Research Article

Determinants of English Language Proficiency of Freshmen Education Students

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to identify the different student-related and teacher-related factors that influence the English language proficiency of freshmen students enrolled in the College of Education of a university in the Province of Bulacan for School Year 2018 – 2019. It looked into their level of proficiency as to gender, tracks and strands, type of school, honors received and language exposure. It also identified four (4) teacher-related factors like gender, educational attainment, teaching experiences and teaching styles. The descriptive correlational research method was employed. There were three (3) standardized instruments used in gathering the necessary data. Mean, Pearson r, and Multiple Regression Analysis were used to generate the findings of the study. The findings revealed that the freshmen education students' English language proficiency level is at Intermediate level. It also revealed that gender, track and strand, type of school, and honors received do not significantly influence the students' proficiency level. However, some language exposure indicators revealed an influence in varying extent. The study also revealed two (2) teacher-related factors are influential and these are teaching experience and teaching styles. Gender and educational attainment of the teachers were found correlated but not to a significant extent.

Keywords: *English Language Proficiency, Freshmen Students, Student-Related Factors, Teacher-Related Factors*

Background

Recent researches identified factors contributory to the students' English language proficiency. These researches suggested that among all school-related factors, the teacher factor is the most influential. John Dewey believes that it is the teachers' responsibility to lead students to 21st century learning as mentioned by Noddings (2007). Similarly, Valerio (2015) stated that teachers are expected to respond to any curriculum change as experts in order to keep teaching and learning dynamic and successful.

Curricular modifications and changes necessitate stronger teachers and higher-quality instruction that is relevant to current

requirements. The teachers are mandated to implement any curricular change due to their direct contact with the learners. Their interpretation and understanding of the desired knowledge and competencies are the ones transmitted to the students.

Therefore, the failure or success of the teaching and learning process depends largely on the teacher's competence. The recent change in the Philippine educational landscape divided educators on their opinions and viewpoints on the relevance of the ten-year basic education program of the Philippines in response to the administrative flagship of Benigno Aquino Jr.'s K-12 Education Program. Moreover, the CIA World Factbook (2016) mentioned that despite a high literacy rate of over 96.6%, the Philippines consistently underperforms in nationwide and international assessments.

According to the results of a recent language test conducted by IDP Education Pt. Ltd. Philippines, an accredited organization that administers the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) to Filipinos intending to work, study, or migrate overseas, has lost its status as Southeast Asia's top English-speaking country. The Philippines currently places only second to Malaysia in English proficiency in Asia and was not even included among the Top 60 countries with high English Proficiency according to Education First: World Leader in the International Education (2014) as cited by Magno (2016) in his report on the analysis of the K12 curriculum.

It is, therefore, alarming that there is a continuous reduction in English proficiency among Filipino graduates knowing that the Philippine economy is largely dependent on remittances from overseas workers; many of whom work in English-speaking countries. In addition, English proficiency has become a major qualification in landing a job whether local or international.

As such, college graduates need to demonstrate effective communication in oral and written English. Drawing on the current discourses and studies, it is interesting to note that if the goal of the K to 12 is the improvement of the nation's student achievement; then, the real solution is improving the quality of teachers because "students don't fail, teachers do" (Calderon, 2014).

Given the abovementioned issues and problems, this study explored the determinants of English language proficiency of first year Education students at a university in Bulacan for Academic Year 2018-2019.

Research Questions
The main concern of this research was to evaluate and ascertain the determinants of English language proficiency of Education students at the College of Education from Bulacan State University during the Academic Year 2018 - 2019. Specifically, this research sought answers to the following problems:

