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ENGLISH PROFICIENCY AND COMPETENCY BACKGROUND  
OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

The study focuses on the background of Social Science and Humanities students (specifically in the course General Psychology) on their English education and competence. This research aims to identify the common factors of these students in terms of their English Proficiency. The students will answer survey questions that will give us information about their educational background, their confidence in using English, their opinion on the competence of their teachers in English, and their interest in the importance of English as a medium of teaching. Only 32.5 % of the students believe that they are good in English and the other 67.5% do not think that they are competent in English. Majority of them, 95% accepts that English is very important and the remaining 5% do not accept that English is very important. This study aims to identify the factors on why Social Science and Humanities students (specifically in General Psychology) are hesitant in discussions, essays, conference, recitations and other activities that involve the English Language.

Keywords: English Proficiency, College Students, Instructors, English as a medium of teaching, Social Science, Humanities, General Psychology

## BACKGROUND

In Social Science and Humanities (specifically General Psychology), it is vital for the students to understand and comprehend English. These courses require the students for analytical and logical comprehension and communication. As we all accept that the terms in these courses are all in the English language thus making it important to be equipped with the capability to understand English. Discussions, debates and essay questions that entail critical analysis and evaluation also require the students to use English in processing and expressing their ideas either in writing or in conference.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper investigates the extent to which productive use of formulaic sequences by intermediate students of two typologically different languages, i.e., English and Spanish, is associated with their oral proficiency in these languages. Previous research (e.g., Boers et al., "Language Teaching Research" 10: 245-261, 2006) has shown that appropriate use of formulaic sequences helps learners of English come across as fluent and idiomatic speakers. The evidence from the present study, which was conducted with the participation of Dutch-speaking students



of English and Spanish, confirms that finding, as oral proficiency assessments based on re-tell tasks correlated positively with the number of formulaic sequences the students used in these tasks. The correlations were strongest in the English language samples, however. It seems that the greater incidence of morphological-inflectional errors in our participants' spoken Spanish dampens the contribution that using formulaic sequences tends to make to their oral proficiency (as perceived by our assessors). The findings are discussed with reference to typological differences between L1 and L2. (**Formulaic Sequences and L2 Oral Proficiency: Does the Type of Target Language Influence the Association?** Stengers, Helene; Boers, Frank; Housen, Alex; Eyckmans, June *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching (IRAL)*, v49 n4 p321-343 Oct 2011)

The evidence gathered in the present study supports the use of the simultaneous development of test items for different languages. The simultaneous approach used in the present study involved writing an item in one language (e.g., French) and, before moving to the development of a second item, translating the item into the second language (e.g., English) and checking to see that both language versions of the item mean the same. The evidence collected through the item development stage suggested that the simultaneous test development method allowed the influence and integration of information from item writers representing different language and cultural groups to affect test development directly. Certified English/French translators and interpreters and the French Immersion students confirmed that the test items in French and English had comparable meanings. The pairs of test forms had equal standard errors of measurement. The source of differential item functioning was not attributable to the adaptation process used to produce the two language forms, but to the lack of French language proficiency as well as other unknown sources. Lastly, the simultaneous approach used in the present study was somewhat more efficient than the forward translation procedure currently in use. (**Validity of the Simultaneous Approach to the Development of Equivalent Achievement Tests in English and French** Rogers, W. Todd; Lin, Jie; Rinaldi, Christia M. *Applied Measurement in Education*, v24 n1 p39-70 2011)

The federal government has had a long-standing commitment to ensuring access of English Learner (EL) students to a meaningful education. As early as 1968, the "Elementary and Secondary Education Act" ("ESEA") contained provisions for supporting the education of EL students and in its 1974 landmark decision, "Lau v. Nichols," the U.S. Supreme Court declared, "There is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education" ("Lau v. Nichols" 1974). In 2001, when "ESEA" was reauthorized as the "No Child Left Behind Act" ("NCLB"), the law substantially strengthened the federal focus on the relationship between English language proficiency (ELP) and academic



