

Speaking Difficulties of Grade 12 Indigenous Students in English at International School of Asia and the Pacific-Kalinga

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine the speaking difficulties in English among Grade 12 Indigenous learners at the International School of Asia and the Pacific-Kalinga during the Academic Year 2024–2025. Guided by Canale and Swain's (1980) Communicative Competence Theory, the study employed a quantitative-descriptive design with comparative and correlational components. Using total enumeration sampling, nineteen (19) Grade 12 Indigenous students served as participants. Data were gathered through a validated survey questionnaire focusing on five areas of speaking difficulty: pronunciation, grammar and sentence structure, vocabulary, fluency, and confidence. The findings revealed that the respondents generally experienced moderate difficulty in speaking English. Among the five indicators, grammar

and sentence structure obtained the highest mean, while confidence recorded the lowest. Statistical analyses showed no significant difference in the speaking difficulties when respondents were grouped according to sex, age, strand, and parents' educational attainment. The results indicate that speaking challenges are shared across all demographic groups and are influenced more by linguistic and affective factors than by personal characteristics. Based on these findings, a plan of action was proposed to enhance learners' English-speaking competence through grammar reinforcement, pronunciation and fluency activities, and confidence-building strategies anchored on communicative and culturally responsive instruction.

Keywords: *English speaking difficulties, communicative competence, Indigenous learners, quantitative-descriptive study, ISAP-Kalinga*

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, English language fluency, especially in speaking, continues to be a vital skill for academic achievement, participation in wider society, and future employment (Crystal, 2012). Yet, many learners, particularly those from indigenous or linguistically diverse backgrounds, continue to report notable obstacles in speaking English, including difficulties with pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and confidence (Obregon & Boquia, 2025; Cagot et al., 2023). These difficulties are not only linguistic but also socio-affective, affected by exposure, teaching methods, and learner anxiety.

Recent research in the Philippines confirms that speaking challenges remain widespread among secondary and senior high school students. Obregon and Boquia (2025) found that indigenous tribal learners in Kalamansig display limited vocabulary, low comprehension, and underdeveloped macro-skills, including speaking, reading, and writing. These findings suggest that even after the disruptions of the pandemic, learners are still recovering and face substantial linguistic barriers. Similarly, a descriptive-correlational study of junior high students (2024) revealed

moderate difficulties in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar; notably vocabulary and pronunciation difficulties were negatively correlated with students' performance in English. (Capadeso & Banquiao, 2025; respectively in relevant similar studies)

Furthermore, studies examining affective dimensions such as language anxiety show that many senior high students feel apprehensive about speaking English. For example, Cagot, Embralinag, Aguado, Premacio, Fernandez, Tapayan, Bendanillo, et al. (2023) found that senior high school students in EEGAFI during SY 2022-2023 reported significant anxiety in English speaking classes, affecting participation and performance. These affective issues often interact with linguistic difficulties, students hesitate, fear error, or avoid speaking, which in turn reduces fluency, vocabulary use, and pronunciation practice.

Despite these findings, less attention has been given to how speaking difficulties vary specifically among Grade 12 indigenous learners according to demographic factors such as sex, age, academic strand, and parental education. Also, while many studies consider anxiety or vocabulary alone, few provide a comprehensive portrait that includes pronunciation, grammar, fluency, vocabulary, and confidence together for Indigenous learners in senior high school settings.

Accordingly, this study aims to determine the speaking difficulties in English among Grade 12 indigenous learners at the International School of Asia and the Pacific–Kalinga. It further seeks to examine whether these difficulties differ by demographic factors (sex, age, academic strand, parents' educational attainment) and to propose a plan of action to improve speaking skills. By addressing these gaps, this research hopes to inform educators and policy-makers about targeted interventions that respect indigenous linguistic and cultural backgrounds while promoting communicative competence in English.

Conceptual Framework

The study is anchored on Canale and Swain's (1980) Communicative Competence Theory, which emphasizes that effective language use goes beyond grammatical accuracy and involves several interrelated components of communication. According to the theory, language proficiency encompasses four key elements: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Together, these dimensions form the foundation for understanding and assessing an individual's ability to communicate effectively in a second language.

