
Students' Proficiency in Using Filipino Language in Academic Communication

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ABSTRACT: The lack of proficiency using a language results in low grades for some students, and quitting the desire to learn the language makes them less confident to ask their teachers for help when they need it. The purpose of this study is to determine the level of proficiency of students in using the Filipino language in academic communication, particularly among Senior High School students at UM Digos College. This study is a quantitative, non-experimental descriptive research design involving n=300 Senior High School students as respondents. Stratified Random sampling and statistical tools such as Frequency, Mean, Post hoc test, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were utilized. Based on the findings, the proficiency of students in using the Filipino language in academic communication is high, indicating frequent recognition. Therefore, the researchers suggest conducting similar studies focused on performance-based assessments to better identify the proficiency of students in using the Filipino language which may yield new results.

KEYWORDS: proficiency, communication, Filipino language, descriptive Research Philippines

INTRODUCTION

The lack of proficiency among students in using a language has an impact on their academic performance (Sayson, Opancia, & Macasojot, 2020). Students with low proficiency in using a language and receiving low grades often end up discontinuing learning the language and hesitating to seek help from their teachers (Fukada, 2019). Furthermore, the lack of proficiency in the correct use of words and having limited vocabulary is an issue concerning spoken English (Sangaji & Sehan, 2019). It has also been found that low proficiency in language use during communication among students leads to anxiety (Xing & Bolden, 2019). In addition, based on the findings of Sheng and Yu (2018), low proficiency in language use among students has a negative impact on their cognitive and behavioral engagement in written corrective feedback, leading to imbalances in three sub-dimensions of engagement.

In other studies conducted in the Philippines by Somblingo and Ricohermoso (2019), they found that the proficiency level of students in using their national language is not yet well-established. Addressing the challenges students face in language learning, Labrador, Cinco, Constantino, et al. (2017) stated that the current state of the Filipino language in the new generation is decreasing over time, with students also losing interest. Bughao, Toyhacao, Tilaon, et al. (2017) emphasized that instead of using it, students tend to neglect the Filipino language and use other languages over their own. In a study conducted by Smith, as discussed by Meligrito (2022), it is stated that teaching lessons using the students' native language significantly contributes to their cognitive understanding, learning, and especially their academic performance. Similarly, in a study conducted in the Philippines, it was identified that using the native language improves the proficiency of students in their academic performance and actively engaging in class discussions with confidence (Trujillo, 2020). Moreover, according to Panmei and Waluyo (2021), the improvement in proficiency in language use among students leads to higher grades. This is supported by Sahragard, (2009), as mentioned in the study by Rafiu and Nwalo (2016), indicating that students with excellent language skills are more proficient in using language and ultimately achieve higher grades. Therefore, language proficiency and communication skills are regarded as crucial aspects in the development and establishment of cross-cultural connections (Rao, 2019).

This study is anchored in Jim Cummins' (1980) Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) theory. CALP refers to proficiency in using language in academic contexts such as reading, writing, and communication. Students with high language proficiency demonstrate high academic performance.

However, most studies tend to focus on proficiency in the English language and often overlook the significance of the Filipino language in academic contexts. Furthermore, there is a deficiency in studies describing the factors that affect the development of students' proficiency in using the Filipino language in academic communication. It is a reality that speaking in the Filipino language is easier for students who come from regions where Tagalog is the primary language; conversely, this is the

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opposite for many students from the Visayas and Mindanao regions (Tana, 2021), especially in Davao del Sur, particularly among Senior High School students studying at UM Digos College. Hence, this study was conducted to determine the proficiency levels of each student in various strands of using the Filipino language in academic communication. While there have been some assessments regarding the proficiency of students in using the Filipino language in academic communication, there remains a lack of in-depth analysis concerning the factors that may affect their readiness and language skills. Some aspects influence language proficiency that have not yet been thoroughly examined and may have implications for the usage and development of the Filipino language. Furthermore, it is crucial to conduct a comprehensive analysis to identify potential barriers or weaknesses in the proficiency of students in using the Filipino language in their academic communication. Additionally, this research aims to open the door for a deeper understanding and possible solutions to issues related to the Filipino language in the field of education and communication. Therefore, this study focuses on the Filipino language, particularly among indigenous students at UM Digos College.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to identify the proficiency of students in using the Filipino language in communication. Additionally, this research seeks to accomplish the following:

1. To determine the profile of the respondents based on:
 - 1.1 Age;
 - 1.2 Gender; and
 - 1.3 Strand.
2. To evaluate the proficiency levels of students in using the Filipino language in academic communication based on:
 - 2.1 Language factors;
 - 2.2 Cultural factors; and
 - 2.3 Educational factors.
3. To determine the proficiency levels in using the Filipino language in academic communication according to the strand.

