English Learning Strategies and Proficiency Level: Grade 11 Students' Perspective in the Post-Pandemic Era

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Abstract — This mixed method research study sought to assess the English learning strategies vis-à-vis proficiency level of Grade 11 students of a public high school for S.Y. 2023-2024. This research made use of a survey questionnaire and interview guide in a form of open-ended questions in gathering the necessary data. There were 21 respondents who participated in the 1st part of the data gathering and 10 were selected to participate in the interview session for the 2nd part. Statistical tools for data analysis included weighted mean, percentage distribution, and frequency count. Results revealed that most respondents were on their appropriate age to be admitted in the grade level in accordance to the K-12 program and majority were females. In terms of English learning strategies, it was found out that respondents had an acceptable result to both cognitive and metacognitive and when taken as a whole garnering a weighted mean verbally interpreted as agree. Meanwhile, students' level of English proficiency in terms of Synonyms, Antonyms, Single-Word Analogy, Double-Word Analogy, Identifying Errors, Correct Usage, and Reading Comprehension and when taken as a whole obtained a mean score verbally interpreted as did not meet expectation. The findings highlighted the dynamic and evolving nature of language acquisition, where strategies employed by learners play a crucial role in shaping their journey towards linguistic mastery. Thus, it is recommended that teachers must look on the other factors regardless of being internal or external that may influence students' capacity in learning English.

Keywords: English learning strategies, proficiency level, post-pandemic era, Philippines

I. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected educational systems worldwide, forcing an abrupt shift to remote learning. As the world transitions back to more traditional educational environments, understanding the challenges and experiences of students during this period is crucial for shaping future educational policies and practices.

Being able to communicate in English can help you compete globally. To be considered "proficient," one must, however, possess a wide range of skills, including the ability to recognize errors, use language correctly, read comprehension, synonyms, antonyms, single- and double-word analogies, and error detection. Habók, et.al. (2021) have highlighted the varying preferences for strategies in various cultural situations. The favored application of metacognitive techniques in Asian and European environments was supported by their findings. Statistically significant variations were observed in the emotional field about the European sample's preference for a lower strategy utilization.

Even after having an English subject in school, it is not an assurance that students learn from it since they come from diverse backgrounds where English is not used in their households. Since English language proficiency affects academic and social adjustment, more research is necessary to get a more comprehensive understanding of language learning strategies for students who struggled to learn during the pandemic and may require extra attention. Because of this, the purpose of this study was to assess, for the academic year 2023–2024, the English learning methodologies employed by Grade 11 students in relation to their proficiency level. The study's goal is to provide guidance for intervention strategies that will help students feel like they are not falling behind and help them become more proficient language users in the classroom.

II. Review Of Literature

The transition from remote learning back to in-person instruction has had varied effects on students' academic performance. Some studies suggest that students who struggled with remote learning have shown improvement with the return to the classroom, while others highlight persistent learning gaps. (Kuhfeld, et.al, 2020)

Recent studies have shown a strong correlation between the use of specific learning strategies and higher language proficiency. Metacognitive strategies, such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's learning, have been particularly effective in enhancing language proficiency. (Griffiths & Incecay, 2021)

English ability is now required for success in the workplace, in business, and in the classroom. A study examined various elements, including learners' motivation, parental participation, learning environment, instructional methodologies, comprehensive input, socioeconomic level, and age, that contribute to the declining English proficiency among Filipinos. (Fernandez et. al., 2022).

According to a study by Fernandez (2020) on the English proficiency level of Systems Plus College Foundation junior high school students, Grade 7 students were "proficient" in both "reading comprehension" and "correct usage"; as a result, it is assumed that as they advance to higher grade levels, they will more likely remain in the "advanced" level.

