. In terms of the number of Filipino words understood and spoken both mono-cultural and multi-cultural communities have similar abilities to understand and speak Tagalog, with most respondents knowing over 100 words. As for the English language, both groups can understand and speak English more than 100 words and none of them can understand below 15 words. The difference in English skills between people who speak only one language and those who speak more than one can be connected to how much they use and depend on English. In the study of Wolf et al., (2024) shows that people who speak multiple languages usually have better English skills because they use English more often in different situations. Hessel and Strand (2020), also found that having a multilingual background helps in school, emphasizing that good English skills are important for success. These studies together suggest that people who speak more than one language often have a wider range of high English skills compared to those who speak only one language, who might not use English as much and therefore have fewer people with very high skills.

Table V Linguistic Inputs

	CEBUANO		FILIPINO		ENGLISH	
	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)
Mono-cultural						
100/above	4	26.7	10	66.7	4	26.8
51-100	3	20	4	26.7	9	60
31-50	7	46.7	1	6.6	1	6.6
16-30	1	6.6	0	0	1	6.6
15 and below	0	0	0	0	0	0

Multi-cultural						
100/above	9	60	10	66.7	5	33.3
51-100	6	40	4	26.7	5	33.3
31-50	0	0	1	6.6	4	26.8
16-30	0	0	0	0	0	0
15 and below	0	0	0	0	1	6.6

Implications of the Results

The result of the study shows that there is a significant difference in the speaking skills between respondents from mono-cultural and multi-cultural communities. Those from multi-cultural communities demonstrating higher proficiency in enunciation, diction, fluency, and grammar. This suggests that exposure to diverse linguistic and cultural environments may enhance language skills by providing a broader range of communication experiences. These experiences allow respondents from multi-cultural communities to practice and refine their speaking skills in varied contexts, leading to greater confidence and fluency. On the other hand, while respondents from mono-cultural communities also show good speaking abilities, their relatively limited exposure to diverse linguistic interactions may restrict the development of their speaking proficiency.

Interestingly, the study found no statistically significant relationship between speaking skills and factors such as years spent in the community, exposure to other languages, or linguistic input. This suggests that the development of speaking skills may not solely depend on these factors, and instead, the quality and diversity of linguistic interactions might play a more pivotal role. These findings highlight the importance of diverse linguistic and cultural exposure in improving speaking proficiency, particularly in a multicultural setting. Despite the lack of a direct correlation with specific factors, the significant difference in speaking skills between the two communities suggests that integrating multicultural experiences into education could bridge language skill gaps and promote more effective communication in varied contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study affirm that Meranaw students from multi-cultural communities demonstrate a higher level of speaking skills in terms of diction, enunciation, fluency, and grammar when compared to those from mono-cultural communities. These results support the assertion that prolonged and diverse cultural and linguistic exposure enhances students' communicative competence and oral performance. The varied interactions within multi-cultural communities likely provided these students with broader linguistic experiences, contributing to improved articulation, vocabulary use, speech fluidity, and grammatical accuracy.

However, the study also revealed that within each community group, there was no significant correlation between the level of speaking skills and the factors such as years spent in the community, exposure to other languages, and the amount of linguistic input. This suggests that while community type influences speaking skills on a broader scale, these individual factors alone may not predict speaking performance unless coupled with other crucial elements. One possible explanation is that passive exposure, such as merely living in a linguistically diverse environment, does not guarantee active language acquisition or skill development.

Limitations and Recommendations of the Study

This study, while insightful in exploring the speaking skills of Meranaw BSSED English major students across different community settings, is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged.

Firstly, the sample size was limited to only 30 respondents from Mindanao State University–Lanao del Norte Agricultural College (MSU-LNAC). Although purposively selected, this small sample may not fully represent the broader population of Meranaw students or accurately generalize the findings to other ethnic or academic groups.

Secondly, the study relied on self-reported data to determine the respondents' exposure to different communities, languages, and linguistic inputs. This approach introduces the possibility of recall bias and social desirability bias, as respondents may either overestimate or underestimate the degree of their exposure or report answers they believe are more favorable.

Thirdly, while speaking performance was assessed using rubrics during activities like poem reading, storytelling, and extemporaneous speech, performance anxiety or varying comfort levels in public speaking may have affected individual scores, thereby influencing the objectivity of the assessment.

Additionally, the study was cross-sectional in design, capturing only a snapshot of the respondents' speaking skills at one point in time. It does not account for the potential development or regression of skills over longer periods or under varying academic and social conditions.

Lastly, while evaluators were instructed to be objective and a third-party English teacher was invited to reduce bias, subjective judgment in rating speaking activities still poses a potential limitation in terms of consistency and inter-rater reliability.

These limitations suggest that the results should encourage further research involving larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, and more controlled variables to strengthen the validity of future findings. Future studies are encouraged to involve a larger and more diverse sample to improve generalizability. Longitudinal research designs may offer deeper insights into the development of speaking skills over time. It is also recommended to use more objective measures of language exposure, such as observational data or language use tracking, to reduce self-report bias. Additionally, incorporating qualitative methods like interviews or focus groups may provide richer context on how cultural and community factors influence speaking development. Expanding the study to include other ethnolinguistic groups could also offer comparative insights across diverse Filipino communities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Our thanks go to all the respondents involved in this study.

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