success. In particular, Title III added provisions intended to "promot[e] English acquisition and help English language learners meet challenging content standards" (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs [NCELA] 2008a). Under Title III, for the first time, districts were held accountable for the progress of EL students both in acquiring English and in achieving states' challenging academic standards. Federal Title III funding was \$730 million in fiscal year 2009 and was \$750 million in fiscal year 2010 (U.S. Department of Education 2011). Drawing on data collected through interviews with Title III officials from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, a nationally representative survey of Title III district administrators, and case studies of 12 Title III districts, this report provides a picture of how states, districts, and schools were implementing the Title III provisions as of the 2009-10 school year. This report also presents findings based on the most recent Consolidated State Performance Reports (2008-09) that were available at the time of the data collection and provides some data from 2006-07 from an evaluation of "NCLB" in order to provide historical context on some of the issues discussed in the report. This report documents the variation across states regarding standards for ELP, assessments to measure ELP, targets for the achievement of districts' EL students, and consequences for districts that do not meet their targets. This report also examines how state policies translate into district practices around identifying EL students and exiting students from the EL subgroup, the various instructional models and strategies districts are implementing to serve ELs, and state and district capacity to implement the law's provisions and to meet the needs of this growing and important student population. Appended are: (1) Supporting Materials on Methodology; (2) Supporting Materials on Identification and Exit of English Learners; (3) Supporting Materials on Instructional Programming and Placement; (4) Supporting Materials on Standards and Assessments; and (5) Supporting Materials on Accountability; and (6) Supporting Materials on State and District Capacity to Implement Title III. (Contains 108 exhibits and 126 footnotes.) [For Appendix G, "National Evaluation of Title III Implementation: Report on State and Local Implementation. (**National Evaluation of Title III Implementation: Report on State and Local Implementation** Tanenbaum, Courtney; Boyle, Andrea; Soga, Kay; Le Floch, Kerstin Carlson; Golden, Laura; Petroccia, Megan; Toplitz, Michele; Taylor, James; O'Day, Jennifer *Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, US Department of Education*)

Having reviewed several bodies of research, the authors provide 14 guidelines for educators to help English learners (ELs) make greater strides in learning English. These guidelines are: (1) Providing English Language Development (ELD) instruction is better than not providing it; (2) ELD instruction should continue at least until ELs attain advanced English language ability; (3) The likelihood of establishing and sustaining an effective ELD instructional program increases when schools and districts make it a priority; (4) A separate, daily block of time should be devoted to ELD instruction; (5) English learners should be carefully grouped by language proficiency for ELD instruction, but they should not be segregated by language proficiency



throughout the rest of the day; (6) ELD instruction should explicitly teach forms of English (e.g., vocabulary, syntax, morphology, functions, and conventions); (7) ELD instruction should emphasize academic language as well as conversational language; (8) ELD instruction should incorporate reading and writing, but should emphasize listening and speaking; (9) ELD instruction should integrate meaning and communication to support explicit teaching of language; (10) ELD instruction should be planned and delivered with specific language objectives in mind; (11) Use of English during ELD instruction should be maximized; the primary language should be used strategically; (12) ELD instruction should include interactive activities among students, but they must be carefully planned and carried out; (13) ELD instruction should provide students with corrective feedback on form. (Based on hypotheses emerging from recent EL research); and (14) Teachers should attend to communication and language-learning strategies and incorporate them into ELD instruction (**English Language Development: Guidelines for Instruction** Saunders, William; Goldenberg, Claude; Marcelletti, David *American Educator*, v37 n2 p13-25, 38-39 Sum 2013)

This paper discusses problems faced by Arab learners of English in general, focusing on problems specific to English language majors/graduates at Arab World University. It highlights the situation with Jordanian students, noting various causes of their problems with English (e.g., school and English language department curricula, teaching methodology, lack of exposure to the target language in language teaching, lack of exposure to the target language as spoken by native speakers, and student attitudes and motivation). The paper discusses the notion of communicative competence, in particular strategic competence, and its relationship with language teaching as it leads to learning. It defines strategic competence (the ability to use communication strategies to get a message across and compensate for limited knowledge of rules of the language), explains communication strategies (which are employed when the second language speaker encounters a problem in communication), and looks at taxonomies of communication strategies. The paper discusses how the use of communication strategies leads to learning and concludes with the pedagogical implications of using communication strategies. (**Communication Problems Facing Arab Learners of English.** Rababah, