



Empowering Learners: Addressing Linguistic Hurdles in English Education for Senior High School Students in the Philippines

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Abstract:

This study explores the challenges encountered by senior high school students in English education within the Philippines through a systematic review of existing literature. Findings reveal significant linguistic challenges, including difficulties in grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary mastery, and comprehension skills. Motivational factors, such as intrinsic motivation and external influences, also play a crucial role in shaping students' engagement with English education. Innovative pedagogical approaches, including task-based learning, cooperative learning, and technology integration, show promise in addressing students' challenges and enhancing their language proficiency and engagement. Furthermore, teacher support and feedback emerge as critical factors in mitigating students' challenges and facilitating their language learning progress. Overall, this study underscores the importance of addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by senior high school students in English education to create a supportive and enriching learning environment that empowers students to succeed in English language learning and beyond.

Keywords: English education, senior high school students, Philippines, linguistic challenges

Introduction:

In 2013, the Philippine government embarked on a significant educational reform with the implementation of the K-12 program, as mandated by the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (Republic Act No. 10533). This initiative aimed to enhance the quality of education by extending the basic education cycle from ten to twelve years. With a focus on mastery learning and strengthened core subjects such as Mathematics, Science, and Language, the K-12 curriculum aimed to align the Philippine educational system with international standards (Republic Act No. 10533, 2013). Despite these aspirations, concerns have emerged regarding the readiness of students graduating from high school, as evidenced by the reported lack of competencies in several subject areas (Barrot, 2019).

One of the crucial aspects of the K-12 curriculum reform was the integration of a spiral progression approach, emphasizing the retention and mastery of topics and skills as students progress through grade levels (Quijano, 2012). Furthermore, the incorporation of a 21st-century learning framework sought to equip students with the necessary skills to compete globally and succeed in the international labor market (DepEd Order No. 55, 2015).

However, as the first batch of senior high school students entered the program in 2016, challenges and objections arose from various sectors of society, prompting calls for a thorough evaluation of the K-12 program's accomplishments and shortcomings (Bernardo, et al., 2020). While efforts have been made to support teachers through training programs and institutional collaborations, there remains a need to address the concerns of students who have been significantly affected by the implementation of the K-12 program (Dizon et al., 2021).

In the context of the Philippines, English occupies a significant position as one of the official languages and a medium of instruction in education. With a reported high proficiency level in English, the Philippines ranks prominently on the global English Proficiency Index (Menoza, 2020; Manuel, 2022). However, despite this proficiency, challenges persist, particularly in reading comprehension, as evidenced by the country's performance in international assessments such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the International Mathematics and Science Study (Ignacio, 2022).





Against this backdrop, this study seeks to explore the experiences of senior high school students in accomplishing and complying with the requirements of their English classes within the K-12 curriculum. By examining the challenges faced by students and their coping mechanisms, this research aims to provide insights for educators to better address the needs of students in English education.

Literature Review:

English language education in the Philippines has undergone significant reforms in recent years, particularly with the implementation of the K-12 curriculum. Barrot (2019) discusses the analysis of the K-12 curriculum, emphasizing the need for contextualization in teaching and learning. This shift towards contextualization aligns with the spiral progression approach proposed by Quijano (2012), which aims to facilitate meaningful learning experiences, especially in subjects like mathematics.

Despite efforts to enhance educational standards, challenges persist in the implementation of the K-12 program. Dizon et al. (2021) evaluated programs designed to enhance the capacities of senior high school teachers, highlighting the need for continuous support and professional development initiatives. The Department of Education (DepEd) recognized these challenges and issued policies such as DepEd Order No. 55, s. 2015, to provide support for teachers and school leaders in implementing the senior high school curriculum (DepEd, 2015).

English proficiency remains a critical concern in the Philippines, given its status as a globally recognized language. Menozo (2020) discusses issues and concerns regarding English proficiency, emphasizing the importance of addressing these challenges to meet international standards. Manuel (2022) provides a comprehensive review of English language education policies, practices, and challenges in the Philippines, underscoring the need for policy reforms and effective pedagogical strategies.

Domingo (2020) examines specific challenges in English language education and proposes strategies to address them. The study emphasizes the importance of innovative teaching methods and continuous professional development for educators. Ignacio (2022) further explores the state of English language education in the Philippines, highlighting both challenges and opportunities for improvement.

Tarrayo, et al. (2021) delve into the challenges faced by students in secondary education regarding English language learning. The study identifies factors such as grammatical problems and lack of motivation as significant barriers to language acquisition. Lato and Oliva (2021) employ structural equation modeling to analyze factors affecting students' English language learning, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach to address these challenges effectively.