In this framework, grammatical competence refers to the mastery of linguistic elements such as syntax, morphology, and vocabulary—skills that directly relate to the study's focus on grammar and sentence structure and vocabulary. Discourse competence pertains to the ability to produce coherent and fluent speech, corresponding to the area of fluency. Sociolinguistic competence involves knowing when and how to use language appropriately across contexts, which influences pronunciation and overall intelligibility. Lastly, strategic competence relates to the use of compensatory communication strategies and self-monitoring mechanisms that enable learners to sustain interaction even in the presence of linguistic gaps, thereby connecting to the learners' confidence in speaking.

This theory provides a comprehensive lens for understanding the speaking difficulties experienced by Grade 12 indigenous learners at the International School of Asia and the Pacific–Kalinga. Each area of difficulty identified in this study—pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and confidence—reflects a potential weakness in one or more components of communicative competence. For instance, errors in grammar or word choice point to limitations in grammatical competence; pauses and hesitations indicate underdeveloped discourse competence; and low confidence suggests a need to strengthen strategic competence.

In addition, Canale and Swain's model underscores that communicative competence is context-dependent—shaped by exposure, educational experience, and sociocultural background. This perspective is particularly relevant for ISAP–Kalinga, which serves a population of indigenous learners representing diverse linguistic and cultural groups. Their varied home languages and levels of English exposure influence how they develop communicative competence, thereby explaining possible differences in speaking performance when grouped by demographic profiles such as sex, age, strand, and parents' educational attainment.

The framework thus guides the present study in identifying which dimensions of communicative competence most challenge indigenous learners and how these challenges differ across profiles. It also provides the theoretical basis for designing a plan of action aimed at enhancing the linguistic and strategic components necessary for confident, fluent English communication.

