

Factors Influencing the English Language Competency of Filipino University Students



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ABSTRACT: This study explores the factors influencing English competency among Filipino university students to develop effective strategies for improvement using Descriptive- Qualitative Design. Findings indicate that the factors that influenced the students' English competency are their commitment to improvement, aspirations to become future teachers, and engagement in hobbies; while the negative factors include cognitive processing difficulties, external determinants, and affective factors. To overcome the challenges in English competency, educators should foster a supportive learning environment, reduce anxiety by managing cognitive load, implement activities that build confidence, and strengthen students' self-belief. This holistic approach can enhance students' attitudes towards language learning and improve their English competency.

KEYWORDS: English language competency, factors, Filipino university students

I. INTRODUCTION

English competency is a critical skill for Filipino students in today's globalized world, especially for students entering higher education, because having the basic English language competence is a must for academic success, effective communication, job opportunities, personal development, and access to resources (Rao, 2019; Todorova and Todorova, 2018) including research papers, e-books, and academic journals, that are primarily written in English. Recent studies have shown that our rank in the English Proficiency Index or EPI have declined since 2018, but despite of our lower ranking, we still manage to rank second in English proficiency in East and Southeast Asia (Santos, et. al., 2022). However, majority of public SHS graduates, and most students who enter universities often lack the necessary English communicative skills to succeed academically and professionally (Manuel, 2022). Recognizing this gap, this study was conducted to determine the factors that are influencing the English competency of Filipino university students that can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the barriers and enablers of English language acquisition that can help develop more effective strategies and interventions to improve English competency among Filipino students.

II. FOCUS OF STUDY

The main objective of this study is to determine the factors that had influenced the English competency of Filipino university students.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

The Descriptive- Qualitative Research Design using an open- ended questionnaire was used to determine the factors that had influenced the English language competency of the students. The questionnaire had undergone face and content validity and was evaluated by language and professional education experts.

Twenty (20) participants who were enrolled for the Second Semester, School Year 2022- 2023 from the College of Education were randomly selected to answer the open- ended questionnaire. The responses have undergone initial coding using inductive approach, specifically the in vivo and values coding, after the initial coding, the data were thematically arranged, and analyzed.

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IV. KEY FINDINGS

The factors that have positively contribute to the English language competency of students are the students' commitment to improvement that shows their positive mindset and willingness to learn; their aspirations to be a future teacher is identified as a motivating factor for improving their English language skills and shows that the emphasis on English proficiency is connected to future professional roles, indicating a forward-looking perspective where language skills are seen as integral to career success, especially in the field of education (Gaytos, et. al., 2019; Lueg and Lueg, 2015; their engagement in hobbies for improvement like reading, watching movies, and listening to music to enhance language learning this suggests an awareness that exposure to written materials and media consumption is crucial for language skill development (Shi, 2017; Widharyanto, 2020).

It was also found out that the factors that have negatively contribute to the students' English language competency are difficulty in cognitive processing, specifically the students' lack of knowledge in English vocabulary, grammar rules, or other linguistic elements; difficulty in articulating thoughts, specifically in translating thoughts into well-constructed sentences and struggles with sentence construction, syntax, structure, and organization of ideas in constructing their sentences because of linguistic interference from their native language (Nakhalah, 2016; Sakarji, et. al., 2019; Leano, et. al., 2019) as they rely on familiar structures like Tagalog, which can hinder integration of English grammar rules and vocabulary.

Another factor that emerged are the external determinants that play a crucial role in shaping the process of English language learning beyond the confines of the classroom, specifically the absence of a mandatory requirement for English language usage within the school environment and their concern about the absence of a mandate reveals a desire for a comprehensive and practical approach to language learning; and limited opportunity to practice the English language and lack of exposure to English speaking environment and lack of opportunity to practice English in communicating had hindered their English language competency because without exposure to native speakers or English-speaking environments, students may struggle to develop their vocabulary naturally (Alzoubi, 2018; Ireme, et. al., 2023).

Affective factors such as English language learning anxiety, specifically their fear about how others will perceive them if they ever make mistake in speaking or writing in English, more so, it negatively affects the performance and language learning advancement; lack of self- confidence, especially in expressing themselves and delivering messages when reporting assigned tasks, becomes challenging; and lack of motivation that might contribute to challenges in language development, have affected their English language competency. Findings also revealed that fear of making mistakes and being corrected or negatively evaluated is a significant source of anxiety for the Filipino learners (Giray, et. al., 2022; Quijano, 2022), thus teachers should create a positive learning atmosphere and use different strategies or techniques to reduce the anxiety and increase the motivation of the students in English classes and eventually encourage them to use English with confidence.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The students have the mentioned positive factors that affected their English competency such as commitment to improvement, their aspirations to be a future teacher, and their engagement in hobbies for improvement that have influenced their English language competency, they are concurrently having difficulty in cognitive processing, English language learning anxiety, and lack of self- confidence. Thus, educators should employ strategies to help these students such as promoting a supportive learning environment, helping students manage cognitive load effectively to alleviate anxiety, implementing confidence-building activities, such as peer collaboration, constructive feedback, and success-oriented tasks, and enhancing students' belief in their abilities for them to foster a more positive attitude towards language learning.

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