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Factors Detrimental to Oral Communication in Secondary School Contexts*

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This study aims to explore factors inhibiting L2 learners' oral communication in Korean EFL secondary school contexts. For this purpose, this study employed a questionnaire survey, which consisted of six overall types of communication obstacles: linguistic, background knowledge, cognitive, affective, interactional, and institutional domains. A total of 337 questionnaires were collected from three student groups: middle school, general high school, and vocational high school students. The results show that the vocational high school students face greater trouble with linguistic, background knowledge, cognitive and affective factors than do the middle school and general high school groups when speaking English. They also show that institutional factors cause greater speaking problems for the general and vocational high school students than for the middle school students. A comparison between engineering and commercial high school students reveals no statistically significant differences in most of the communication barriers except for the institutional factors. Another noteworthy finding is that many subsets of communication obstacles in the vocational high school group are significantly correlated with each other, one problem interacting with another. On the basis of the results, pedagogical implications are provided together with helpful suggestions for overcoming speaking difficulties in secondary school contexts. (195)

[oral communication/speaking difficulties/communicative competence]

I. INTRODUCTION

With the advent of the theory of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972) and the practice of communicative language teaching, the teaching of speaking or oral communication skills has become the focal point in many ESL classrooms (Lazaraton,

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2001). Ur (1996) also took a similar position, regarding speaking as the most important skill among four language skills. Despite its significance, speaking is considered as one of the most difficult aspects of language learning (Brown & Yule, 1983) or the greatest challenge for all language learners (Pinter, 2006).

This inspired L2 researchers to delve into what factors make speaking difficult. A substantial amount of research has reported that learners' speaking difficulties are caused by a wide variety of factors ranging from linguistic to affective factors. Among these factors, affective factors have drawn utmost attention thus far. For example, Brown (2007) argued that one of the major obstacles learners have to overcome in learning to speak is anxiety generated over the risks of blurting things out that are wrong, stupid, or incomprehensible. Although the previous studies on the impediments to oral performance are appealing and informative, they have several limitations. First, they paid too much attention to an exploration of affective factors, especially anxiety (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Park, 2006; Tsui, 1996) with much less consideration of other factors inhibiting oral communication. Second, this line of research focused too heavily on university students (e.g. Ferris, 1998; Kim, 2006; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Pae, 2013; Park, 2004b) without due heed to secondary school students. This is especially true in Korean EFL contexts since to date little has been known about the difficulties secondary school students encounter when speaking English.

The current research is therefore an attempt to fill this gap by building upon the previous studies dealing with potential blocks to students' oral communication. The main purpose of the study is to identify what kinds of speaking difficulties are encountered by students in three types of secondary schools: middle school, general high school, and vocational high school. This study pays special attention to the vocational high schools since they are classified as a specialized high school, which seeks to provide students with vocational education or technical instructions so that they can prepare for the workplace, especially in the engineering and commercial fields. The purpose of this research merits exploration in that the main goal of English education in Korean EFL secondary school settings is to help students develop their communicative competence, but secondary education has not been so successful in the development of communicative competence. In this sense, it is of significance to identify factors hampering learners' speaking performance, which will eventually lead to their effective communication.

On the basis of the research purpose, this study addresses three main research questions, as shown in the following:

(a) Are there any differences in each domain of communication obstacles among the middle school, general high school, and vocational high school student groups?

(b) Are there any differences in each domain of communication obstacles between the engineering and commercial high school student groups?
(c) Is there any relationship among the six domains of communication obstacles in the vocational high school student group?

The first research question compares three types of secondary school student groups, while the remaining two questions focus on the vocational high school students.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Oral Communication Skill

Speaking skill is complex in nature since successful oral communication is possible when L2 speakers equip themselves with a wide range of knowledge and sub-skills. The complexity of learning to speak in another language is reflected in the range and type of sub-skills that are entailed in L2 oral production: Learners must simultaneously attend to content, morphosyntax and lexis, discourse and information structuring, and the sound system and prosody, as well as appropriate register and pragmalinguistic features (Tarone, 2005).

Earlier, Canale and Swain (1980) classified communicative competence into four components such as grammatical competence (grammatical, phonological, and lexical knowledge), discourse competence (cohesion and coherence), sociolinguistic competence (sociocultural knowledge), and strategic competence (verbal and nonverbal communication strategies). This model is further developed by Bachman (1990). Her model is made up of two main components: organizational competence and pragmatic competence with the former involving grammatical and textual knowledge and the latter involving knowledge of illocutionary conventions and sociolinguistic conventions. In her model, strategic competence plays a crucial role since it serves an executive function of making the final decision (Bachman, 1990).

Casting doubt on the validity of the previous models of communicative competence, Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1995) provided detailed content specifications for the constituent components of communicative competence, which includes five components: linguistic competence, discourse competence, actional competence, sociocultural competence, and strategic competence.

While these models have their own characteristics, it is crucial that L2 learners should have adequate preparation for each component of communicative competence. If they do not equip themselves with a particular component of communicative competence, it can

serve as a debilitating force of oral communication, which is directly linked to the purpose of the present study.

2. Previous Studies on Oral Communication Obstacles

The issue of oral communication obstacles has been widely explored in ESL and EFL contexts.

1) ESL and Non-Korean EFL Contexts

In ESL and Asian EFL contexts, it has been reported that L2 learners' speaking difficulties can be caused by a multitude of factors ranging from poor linguistic knowledge to psychological and affective factors. For example, Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000) noted that mismatches and misunderstanding in oral communication could be the result of any of the following problems: lack of linguistic knowledge, lack of background knowledge, lack of sociocultural rules of appropriacy. In a similar vein, Burns and Joyce (1997) identified three main factors which cause a reluctance to speak English: linguistic, cultural, and/or psychological/affective factors.

On the other hand, Ur (1996) presented four major factors impeding speaking skill: inhibition (e.g. worry about making mistakes or losing face), nothing to say, low or uneven participation, and mother-tongue use. Similar claims are evident in Shumin's (2002) study since she considers affective factors (anxiety, fear of making mistakes or losing face) and sociocultural factors (interference of cultural norms) as potential blocks to L2 learners' oral communication.