Conceptual Paradigm

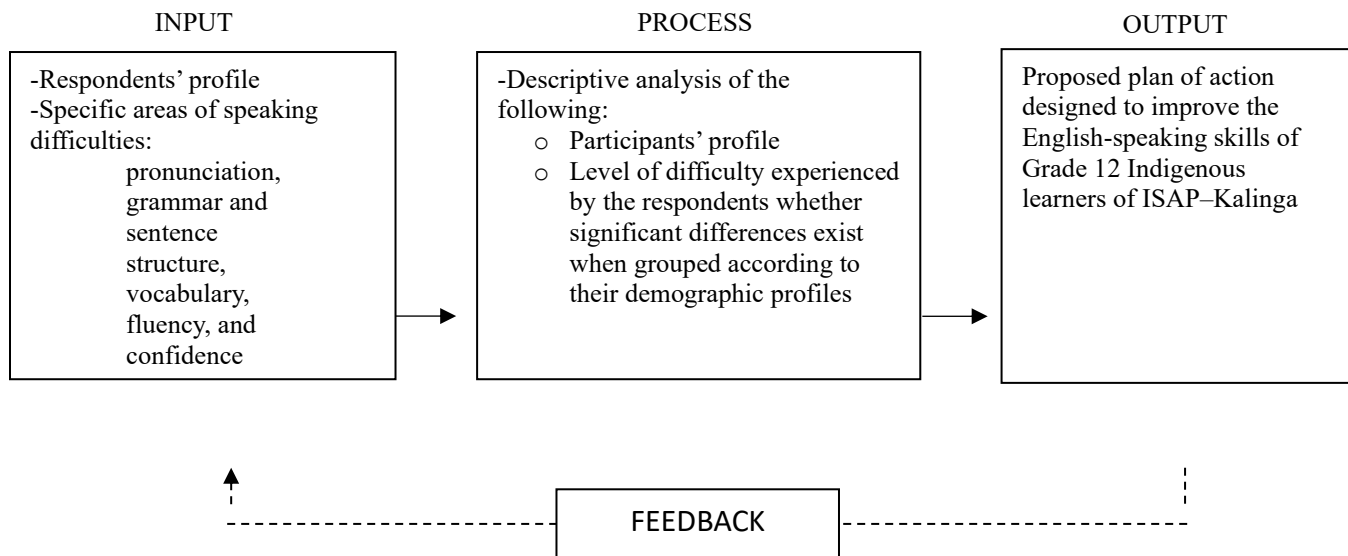


Figure 1. *Input-Process-Output (IPO) Model*

The input includes the demographic profile of the respondents, which consists of their sex, age, strand, and parents' educational attainment. It also includes the five specific areas of speaking difficulties—pronunciation, grammar and sentence structure, vocabulary, fluency, and confidence—that are examined in relation to the learners' profiles.

The process involves the collection and statistical treatment of data through descriptive, comparative, and correlational analyses to determine the level of difficulty experienced by the respondents and whether significant differences exist when grouped according to their demographic profiles.

The output of the study will be a proposed plan of action designed to improve the English-speaking skills of Grade 12 Indigenous learners of ISAP-Kalinga. This plan will focus on strengthening both the linguistic and strategic aspects of speaking through differentiated instruction, communicative activities, and confidence-building strategies tailored to the learners' profiles and specific areas of difficulty.

Statement of the Problem

This study generally aims to determine the speaking difficulties in English among secondary school students at the International School of Asia and the Pacific-Kalinga, with a particular focus on Grade 12 indigenous learners.

Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following question:

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of the following?
 - 1.1 Sex
 - 1.2 Age
 - 1.3 Strand
 - 1.4 Parents' Educational Attainment

2. What are the specific difficulties encountered by the participants of speaking in English in terms of the following?

- 2.1 Pronunciation
- 2.2 Grammar and Sentence Structure
- 2.3 Vocabulary
- 2.4 Fluency
- 2.5 Confidence

3. Is there a significant difference on the speaking difficulties in English of Grade 12 indigenous learners when grouped according to their demographic profile?

4. What plan of action can be proposed to improve the speaking skills in English of the learners?

METHODS

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative-descriptive research design with comparative and correlational components. The descriptive method was employed to identify, describe, and analyze the speaking difficulties in English encountered by Grade 12 Indigenous learners of the International School of Asia and the Pacific–Kalinga (ISAP–Kalinga), while the comparative and correlational approaches were used to determine whether significant differences exist in the learners' difficulties when grouped according to their demographic profiles. The results served as the basis for formulating a plan of action to enhance the learners' English-speaking skills.

The descriptive research design was deemed appropriate because it allows the researcher to gather quantifiable information that describes existing conditions and the characteristics of the respondents without manipulating variables. As explained by Creswell and Creswell (2018), descriptive research is suitable when the goal is to portray the nature of a phenomenon as it naturally occurs. In this study, the researcher sought to identify the level of difficulty experienced by Indigenous learners across five speaking dimensions—pronunciation, grammar and sentence structure, vocabulary, fluency, and confidence—as perceived by the students themselves.

The comparative component of the design was used to test whether there were significant differences in speaking difficulties when the learners were grouped according to their sex, age, academic strand, and parents' educational attainment. This aspect of the design was necessary to determine if demographic factors contribute to variations in the learners' oral communication challenges. The use of t-test and ANOVA helped establish whether differences in mean scores across groups were statistically significant at the 0.05 level of significance.

The correlational component, on the other hand, was employed to examine potential relationships among variables when necessary—particularly between demographic characteristics and levels of difficulty in each speaking area. This approach aligns with the purpose of identifying possible factors influencing learners' communicative competence, consistent with Canale and Swain's (1980) theory of communicative competence, which posits that language ability is shaped by the interplay of grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies.

Participants of the Study

The study involved all Grade 12 students of International School of Asia and the Pacific Kalinga Campus. Total enumeration was employed, meaning that every student of the population is included. The population consisted of 19 students. This approach was selected because the total number of Grade 12 Indigenous learners at ISAP–Kalinga was manageable and allowed the researcher to gather comprehensive and accurate data from the entire group. The following table shows the distribution of the participants.