According to Pangket's 2019 study, "Oral English Proficiency: Factors Affecting the Learners' Development," the main factors

affecting students' oral proficiency include grammar, motivation, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Curriculum and teaching methods are supporting components. According to the data analysis, the relevant elements are having a sequential effect on the performance of teachers and pupils. Pupils' poor performance is caused by the requirement for the curriculum and teaching practices to be thoroughly prepared and implemented to meet the demands of the learners.

However, Manuel (2022) found that despite the fact that English is not spoken natively in the nation, grade 11 pupils at Gammad National High School showed excellent proficiency in grammar and reading comprehension. This demonstrates their mastery of the fundamental linguistic concepts that form the basis for learning the English language.

Students' use of learning methodologies affects their English proficiency. However, due to a mismatch between teaching strategies and student language learning approaches, which impacts the students' English ability, learning the language has become a laborious task for students (Ella, 2018). However, a few research looked at how different language learning approaches affected people's ability to speak English over time.

In the research by Ocampo, et al. statistics findings by al. (2022) showed that the three games contributed to students' increased proficiency levels because the gain score increased in the posttest. In light of these results, it is advised that language instructors employ gamification as an additional teaching tool to raise their students' English competence.

In the meanwhile, Habók, et. The usage of English language strategies varies significantly amongst learners who are more and less adept, as noted by al. (2022). Quantitative studies revealed that the methods were statistically significant predictors of foreign language attitude and language proficiency, even though the students claimed to employ them only seldom or frequently. The findings highlight the value of strategy research in teaching foreign languages and support the integration of strategy instruction into language training.

The study "English Language Learning Strategies Reported By Advanced Language Learners" yielded various insights on what effective language learners have done to attain a high degree of competency in the language, according to Lee and Heinz (2016). The individuals exhibited the characteristics of self-directed, autonomous learners who take responsibility for their education and monitor their progress. Metacognitive tactics are those that are associated with this aspect. Metacognitive methods were the most commonly employed by language learners in both Nisbet et al. (2005) and Takeuchi (2003).

III. Objectives

This study sought to assess the English learning strategies and proficiency level of Grade 11 students of Planas National High School, Guihulngan City Division, Negros Oriental for S.Y. 2023-2024. More specifically, it sought to accomplish the following stated goals:

To determine the profile of the respondents in terms of age, and gender.
To determine the respondents' level of usage of the different learning strategies in English in terms of Cognitive Strategies and Metacognitive Strategies.
To determine the level of proficiency in English of the respondents in terms of Synonyms, Antonyms, Single – word analogy, Double – word analogy, Identifying errors, Correct usage, and Reading comprehension.
To determine the challenges experienced and the solutions made by the respondents in relation to English learning.

IV. Methodology Of The Study

This study used mixed method research design to determine the English learning strategies and proficiency level of Grade 11 students of Planas National High School, Guihulngan City Division, Negros Oriental for S.Y. 2023-2024. This research used a researcher's made questionnaire conducted to 21 grade 11 students from the identified locale to gather the vital information needed in the attainment of the research objectives. A qualitative interview was conducted to ten (10) respondents on the challenges and solutions made by them in learning English. Frequency Count, Percentage Distribution, and Weighted Mean were used as statistical tools for data analysis.

V. Result And Discussion

The results are presented in this part in accordance with the research questions of the study. The specified issue statement for this research project served as the basis for the presenting order. Furthermore, the results are presented in this portion following an adequate statistical analysis of all the collected data. Data from the baseline and statistics were tallied, examined, and explained.

Profile Of The Respondents

Table 1 details the profile of the respondents based on their age and gender. It can be gleaned from the table that in terms of age, majority of the respondents were in the of age 17 which is 11 out of 22 respondents or 52.38%. It can be implied that most of the respondents are in the appropriate age to be admitted in Grade 11 based on the K-12 curriculum.

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents (N=21)

PROFILE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
AGE		
16 years old	2	9.52

17 years old	11	52.38
18 years old	8	38.10
GENDER		
Male	9	42.86
Female	12	57.14
TOTAL	**21**	**100.00**

According to a Mamolo (2019) study, in the Philippines, senior high school pupils are currently between the ages of 17 and 18, and they have the chance to complete two extra years of basic education thanks to DepEd's K–12 program.