Some studies focused on linguistic factors as contributory to oral performance. Brown (2007) provided eight features of spoken language which may make speaking difficult: unmanageable clusters of words, redundancy, reduced forms, performance variables (e.g. false starts), colloquial language, rate of delivery, stress and intonation, and rules of interaction. In an examination of the perceptions of ESL learners with regard to their communication difficulties, Derwing and Rossiter (2002) focused particularly on pronunciation problems, arguing that pronunciation is a factor contributing to the learners' communication problems.

Although some studies identified lack of linguistic knowledge as a factor hampering speaking skill, copious research has focused considerable attention upon affective factors. In ESL settings, Liu and Kuo (1996) examined the impact of affective variables on graduate students' oral classroom participation. They showed that the learners have the potential to speak up in their academic content courses, but they are overcautious in risk-taking and socializing, which is the main hindrance to their speaking performances. In

another study conducted in ESL contexts, Ferris (1998) explored students' perceptions of their own difficulties in the aural/oral skills and revealed that the students expressed a general lack of confidence in their speaking skill, which inhibited their oral interaction. Unlike Ferris's (1998) study, Tsui (1996) delved into teachers' perceptions of the factors causing students' lack of participation in oral interactions. From the point of view of the teachers, the students had five speaking problems such as students' low English proficiency, students' fear of mistakes, teachers' intolerance of silence, uneven allocation of turns, and incomprehensible input. These factors, Tsui argued, contribute to language anxiety, which is a critical factor inhibiting oral interactions. The same is also true in Chilean EFL contexts. Gregerson and Horwitz (2002) examined the reactions of Chilean EFL learners to their actual oral performance and indicated that anxious and non-anxious learners differ in their oral performance standards, fear of evaluation, and concern over errors.

Many studies on communication obstacles have been carried out in Chinese EFL contexts. Interestingly, most of these studies attributed the learners' speaking difficulties to affective factors. For example, Liu and Littlewood (1997) raised a question as to why East Asian students are reluctant to participate in classroom learning discourse and showed that this is largely due to lack of confidence in spoken English and anxiety from high-performance expectations. A very similar tendency seems evident in Jackson's (2002) study, which revealed that Chinese EFL students' obstacles to English discussions include lack of confidence, anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and fear of losing face. His collaborative research (Liu & Jackson, 2008) also demonstrated the great influence of Chinese EFL learners' willingness to communicate and language anxiety on oral communication.

2) Korean EFL Contexts

Research on Korean students' communication obstacles has flourished over the past several decades. Earlier, Pae (1984) argued that Korean students' speaking skill is impeded by a wide variety of factors including L1 and L2 differences, the neglect of oral skills, the cultural climate surrounding Korean students, and educational facilities. These findings, however, were not empirically based.

Pae's (1984) findings do not always hold true in more recent research. For example, Jung and Oh (2005) looked into what makes oral communication difficult at the Korean EFL adult level and revealed that major barriers to oral communication involve lack of linguistic knowledge (e.g. lack of vocabulary and grammar) followed by lack of background knowledge.

Other studies went far beyond the linguistic factors. Kim (2006) presented five factors

influencing the university freshmen's speaking ability, including the total amount of time spent with visual media and the total of amount of time spent at English language institutes. On the other hand, Lee's (2009) study of graduate students' oral participation showed that the students' oral skill is influenced by multi-layered factors, including the students' English proficiency, differences in sociocultural values and educational practices between L1 and L2 cultures, and classroom environment.

Unlike these studies, Pae (2013) placed a heavy weight on affective factors, showing that students' anxiety and positive attitudes toward English as well as students' perceived English competence made a direct influence on the students' speaking ability. Indeed, the issue of anxiety has gained widespread popularity in many studies conducted in Korean EFL contexts. For example, Park (2006) showed that both integrative motivation and anxiety have direct effects on English speaking skills, integrative motivation affirmatively but anxiety negatively.

In another line of research, Park (2000, 2004a, 2004b) carried out a series of qualitative studies into the factors implicated in speaking difficulties. His studies paid special attention to sociocultural and affective factors. For example, some of his studies (Park, 2000) attributed university students' deficiency in oral interaction to peer pressure, while others (Park, 2004a) ascribed it to the fear of losing face and teacher characteristics. The previous studies discussed thus far dealt with university students' speaking difficulties. This motivated the present study to explore barriers to oral production encountered by secondary school students.

III. METHOD

1. Participants

Those who participated in this study were 337 secondary school students in Daegu city and Gyongbuk Province: middle school students (94; 27.8) and high school students (243; 72.1) with the high school students further divided into two specific groups: general high school (84; 24.9) and vocational high school (159; 47.2) students. A total of 10 schools participated in this study: four middle schools, three general high schools, and three vocational high schools. The vocational high schools were further divided into two kinds: engineering schools and commercial schools. A detailed profile of the participants is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Distribution of Participants

Types of school		Gender		School year		
		Male	Female	1st	2nd	3rd
Middle	(94; 27.9)	46 (48.9)	48 (51.1)	39 (41.5)	21 (22.3)	34 (36.1)
General	(84; 24.9)	31 (36.9)	53 (63.1)	51 (60.7)	4 (4.8)	29 (34.5)
Vocational	(159; 47.2)	96 (60.3)	63 (39.6)	37 (23.3)	103 (64.8)	19 (11.9)
TOTAL	337	173	164	127	128	82

Middle=Middle school, General=General high school, Vocational=Vocational high school

In terms of gender, the middle school students were similarly divided into 46 males (48.9%) and 48 females (51.1%), but the two types of high schools were in contrast since females (63.1) were predominant in the general high schools but males (60.3) were predominant in the vocational high schools. When the participants were divided in terms of school year, first-year students represented the largest portion at 41.5 percent in the middle schools and 60.7 percent in the general high schools, but a majority of students were second-year students (64.8) in the vocational high schools.