Table 1. *Distribution of the Participants in the Study*

Strand Category	Frequency	Percentage
Humanities and Social Sciences (HumSS)	14	73.68
Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)	3	15.79
Industrial Arts (IA)	2	10.53
Total	19	100

Research Instruments

The main research instrument of this study is a survey-questionnaire which contained two main parts. The first part gathered the profile of the respondents. The second part obtained responses on the specific difficulties encountered by the participants of speaking in English. The grade 12 respondents responded using the 4-point Likert scale. The following were the steps taken by the researcher in gathering the data:

Preparation of Research Instruments

The researcher designed a structured survey questionnaire based on previous and related studies concerning speaking difficulties among secondary and senior high school learners. The instrument was adapted and modified to suit the context of the International School of Asia and the Pacific–Kalinga, focusing on the five areas of speaking difficulty: pronunciation, grammar and sentence structure, vocabulary, fluency, and confidence.

Validation of the Instrument

The initial draft of the questionnaire was submitted to a panel of experts composed of English language teachers and research advisers for content validation. The validators assessed the instrument in terms of clarity, relevance, and suitability to the objectives of the study. Revisions were made based on their comments and recommendations to ensure that the tool was valid and appropriate for data collection.

Securing Permission to Conduct the Study

A formal letter of request was submitted to the Head of the Senior High School Department and the School Research Committee of ISAP–Kalinga, seeking approval to administer the survey among Grade 12 Indigenous learners. Upon approval, coordination with class advisers and subject teachers was conducted to schedule the administration of the questionnaire without disrupting class activities.

Orientation of Respondents

Before data gathering, the researcher personally met the respondents to explain the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to participate voluntarily. The participants were informed that the data collected would be used solely for academic purposes. Verbal and written consent were obtained from all respondents.

Administration of the Questionnaire

The validated survey questionnaire was distributed to all nineteen (19) Indigenous Grade 12 students using the total enumeration sampling method. The researcher facilitated the answering process to ensure that all directions were clear and that participants understood each question. Respondents accomplished the instrument within the allotted time in a calm and familiar classroom environment to avoid anxiety and ensure accuracy of responses.

Retrieval and Checking of Questionnaires

After completion, all accomplished questionnaires were retrieved immediately to ensure a 100% retrieval rate. The researcher checked each questionnaire for completeness and consistency before proceeding to data encoding.

Data Encoding and Statistical Treatment

The collected data were tallied, encoded, and organized using spreadsheet software for statistical analysis. The following statistical tools were applied: frequency and percentage for the demographic profile; weighted mean for determining the level of speaking difficulty; and t-test and ANOVA for identifying significant differences across demographic variables. All computations were done at a 0.05 level of significance.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

The results were analyzed and interpreted based on the theoretical foundation of Canale and Swain's (1980) Communicative Competence Theory. The findings were then synthesized to identify the prevalent areas of speaking difficulty among Grade 12 Indigenous learners and to determine which aspects required instructional intervention.

Formulation of the Plan of Action

Guided by the findings and conclusions of the study, the researcher formulated a proposed plan of action intended to improve the English-speaking skills of Indigenous learners at ISAP–Kalinga. The plan focused on strategies to enhance pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and confidence through culturally responsive and communicative teaching methods.

Data Analysis

The study utilized quantitative methods in analyzing the data collected from the Grade 12 Indigenous learners of the International School of Asia and the Pacific–Kalinga. Statistical tools were used to describe the respondents' profile, determine the level of speaking difficulties, and test for significant differences across demographic variables.

Frequency and percentage distribution were used to present the respondents' demographic profile in terms of sex, age, strand, and parents' educational attainment. The weighted mean determined the extent of speaking difficulties in the five areas—pronunciation, grammar and sentence structure, vocabulary, fluency, and confidence—interpreted using a four-point Likert scale.