1. How can the determinants of English language proficiency of the first year education students at the College of Education of University A be described in terms of the following:
    1.1 Student-Related Factors;
        1.1.1 Gender;
        1.1.2 Track and Strand taken during Senior High School;
        1.1.3 Type of school graduated from;
        1.1.4 Honors received; and
        1.1.5 Language Exposure?
    1.2 Teacher-Related Factors;
        1.2.1 Gender;
        1.2.2 Educational Attainment;
        1.2.3 Teaching Experience; and
        1.2.4. Teaching Styles?
2. How can the English language proficiency of the students be described in terms of the following skills:
    a.   Grammar;
    b.   Identifying Errors;
    c.   Vocabulary; and
    d.   Reading Comprehension?
3. How do the following factors influence the English language proficiency of Education students?
    3.1 Student-Related Factors;
        3.1.1 Gender;
        3.1.2 Track and Strand taken during Senior High School;
        3.1.3 Type of school graduated from;
        3.1.4 Honors received; and
        3.1.5 Language Exposure?

4. What implications may be drawn from the findings of the study?

Methods
Research Design
The researcher used the quantitative research approach in presenting, analyzing and interpreting the different student-related and teacher-related factors that influence the English language proficiency of education students. The aim of the study was to explain or explore in-depth a unit of analysis in order to evaluate and ascertain if there is a relationship between two or more variables. Thus, this study utilized this research design to find out the significant correlation existed between all the different student and teacher related factors and the students' level of English language proficiency.

The descriptive method is concerned with the existing status of an event or problem, and the researcher explores the causes of this particular problem. Moreover, the correlation method aims to describe certain phenomena and ascertain the degree to which two or more variables are significantly related or correlated. The correlation measures the relationship using the correlation coefficients. This has reference to the mathematical way of indicating the extent of the relationship between variables according to Bernardez (2011). The primary data gathering tools in the study were the standardized tests and questionnaire.

Respondents of the Study
The respondents of the study were the freshmen education students of the College of Education of University A. The respondents were chosen through Random Sampling Method after computing the representative sample with the use of Slovin's Formula since it allowed the researcher to sample the population with a desired degree of accuracy. 282 students were chosen out of the 953 total population of the respondents. The respondents of this study were the 282 freshmen education students from the College of Education in University A. These students are currently enrolled in the different programs of the College of Education.

There are eleven (11) sections under the Bachelor of Secondary Education with specialization in Science, Math, English, Filipino, Social Studies and Values Education; two (2) sections under the Bachelor of Elementary Education; two (2) sections of Bachelor of Physical Education; three (3) sections of Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education with specialization in Industrial Arts, Information and Communications Technology, and Home Economics; three (3) sections of Bachelor of Technical-Vocational Teacher Education with specialization in Food Service Management, and Garments, Fashion and Design; and one (1) section of Bachelor of Early Childhood Education.

The twenty three (23) teacher-respondents are the English teachers handling the only English subject in the tertiary level which is Purposive Communication. These teachers were faculty members of the Department of English at the College of Arts and Letters.

Instrument of the Study
In line with the research questions in this investigation, three (3) research instruments were used. The instrument that was used to test the English language proficiency of the respondents is a Standardized English Language Proficiency Test that was prepared by Transparent Language and is available and used by all U.S. Government personnel, language schools and language programs via a program of the Department of Defense's Language Portal, Joint Language University. The same instrument was used by the Kalinga Apayao State University and Central Bicol State University of Agriculture to measure the English language proficiency of freshmen students taking up Education. Though standardized, Leyaley (2014) floated the test to ensure the reliability of the instrument to their second year education students. The reliability of two scores in the test re-test was computed using Pearson's r, which resulted in 0.812 indicating a high correlation which means that there is a very dependable relationship between two scores.

This research, also, made use of the English Language Exposure Survey adapted from Candilas (2016). This researcher-made questionnaire was subjected to a validity and reliability procedure. Results indicated that the Language Exposure The Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient for the formal factor's questionnaire was.847, while the Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient for the informal factor's Language Exposure Questionnaire was.827. This study used the Staffordshire Evaluation of Teaching Styles (SETS) tool survey to identify the teaching styles of the respondents using a 24-item Likert-type questionnaire that ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) to determine the teaching styles of the respondents (Wall, 2007). The survey tool's validity and reliability were excellent, with an overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.901.