In regard to the self-rated level of English proficiency, the three student groups had a similar distribution, showing a bell-shaped curve that represents the typical distribution. This is summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Distribution of Students' Self-Rated Level of Proficiency

	Low	Intermediate	High	TOTAL
Middle	22 (23.4)	60 (63.8)	12 (12.8)	94 (100)
General	30 (35.7)	45 (53.6)	9 (10.7)	84 (100)
Vocational	63 (39.6)	87 (54.7)	9 (5.7)	159 (100)

In the three types of schools, the students who rated their proficiency as intermediate occupied the greatest portion, those who rated their proficiency as high represented the smallest portion, and those who rated their proficiency as low are in between.

With respect to whether the participants had been to any English speaking countries, those who gave a negative response outnumbered those who gave a positive response. Specifically, the number of students who had been to English speaking countries added up to three in the middle schools, twelve in the general high schools, and five in the vocational high schools. Their average length of stay in English speaking countries was 4.7 months for the middle school students, 7 months for the general high school students, and 8.4 months for the vocational high school students.

When it comes to the last demographic question, the number of students who were having opportunities to engage in English conversations at the time of the survey was greater for the middle school students (27; 69.2) than for the general high school students (3; 7.7) and for the vocational high school students (9; 23.1), respectively. Their average hours of English conversations per week were 8.4 hours for the middle school students, 1.3 hours for the general high school students, and 1.1 hours for the vocational high school students.

2. Research Instrument

The research instrument employed in the study was a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire was composed of two main parts. The first part pertained to demographic information, which covered the following questions: type of school, gender, school year, self-rated level of proficiency, whether or not to have any opportunities to stay in English speaking countries, the length of stay in English speaking countries, whether or not to currently have opportunities to engage in English conversation, and the hours of English conversations per week.

The second part of the questionnaire was designed to answer the main research questions. It consisted of a total of 30 questions, which were in turn divided into six domains of communication obstacles: linguistic, background knowledge, cognitive, affective, interactional, and institutional domains. Distribution of questionnaire items is summarized in Table 3.

As seen in the table, the linguistic domain was comprised of 6 items (item 1 to 6) covering a multitude of linguistic elements ranging from pronunciation to colloquial language, while background knowledge domain included 4 items (item 7 to 10) related to a range of conversation topics. Cognitive domain as another crucial domain consisted of 4 items (item 11 to 14) involving thinking and memory, while affective domain covered 6 items (item 15 to 20) including anxiety, motivation, and confidence. On the other hand, interactional and institutional domains were equally divided into 5 items. The former domain (item 21 to 25) pertained to interaction with others or the influence from others, while the latter (item 26 to 30) had to do with education systems or educational environment. Responses to the closed questions were measured on the basis of a five-point Likert scale with values of 1 to 5 assigned to each descriptor (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree). This scale was used to measure the degree of the participants' agreement or disagreement on individual statements regarding communication obstacles. In addition to the 30 closed questions, the questionnaire also included an open-ended question left for the participants to write freely about their speaking difficulties other than those provided in the questionnaire. The full

version of the questionnaire is given in Appendix A.

TABLE 3

The Structure of the Questionnaire

Domain	Item
Linguistic Domain	1. poor pronunciation
	2. lack of vocabulary
	3. lack of grammatical knowledge
	4. lack of colloquial language
	5. word order
	6. lack of listening skill
Background Knowledge Domain	7. limited conversation topics
	8. lack of background knowledge about a topic
	9. unfamiliar topics
	10. lack of English cultural knowledge
Cognitive Domain	11. thinking in Korean and speaking in English
	12. difficulty in retrieving knowledge from memory
	13. the differences in the way of thinking
	14. thinking too much before speaking
Affective Domain	15. fear of making mistakes
	16. lack of motivation
	17. shyness
	18. lack of risk-taking
	19. lack of confidence
	20. lack of willingness to communicate
Interactional Domain	21. fear of criticism or losing face
	22. being overwhelmed by a better speaker
	23. being evaluated by peer students
	24. difficulty in speaking with L2 speakers
	25. teacher's pressure
Institutional Domain	26. lack of opportunities to speak English
	27. lack of time for speaking English
	28. lack of native speakers
	29. lack of English speaking classes
	30. the university entrance exam

The questionnaire items were developed on the basis of literature on the factors influencing oral communication, especially on the basis of Jung and Oh's (2005) study. Moreover, given that most of the previous studies focused on university students, further information on communication barriers was collected from preliminary interviews with a sample of secondary school students: two middle school, two general high school, and

three vocational high school students. The interviews were undertaken in Korean language using a semi-structured technique. The researcher interviewed some of the students independently and others in pairs. He began interviews by asking ready-made general questions such as “Do you have any difficulty in speaking English?”; “What makes your oral production difficult?” The participants were asked to feel free to express the difficulties they face in their oral production. Wherever necessary, the researcher asked more detailed, follow-up questions to clarify, further probe, and expand the interviewees’ responses. This approach helped to grasp the reality faced by secondary students while speaking English. It eventually helped to ensure the quality of the questionnaire by reflecting the voices of the secondary students.

The first version of the questionnaire was piloted with 10 students (three middle school, three general high school, and four vocational high school students) to ensure that the statements in the questionnaire best suited the purpose of the study. This pilot study helped to identify any unclear, unnatural or inappropriate statements and subsequently refine them. The questionnaire was designed in Korean to avoid potential misunderstanding and confusion.

Cronbach’s alpha was used to gauge the reliability of the questionnaire. This is presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4

Reliability of Six Domains in the Questionnaire

Domain	No. of items	Cronbach’s alpha
1. Linguistic	6	0.85
2. Background knowledge	4	0.79
3. Cognitive	4	0.75
4. Affective	6	0.84
5. Interactional	5	0.79
6. Institutional	5	0.79

As presented above, Cronbach’s alpha for linguistic and affective domains fall over 0.8, which indicates good reliability, while the remaining domains are close to 0.8, which indicates acceptable reliability. These results taken as a whole are indicative of generally high internal consistency.

3. Procedure and Data Analysis

The questionnaire survey was administered during the 2017 fall semester with the cooperation of secondary school English teachers. The teachers gave clear and detailed

information on the purpose of administering the questionnaire and the way of completing the questionnaire. The participants were asked to choose one of five options on a five-point Likert scale, which measures the degree of the participants' agreement or disagreement on individual statements regarding speaking difficulties.

