

STUDENTS' LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to determine the students' language proficiency in English classes, specifically to find out a significant pre-post difference in their proficiency level as well as the contributory factors affecting performance as perceived by teachers and the students. A lesson guide was designed to provide communication practice in the four macro-skills needed in different work settings.

Six intact English Plus classes were the respondents of the study. A quasi-experimental pre-test post-test group design was used. Two instruments were utilized in the study. A Departmental Integrative Achievement Test was adapted from dela Cruz's study while the questionnaire for the teachers was adapted and modified from Artiaga's study and the questionnaire for the students was adapted from Angco's study.

The findings showed that the freshman students' language proficiency level in listening, speaking, reading, and writing both in the pre-test and post-test was below average. Among the four competencies, the students' listening proficiency level showed no significant improvement. The contributory factors affecting performance as perceived by the teachers and the students were learning improvement; teaching performance; teachers' family problems; and absenteeism; financial and health problems; and lack of facilities and incentives. Students' motivation and attitude affected their performance exemplifying favorable attitude towards English as a second language. In addition, class schedule and school facilities also affected their performance in English classes.

Keywords- attitude, English Plus, English proficiency level, motivation, teaching performance

I. INTRODUCTION

English as the language of the global community has found a prominent place in the lives of the people. To the students, learning the language for effective and efficient communication has been considered an imperative for school learning, where they use it to learn, how to learn and...” to foster a critical understanding and application of how they give expression to their experiences in the world” (Tejero, 2008).

In this study, the researcher is going to find out if Refresher English (English Plus) has really been effective to remedy the low English proficiency of the students.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study primarily determined the language proficiency of the students in English

Plus in the University of Eastern Philippines (UEP) Main Campus.

Specifically, it sought to:

1. find out the English proficiency level of the students before and after taking English Plus;
2. determine the significant pre-post difference in the students' language proficiency; and
3. enumerate the contributory factors affecting performance as perceived by teachers and the students.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted at the main campus of the University of Eastern Philippines (UEP) Main Campus, formerly known as Catarman Farm School, later converted to a college, the Samar Institute of Technology and finally to a state university. Six classes (intact classes) of freshman

students with different degree programs and six professors were the respondents of the

It made use of a quasi-experimental pre-test post-test group design which involved the use of intact groups in an experiment rather than assigning subjects at random to experimental treatments. The comparison was not based in random assignment but on the pre-existing or pre-selected. To analyze and interpret the data, descriptive statistics was used. In determining the English proficiency level of the students before and after the English Plus, the z-test was used. The t-test of correlated means was used to find out the significant mean in determining the pre-post gain of the students' English proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. While on the contributory factors affecting performance as perceived by the teachers, the weighted mean was applied.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Students' Language Proficiency level in Listening, Speaking, Reading, and

Competencies	Scoring Points	h.m	a.m	SD	z-test value	Description
Listening	20	10	6.29	2.51	17.73	BA
Speaking	18	9	6.26	2.34	14.05	BA
Reading	125	62.5	39.43	9.28	29.83	BA
Writing	20	10	5.37	2.73	20.35	BA
TOTAL	183	91.5	57.35	4.22	97.10	BA

Writing before English Plus

The four competencies covered 50 percent of the total test items. In listening competence, the students obtained a mean of 6.29 with a standard deviation of 2.51 and the computed z-test of 17.73. The students' **listening competence** was *below average*. Their lack of exposure was not enough to ensure that they develop the ability to listen and understand perhaps due to situational factors. It suggests for enhancement exercises or activities where the communicative purpose is practical, rather than simple interest or curiosity such as activities which involve learners in listening with a specific purpose

study.

that is based on the need to produce some sort of response to the spoken text.

For **speaking competence**, the students were expected to obtain a mean of 9.00 but they got a mean of 6.26 with a standard deviation of 2.34. The computed z-test value of 14.05 was greater than the tabular value of 1.96. The results of the direct and semi-direct oral tests showed that the students were hesitant to speak English during group discussion and individual interaction which made their performance at *below average* level. They showed nervousness when they took the speaking test. They could hardly communicate simple sentences orally or something they ought to say. This contradicted the idea of Ulit that to be competent users of language, students need to be aware of its functions and they should develop skills in using it for difficult purposes.

In the **reading competence**, the students obtained an assumed mean of 39.43 with the standard deviation of 9.28 which is

lower than the expected mean of 62.5. The computed z-value of

29.83 is higher than the tabular value of 1.96. It can be inferred that their reading competence was *below average*. Majority of the respondents found the test difficult to comprehend specifically in the cloze test. Rubin as cited by Arandia, declared that the more intelligent the individual is, the more able as he comprehends.

