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College Students' Perspectives on English as a Second Language

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the perspectives of college students at Mindoro State University (MinSU) on learning English as a second language (ESL), focusing on attitudes, challenges, and the influence of sociocultural and educational factors on motivation and confidence. English, widely regarded as a global lingua franca, is essential for academic success, professional growth, and cross-cultural communication. Using an exploratory research design and in-depth interviews, the study reveals that students recognize English as a critical tool for career opportunities and academic excellence. However, they face challenges such as limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, grammar issues, and anxiety about judgment when speaking. Sociocultural factors, including family expectations, cultural identity, and peer interactions, significantly shape students' confidence and drive to learn significantly shape students' confidence and drive to learn, including family expectations, cultural identity, and peer interactions. Respondents highlighted the supportive role of teachers and peers in creating a positive learning environment, which fosters resilience and reduces fear of mistakes. While some students leverage self-directed learning strategies, such as digital tools, these often lack personalized feedback. The study underscores the importance of integrating culturally sensitive, student-centered interventions to enhance ESL learning experiences. Recommendations include implementing structured language programs, such as pronunciation workshops and vocabulary-building activities, alongside fostering collaborative and inclusive classroom dynamics. Addressing these challenges holistically can empower students to overcome language barriers and develop the competence and confidence needed for academic and professional success. This research contributes to understanding localized ESL experiences in a multilingual educational setting, offering actionable insights to improve English language instruction in culturally diverse contexts.

INTRODUCTION

The ability to communicate effectively in English has become a global necessity due to its status as a lingua franca in international trade, education, and technology. English is the primary language of instruction and contact in many global institutions, influencing not only academic performance but also professional prospects (Crystal, 2003). As globalization accelerates, the demand for English proficiency rises, prompting educational systems around the world to promote acquisition of English as a second language (ESL). Despite this, English competency remains a problem for learners, particularly in multilingual communities where local languages dominate daily interactions.

English, along with Filipino, is a popular official language in the Philippines. It serves as a medium of instruction and an important instrument for economic and social mobility (Martin, 2014). Despite its extensive use, many Filipino students struggle to master English due to a mix of structural, societal, and personal reasons (Borlongan, 2016). For example, the interaction of local dialects, cultural identity, and availability of learning resources all have a substantial impact on language acquisition. According to studies, while Filipino students acknowledge the value of English for academic and professional success, they frequently face barriers such as limited

exposure to conversational English and fear of speaking the language (Limos, 2019).

Locally, at Mindoro State University (MinSU), students' linguistic variety, impacted by their ethnic and cultural origins, hinders the process of learning English as a second language. Although English is included in the university curriculum, students' confidence and enthusiasm to utilize it differ greatly. Despite efforts to improve English language instruction, there is little study on how sociocultural and pedagogical factors influence MinSU students' learning experiences. This study seeks to address this vacuum by looking into MinSU college students' perspectives on English as a second language, focusing on their attitudes, obstacles, and coping methods, as well as the sociocultural factors that determine their motivation and confidence in using English.

Existing literature has examined ESL learning obstacles in the Philippines at a broad level, but it frequently overlooks the varied experiences of students in specific regional contexts such as Mindoro. Furthermore, whereas much research highlight the significance of cultural and educational elements, few investigate how these aspects interact to influence learners' attitudes and motivation. By concentrating on MinSU students' experiences, this study addresses the gap in localized insights into ESL learning in a multicultural and multilingual university setting.

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Research Objectives

This research aimed to investigate how College students perceive English as a second language. Specifically:

1. To investigate college students' perspectives and attitudes toward learning English as a second language and its importance in their academic and personal life.
2. Identify the problems that college students have when learning English and the solutions they use to overcome these challenges.
3. To assess the impact of sociocultural and educational factors on college students' motivation and confidence in speaking English as a second language.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This part presents the methodology the researcher employed in analyzing and interpreting the data about the variables in the study.

Exploratory research design is used to study unsolved problems, allowing for the exploration of new ideas and the identification of patterns without the limits of a formal framework. According to Saunders *et al.* (2014), this strategy is especially useful when the researcher is unsure about the exact nature of the problem or phenomenon being examined, as it allows for the development of more explicit research questions and hypotheses for further examination. It is frequently the beginning point for expanding knowledge in areas with scarce information.

The study was conducted at Mindoro State University, Main Campus, Alcate, Victoria, Oriental Mindoro. The participants are the selected College students in the university. In-depth interviews were conducted for the purpose of this research. The study utilized a researcher-made interview guide with three parts as the main data-gathering instrument. The first part is composed of questions dealing with students' perspectives and attitudes toward learning English as a second language and its importance in their academic and personal life. The second part dealt with questions assessing the problems that college students have when learning English and the solutions they use to overcome these challenges. And lastly, it dealt with questions assessing the impact of sociocultural and educational factors on college students' motivation and confidence in speaking English as a second language.