The students were allowed to complete the questionnaire in their free time (break time or lunch time), which means that they were given no time limit to this task. The respondents were informed that the questionnaire was anonymous. The total number of questionnaires distributed was 370, of which 362 were returned. Out of 362, 25 copies were eliminated due to incompleteness and inconsistencies. Thus, 337 questionnaires finally remained valid for analysis.

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS Version 22. Specific statistical methods employed here included t-tests, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and Pearson correlation analysis. The level of statistical significance was set at .05. However, the data regarding the respondents' demographic information were calculated and presented in percentage.

IV. RESULTS

1. Descriptive Statistics of Communication Obstacles

Before proceeding to a discussion of the three main research questions, it is worthwhile to take a glimpse at the mean scores of communication obstacles across the three student groups. This is presented in Table 5.

TABLE 5

Descriptive Statistics of Six Domains across the Three Student Groups

Domain	Middle		General		Vocational	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
1. Linguistic	2.87	0.83	2.84	0.87	3.21	0.78
2. Background	2.68	0.85	2.59	0.79	3.10	0.83
3. Cognitive	2.88	0.90	2.77	0.84	3.20	0.73
4. Affective	2.65	0.83	2.62	0.91	2.94	0.85
5. Interactional	2.72	0.89	2.58	0.93	2.81	0.83
6. Institutional	2.76	0.85	3.37	0.91	3.23	0.81

For the middle school students, the mean score of each category is below 3.0, whereas for the vocational high school students, many categories reveal a mean score above 3.0: institutional (*M*=3.23), linguistic (*M*=3.21), cognitive (*M*=3.20), and background knowledge (*M*=3.10) domains. On the other hand, for the general high school students,

institutional domain (*M*=3.37) displays the highest mean score.

In order to clarify these results, it is important to look closely at the distribution of each individual item hampering oral production. This is presented in Appendix B. Due to space limitations, only some items of higher mean scores are summarized in Table 6.

TABLE 6

Items of Higher Mean Scores across the Three Student Groups

Group	Item	*M*	*SD*
Middle School	3. lack of grammatical knowledge	3.07	1.15
	2. lack of vocabulary	3.06	1.06
	4. lack of colloquial language	3.06	1.02
General high school	30. the university entrance exam	3.89	1.16
	26. lack of opportunities to speak English	3.46	1.27
	29. lack of English speaking classes	3.29	1.32
Vocational high school	11. thinking in Korean and speaking in English	3.54	0.96
	4. lack of colloquial language	3.53	0.97
	3. lack of grammatical knowledge	3.51	1.00

The table shows some important points. First, the items with higher mean scores for the middle school and vocational high school students involve lack of linguistic knowledge including grammar and colloquial language. Second, the items negatively influencing the general high school students' oral production involve institutional factors such as the university entrance exam, lack of opportunities to speak English, and lack of English speaking classes. The results taken as a whole differ considerably from most of the previous studies, which showed that L2 learners' difficulties in oral production are brought about by affective and/or sociocultural factors (MacIntyre, Dornyei, Clement, & Noels, 1998; Park, 2004a, 2004b; Park, 2006).

2. An Exploration of the Three Research Questions

It is vital to scrutinize communication barriers according to the three student groups in different learning contexts: middle school, general high school and vocational high school groups. This issue is related to the first research question, which pertains to whether there are any differences in each domain of communication obstacles among the three student groups. This question can be analyzed with a one-way ANOVA. The results are tabulated in Table 7.

TABLE 7

One-way ANOVA of Communication Obstacles According to the Three Student Groups

Domain	Group	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*F*	Welch	*p*	post-hoc
Linguistic	Middle[b]	94	2.87	0.83	8.158		.000***	a > b
	General[b]	84	2.84	0.87				
	Vocational[a]	159	3.21	0.78				
Background	Middle[b]	94	2.68	0.85	13.450		.000***	a > b
	General[b]	84	2.59	0.79				
	Vocational[a]	159	3.10	0.83				
Cognitive	Middle[b]	94	2.88	0.90		9.532	.000***	a > b
	General[b]	84	2.77	0.84				
	Vocational[a]	159	3.20	0.73				
Affective	Middle[b]	94	2.65	0.83	5.061		.007**	a > b
	General[b]	84	2.62	0.91				
	Vocational[a]	159	2.94	0.85				
Interactional	Middle[b]	94	2.72	0.89	1.992		.138	
	General[b]	84	2.58	0.93				
	Vocational[a]	159	2.81	0.83				
Institutional	Middle[b]	94	2.76	0.85	13.545		.000***	a > b
	General[a]	84	3.37	0.91				
	Vocational[a]	159	3.23	0.81				

**p<.01, ***p<.001

At this point, it is important to note the differences between *F*-test and Welch's test. If the data met the assumption of homogeneity of variances, which requires that the variances of the groups are equivalent, *F*-test was used, whereas if the data failed to meet this assumption, Welch's test was run in the one-way ANOVA. The statistical analyses show that there are statistically significant differences among the three student groups in linguistic (F = 8.158, p = .000), background knowledge (F = 13.450, p = .000), cognitive (Welch = 9.532, p = .000) and institutional (F = 13.545, p = .000) domains at the significance level of .001 and in affective domain (F = 5.061, p = .007) at the .01 significance level.

Since the one-way ANOVA simply shows that at least two groups are different, a post-hoc test was run to ascertain which specific groups show statistically significant differences from each other. In the case of linguistic domain, there are statistically significant differences between the vocational high school group and the middle school group on the one hand and the vocational high school group and the general high school group on the other, but not between the middle school group and the general high school group. More specifically, lack of linguistic knowledge is more troublesome case for the vocational high

school students (*M*=3.21) in oral production than for the middle school (*M*=2.87) and the general high school (*M*=2.84) groups, respectively. This finding is in part supported by Kim (2000)'s report that vocational high school students have poor English language skills and abilities. It is also backed up by the participants' self-rated proficiency of English since the proportion of the students who rated their English proficiency as low was found to be higher for the vocational high school group at 39.6 percent than for the middle school group at 23.4 percent and for the general high school group at 35.7 percent, respectively, as illustrated in Table 2 earlier. The finding that the vocational high school students have greater trouble with linguistic knowledge than the middle school students clearly indicates that the level of academic schooling does not always ensure a high level of linguistic knowledge. Since the main pedagogical focus of vocational high schools is vocational education and training, English is not a core subject. This is another plausible reason for the vocational high school students' deficiency in linguistic knowledge.