Data Analysis

This study utilized the descriptive-correlational method of research which determined the proficiency level and the factors influencing the English language proficiency of the respondents.

The data retrieved was computer-processed using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS). Frequency and percentage were used to determine the occurrence of responses or conditions related to the English language proficiency of the respondents. The weighted mean was used to determine the meaning of responses along the variables identified in the study. Pearson's r and multiple regression were the statistical treatment used to analyze the data. The descriptions were adapted from Baeta et al (2012) in their study on English Language Proficiency of College Freshmen at Central Bicol State University of Agriculture.

Results and Discussion

Student-Related Factors. This section presents the different student-related factors such as gender, track and strand taken during senior high, type of school graduated from, honors received and language exposure.

Table 1. Student-Related Factors in terms of Gender

Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
Male	86	30.50
Female	196	69.50
Total	282	100.0

Table 1 illuminates the gender of the respondents, which is mostly female (196) respondents which is 69.5 % of the total number of respondents. On the other hand, the male population is composed of eighty-six (86) or 30.5% of the respondents.

Table 2. Student-Related Factors in terms of Track and Strand

Track and Strand	Frequency	Percentage
Academic – HUMSS	45	15.96
Academic – GAS	111	39.36
Academic – STEM	16	5.67
Academic – ABM	37	13.12
TVL	69	24.47
Sports	1	0.35
Arts & Designs	1	0.35
Old Curriculum	2	0.71
Total	282	100.00

Table 2 presents the Track and Strand that the respondents had taken during their Senior High School. The highest number of respondents was 111 or 39.36 % from the General Aca-

demic Strand, followed by 24.47% or 69 students who have taken the Technical-Vocational and Livelihood Strand. There are 45 students or 15.96% under Humanities and Social Sciences, 37 students or 13.12% under the Accountancy, Business and Management and one (1) respondent from the Sports, one (1) from the Arts and Design Track, and two (2) from the old curriculum.

Table 3. Student-Related Factors in terms of Type of School Graduated from

Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
Private	115	40.78
Public	167	59.22
Total	**282**	**100.0**

Table 3 reiterates that most of the freshmen education students were graduates of public schools with 167 or 59.22%, while there are only 115 or 40.78% who graduated from the private schools.

Table 4. Student-Related Factors in terms of Honors Received

Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
With Highest Honors	3	1.06
With High Honors	49	17.38
With Honors	171	60.64
None	59	20.92
Total	**282**	**100.0**

Based from Table 4, 79.08% of the 282 respondents received an honor during their K12 graduation. There are three (3) who received with Highest Honors award, forty-nine (49) or 17.38% with High Honors, and one hundred seventy-one (171) or 60.64% who graduated with Honors.

The Teacher-Related Factors

Table 5. Teacher-Related Factors in terms of Gender

Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
Male	6	26.09
Female	17	73.91
Total	**23**	**100.0**

Table 5 presents the gender of the teacher-respondents of the study. There are more female (17) faculty teaching English in the College of Education with only six (6) male faculty assigned in the college.

Table 6. Teacher-Related Factors in terms of Highest Educational Attainment

Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
Ph.D./Ed.D.	8	34.78
Master's	9	39.13
Bachelor's	6	26.09
Total	**23**	**100.0**

Table 6 shows the Educational Attainment of the teacher-respondents teaching at the College of Education. There were eight (8) respondents who had Doctoral degrees with five (5) of them major in the English Language and three (3) with Educational Management as their major.

Nine (9) of the respondents were Masters' degree holder and six (6) who were Bachelor's degree holders with units in Master's.

Table 7. Teacher-Related Factors in terms of Teaching Experience

Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
26 years above	9	39.13
21 – 25 years	2	8.70
16 – 20 years	3	13.04
11 – 15 years	2	8.70
06 – 10 years	4	17.39
01 – 05 years	3	13.04
Total	**23**	**100.0**

Table 7 presents the teaching experience of the teacher-respondents. There were more seasoned educators teaching in the College of Education with nine (9) of them having twenty-six (26) and above years of teaching experience, two (2) with 21 – 25 years of experience, three (3) with 16 – 20 years, two (2) with 11 – 15 years, four (4) with 6 – 10 years, and only three (3) below five (5) years teaching experience.