METHOD

Respondents

This study involved students in the 11th and 12th grades of UM Digos College – Senior High School for the academic year 2022-2023 as the primary respondents. In total, the research will include three hundred (n=300) students. Additionally, the study was conducted at UM Digos College, Brgy. Zone II, Roxas Extension, Digos City, Davao del Sur. In determining the sample size of the participants in this study, Stratified Random Sampling was utilized, selecting students from each strand. The criteria for this study also emphasized the inclusion of student profiles such as name, age, gender, and strand.

Instrument

The questionnaire used to gather data is an adapted version from the research conducted by Misiran et al. (2018) titled "Exploring Factors That Affect English Proficiency Level among University Students: A Case Study in Universiti Utara Malaysia." It consists of forty-six (46) questions, with twenty-one (21) focusing on language factors, twelve (12) on cultural factors, and thirteen (13) on educational factors. To better understand their responses, a guide for describing the levels derived from the data is prepared, utilizing scaling and mean ranges, which will be explained in the following tables.

Range of Means	Descriptive Level	Interpretation
4.20-5.00	Very High	Indicates that the condition related to the level of proficiency in speaking is always noticed.
3.40-4.19	High	Indicates that the condition related to the level of proficiency in speaking is often noticed.
2.60-3.39	Moderate	Indicates that the condition related to the level of proficiency in speaking is sometimes noticed.
1.80-2.59	Low	Indicates that the condition related to the level of proficiency in speaking is rarely noticed.
1.00-1.79	Very Low	Indicates that the condition related to the level of proficiency in speaking is not noticed.

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Design And Procedure

This research utilized a non-experimental quantitative descriptive research design. The design of descriptive research aims to systematically gather information to describe a phenomenon, situation, or population (Reichheld, 2021). The said design is appropriate for this study because it simply intends to determine the level of proficiency of students in academic communication based on three factors.

In gathering data for the study, the researchers first determined the validity and reliability of the questionnaire used. The adapted questionnaire underwent pilot testing to determine the Cronbach Alpha value. Here, it will be determined if the questionnaire is effective and reliable. Once it is established that the questionnaire is valid and ready for actual research, the researchers will commence the survey. They will draft an official letter addressed to the administration of UM Digos College – Senior High School seeking permission to conduct a survey among selected students in the said department. Following the mentioned sampling technique, the researchers will administer the questionnaire to the identified sample size. The collected papers will be gathered in preparation for data encoding and analysis.

To obtain accurate and reliable results, the following statistical tools are utilized. Frequency is employed to determine the demographics of the respondents based on strand, gender, and grade level. The Post hoc test is used to measure the proficiency level of students in using the Filipino language in academic communication for each strand. The Mean is employed to identify the proficiency level of students in using the Filipino language in academic communication based on three factors: language factor, cultural factor, and educational factor. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is then used to compare the proficiency of students in using the Filipino language in academic communication based on the three factors, as outlined in the proposal.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers conducted a thorough review of ethical standards for conducting research at the University of Mindanao Digos College, particularly in managing the population and handling non-restricted data, based on the evaluation of proposals and standards in standardization, such as:

Voluntary Participation: It was ensured that the selected students voluntarily participated by freely responding to the questionnaire. Students were neither coerced nor threatened with punishment for inadequately answering the questions.

Privacy Act Confidentiality: The researchers guaranteed the confidentiality of the personal information of the study participants. The privacy of the respondents was maintained throughout the research process.

Informed Consent Process: The survey, conducted through questionnaire responses, underwent the process of obtaining consent from the school head of the involved students. Permission was sought before proceeding with the survey.

Assent Form (Minor Respondent): The researchers clarified the purpose of the current research to the minor respondents. This form was read and explained to the respondents, who were allowed to voluntarily sign to signify their agreement. They were also provided with copies of the agreed terms, duly signed by them.

Risk: Respondents in this study were never exposed to hazardous situations such as physical, psychological, and socio-economic aspects.

Data Collection: Selection and consideration were made, with written permissions obtained to provide adequate responses through the data collection method. The study was conducted using a Survey Questionnaire through personal interaction, with accompanying consent requested.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Respondents

The table presented in Table 1 shows that there are more respondents in the age range of 16-17, followed by those in the 18-19 age group, and a lower number of respondents in the 20 and above age group. This indicates that there are more respondents in Grade 11 compared to Grade 12 among the students who participated in the survey for this research. The number of respondents in the 16-17 age range is 81.0%, which is a high proportion, while the number in the following 18-19 age group is 16.3%, representing a moderate count. The age group 20 and above obtained 1.7%, indicating a low count.