Similarly, lack of background knowledge is a greater hindrance to speaking performance for the vocational high school group (*M*=3.10) than for the middle school group (*M*=2.68) and for the general high school group (*M*=2.59), respectively. These results indicate that the vocational high school students have deficiency not only in linguistic knowledge but also in background knowledge, both of which are important elements of oral communication.

The exactly same tendency is repeated in the case of cognitive domain (the vocational high school group=3.20 > the middle school group=2.88, the general high school group=2.77) and in the case of affective domain (the vocational high school group=2.94 > the middle school group=2.65, the general high school group=2.62). This is consonant with Kim's (2000) finding that vocational high school students have a relatively low level of interest and confidence in English.

Unlike the above-mentioned domains, institutional domain reveals statistically significant differences between the middle school group (*M*=2.76) and the general high school group (*M*=3.37) on one hand and between the middle school group (*M*=2.76) and the vocational high school group (*M*=3.23) on the other, but not between the general high school and vocational high school groups. This signals that institutional domain is a greater communication barrier for the general high school and vocational high school groups than for the middle school group. The general high school students' speaking problems regarding institutional factors are largely because English education in this type of school is really oriented toward training the students to score highly on the university entrance exam. This exam-oriented education system has negative influences on other institutional factors. As Choi (2008) pointed out, the national exam does not include speaking and writing components, thus leading to very little, if any, teaching of speaking and writing at high school. This in turn hinders the students from having many opportunities to speak and

write in English.

In order to address the second research question, the vocational high school group was further divided into two different subtypes: engineering and commercial schools. The specific research question in this regard is whether there are any differences in each domain of communication obstacles between the engineering and commercial high school groups. This issue was analyzed using a t-test, as shown in Table 8.

TABLE 8

Communication Barriers between the Engineering and Commercial Groups

Domain	Group	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
Linguistic	Engineering	96	3.21	0.79	-0.061	0.951
	Commercial	63	3.22	0.78		
Background	Engineering	96	3.12	0.84	0.419	0.676
	Commercial	63	3.06	0.81		
Cognitive	Engineering	96	3.25	0.80	1.132	0.259
	Commercial	63	3.12	0.63		
Affective	Engineering	96	2.94	0.90	0.140	0.889
	Commercial	63	2.92	0.80		
Interactional	Engineering	96	2.75	0.83	-1.228	0.221
	Commercial	63	2.91	0.83		
Institutional	Engineering	96	3.06	0.80	-3.272	0.001**
	Commercial	63	3.48	0.75		

**p<.01

The statistical results indicate that institutional domain is the only domain which reveals statistically significant differences between the engineering and commercial high school groups (t = -3.272, p = .001) at the significance level of .01. To rephrase, institutional domain is a more serious communication barrier for the commercial school group (M=3.48) than for the engineering school group (M=3.06). The other categories did not show statistically significant differences.

At this point, it is worth probing further into which individual items in the institutional domain show significant differences between the two types of vocational high schools. This was analyzed with a t-test.

TABLE 9

Differences between the Engineering and Commercial Groups in the Individual Items in the Institutional Domain

Item	Disciplines	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
26. lack of opportunities to speak English	Engineering	96	3.25	0.96	-2.493	0.014*
	Commercial	63	3.65	1.03		
27. lack of time for speaking English	Engineering	96	3.01	1.06	-0.402	0.688
	Commercial	63	3.08	1.05		
28. lack of English native speakers	Engineering	96	2.83	1.14	-1.801	0.074
	Commercial	63	3.17	1.21		
29. lack of English speaking classes	Engineering	96	2.99	1.11	-3.495	0.001***
	Commercial	63	3.60	1.04		
30. the university entrance exam	Engineering	96	3.22	1.18	-3.545	0.001***
	Commercial	63	3.87	1.07		

*p<.05, ***p<.001

There are statistically significant differences between the engineering and commercial high school groups in speaking problems pertaining to lack of opportunities to speak English (t = -2.493, p = 0.014), lack of English speaking classes (t = -3.495, p = 0.001), and the university entrance exam (t = -3.545, p = 0.001), More specifically, the lack of opportunities to speak English makes speaking more difficult for the commercial students (M=3.65) than for the engineering students (M=3.25). The same is true for the lack of English speaking classes since it is a more troublesome case for the commercial students (M=3.60) than for the engineering students (M=2.99). Another noteworthy factor is the university entrance exam, showing that the commercial high school students (M=3.87) face greater problems with the national exam than do the engineering students (M=3.22). This seems to indicate that the number of students planning to apply for university is greater in the commercial high school than in the engineering high schools. As noted earlier, the university entrance exam does not include a speaking test and thus students as well as teachers do not bother to deal with productive skills in high school classrooms (Choi, 2008). This is one of the crucial reasons that show why high schools avoid offering speaking classes, which in turn can block pathways to the students' oral performance.

With respect to the last research question, a Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to measure whether there is any relationship among the six domains of communication obstacles in the vocational high school group. Table 10 summarizes the correlations among each subset of communication obstacles in the vocational high school group.

TABLE 10

Correlations among the Six Domains in the Vocational High School Group

	Linguistic	Background	Cognitive	Affective	Interaction	Institution
Linguistic	1					
Background	0.508***	1				
Cognitive	0.607***	0.515***	1			
Affective	0.570***	0.545***	0.579***	1		
Interaction	0.458***	0.437***	0.449***	0.660***	1	
Institution	0.264***	0.222**	0.153	0.339***	0.294***	1

**p<.01, ***p<.001

Interaction=Interactional domain, Institution=Institutional domain

As presented in the table, the correlation analyses reveal that the most significant positive correlation is the correlation between affective and interactional domains (r = 0.660, p < .001), immediately followed by the correlation between linguistic and cognitive domains (r = 0.607, p < .001).