The frequency of 12, or 57.14%, indicates that the majority of responders are female. This is evident from the table.

The study of David et al. (2018) revealed that vices and peer pressure (i.e., barkada) contributed to a disproportionate incidence of school dropouts among boys in upper grades. Furthermore, gaming on computers and mobile devices were often cited as causes of chronic absenteeism and inability to concentrate.

English Level Strategies Of The Respondents

Table 2 presents the respondents' strategies for learning English, with an emphasis on cognitive and metacognitive approaches. Overall, the weighted mean was 3.58, which can be translated as "Agree," meaning that most students thought they were implementing these strategies effectively.

Table 2. English Learning Strategies of the Respondents (N=21)

ENGLISH LEARNING STRATEGIES	WEIGHTED MEAN	DESCRIPTION
Cognitive Strategies	3.59	Agree
Metacognitive Strategies	3.57	Agree
TOTAL	**3.58**	**Agree**

Legend: 4.50-5.00 (Strongly Agree); 3.50-4.49 (Agree); 2.50-3.49 (Neutral); 1.50-2.49 (Disagree), 1.00-1.49 (Strongly Disagree

The widespread usage of cognitive techniques emphasizes their importance in language learning. Teachers should continue to promote these behaviors by including activities that involve active participation in the language.

Metacognitive strategies are critical for fostering self-directed learning. Teachers can adopt these strategies by encouraging students to create specific learning objectives, track their progress, and reflect on which strategies work best for them.

The successful implementation of these strategies is contingent on resolving the issues that may hamper their effectiveness. Educators can assist students improve their English proficiency by offering scheduled practice opportunities, creating a supportive learning atmosphere, and mentoring them in the use of these tactics. This technique will not only help students enhance their language abilities but will also allow them to become more self-sufficient and successful learners.

Fooladvand et.al. (2017) noted that a number of research findings indicate that cognitive and metacognitive techniques significantly improve students' academic performance. It is advised that curriculum in schools and other educational institutions prioritize cognitive and metacognitive methods concurrently.

Respondents Level Of English Proficiency

Table 3 showed the respondents' level of proficiency based on the assessment conducted. It was found out that they got a high Mean Percentage Score (MPS) of 60.00 on the assessment related to synonyms with an interpretation of Did Not Meet Expectation. Meanwhile, the assessment related to antonyms got the lowest MPS of 22.86 which is also interpreted as Did Not Meet Expectation.

Table 3. Respondents' Level of English Proficiency (N=21)

AREAS	MEAN PERCENTAGE SCORE	INTERPRETATION
Synonyms	60.00	Did Not Meet Expectation
Antonyms	22.86	Did Not Meet Expectation
Single-Word Analogy	58.10	Did Not Meet Expectation
Double-Word Analogy	54.28	Did Not Meet Expectation
Identifying Errors	24.76	Did Not Meet Expectation
Correct Usage	59.05	Did Not Meet Expectation

Reading Comprehension	58.10	Did Not Meet Expectation
AVERAGE	**46.18**	**Did Not Meet Expectation**

The overall Mean Percentage Score (MPS) is 46.18 which is interpreted as Did Not Meet Expectation. This implies that students were not able to reach and obtain the minimum standards and competencies that are expected from them in the areas such as Synonyms, Antonyms, Single-Word Analogy, Double-Word Analogy, Identifying Errors, Correct Usage, and Reading Comprehension. This suggests that the students' proficiency levels are below the expected standards for their grade level, indicating significant challenges in their English language acquisition.

The low proficiency levels across all components imply that pupils experience major barriers to successfully using and understanding English. These difficulties could be attributed to a number of causes, including minimal exposure to English outside of the classroom, insufficient basic abilities, and a lack of practice applying language norms.