Illustrates the characteristics of two hundred and ninety-nine (299) Senior High School students who responded to the survey. It can be observed in the table that there are more female respondents compared to LGBTQIA and male respondents. The number of female respondents is one hundred and eighty (180), constituting 60.0% or a higher percentage. This is followed by the number of male respondents, totaling one hundred and one (101), which represents 33.7% or a substantial count. Meanwhile, the number of LGBTQIA respondents is eighteen (18), comprising only 6.0% or a lower percentage.

There are five groups of strands among the 299 Senior High School students who participated in the survey. It can be seen in the table that the HUMSS strand has the highest count, obtaining 47.0% or a higher percentage. Following this is the STEM

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strand, which garnered 25.7% or a substantial count. The ABM strand comes next, with 14.3% or a significant count. On the other hand, the TVL strand obtained 8.7% or a lower count, while the GAS strand got 4.3% or a lower count.

Table 1. Demographic profile of SHS students

Demographic Profile	f	%
Age		
16-17	245	81.0%
18-19	49	16.3%
20 above	5	1.7%
Gender		
Babae	180	60.4%
LGBTQIA	18	6.0%
Lalaki	101	33.7%
Strand		
ABM	43	14.3%
GAS	13	4.3%
HUMSS	141	47.0%
STEM	76	25.7%
TVL	26	8.7%
Overall	299	100%

The Level of Students' Proficiency in Using the Filipino Language in Academic Communication

Table 2 presents the data on the proficiency of students in using the Filipino language in academic communication, indicating an overall mean score where the proficiency of students in using the Filipino language in communication was obtained ($\bar{x} = 3.62$; $SD = 0.578$). This suggests that the condition related to the proficiency of students in using the Filipino language in communication is often observed. The mentioned overall mean score is a result of the collected data provided by the respondents for each item on the proficiency of students in using the Filipino language in academic communication, which is frequently noticed.

This result aligns with a study conducted by Racca and Lasaten (2016), where it was discovered that most eighth-grade students at the Philippine Science High School in Northern Luzon with high proficiency in using the English language also exhibited high academic performance. Additionally, the analysis of the data showed that when students have a clear understanding of their multiple intelligences profile, their motivation to improve their language proficiency is enhanced (Madkour and Mohamed, 2016).

Table 2. Proficiency Level of Students in Using the Filipino Language in Academic Communication

Indicators	Mean	SD
Language Factor	3.87	0.619
Culture Factor	3.57	0.683
Education Factor	3.43	0.675
Overall	3.62	0.578

It was also stated in a study presenting results that students with positive motivation exhibit higher proficiency in learning a second language compared to those without positive motivation, highlighting the importance of motivation in second language learning in the present time (Ai, Pan, & Zhong, 2021). However, based on the findings of Heidrich and Kraemer (2018), several factors may affect language proficiency: students studying a language for professional purposes and those studying in another country show higher levels of language proficiency. It was emphasized that students learning a language solely to meet a requirement may have lower levels of language proficiency.

Language Factors. Described in Table 2 that the first language factor indicator obtained a high proficiency level of students in using the Filipino language in academic communication ($\bar{x}=3.87$; $SD=0.619$). This suggests that language factors are often noticed. This implies that Senior High School students exhibit language factors that enable them to speak using the Filipino language.

The research of Smith (2023) revealed that how exposed a student is to a language significantly impacts language learning. As language acquisition progresses, it is necessary to learn it based on what is heard and read. Through this, students acquire new words and grammatical structures, enhancing their language knowledge. This is key to improving language proficiency, explaining why students who learn more tend to become proficient speakers. Thus, when a child understands the importance of understanding

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a language and sees how it directly benefits their life, students learn more quickly. Contextually, a curriculum-based thematic approach also aids students in becoming more enthusiastic about learning the language. When students are interested in language learning and see its meaningful connection to their lives, they begin to use it, helping them learn it faster (Miller, 2016).

Cultural Factors. Table 2 shows that the second language factor indicator, Cultural Factors, obtained a high level of proficiency of students in using the Filipino language in academic communication ($\bar{x}=3.67$; $SD= 0.683$). This indicates that Cultural Factors are often noticed. It means that the Senior High School students of UM Digos exhibit proficiency in using the Filipino language in academic communication.

In a study conducted by Lou, Ren, and Zhang (2020), the study of culture and language are inseparable and interconnected. Culture contributes to our language learning and can strengthen expression and proficiency. The study by Bautista, Cunanan, Fernando, et al (2019) identified that cultural factors significantly affect the proficiency of students in using the Filipino language. This may be due to the language culture of the country, where Filipinos have various dialects and bilingualism is used within schools, leading to confusion among Filipinos about their language. This has led to an evolution of the national language. Additionally, the study by Poonam, Shamim, Priya, et al. (2023) found that beliefs in culture, cultural values, norms, and practices affect students' learning styles, motivation, and language use. Cultural factors impact various aspects of language learning, including vocabulary, pronunciation, pragmatics, and intercultural communication competence.