On the other hand, moderate correlation is evident between cognitive and affective domains (r = 0.579, p < .001), between linguistic and affective domains (r = 0.570, p < .001), between background knowledge and affective domains (r = 0.545, p < .001), between background knowledge and cognitive domains (r = 0.515, p < .001), between linguistic and background knowledge domains (r = 0.508, p < .001), between linguistic and interactional domains (r = 0.458, p < .001), between cognitive and interactional domains (r = 0.449, p < .001), and between background knowledge and interactional domains (r = 0.437, p < .001).

In addition, weak correlation is found between affective and institutional domains (r = 0.339, p < .001), between interactional and institutional domains (r = 0.294, p < .001), between linguistic and institutional domains (r = 0.264, p < .001), and between background knowledge and institutional domains (r = 0.222, p < .01). However, institutional domain is not correlated with cognitive domain.

These results clearly indicate that many of the communication obstacles are not mutually exclusive but interrelated with each other, one domain influencing and being influenced by another.

3. The Results of the Open-ended Question

In addition to the closed-ended questions, the questionnaire included an open-ended question asking the participants to write freely about any communication obstacles other than those presented in the questionnaire. The participants made only a few comments on

this question with the middle school students making no comments at all. The comments are summarized in Table 11.

TABLE 11

Summary of Comments on the Open-ended Question

School	Comments	Frequency
General high school	1. nervousness about meeting English speakers	1
	2. late English learning	2
	3. heavy reliance on rote learning	2
Vocational high school	1. too much focus on accuracy	1
	2. grammar-based learning	2
	3. lack of basic knowledge	2
	4. lack of writing ability	1
	5. lack of concentration	1

These comments display a similar tendency revealed from the statistical analyses in the sense that the general high school students attribute their speaking difficulties largely to institutional factors and teaching methods, while the vocational high school students perceive lack of linguistic knowledge as a crucial factor detrimental to their oral performance.

V. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The analysis thus far has demonstrated that speaking difficulties encountered by the secondary school students are caused by a wide range of factors, especially linguistic and institutional factors. However, this study found that affective factors are not critical stumbling blocks to oral communication for the Korean EFL secondary students. This finding stands in sharp contrast to what has been reported in many previous studies (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Liu & Kuo, 1996; Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Pae, 2013; Park, 2006; Tsui, 1996) which attributed L2 learners' poor speaking performance to affective factors such as anxiety, lack of motivation, and/or lack of self-confidence. This gap may be due to different learning contexts. In other words, the previous studies focused on university students, whereas the present study focused on secondary students. Unlike university students who already passed the university entrance exam, secondary students put too much emphasis on the preparation for the exam (Choi, 2008).

A brief look at the mean scores of communication obstacles showed that there is no critical factor blocking pathways to oral interaction for the middle school group considering that the mean scores of all the categories are below 3.0. On the other hand, the

general high school students' speaking problems are related to institutional factors such as the university entrance exam and lack of opportunities to speak English. This suggests that there is a strong need for including a speaking test in the university entrance exam, which will help the students have more opportunities to speak English. Unlike the middle school and general high school students, the vocational high school students encountered multi-faceted speaking difficulties, i.e., institutional, linguistic, cognitive, and background knowledge domains. This suggests that greater efforts should be exerted by the vocational high school educators than the middle school and general high school educators to help the inferior students overcome these barriers, thereby improving their speaking ability.

The statistical analyses of the three student groups showed that the vocational high school students face greater trouble with linguistic, background knowledge, cognitive and affective factors than the middle school and general high school students when speaking English. Some of these results run contrary to our expectations. Specifically, the vocational high school students had a higher level of academic schooling than the middle school students and thus they were expected to have less trouble with linguistic knowledge than the middle school group, but the results revealed the opposite. This finding indicates that the higher level of formal academic schooling does not always guarantee greater linguistic knowledge in a narrow sense and more effective speaking performance in a wide sense. The first and foremost thing the vocational high school teachers should do is to help their students to equip themselves not only with linguistic knowledge but also with background knowledge. Prior knowledge, either linguistic or nonlinguistic, will serve a good basis for producing the intended message.

Another finding deserving much consideration is that institutional factors cause greater trouble for the general and vocational high school students than the middle school students when speaking English. Among the institutional factors, the university entrance exam system is of particular attention. Since the general high school curricula are oriented toward the university entrance exam, an overwhelming majority of English classes deal primarily with reading skills coupled with grammar and vocabulary with little heed paid to speaking skill (Choi, 2008), despite the fact that the goal of secondary school English education is to help students develop their communicative competence. This clearly shows that there is a mismatch between the goal of secondary school English education and actual classroom practice. This discrepancy fails to respond to the students' need to improve communication ability. This gap can be bridged by integrating a speaking test into the university entrance exam system. This reform will help the high schools provide students with more English speaking classes, which in turn can help the students develop their speaking skills. The findings also suggest that institutional problems such as the lack of opportunities to speak English and the lack of speaking classes should be improved in both the general high schools and the vocational high schools.

Also worthy to note is the finding that the comparison between the two types of vocational high schools revealed no statistically significant differences in most of the communication barriers such as linguistic, background knowledge, cognitive, affective, and interactional domains. These findings demonstrate that the engineering school students and the commercial school students encounter similar difficulties when speaking English. The only domain that showed a difference between the two types of vocational high school groups was institutional domain. To rephrase, the commercial school students face greater problems with the university entrance exam, the lack of opportunities to speak English, and the lack of English speaking classes than do the engineering school students. This finding leads us to assume that the number of students planning to apply for university is greater in the commercial schools than in the engineering schools. This finding reemphasizes the need to change the current university entrance exam for the commercial high school students. The inclusion of a speaking test in the university entrance exam is expected to bring about positive washback effects on English language teaching in the classroom (Taylor, 2005) since it can provide the students with more opportunities to speak English in the classroom. Only when the national exam is reformed can the high school educators tailor their curricula to the students' needs and pedagogical goals. Though this attempt is a great challenge, it is of paramount importance.