According to Shahmohammadi (2021), the effects of synonym/antonym and input enhancement techniques can be examined in the vocabulary knowledge of students in different levels of language proficiency.

Challenges Experienced By The Respondents In Relation To English Learning:

Theme 1: I'm in Struggle: Encountering Unfamiliar and Difficult Words in Learning English

Language is a powerful tool that enables communication, understanding, and the transmission of knowledge. Within the intricate tapestry of language, vocabulary plays a pivotal role in shaping the depth and precision of expression. The ability to comprehend and effectively use words is fundamental to successful communication, academic achievement, and cognitive development. However, encountering unfamiliar words can present a significant challenge for learners, hindering their proficiency and limiting their capacity to engage with diverse texts and contexts.

The process of learning unfamiliar words is a multifaceted and dynamic endeavor, involving cognitive, linguistic, and contextual dimensions. Research in this area seeks to unravel the intricacies of vocabulary acquisition, exploring the mechanisms that underpin the absorption, retention, and application of novel lexical elements. Understanding how individuals navigate the vast terrain of unfamiliar words is not only crucial for educators and language learners but also has implications for cognitive psychology, educational technology, and language processing.

In fact, according to Respondent 1, "I encountered words that were unfamiliar and difficult". Respondent 2 added, "I encountered unfamiliar words, and because of that, I had a hard time comprehending the learning material and answering the module". Respondent 5, 6, 7 also expressed respectively, "I encountered words that were unfamiliar and difficult", "I did not know some English words because the teacher did not teach them thus, I considered it difficult to learn", and "I encountered some unfamiliar words, and with that I think that we a teacher to guide us". Lastly, respondents 9 and 10 shared that "I encountered and faced words in English that were unfamiliar, and I personally needed help and assistance on how to correctly pronounce each of them" and "I encountered unfamiliar words in learning English".

Theme 2: Oh! Teacher, I Need Your Help: Teachers' Lack of Feedback in Learning English Words

Teachers play a far wider role in the ever-changing field of language instruction than just sitting in a classroom. As facilitators of learning, mentors, and guides, teachers play a pivotal role in shaping students' linguistic proficiency. Regarding the field of English language learning, the importance of effective feedback from teachers cannot be overstated.

More so, mastering a language involves more than the rote memorization of vocabulary; it requires a nuanced understanding of context, usage, and the subtle intricacies that make language a living, evolving entity. Within this intricate journey, teachers' feedback emerges as a guiding beacon, illuminating the path towards linguistic proficiency for learners of English.

Lastly, in the journey to master English words, teachers' feedback stands as a cornerstone, shaping not only linguistic competence but also fostering a love for language learning. This exploration into the pivotal role of teachers' feedback sets the stage for a deeper investigation into the specific strategies, forms, and implications of constructive feedback in the realm of English language education. As we navigate this terrain, the impact of teachers' guidance becomes increasingly evident, unlocking the doors to effective language acquisition and empowering learners to navigate the intricate tapestry of the English language with confidence and proficiency.

According to Respondent 2 "Not having immediate feedback from teachers or classmates could hinder language skills development, as real-time interaction plays a significant role in learning". Respondent 4 also shared "Learning English words has been never easy for me since our teacher had a limited interaction with us specifically, giving feedback and corrections on how we pronounced different words. I think that teacher must have more time in giving constructive feedback for their students for them to learn". Respondent 7 said "I needed to double and triple my time in gaining more knowledge and skills in English since no teacher could guide us. Learning English words would be better, and I think more effective if teachers are giving more time in providing their students the feedback in every activity and even classes that is being held in a week." Lastly, Respondent 9 uttered "Teachers' feedback is lacking during the teaching and learning process. I would have learned more in English if our teacher had enough time in dealing with our discussions at the same time in providing us the feedback".