Thematic analysis was used in this study. In using the thematic analysis, there are different approaches to consider. The researcher decided to use the inductive approach as it involves deriving meaning and creating themes from data without any preconceptions. In doing a thematic data analysis, the researcher followed the steps: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and writing up.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based from the analyzed responses of the respondents on the different questions assessing the three major objectives of the study, here are the generated themes: Students' perspectives and attitudes toward learning

English as a second language and its importance in their academic and personal life.

English as a Tool for Communication and Cultural Connection

One of the most common themes among respondents is their acknowledgment of English as a valuable tool for communication and interacting with people from various cultural backgrounds. Many respondents underlined its function as a global language, allowing for communication across national and cultural borders. For example, one respondent stated, "Learning English is important to me because it's a key to having opportunities and it helps to communicate with people with different nationalities because English is a global language." Another responded, "It allows me to connect with people from different cultures and backgrounds." This sentiment aligns with studies emphasizing the role of English in promoting intercultural communication. Kirkpatrick (2014) noted that English serves as a lingua franca, enabling interaction among speakers from varied linguistic and cultural contexts. The ability to connect on a global scale fosters personal growth, enhances cultural awareness, and provides an avenue for mutual understanding.

Academic Success and Learning Resources

Another common subject is the value of English in academic performance. Respondents regularly mentioned English as a must for comprehending course content, engaging in discussions, and accessing academic resources. One respondent expressed, "Learning English is a great help to help me perform better because the majority of the courses and subjects use the English language in instructions." Another shared, "Most academic resources are in English, so fluency is significant for research and writing high-quality papers." Research supports these claims; Hu and Gao (2018) argued that English proficiency correlates with academic achievement, particularly in environments where English is The capacity to traverse English-based academic content enables students to flourish in their studies, write effectively, and make important contributions in academic settings.

Career Aspirations and Opportunities

Respondents underscored the role of English in enhancing career prospects and professional growth. Many viewed English proficiency as a means to access better job opportunities and succeed in global workplaces. For example, one respondent noted, "Being fluent in English provides significant benefits, including opening doors to better career opportunities." Another shared, "English makes me more look smart or reliable individual." Studies corroborate these observations. According to Tavit (2014), English proficiency is increasingly a prerequisite in professional environments, especially in multinational organizations where it is the standard for communication. Mastery of English thus equips individuals to compete in

global job markets and navigate professional landscapes effectively.

Confidence and Personal Growth

One frequent theme among respondents is the impact of English ability on personal development and confidence. Respondents explained how studying English helped them overcome self-doubt and boost their self-esteem. One respondent stated, “The ability to speak English influences my personal growth and future career aspirations by boosting my self-confidence and helping me overcome my fear of public speaking.” Another stated, “Being fluent in English is crucial when communicating with other people and expressing ideas effectively.” These observations are consistent with the findings of Hakuta *et al.* (2014), who found that language learning promotes cognitive and social development. The capacity to articulate oneself successfully in English promotes personal empowerment, allowing people to pursue their goals with confidence.

Challenges and Rewards in Learning English

Despite the favorable results, respondents recognized the difficulties associated with learning English as a second language. They regarded the procedure as challenging but gratifying, requiring perseverance and regular effort. One respondent compared it to solving a Rubik’s cube, noting, “It requires numerous moves, steps, and processes until it is achieved.” Another commented, “While there are frustrating moments, the sense of accomplishment when I understand complex texts or hold fluent conversations is motivating.” This echoes Ellis’s (2015) research, which emphasizes the cognitive and emotional effort required in language acquisition. Overcoming these hurdles builds resilience and contributes to the overall satisfaction that comes from reaching fluency.

Problems that college students have when learning English and the solutions they use to overcome these challenges.

Pronunciation and Vocabulary Limitations

Respondents reported challenges with precise pronunciation and a limited vocabulary, both of which are necessary for efficient communication. The difficulty stems from a lack of exposure to native accents and context-specific phrases. According to Ellis (2015), developing phonological awareness and contextual vocabulary is essential for competency. These difficulties are exacerbated by the diversity of English dialects in worldwide situations, emphasizing the significance of immersive listening environments (Hakuta, Butler, and Witt, 2014). The findings imply that systematic pronunciation exercises and interactive vocabulary-building activities could help to close these gaps.

Fear of Judgment and Lack of Confidence

Anxiety about speaking stems from fear of criticism, which limits active engagement. This hesitance aligns

with cultural influences where mistakes are stigmatized (Kirkpatrick, 2014). Such apprehensions disrupt fluency development, as students avoid risks essential for improvement. Creating supportive practice spaces can counteract these barriers, fostering a culture where mistakes are part of learning. Confidence-boosting interventions, like peer collaboration and public speaking exercises, could empower learners to take communicative risks without fear of judgment.