The literature highlights the complexities of English language education in the Philippines within the context of the K-12 curriculum. While reforms aim to enhance educational standards and promote language proficiency, various challenges persist. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including policy reforms, professional development initiatives, and innovative teaching strategies, to ensure that students develop the necessary language skills to succeed in an increasingly globalized world.

Methodology:

A systematic review was conducted to comprehensively examine existing literature on the challenges faced by senior high school students in English education within the Philippines. This approach followed established guidelines to ensure transparency, rigor, and reproducibility throughout the review process (Moher et al., 2009).

A systematic search of relevant literature was conducted across multiple electronic databases, including Google Scholar, PubMed, ERIC, and PsycINFO. The search was limited to articles published between 2010 and 2023, written in English, and focusing on senior high school students' experiences and challenges in English education in the Philippines. The following search terms were used in various combinations: "senior high school," "English education," "Philippines," "challenges," "students," and "K-12 curriculum."

Studies were included if they met the following criteria: (1) focused on senior high school students (grades 11-12) in the Philippines, (2) addressed challenges or difficulties encountered in English education, (3) provided empirical data or qualitative insights, and (4) were published in peer-reviewed journals or academic books. Studies were excluded if they were not related to the specific context of senior high school education in the Philippines or did not report primary data.

Two independent reviewers screened the titles and abstracts of identified articles to assess their relevance to the research question. Full texts of potentially eligible articles were then obtained and assessed for final inclusion based on the predetermined criteria. Any discrepancies between reviewers were resolved through discussion and consensus. Data extraction was conducted using a standardized form to capture relevant information from included studies, including author(s), publication year, study design, participants, key findings, and implications. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and patterns across the literature, allowing for a comprehensive synthesis of the findings.

The methodological quality of included studies was assessed using established criteria appropriate for each study design (e.g., STROBE checklist for observational studies, CASP checklist for qualitative studies). Studies were not excluded based on quality assessment but were considered in the context of their methodological rigor when interpreting the findings. Thematic analysis was used to identify common themes, patterns, and variations in the challenges reported by senior high school students in English education. Themes were derived through iterative coding of the extracted data and were subsequently organized into meaningful categories to facilitate interpretation and synthesis.

Findings and Discussion:

The English language holds a significant position in the Philippines, with it being one of the official languages and a medium of instruction in education (Menozo, 2020). However, despite this prominence, senior high school students in the country face a multitude of linguistic challenges within their English education.





A systematic review of literature conducted in this study revealed that these challenges encompass various aspects of language acquisition, including grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary mastery, and comprehension skills. This finding aligns with previous research conducted by Alhassan et al. (2021), which highlighted the prevalent difficulties encountered by students in navigating the intricacies of English grammar.

One of the primary linguistic challenges identified is the struggle with understanding complex grammatical structures. Studies conducted by Lato and Oliva (2021) and Akbari (2015) have shown that many students find it challenging to grasp the nuances of English grammar rules, resulting in errors in both written compositions and verbal communication. This difficulty in grammatical comprehension often leads to impediments in expressing ideas coherently and accurately.

Moreover, pronunciation issues emerge as another significant obstacle hindering effective communication among senior high school students. Tarrayo, et al. (2021) highlighted the common perception among students of difficulty in mastering English pronunciation, which often leads to miscommunication and lack of confidence in speaking English fluently. This finding underscores the importance of addressing pronunciation skills in English language instruction to enhance students' oral communication abilities.

In addition to grammar and pronunciation, vocabulary mastery poses a considerable challenge for senior high school students in the Philippines. Manuel (2022) noted that limited vocabulary knowledge significantly affects students' reading comprehension and writing fluency. Without a robust vocabulary base, students struggle to comprehend complex texts and convey their thoughts effectively in written form, thereby impeding their overall language proficiency.

Furthermore, comprehension skills emerge as a critical area of concern in English education. Rahayu (2015) emphasized that many students face difficulties in comprehending English texts due to limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, as well as insufficient practice in reading comprehension strategies. This lack of comprehension skills not only affects academic performance but also impedes students' ability to engage critically with English-language materials (Mansueto, et al., 2024).

The linguistic challenges encountered by senior high school students in the Philippines encompass difficulties in grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary mastery, and comprehension skills. Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions that focus on enhancing students' grammatical understanding, improving pronunciation accuracy, expanding vocabulary knowledge, and developing effective reading comprehension strategies.