Education Factors. Table 2 presents the third indicator, Education Factors, which obtained a high level of proficiency in using the Filipino language in academic communication ($\bar{x}=3.43$; $SD=0.675$). This suggests that the condition related to the proficiency of students in using the Filipino language in academic communication is often observed. This means that Senior High School students at the University of Mindanao Digos College are proficient in using the Filipino language within the classroom.

In the study by Sinaga and Oktaviana (2020) on developing competent students in language learning, especially in communication, teachers should be prepared to develop effective plans in the language teaching process. This can take the form of strategies that inspire students to learn. Furthermore, in teaching students, teachers should be more creative in encouraging student motivation in speaking through the use of attractive media in teaching, including physical activities, as students typically have a short attention span.

Moreover, it has been stated in educational research that instructional methods within the classroom show four language learning skills that enhance students' proficiency in language use. These skills include listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The findings from this study indicate that online training is directly beneficial in improving these four language learning skills, as well as fostering autonomous learning and student motivation (Banditvilai 2016). However, Sardana, Rathore, and Dhurina (2022) emphasized that research on language and learning in the classroom suggests a strong correlation between languages in teaching and interactive, participatory, or learner-centered methods within the classroom. They further asserted that interactive training can facilitate more effective communication and interaction between teachers and students. The participatory approach values active student participation in their learning, while the learner-centered approach focuses on the needs and abilities of each student.

Levels of Proficiency in Using the Filipino Language in Academic Communication According to Strand

Table 3 illustrates the Levels of Proficiency of students in using the Filipino language in academic communication based on the Strand. Based on the results, there is generally no significant difference in the proficiency levels of using the Filipino language in academic communication when analyzed according to the strand with an 'Overall' ($F(4, 294) = 1.659, p = 0.160$). From the obtained results, it became apparent that there is no meaningful difference because this value is higher than the 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that there is no significant difference due to insufficient evidence to support the influence of factors in each strand.

Table 3. Students' Proficiency in Using the Filipino Language in Academic Communication According to Strand

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	f	Sig.
Language Factor	Between Groups	1.956	4	.489	1.281	.277
	Within Groups	112.203	294	.382		
	Total	114.159	298			
Culture Factor	Between Groups	3.518	4	.879	1.901	.109
	Within Groups	135.382	294	.460		

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	Total	138.900		298		
Education Factor	Between Groups	2.62	4	.673	1.486	.208
	Within Groups	133.138	294	.453		
	Total	135.830		298		
Overall	Between Groups	2.195	4	.549	1.659	.160
	Within Groups	97.274	294	.331		
	Total	99.469		298		

Based on the results of the study conducted by Macado and Diano (2021), show that there is no significant difference in language proficiency among students from the five (5) strands. It also suggests that STEM students excel in developing their academic literacy, alternative comprehension, and adequate framing of theories and concepts when facing various variations of linguistic skills. On the other hand, there is another study that presented that STEM students have a significant correlation between their language proficiency and academic performance (Galang, 2022). Additionally, research revealed a meaningful difference among factors (Azarcon & Zabala, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, this research indicates that Senior High School students at UM Digos exhibit a high level of proficiency when using the Filipino language in academic communication. Furthermore, the results from the data analysis described in this research show that among the five strands in Senior High School included in the survey, namely HUMSS, STEM, ABM, TVL, and GAS, there are significant differences in the use of the Filipino language among students. In the final analysis, this study is grounded in Jim Cummins' Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) theory (1980), as the students' elevated proficiency in using the Filipino language signifies an improvement in their academics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The institution can use the obtained research results as a basis to initiate further investigation aimed at thoroughly examining students' confidence in speaking Filipino in academic communication. This can lead to the development of meaningful activities and various types of texts to achieve the highest level of language proficiency. Researchers encourage students, teachers, and staff to consistently use the Filipino language both inside and outside the school. This would serve as a means to sustain a high level of proficiency in their conversational skills in Filipino.

The researchers also suggest, especially to language institutions and organizations, to support studies aligned with their goals and projects related to our languages. This is to deepen the proper use of the Filipino language in various situations, whether within or outside the school.

Furthermore, the researchers recommend to teachers the organization of activities focused on academic communication to further enhance students' speaking skills using the Filipino language. Such initiatives can assist teachers in closely identifying students' readiness for precise and formal language use, particularly in communication.

It is also crucial to implement a program emphasizing the importance of the Filipino language in students' learning. Finally, this study can serve as a benchmark for similar research or encourage the creation of performance-based research to identify students' proficiency in using the Filipino language and potentially yield new insights.

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