Table 8. *Teacher-Related Factors in terms of Teaching Styles*

Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
The Straight facts no nonsense teachers	4	17.39
The All-around flexible & adaptable teacher	14	60.87
The big conference teachers	0	0.00
The Official Curriculum teachers	3	13.04
The One-off teachers	1	4.35
The Student centered, sensitive teacher	1	4.35
Total	**23**	**100.0**

Table 8 presents the Teaching Styles as identified using the Staffordshire Evaluation of Teaching Styles tool. The table shows that the teachers' most common teaching style in the College of Education was the all-around flexible and adaptable teacher with fourteen (14) of them having the same style. This means that these teachers use a lot of different skills, teach both peers and juniors, and is very aware of the whole environment in relation to teaching and the learners. The straight facts no nonsense teacher followed the rank which means that these teachers like to teach the clear facts, with straight talking, concentrating on specific skills, and much prefer not to be involved with multi-professional teaching and learning. There are three (3) teachers who identified themselves as the official curriculum teachers which means they are very well prepared as a teacher, accredited, aware of and teaches to the formal curriculum and follows external targets for teaching. However, none (0) of the teacher-respondents identified themselves as the big conference teacher. This implies that standing up in front of a big audience and sitting in groups or one to one teaching is not common to teachers in the College of Education.

The English Language Proficiency of the Students
Table 9. The English Language Proficiency of Freshmen Education Students

	A	EA	I	EI	B	Xw	
Grammar	5	40	145	91	1	**2.85**	**I**
	(25)	(160)	(435)	(182)	(1)		
Identifying Errors	35	72	104	63	8	**2.26**	**EI**
	(175)	(288)	(312)	(126)	(8)		
Vocabulary	42	131	87	16	6	**3.66**	**EA**
	(210)	(524)	(261)	(32)	(6)		
Reading Comprehension	48	89	76	46	23	**3.33**	**I**
	(240)	(356)	(228)	(92)	(23)		
Weighted Mean						**3.03**	**I**

Table 9 shows the level of English Language Proficiency of freshmen students of the College of Education in Bulacan State University. As can be gleaned from the table, as a whole, the respondents are described to be *Intermediate* with the obtained weighted mean of 3.03. Students at the Intermediate level of language proficiency are able to understand and communicate academic content with more sophisticated academic vocabulary and varied verb tenses. They tend to use consistent grammar speaking and writing while making occasional errors. Thus, at the intermediate language level, English language learners greatly benefit from the explicit teaching and modeling of basic figurative language, common idioms, irregular verb tenses and the writing process (Leyaley, 2014). They are described *Intermediate* in Grammar and Reading Comprehension with their obtained means of 2.85 and 3.33 respectively. This implies that the students commit error in grammar but are able to write and speak in correct simple sentences and are just having a little problem in understanding texts comprehensively. They comprehend what they read but are limited to literal interpretation.

The respondents are described *Early Intermediate* in Identifying Errors in the sentence. It means that students are having problems identifying which part of the sentence has a grammar or vocabulary problem. Identifying errors include errors in grammar, correct usage of words or diction as well as rules in punctuation and capitalization. This could also mean that students will have problems in editing and proof reading of texts and will most likely have problems dealing with complicated sentence structure.

In a more positive look at the table, it presents an *Early Advance Level* of proficiency in the Vocabulary part of the test. Early advanced language students can comprehend and convey academic topics in more cognitively sophisticated ways. They can read and interpret literature because they have a larger vocabulary in their heads. They can also create longer, more sophisticated, and abstract sentences employing academic terminology and consistent grammatical structures. Early advanced language competence English language learners may be ready to be classed as fluent English proficient. The findings of the study somehow support the findings of Leyaley (2014) on the English Language Proficiency of Freshmen Students. She revealed a *Beginner* level of English language proficiency of freshmen education students which is not ideal for future teachers.