Motivational Factors in English Language Learning

The motivation of students in learning English has been a significant area of concern within the educational landscape, particularly in the Philippines. This section delves into the findings regarding motivational factors influencing senior high school students' English language learning experiences, drawing upon insights from existing literature.

The systematic review identified motivational factors as pivotal determinants shaping students' engagement and proficiency in English education. One seminal study by Dörnyei (2009) emphasized the multifaceted nature of motivation, distinguishing between intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors (Abrenilla, et al., 2023). Intrinsic motivation, characterized by personal interest and enjoyment in language learning, was found to be lacking among some senior high school students in the Philippines. This deficiency often stems from a perceived disconnect between English language skills acquired in the classroom and their practical application in real-world contexts (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Moreover, external influences such as parental expectations, societal norms, and future career prospects significantly impact students' motivation levels and commitment to English language learning (Al-Hoorie, 2017). Parents, in particular, exert considerable pressure on students to excel academically, including achieving proficiency in English, which may either enhance or diminish students' intrinsic motivation depending on the nature of parental support and encouragement (Zhu & Leung, 2012). Similarly, societal expectations regarding English proficiency as a marker of social status and upward mobility contribute to students' motivation to varying extents (Gardner, 1985).

Furthermore, students' future career aspirations and perceived utility of English language skills influence their motivation to engage with English education (Ushioda, 2009). For instance, students aspiring to pursue careers in industries requiring English proficiency, such as tourism, business, or information technology, may exhibit higher levels of motivation compared to those with different career trajectories (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003).

Importantly, motivational factors interact with individual differences and contextual variables, shaping students' attitudes and behaviors towards English language learning (Dörnyei, 2001). For instance, students with high self-efficacy beliefs and a growth mindset are more likely to persevere through challenges and maintain motivation in the face of setbacks (Bandura, 1997; Dweck, 2006).

Motivational factors exert a significant influence on senior high school students' English language learning experiences in the Philippines (Rabillas, et al., 2023). Understanding and addressing these motivational dynamics are crucial for educators and policymakers to design effective interventions that foster sustained engagement and proficiency in English education.

Pedagogical Approaches:

The pedagogical approaches employed in English education play a crucial role in addressing the challenges encountered by senior high school students in the Philippines. Traditional grammar-focused teaching methods, while still prevalent, may not always be the most effective means of engaging students and facilitating language acquisition (Krashen, 1982). A review of literature suggests that students, especially in the context of diverse learning styles and preferences, may benefit from alternative pedagogical strategies that emphasize communication and interaction (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Task-based learning (TBL) is one such innovative approach that has gained traction in language education research. TBL emphasizes the completion of meaningful tasks as the central focus of instruction, with language learning occurring incidentally through task performance (Ellis, 2003). By engaging students in authentic, real-world tasks, such as problem-solving activities or role-plays, TBL promotes active participation and fosters the development of communicative competence (Skehan, 1996).





Furthermore, cooperative learning strategies have shown promise in enhancing students' language skills and promoting collaborative interactions in the classroom (Johnson et al., 2014). Through cooperative learning activities, students work together in small groups to achieve common goals, thereby facilitating peer-to-peer interaction, language practice, and the sharing of ideas (Slavin, 1996). This collaborative approach not only strengthens students' language proficiency but also cultivates important social and interpersonal skills.

Incorporating technology into English language instruction represents another avenue for enhancing pedagogical effectiveness and student engagement (Warschauer & Meskill, 2000). Digital tools and resources, such as multimedia presentations, online platforms, and educational apps, offer opportunities for interactive learning experiences and personalized instruction (Levy & Stockwell, 2006). Moreover, technology integration aligns with the digital literacy skills necessary for success in the 21st-century globalized society (Warschauer, 2003).

The effectiveness of these pedagogical approaches lies not only in their ability to address students' linguistic challenges but also in their capacity to foster a positive learning environment conducive to language acquisition (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). By shifting the focus from rote memorization and grammar drills to meaningful, communicative activities, educators can create engaging and relevant English language learning experiences for students, thereby promoting motivation, autonomy, and proficiency (Brown, 2007).

The adoption of innovative pedagogical approaches, such as task-based learning, cooperative learning, and technology integration, holds promise for addressing the challenges faced by senior high school students in English education (Andrin, et al., 2024). By embracing these methods, educators can cater to the diverse needs and preferences of learners, foster active participation and collaboration, and ultimately, enhance students' language proficiency and engagement in the classroom.