The finding that a great majority of subsets of communication obstacles in the vocational high school group were significantly correlated with each other indicates that the students in this type of high school face a wide range of speaking problems. Out of many pairs of variables, the correlations between interactional and affective domains and between linguistic and cognitive domains are of particular attention in the sense that both marked strong correlation coefficient values. In other words, the students who suffer more greatly from interactional problems tend to face greater trouble with affective problems, or the other way around, when speaking English. By the same token, the greater trouble the learners have with linguistic knowledge, the greater cognitive problems they tend to face, or the other way around, when speaking English. These strong relationships and positive correlations demonstrate that most of the communication obstacles in the vocational high school group are not mutually exclusive but related with each other, one problem interacting with another. They suggest that the vocational high school teachers have many challenging things to do to make their students' oral communication more effective. Specifically, they should encourage their students to free themselves from the negative aspects of peer pressure or teacher pressure, which will in turn help them to lower the defenses that prevent open interpersonal communication (Brown, 2007). Moreover, the teachers should also guide their students to enrich their linguistic repertoire ranging from grammar and vocabulary to colloquial language expressions. At the same time, they should train them to strengthen their cognitive functions such as better thinking skills and memory

skills which can facilitate effective communication. These efforts will eventually help the students to cope adequately with a number of interrelated speaking problems they encounter.

The present study is not without limitations. The sample was drawn from only one particular area, that is, Gyeongsang area. Thus, the results are not generalizable to the whole population of secondary school students. In addition, this study did not cover students from foreign language high schools and science high schools. Hence, an examination of a larger sample with more diverse school backgrounds is obviously worthy of further investigation in the future. Another limitation is that the questionnaire survey was conducted with the cooperation of secondary school English teachers. In future research, it would be more effective if the researcher himself administers the survey. In spite of these limitations, the findings of the study will help to capture what types of speaking problems Korean EFL secondary students face, which will in turn provide some insightful ideas of how to overcome their speaking problems. This attempt will eventually pave the way for the development of speaking skills and communicative competence in secondary school contexts.

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire (Korean Version)

이 설문지는 여러분이 교내에서나 교외에서 영어로 대화 나눌 때 영어 말하기에 어려움을 초래하는 요소가 무엇인지를 파악하기 위한 것이오니, 솔직한 답변을 부탁 드립니다.

1. (중학교□ / 인문계 고교□ / 실업계 고교□) 2. 성별: (남□ / 여□)
3. 학년: ____
4. 당신의 영어 말하기 수준은 어느 정도 된다고 생각하십니까?
   ① 낮은 수준이다 ② 중간 수준이다 ③ 높은 수준이다
5. 영어권 국가에서 체류한 경험이 있습니까? (예: ___ 아니오: ___)
   있다면, 몇 개월 동안 체류했습니까? _____ 개월
6. 당신은 요즘 영어 대화를 나누고 있습니까? (예: ___ 아니오: ___)
   있다면, 주당 대화 시간을 적어주세요. (주당 총시간: ___시간)

아래 각각의 요소들이 당신의 영어 말하기에 어려움을 초래하는 정도를 체크 표시해 주세요. (오른쪽에 다섯 개 중에 하나를 골라 체크 표시하면 됩니다.)

1.매우 그렇지 않다 2. 그렇지 않다 3. 보통이다
4. 그러하다 5. 매우 그러하다

1. 발음이 별로 좋지 않아서 영어로 말하기가 어렵다. 1 2 3 4 5
2. 단어 지식이 부족해서 메시지를 전달하기 어렵다. 1 2 3 4 5
3. 문법 지식이 부족해서 전달하고자 하는 문장을 만들기가 어렵다. 1 2 3 4 5
4. 영어회화에 사용되는 구어체 표현을 잘 몰라서 말하기가 어렵다. 1 2 3 4 5
5. 한국어와 영어가 어순이 달라서 말이 금방 나오지 않는다. 1 2 3 4 5
6. 원어민이 말한 것을 이해할 수 없어서 영어로 답하기가 어렵다. 1 2 3 4 5
7. 대화 주제가 다양하지 못해 무슨 말을 해야 할지 모르겠다. 1 2 3 4 5
8. 특정 주제에 대한 배경지식이 부족해서 깊이 얘기하지 못하겠다. 1 2 3 4 5
9. 친숙하지 못한 주제에 대해서는 피하거나 다른 주제로 바꾼다. 1 2 3 4 5
10. 영어권 문화에 대한 지식이 부족해서 대화에 한계를 느낀다. 1 2 3 4 5
11. 한국어로 먼저 생각하고 난 후 영어로 표현하니 시간이 많이 걸린다. 1 2 3 4 5
12. 영어로 대화 나눌 때 머릿속에 있는 지식을 금방 꺼내서 사용할 수가 없다. 1 2 3 4 5
13. 한국인과 원어민의 사고관 차이로 인해 영어 대화가 어렵다. 1 2 3 4 5
14. 말로 표현하기 전에 생각을 너무 많이 한다. 1 2 3 4 5
15. 실수할까봐 긴장되고 두려워서 영어로 말이 잘 안 나온다. 1 2 3 4 5
16. 영어 회화를 잘 하기 위한 동기가 부족하다. 1 2 3 4 5
17. 소심하고 수줍은 성격으로 인해 영어 대화가 어렵다. 1 2 3 4 5
18. 과감한 시도가 부족해서 영어 회화에 한계가 있다. 1 2 3 4 5
19. 영어 회화를 잘 하고 싶지만 자신감이 생기지 않는다. 1 2 3 4 5
20. 영어로 대화하려는 의지가 부족하여 영어 회화에 한계가 있다. 1 2 3 4 5
21. 남들이 나의 실력을 비웃을까봐 눈치가 보여서 하고 싶은 말을 못하겠다. 1 2 3 4 5
22. 영어회화에 뛰어난 사람이 있으면 위축되어 말이 잘 안 나온다. 1 2 3 4 5
23. 친구들이 나의 영어실력을 평가한다고 생각하니 영어회화가 잘 안 된다. 1 2 3 4 5
24. 한국인과는 대화가 잘 되지만 원어민과는 회화가 잘 안 된다. 1 2 3 4 5
25. 원어민이나 선생님이 나에게 말을 시킬까봐 신경이 쓰인다. 1 2 3 4 5
26. 영어로 대화 나눌 기회가 부족해서 영어 회화에 한계가 있다. 1 2 3 4 5
27. 영어로 대화 나눌 기회가 있어도 시간적 여유가 충분하지 않다. 1 2 3 4 5
28. 대화 나눌 원어민 강사가 부족해서 영어 대화가 어렵다. 1 2 3 4 5
29. 영어 회화 수업이 부족해서 말하기에 한계가 있다. 1 2 3 4 5
30. 대학입시 시험 위주의 교육방식이 영어회화에 저해요소가 된다. 1 2 3 4 5