Table 10. *Student-Related Factors in terms of English Language Exposure*

Formal Language Exposure	Mean	Interpretation
1. Listening to class presentation	2.96	Great extent
2. Sharing ideas in English	2.49	moderate Extent
3. Giving oral presentation	2.63	Great extent
4. Talking to the teachers	2.48	moderate Extent
5. Writing reports and requirements	2.94	Great extent

Average	2.70	Great extent
Informal Language Exposure	**Mean**	**Interpretation**
1. Home	2.15	moderate Extent
2. Technology-mediated communication (e.g. social media, texting, email etc.)	2.73	Great extent
3. Reading materials like books, magazines, newspaper, etc.	2.83	Great extent
4. Watching TV programs/ movies	2.93	Great extent
5. Listening to radio programs or songs	2.88	Great extent
Average	2.71	Great extent

Table 10 shows the respondents' mean distribution of formal language exposure. Results reveal that the respondents had a great extent of formal language exposure. Highest among the indicators was listening to class presentation (2.96) followed by writing reports and requirements (2.94). The lowest among the formal language exposure indicator was talking to teachers (2.48).

The respondents' answers to the survey imply that they are exposed to the English language through the experiences inside the English classroom. This is corroborated by a study by Gamez (2015), which found that having a larger teacher-to-student word ratio, as well as exposure to high-quality classroom-based English that matches their possibilities for language exposure, increases English language development.   Table 10 also reveals the distribution of informal language exposure of the re-

spondents. As presented in the table, the respondents' informal language exposure was also at a great extent with 2.71 as the mean. This is true especially in watching TV programs and movies, as well as, listening to the radio and songs (2.88). Highest among the indicators was watching TV programs and movies (2.93) which supports the study done by Eustaquio (2015) when she claimed that informal language exposure like home, use of media and watching movies etc. showed a significant relationship to students' speaking abilities. The findings could also suggest that students were able to study and develop their English language abilities outside of the classroom. Hence, Ajileye as cited in Manuel (2014) supported these results by claiming that the amount of exposure to the target language in formal and informal situations influenced second language acquisition.

Table 11. Regression Analysis of Student-Related factors on English Language Proficiency

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**
(Constant)	3.227	20.6		0.157	0.879
Gender	7.707	9.544	0.392	0.808	0.438
Track and Strand taken	9.78	8.951	0.447	1.093	0.3
Type of school graduated	4.549	7.94	0.207	0.573	0.579
Honors Received	6.663	4.845	0.41	1.375	0.199
Language Exposure	10.658	8.219	0.43	1.297	0.224
R-squared = .311					
F-value = .902					
p-value = .516					
alpha = 0.05					

Summary of the regression analysis of students-related factors on English Language Proficiency in Table 11 revealed that the five predictor variables are correlated with English

language proficiency in varying extent. This is shown by the attained B coefficient which are all non-zero. Among the five predictor variables, all were found to be positively correlated.

These are Gender B = 7.71, Track and Strand taken B = 9.78, Type of School B = 4.55, Honors received B = 6.66 and Language Exposure B = 10.66 respectively with p-values that exceed the 0.05 alpha. Though insignificant, the B coefficient values signify that somehow track and strand, type of school, honors received may help improve the English language proficiency of students.

In addition, the obtained F-value of .902 is not found significant since the associated probability of .516 greatly exceeds 0.05 alpha. The results suggest that the different student-related factors of respondents are not substantial predictors of the English language proficiency of the education students of University A. Thus, the study *accepts* the null hypothesis which states that *student-related factors do not influence the English language proficiency of the students.*

The results of the present study corroborated those of Genc and Aydin (2011) and that of Omari (2016) when they found no statistical differences between gender, grades and type of school to the English test scores.