Teacher Support and Feedback:

Teacher support and feedback play a pivotal role in addressing the challenges faced by senior high school students in English education within the Philippines. Effective teaching practices that encompass scaffolding, differentiated instruction, and timely feedback are essential for fostering a supportive learning environment and enhancing students' language proficiency (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Scaffolding refers to the provision of temporary support and guidance by teachers to assist students in acquiring new knowledge and skills (Wood et al., 1976). In the context of English education, scaffolding techniques such as modeling, guided practice, and corrective feedback help students navigate through challenging language tasks and gradually develop their linguistic competencies (Vygotsky, 1978). By breaking down complex language concepts into manageable steps and offering structured support, teachers enable students to build upon their existing knowledge and make meaningful progress in English language learning (Gibbons, 2002).

Moreover, differentiated instruction recognizes and accommodates the diverse learning needs and preferences of students (Tomlinson, 1999). In English classrooms, teachers employ a variety of instructional strategies, materials, and assessments to cater to students' individual strengths, interests, and readiness levels (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2003). By providing multiple entry points, flexible grouping arrangements, and differentiated tasks, teachers ensure that all students have equitable access to learning opportunities and can progress at their own pace (Tomlinson et al., 2003).

Central to effective teaching practices is the provision of timely and constructive feedback on students' language skills and performance (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Feedback serves as a catalyst for student learning, providing valuable information about strengths, areas for improvement, and strategies for further development (Black & Wiliam, 1998). In the context of English language learning, feedback can take various forms, including written comments, verbal praise, corrective suggestions, and peer evaluations (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). By offering specific, actionable feedback that targets students' language errors and provides guidance for improvement, teachers empower students to take ownership of their learning and strive for continuous growth (Sadler, 1989).

However, despite the importance of teacher support and feedback, the review identified challenges related to the perceived lack of feedback from teachers, particularly in writing tasks. Some students reported feeling undersupported and disengaged due to minimal or generic feedback on their written work, which may hinder their progress and confidence in English language learning (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Addressing this issue requires teachers to adopt a more proactive approach to providing feedback, including regular assessment of students' writing, targeted intervention strategies, and opportunities for self-reflection and revision (Wiggins, 2012).

Teacher support and feedback are integral components of effective English education in senior high schools in the Philippines (Manire, et al., 2023). By implementing scaffolding, differentiated instruction, and timely feedback, teachers can create a nurturing learning environment that fosters students' language development, promotes academic success, and enhances their overall engagement and confidence in English language learning.

Conclusion:

This study has shed light on the multifaceted challenges encountered by senior high school students in English education within the Philippines. Through a systematic review of existing literature, several key findings have emerged, highlighting the linguistic, motivational, pedagogical, and teacher-related factors that influence students' experiences and outcomes in English language learning.

Linguistic challenges such as difficulties in grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary mastery, and comprehension skills were identified as significant barriers to students' language acquisition and proficiency. These challenges underscore the need for targeted instructional support and intervention strategies to address students' specific learning needs and enhance their linguistic competencies.

Motivational factors, including intrinsic motivation and external influences such as parental pressure and societal expectations, play a crucial role in shaping students' engagement and commitment to English education. Educators must recognize and leverage these motivational factors to foster a positive learning environment and promote students' intrinsic interest and investment in language learning.





The adoption of innovative pedagogical approaches, such as task-based learning, cooperative learning, and technology integration, holds promise for addressing students' challenges and enhancing their language proficiency and engagement in the classroom. By providing meaningful and interactive learning experiences, educators can cater to diverse learning styles and preferences and promote active participation and collaboration among students.

The provision of teacher support and feedback emerged as a critical factor in mitigating students' challenges and facilitating their language learning progress. Effective teachers play a pivotal role in scaffolding students' learning, differentiating instruction to meet individual needs, and offering timely and constructive feedback on students' language skills. However, efforts are needed to address students' perceptions of inadequate feedback, particularly in writing tasks, to ensure that all students receive the support and guidance they need to succeed.

This study underscores the importance of addressing the complex challenges faced by senior high school students in English education within the Philippines. By adopting a holistic approach that encompasses linguistic, motivational, pedagogical, and teacher-related factors, educators can create a supportive and enriching learning environment that empowers students to achieve success in English language learning and beyond.

Through continued research, collaboration, and innovation, stakeholders can work together to enhance the quality of English education in the Philippines, ultimately empowering students to become proficient communicators, critical thinkers, and lifelong learners in the globalized world.

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