Grammar and Sentence Construction Issues

Difficulties in organizing ideas and using proper grammar highlight deficiencies in fundamental writing skills. This is consistent with Hu and Gao’s (2018) advice for structured approaches, such as guided composition activities. Respondents’ challenges highlight the importance of clear grammar teaching combined with practice in idea development and logical organization. Furthermore, using technology-based tools, such as grammar apps and online writing platforms, can provide rapid feedback and strengthen learning.

Difficulty with Listening and Reading Comprehension

Respondents’ difficulty understanding quick speech and complicated texts indicates a lack of exposure to a variety of English registers. Scaffolded learning tactics, such as progressive exposure to diverse accents and thematic reading sessions, are essential. Tavil (2014) shows that activities that imitate real-world circumstances, such as group listening assignments and annotated reading exercises, can help students improve their comprehension. Integrating multimedia tools that demonstrate authentic language use can help learners improve their auditory and textual processing skills.

Self-directed Learning Strategies

Technology emerges as an important tool for addressing language problems. Respondents’ usage of applications and online resources for pronunciation and grammar demonstrates an increasing trend towards self-directed learning. However, self-directed strategies frequently lack individualized input. While Ellis (2015) emphasizes the value of digital tools, a mixed approach that combines these resources with teacher-led sessions could improve learning outcomes. Encouraging learners to curate content based on their goals leads to a more focused and meaningful self-learning experience.

Impact of sociocultural and educational factors on college students’ motivation and confidence in speaking English as a second language.

Cultural Identity and Native Language Influence

Respondents cited difficulties in crossing the linguistic bridge between their original languages and English. A participant mentioned, “My native language makes it hard to articulate English words properly,” emphasizing phonetic and grammatical difficulties. However, cultural

norms frequently reinforced motivation: “Our family values English, seeing it as a sign of competence.” Recent research supports similar findings. Darwin and Norton (2021) demonstrate how sociocultural frameworks influence learners’ engagement in language acquisition. Gao (2021) investigates the multiple challenges learners face: reconciling their original language identity with the demands of studying English, which ultimately shape their tactics and motivation.

Impact of Teachers, Peers, and Learning Environments

The influence of a nurturing environment appeared as a major subject. Participants reported feelings such as, “My teacher provides gentle corrections,” and “Peers encourage me to practice without fear.” This highlights the importance of social support in language acquisition. Recent research supports these conclusions. Sang (2023) emphasizes the importance of teacher-student relationship in establishing confidence, whereas Lynch and Motha (2023) see peer collaboration as critical to developing language competence. These ideas are consistent with Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, emphasizing the importance of contact in cognitive and language development.

Societal Expectations and English as a Global Language

Respondents underlined societal influences on English competence. According to one, “Knowing English is crucial for global opportunities, but it creates pressure to be perfect.” This tension illustrates English’s dual nature as both a tool of upward mobility and a source of anxiety. These findings are consistent with Johnson (2009), who investigated English’s impact on cultural identity and the perceived need for global engagement. Kanno and Varghese (2010) further highlight institutional pressures that reinforce English’s dominance while marginalizing native languages. Such forces motivate and push learners as they navigate their language journeys.

CONCLUSIONS

The study highlighted college students’ diverse viewpoints on learning English as a second language, emphasizing its importance as a worldwide communication tool, a means of academic success, and a path to employment chances. While respondents acknowledged difficulties with pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, they also recognized the benefits of personal development, confidence, and resilience. Furthermore, sociocultural variables, professors, peers, and societal expectations influenced their drive and confidence. These findings highlight the need of implementing culturally sensitive, student-centered interventions to successfully enhance English language acquisition and address learner problems.

Recommendations

To improve English learning experiences, educators and policymakers should prioritize building supportive environments that foster risk-taking while reducing fear of criticism. Integrating technology, such as interactive software and digital tools, alongside teacher-led activities can result in more individualized and engaging learning experiences. Furthermore, encouraging intercultural encounters and exploiting students’ cultural identities can motivate and empower them. Structured interventions, such as pronunciation workshops, vocabulary-building programs, and guided writing exercises, should be used to address specific language issues. These findings highlight the need to implement culturally sensitive, student-centered interventions to enhance English language acquisition and address learner problems successfully.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The author hereby declare that this work was conducted in strict accordance with ethical research guidelines. All respondents were provided informed consent prior to participating, ensuring that they were fully aware of the study’s nature and objective. Respondents were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any moment, without consequence or detriment. The respondents’ anonymity was protected throughout the research procedure, and all personal information was kept private. The respondents’ well-being was prioritized, and all measures were taken to protect their rights and dignity. The author additionally confirm that no conflicts of interest arose during the course of the investigation. Every attempt was taken to avoid plagiarism, and all sources were appropriately mentioned. Additionally, the findings were interpreted honestly and without bias. Finally, the findings of this study were used purely for research reasons, benefiting the academic and scientific communities.

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