Table 12. Regression analysis of Teacher-related factors on English Language Proficiency

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	29.508	1.838		16.053	0.000
Gender	0.339	0.842	0.026	0.402	0.688
Highest Educational Attainment	1.114	0.721	0.099	1.545	0.123
Teaching Experience	1.275	0.392	0.243	3.255	0.001
Teaching Styles	1.229	0.268	0.344	4.579	0.000
R-squared = .077					
F-value = 5.488					
p-value = .000					
alpha = 0.05					

Examination of the regression analysis of teacher-related factors in Table 12 shows that the four predictor variables are correlated with English language proficiency in varying extent. This was shown by the non-zero B coefficient. Among the four predictor variables, all were found to be positively correlated. A closer look at the result shows that only two (2) were found to be significantly correlated with English language proficiency. These are teaching experience B = 1.28 P = 0.001 and teaching styles B = 1.23 P = 0.000. Gender and educational attainment correlated with English language proficiency but not to a significant extent.

The results suggest that gender and educational attainment are not substantial predictors of English language proficiency of the education students. However, teaching experience and teaching styles were found to be significant with a P-value of 0.000 and a B coefficient values that signify that in every year of teaching experience there is an increase in the English language proficiency of the students.

Thus, the researcher *rejects* the null hypothesis that states that *teacher-related factors do not influence the English language proficiency of the students.* The result of the study is supported by Mosha (2014) which suggest the importance of teaching experience in providing quality input to students that will help them improve their English language proficiency. In the same manner, according to Harmer (2007), language-teaching outcomes depend mainly on the use of teaching materials and teaching styles as presented by Phon (2017) which was supported by Wang (2013) when he stated that teaching methodology or styles is likely to have direct effects on learning behavior and teaching result. Mangada (2015) also noted that the teachers' personality, methods and styles significantly affect the students English language proficiency. Most interviewees shared that the method and style of the teacher affect the way

they understand the lesson and in turn results to confusion, specifically in grammar topics.

Implications Drawn from the Findings of the Study

The following were the implications drawn based on the findings of the study:

1. The understanding of the different factors that influence the English language proficiency of the students is crucial in identifying and devising different ways to help students improve their English language proficiency.
2. The knowledge of the different tracks and strands, as well as, the subjects to be taken during the Senior High School is perennial in students English language proficiency. Therefore, schools and educators should help students in identifying the right track and strand that will match their abilities.
3. The idea that honors and awards as well as the number of drop outs are the reflection of the school. It is equally important that we produce quality graduates who are proficient in all learning areas with honors or none.
4. Fostering an environment that provides enough language exposure whether formal and informal. Since life-long learning does not solely reside in the enclaves of a classroom but more on the expanse of the outside world, we must teach our students how to effectively communicate in a multicultural environment.
5. The influence of teaching style and teaching experience undeniably help students in improving the English language proficiency. Every learning institution must take into consideration the teaching experience of the teachers and help them develop teaching styles that will be beneficial to students.

Conclusion

In the light of the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. The English language proficiency of the freshmen education students of University A is described as Intermediate regardless of their gender, type of school, track and strand taken during Senior High School and honors received.
2. All the five (5) student-related factors do not significantly influence the English language proficiency of the students.
3. The different teacher-related factors, such as teaching styles and teaching experience influence proficiency better than any other factors. The gender and educational attainment of the teacher is not influential to students' English language proficiency.
4. Findings of the study point the need for schools to focus on the curricular offerings and improve the quality of English classes especially at the tertiary level. It is also important that both home and school create more opportunities for learners to practice the English language in meaningful contexts.

Recommendation

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are hereby offered:

1. That education students take additional English classes to ensure the quality of language input they will provide their students. The College of Education may consider remedial classes especially to students whose language proficiency is lower than Intermediate.
2. That Department of Education review the K-12 Program especially the grading system. As presented in the paper, 79% of the respondents graduated with honors but with Intermediate language proficiency. They should also look into the criteria in allowing students to take certain tracks and strands which should match students' ability.
3. That teachers create different teaching styles and methods to cater to the changing needs of the students. Leaning how to adapt to the students' needs is one key factors that might help students achieve their full potential.
4. That future researchers conduct investigations on other factors influential to students English language proficiency to improve the quality of English language teaching and learning.

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