Solutions Made By The Respondents In Relation To English Learning

Theme 1: Taking Breaks, Pause for a While: An Effective Strategy in Learning English

In the pursuit of language mastery, the journey to learn English is often an intricate and demanding endeavor. As learners navigate

the complexities of grammar, vocabulary, and communication skills, the efficacy of various strategies becomes paramount. Among these strategies, the intentional use of breaks, or pausing for a while, emerges as a nuanced and potentially transformative approach. In the relentless pursuit of knowledge, the idea of taking breaks may seem counterintuitive at first glance. However, recent research suggests that strategic pauses in the learning process can have profound effects on cognitive functions, memory consolidation, and overall learning outcomes.

Moreover, taking breaks is more than a momentary reprieve; it is a cognitive recalibration. Research in educational psychology, such as the work of Hembrooke and Gay (2003), highlights the "spacing effect," demonstrating that spacing out learning sessions with breaks enhances long-term retention and understanding. This raises intriguing possibilities for integrating deliberate pauses into the language-learning process.

In fact, Respondent 1 said that "Taking breaks when overwhelmed and breaking down complicated tasks into simple ones were my coping mechanisms for learning recovery". Respondent 5 shared that "When it comes to learning recovery, taking breaks like walking, listening to music, and practicing mindfulness exercises can help prevent burnout and improve focus. Additionally, practicing self-care is also an essential coping mechanism". Respondent 7 mentioned that "Taking breaks when overwhelmed and breaking down complicated tasks into simple ones were my coping mechanisms for learning recovery". Respondent 9 added that "I practiced positive thinking relaxation technique as my coping mechanism during that time." and lastly, Respondent 10 said that "Learning recovery involves taking care of yourself by prioritizing self-care and incorporating breaks into your learning routine".

Theme 2: Go Online, Online Platforms as a Powerful Partners in Learning English

In the age of digital connectivity, the landscape of education has undergone a transformative shift, with online platforms emerging as powerful allies in the quest for language proficiency. As the demand for English language skills continues to grow globally, the integration of technology into language learning has become not just a convenience but a necessity.

For an instance, Respondent 1 said that "I checked the google to learn the meaning of unfamiliar words and watched some English movies". Respondent 2, 3, 4, and 5 added respectively, "I watched English movies to improve my skills in English", "I watched some English lessons on YouTube and read the English dictionary", "I searched on the internet for the meaning of the difficult words", and "I searched on Google for the correct pronunciation of words". and lastly, Respondents 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 also shared that "I searched for the correct pronunciation of words and their definition on Google", "Through the Messenger app, I seek support and collaboration from those on the learning journey with me", "I searched on Google for the correct pronunciation of words", "I watched English movies and TV shows and engaged in self-study activities", and "I tried to look at the meaning of the words in my mobile dictionary and sometimes searched them on the internet".

VI. Conclusion

In the pursuit of English language proficiency, this research has delved into the intricate relationship between learning strategies and proficiency levels. The findings highlighted the dynamic and evolving nature of language acquisition, where strategies employed by learners play a crucial role in shaping their journey towards linguistic mastery.

It can be concluded that respondents had an acceptable results in terms of their English Learning Strategies which obtained high results on both Cognitive Strategies and Metacognitive Strategies. However, their English Learning Strategies in terms of Synonyms, Antonyms, Single-Word Analogy, Double-Word Analogy, Identifying Errors, Correct Usage, and Reading Comprehension obtained a low mean percentage score which implied that respondents did not meet expectations. This concluded that teachers must pay attention and give more focus on conducting classes where students are exposed to these areas of English hence, providing students the opportunity to learn English in the context of teaching-learning process by identifying the appropriate strategies and considering other factors in learning should be part of the teachers' teaching priorities.

Lastly, in the pursuit of learning English, students have identified and experienced some major challenges and solutions which have made a significant impact in their experiences and learning at school. Thus, teachers and the administration as a whole shall provide holistic learning experience to their school stakeholders which can be part of the school's measurement of performance.

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