▌위에 제시된 요소 외에 당신이 영어 말하기를 하는데 있어서 어려움을 초래하는 요소가 있다면 구체적으로 적어주세요.

APPENDIX B

Descriptive Statistics of Individual Items across the Three Student Groups

	Middle School		General high school		Vocational high School	
Item	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1. poor pronunciation	2.33	1.03	2.37	1.05	2.54	0.95
2. lack of vocabulary	3.06	1.06	3.24	1.17	3.36	1.07
3. lack of grammar	3.07	1.15	3.00	1.12	3.51	1.00
4. lack of colloquial language	3.06	1.02	3.15	1.20	3.53	0.97
5. word order	2.94	1.18	2.81	1.15	3.23	1.05
6. lack of listening skill	2.77	1.10	2.44	1.21	3.12	1.13
7. limited conversation topics	2.63	1.05	2.51	0.95	3.01	1.06
8. lack of background knowledge about a topic	2.65	1.07	2.51	1.02	3.23	1.05
9. unfamiliar topics	2.47	0.99	2.68	1.02	3.02	1.02
10. lack of English cultural Knowledge	2.96	1.22	2.65	1.20	3.13	1.08
11. thinking in Korean and speaking in English	3.00	1.16	2.99	1.17	3.54	0.96
12. difficulty in retrieving knowledge from memory	2.96	1.08	3.00	1.17	3.44	0.92
13. the differences in the way of thinking	2.63	1.10	2.23	1.10	2.64	1.00
14. thinking too much before Speaking	2.91	1.18	2.86	1.11	3.16	1.10
15. fear of making mistakes	2.76	1.27	3.00	1.25	3.14	1.18
16. lack of motivation	2.76	1.15	2.73	1.24	3.08	1.03
17. shyness	2.33	1.08	2.27	1.11	2.50	1.11
18. lack of risk-taking	2.66	1.13	2.61	1.13	2.97	1.10
19. lack of confidence	2.74	1.22	2.70	1.20	3.07	1.18
20. lack of willingness to communicate	2.64	1.19	2.43	1.24	2.85	1.10
21. fear of criticism	2.69	1.28	2.55	1.27	2.72	1.21
22. being overwhelmed by a better speaker	2.82	1.25	2.93	1.23	3.01	1.15
23. peer's evaluation	2.72	1.20	2.56	1.22	2.72	1.14
24. difficulty in speaking with English native speakers	2.74	1.10	2.31	0.99	2.77	1.10
25. teacher's pressure	2.61	1.23	2.54	1.28	2.83	1.17
26. lack of opportunities to	2.96	1.20	3.46	1.27	3.41	1.01

speak English						
27. lack of time for speaking English	2.61	1.14	3.13	1.22	3.04	1.05
28. lack of native speakers	2.47	1.16	3.07	1.42	2.97	1.18
29. lack of English speaking Classes	2.73	1.11	3.29	1.32	3.23	1.12
30. the university entrance exam	3.01	1.18	3.89	1.16	3.48	1.18

APPENDIX C

Descriptive Statistics of Individual Items in the Engineering and Commercial Groups

	Engineering		Commercial	
Item	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1. poor pronunciation	2.47	0.92	2.65	0.99
2. lack of vocabulary	3.38	1.09	3.35	1.05
3. lack of grammar	3.44	1.03	3.62	0.94
4. lack of colloquial language	3.52	1.01	3.54	0.91
5. word order	3.16	1.11	3.33	0.95
6. lack of listening skill	3.31	1.09	2.83	1.14
7. limited conversation topics	3.08	1.01	2.90	1.12
8. lack of background knowledge about a topic	3.24	1.09	3.22	0.99
9. unfamiliar topics	2.94	1.10	3.14	0.88
10. lack of English cultural knowledge	3.22	1.09	2.98	1.07
11. thinking in Korean and speaking in English	3.50	0.99	3.60	0.91
12. difficulty in retrieving knowledge from memory	3.45	0.96	3.43	0.87
13. the differences in the way of thinking	2.85	0.98	2.32	0.95
14. thinking too much before speaking	3.19	1.09	3.13	1.13
15. fear of making mistakes	3.22	1.22	3.02	1.11
16. lack of motivation	3.10	1.07	3.03	0.98
17. shyness	2.53	1.16	2.46	1.04
18. lack of risk-taking	2.92	1.12	3.06	1.06
19. lack of confidence	3.04	1.20	3.11	1.14
20. lack of willingness to communicate	2.84	1.12	2.86	1.08
21. fear of criticism or losing face	2.59	1.28	2.92	1.07
22. being overwhelmed by a better speaker	2.88	1.17	3.22	1.10
23. peer’s evaluation	2.63	1.10	2.87	1.20
24. difficulty in speaking with L2 speakers	2.80	1.07	2.71	1.16
25. teacher’s pressure	2.83	1.16	2.83	1.20
26. lack of opportunities to speak English	3.25	0.96	3.65	1.03
27. lack of time for speaking English	3.01	1.06	3.08	1.05

28. lack of native speakers	2.83	1.14	3.17	1.21
29. lack of English speaking classes	2.99	1.11	3.60	1.04
30. the university entrance exam	3.22	1.18	3.87	1.07

Examples in: English
Applicable Language: English
Applicable Level: Secondary

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