A t-test was applied to assess differences in speaking difficulties when grouped by sex, while a one-way ANOVA was used for age, strand, and parents' educational attainment. All tests were interpreted at a 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The study involved nineteen (19) Grade 12 Indigenous learners of ISAP–Kalinga, composed of both male and female students aged 17 to 20 years old. They were enrolled in different academic strands such as Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS), Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), and Industrial Arts (IA). The respondents' parents had varied educational backgrounds, ranging from elementary to postgraduate levels.

The diverse demographic profile reflects the school's inclusive nature, catering to students from various Indigenous communities. This variation may influence learners' English proficiency since exposure to language use at home and across academic contexts differs. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), demographic factors such as educational background and environment can influence learners' access to linguistic resources and communicative competence.

Speaking Difficulties Encountered by the Respondents

The overall results revealed that the respondents experienced moderate difficulty in speaking English across all areas. Among the five indicators, grammar and sentence structure obtained the highest mean, followed by pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary, while confidence registered the lowest mean. This indicates that while the

learners can express themselves in English, they still struggle with sentence formation, proper verb use, and phonological accuracy.

These findings align with Canale and Swain's (1980) Communicative Competence Theory, which posits that grammatical competence is a foundational element in effective communication. Learners who have not yet developed mastery of syntax and morphology tend to experience hesitation and reduced fluency. Similarly, Kilag et al. (2024) found that Filipino senior high school students face consistent pronunciation difficulties due to limited exposure to native-like English input. Moreover, Abellana (2024) observed that errors in grammar and pronunciation often lower students' self-esteem during oral communication.

The results suggest that speaking challenges among Indigenous learners stem not only from linguistic gaps but also from cultural and environmental factors, as many come from multilingual communities where English is used primarily for academic purposes.

Significant Difference in Speaking Difficulties When Grouped by Profile Variables

The results of the t-test and ANOVA indicated no significant difference in the speaking difficulties of Grade 12 Indigenous learners when grouped according to sex, age, strand, and parents' educational attainment. This implies that speaking difficulties were commonly experienced regardless of demographic characteristics.

This finding suggests that the challenges in speaking English among Indigenous learners are systemic rather than individual, rooted in broader issues such as exposure, teaching methodology, and confidence development. This supports Cagot et al. (2023), who reported that both male and female students experience similar anxiety and linguistic struggles in speaking English due to limited opportunities for authentic communication. Likewise, Obregon and Boquia (2025) emphasized that Indigenous students' speaking competence is shaped more by environmental support and instructional design than by demographic variables.

The lack of significant difference reinforces the need for school-wide interventions that address the common linguistic and affective barriers faced by all learners, rather than differentiated interventions solely based on profile.

Proposed Plan of Action to Improve English-Speaking Skills

Based on the findings of the study, a Plan of Action was developed to enhance the English-speaking skills of Grade 12 Indigenous learners at the International School of Asia and the Pacific–Kalinga. The plan is designed to address the specific areas of difficulty identified in the study—namely, grammar and sentence structure, pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and confidence—and is grounded on Canale and Swain's (1980) Communicative Competence Theory.

To address the learners' difficulty in grammar and sentence construction, the plan proposes the conduct of grammar-focused speaking workshops and interactive oral drills that integrate contextualized grammar instruction with communicative tasks. These activities aim to strengthen learners' syntactic accuracy and help them construct coherent sentences when expressing ideas. Furthermore, peer editing and grammar games may be introduced to make grammar learning more engaging and collaborative.

In response to challenges in pronunciation and fluency, the plan includes pronunciation clinics and fluency enhancement sessions utilizing audio-visual materials, speech shadowing exercises, and oral reading practices. These activities are designed to improve articulation, rhythm, and confidence in continuous speech. Regular exposure to spoken English through listening and imitation exercises will help learners internalize natural pronunciation patterns.

For vocabulary development, the plan recommends daily or weekly vocabulary enrichment activities such as "Word of the Day," thematic word-building games, and contextual usage drills. These tasks will help students expand their lexical repertoire and use words appropriately in various contexts, which in turn contributes to smoother and more precise communication.