The last competence tested was **writing**. In this test, the assumed mean was 5.37 and the standard deviation is 2.73 with

the computed z-value of 20.35 which was higher than the tabular value of 1.96. Thus, there was a significant difference of the two means. The students' performance was *below average*. They were unable to re-arrange the correct sequence of sentences in a paragraph and unable to write the correct conventions of letting writing. Caharop studied on a survey of difficulties in technical writing of freshman students also found that her respondents could not write a single correct sentence, an indication that they were not adequately equipped for college writing tasks and their level of English proficiency was not within the level necessary to cope with college students.

The Students' Language Proficiency level in Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing after English Plus

With the same test given to the same students, the students' lack of mastery of the four language competencies resulted in a

Competencies	Scoring Points	h.m	a.m	SD	z-test value	Description
Listening	20	10	6.19	2.35	19.46	BA
Speaking	18	9	8.13	2.36	4.43	BA
Reading	125	62.5	41.78	10.95	22.71	BA
Writing	20	10	7.47	2.77	11.12	BA
TOTAL	183	91.5	63.57	4.61	92.70	BA

below level

average of performance. The findings meant that their English proficiency had not been well-developed when they were in the elementary and secondary education. Moreover, the respondents were not adequately equipped to perform tasks relevant to their college studies such as listening to passages or selections, reading longer paragraphs, writing compositions and using the language in any communicative situation. The students got a mean of 6.19 in the listening test after the English Plus was taught. The computed z-test of 19.46 was considered significant because it was greater than the tabular value of 1.96. The *post-test result in listening* was *lower* than the pre-test result. Students' less exposure in the two sets of listening tests proved that there was no active involvement/focus which resulted to their low

results even though they had already taken the same test in the pre-test. Another reason that may have caused their low performance was the inability to answer all the items in sets A and B. Some answered all items yet they got very low scores. They failed to get a passing score in the listening cloze and multiple choice listening tests. Teachers should come up with effective and interesting teaching strategies/techniques that will provide opportunities for improving listening skills. Olshtain remarked that those students from less advantaged background have difficulty acquiring the language competence necessary to cope with their school works.

In **speaking competence**, the mean of 8.13 in the post-test increased with a standard deviation of 2.36. The computed z-test of 4.43 was greater than the tabular value of 1.96. The exercises/drills introduced during the class interaction as well as the lessons taught were found effective and the students indeed made a

little improvement. Students would have greater chances to improve their

communicative skills if they have exerted more effort in using the language for communication of meanings.

In **reading competence**, the mean of 41.78 in the post-test increased with a standard deviation of 10.95. The computed z-test of 22.71 was greater than the tabular value of 1.96 thus there was significance in the difference of the means. Of the one hundred twenty-five (125) reading test, the students' performance was higher than the pre-test result. It showed that they developed a positive attitude and were motivated to take the English course seriously.

In totality, their post-test proficiency level in listening, speaking, reading, and

writing was *below average*. There was a little improvement in their performance after the lessons were taught or introduced.

The Pre-Post Difference in the Students' Language Proficiency or Pre-Post Test Performance in Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing

Competencies	Scoring Points	X Pre	X Post	Mean Difference	t-computed value	Table value at .05
Listening	20	6.29	6.19	-0.1	-0.36	1.96
Speaking	18	6.26	8.13	1.87	8.39	1.96
Reading	125	39.43	41.78	2.35	3.71	1.96
Writing	20	5.37	7.47	2.1	8.00	1.96
TOTAL	183	57.35	63.57	6.22	10.18	1.96

The test on **listening competence** had a mean of -0.1. The computed tabular value was -0.36 which was less than the tabular value of 1.96. A considerable decrease and no improvement was noted. The students did not reach the 50% mastery level of performance. Their performance in the listening test was affected by external factors such as teaching methodologies, school environment, home and family problems, and personal motives. Students were not focused due to linguistic signals such as noise or inattention which contributed to their low performance. However, the students appeared to have improved in speaking, reading, as well as in writing competencies.

This means that there was an improvement in their proficiency level which could be attributed to the exercises and tests used in English Plus. The computed tabular value of 8.39 was higher than the tabular value of 1.96 at .05 level of significance. There was a significant pre-post difference with a mean gain of 1.87. This meant that the respondents performed better in the direct and semi-direct oral tests. The results showed that they had developed how to communicate and interpret the message based on the pictures given. Littlewood stressed that communicative activity provides opportunities for positive personal relationship to develop among learners and between learners and teachers.

Significant differences in **reading** and writing tests were also noted among the respondents. The reading test showed a mean difference of 2.35 with a 3.71 computed value which is greater than the tabular value of 1.96. This confirmed the study of Balanon which found that her respondents performed better in logical organization, selecting an appropriate continuation, and letter writing. It means that

after the students' exposure in the different types

reading test in English Plus, they learned whereto focus the various types of reading skills that they really need to improve. At this point, teachers need to introduce more meaningful tasks to develop the students' reading skills development.

The **writing test** had a mean gain of 2.1 in the pre-test and the post-test. The computed tabular value of 8.00 was greater than the tabular value of 1.96. Their exposure to the three sub-tests of the writing test had improved. The writing test in English Plus had a positive effect on the students' proficiency level. The knowledge of the rules of grammar helps them construct simple sentences and develops them into a simple paragraph.

Longcop in her study on narrative writing concluded that in order to produce a well-written test in the second language, a writer must have an adequate level of proficiency in the target language. The findings implied that students' previous education had provided them with inadequate language skills that made them unable to cope with college tasks.

In totality, the table showed a computed mean gain of 6.22. The computed tabular value which is 10.18 was greater than the tabular value of 1.96. The total mean gain

was significant. Although the students were in below average category, both in the pre-test and the post-test, the need of improving the teaching of English is an open door to students' progress in English proficiency. Their lack of proficiency in English is not a deterrent to progress.

Contributory Factors Affecting Performance as Perceived by the Teachers

The contributory factors affecting performance as perceived by the six college teachers handling English Plus consist of personality profile, teaching performance, and learning environment.

On the **personality profile**, lack of trainings/seminars was considered serious among the teacher respondents; lack of teaching experience was *not serious* and being young or too old to teach was not a problem.

The **teaching performance** of English teachers in terms of limited teaching devices, poor methodology, lack of arts in motivation, and lack of preparation in teaching techniques were found *serious* and the causes of students' low performance in English. This meant that teachers must utilize current and more interesting appropriate teaching devices to ensure positive and active participants in English classes.

Learning environment was the first highest ranked contributory factor to students' performance. The first two items identified as *very serious* problems were unnecessary noise in the classroom and no permanent classroom. The classroom is the best arena which will facilitate maximum learning. Both teachers and students prefer to have an atmosphere conducive to learning. Learners' performance in the classroom is affected because of poor classroom management. Such poor management is the inability to understand the learner's unique individuality in the learning process.

Contributory Factors Affecting Performance as Perceived by the Students

The contributory factors affecting performance as perceived by the one hundred seventy-eight (178) respondents consist of **motivation** and **attitude**. The eight items pertaining to motivation were considered of practical importance such as English develops good reasoning ability, provides opportunities, practical to all purposes, important in daily life's activities, and profitable to everybody. The respondents also see merit on English as second language, a weapon to fight ignorance and an observation that most people speak English in their workplace.

Wentzel and Al-Bassam believed that motivation contributes to academic competence and is a major factor in language learning. Mastery of the second language is a requirement and an advantage. Lukmani also found that "proficiency" in English was significantly related to instrumental and not integrative motivation."

Student's attitude is also considered an indicator of one's language proficiency. Students with favorable attitude to learn a language in all aspects have positive views on the benefits of language. This factor constitutes their behavior in their learning style and modes. This means that their approach to learning is measured by their behavior and attitude towards the subject, teachers, and classmates for his immediate environment in the learning situation (Angco).

The aforecited research findings with regard to the language proficiency of the students in English Plus were definitely a major concern and the proposed lesson guides developed by the researcher was conceived and addressed to the students which aimed to accomplish self-learning activities and would help them improved their language proficiency.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The findings revealed that the freshman students' language proficiency level in listening, speaking, reading, and writing before and after English Plus was *below average*. Statistical analysis showed significant improvement in speaking, reading,

and writing competencies. No significant difference was shown in listening competence.

Among the factors affecting students' performance as perceived by the teachers were learning environment; teaching performance, teacher's family problem and absenteeism; financial and health problems, and lack of facilities and incentives.

On the students' factors, *motivation* and *attitude* affected their performance towards English as a second language; teacher's teaching performance and learning environment; financial and health problems; class schedule; and social facilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following are recommended :

1. Language teachers may prepare and use lesson guides with realistic, interesting, and meaningful activities enhancing students' language competencies;
2. They may utilize the audio-visual and other instructional paraphernalias to motivate the students.
3. They may emphasize note-taking through " dictation" for the students to develop their listening and writing skills.
4. They may incorporate listening and speaking in major tests to further improve and reinforce the students' listening and speaking skills;
5. The school through the administration may give assistance in terms of facilities (audio visual room, reading room, books, etc.) which will be utilized by the English instructors/professors and the clientele.
6. Similar studies be conducted in other colleges and universities.

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