Recognizing that lack of confidence was identified as the least developed area, the plan also emphasizes confidence-building and affective strategies. These include oral recitation simulations, peer support groups, and public speaking workshops that provide safe and encouraging spaces for learners to express themselves. Teachers

will be encouraged to provide positive reinforcement and constructive feedback to help students overcome language anxiety and fear of making mistakes.

Lastly, to ensure sustainability and continuous improvement, the plan includes an evaluation component that involves post-assessment of students' speaking skills and feedback collection from both learners and teachers. Results from these evaluations will be used to refine future language interventions. Additionally, the implementation of English-Speaking Hours and English Fridays is suggested to promote daily exposure to English in authentic communication settings.

CONCLUSIONS

The Grade 12 Indigenous learners of ISAP–Kalinga represent a diverse group in terms of sex, age, strand, and parents' educational attainment. This diversity reflects the inclusive educational environment of the institution and highlights the varying linguistic and cultural backgrounds of Indigenous learners. Despite these differences, they share common challenges in English oral communication, demonstrating that speaking difficulties transcend demographic factors.

The Indigenous learners generally experience moderate difficulty in speaking English, particularly in grammar and sentence structure, followed by pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary, while confidence registered the lowest level of difficulty. This suggests that while learners have foundational skills in English, they continue to face problems in constructing grammatically accurate sentences and in articulating English sounds fluently. The results affirm Canale and Swain's (1980) view that communicative competence involves the balanced development of grammatical, discourse, and strategic skills.

The absence of significant differences in speaking difficulties across sex, age, strand, and parents' educational attainment implies that these challenges are systemic and influenced more by educational and environmental factors than by individual demographics. This supports the accepted null hypothesis, indicating that all learners—regardless of background—encounter similar struggles in using English as a second language. The finding underscores the need for institution-wide interventions that focus on exposure, instructional strategies, and confidence-building.

The proposed plan of action serves as a proactive response to the identified linguistic and affective needs of the Indigenous learners. It emphasizes grammar reinforcement, pronunciation and fluency training, and the promotion of confidence through communicative and culturally sensitive teaching approaches. Such initiatives are expected to enhance learners' overall communicative competence and foster a more supportive learning environment.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are hereby presented to various stakeholders who can utilize the results to improve English-speaking proficiency among Indigenous learners:

For School Administrators

The administration of the International School of Asia and the Pacific–Kalinga may consider integrating communicative and culturally responsive English programs in the Senior High School curriculum. These programs should emphasize both linguistic and affective aspects of learning by providing sustained opportunities for oral communication practice, speech enhancement sessions, and culturally inclusive activities that affirm Indigenous identity while developing language skills. Administrators are also encouraged to provide faculty training and workshops focused on modern communicative language teaching strategies.

For English Teachers

Teachers are encouraged to adopt instructional methods grounded on Canale and Swain's (1980) Communicative Competence Theory, emphasizing real-life interaction, authentic use of English, and learner-centered approaches. Teachers should design classroom tasks that integrate grammar instruction with fluency-building activities, such as role-playing, group discussions, and oral presentations. Furthermore, confidence-building strategies—such as positive reinforcement, peer support, and feedback focused on progress rather than error—should be consistently practiced.

For Indigenous Learners

Students should be encouraged to actively participate in oral English activities both inside and outside the classroom. They may engage in peer tutoring, English clubs, or digital platforms that promote spontaneous speaking practice. Learners are also advised to develop self-directed learning habits, such as reading English texts, listening to English media, and maintaining an open attitude toward language learning. Building confidence and overcoming fear of mistakes are essential to improving communicative competence.

For Parents and Guardians

Parents can support language development by creating a home environment that values English exposure through conversation, media use, and encouragement. Their involvement reinforces learning continuity beyond the classroom and helps students build motivation and confidence in using English.

For Future Researchers

Future studies may expand the scope of the present research by including a larger number of Indigenous students across different institutions or by exploring qualitative insights into learners' experiences and coping strategies. Further investigation may also focus on the effectiveness of specific intervention programs developed from this study's proposed plan of action to validate its applicability in other learning contexts.

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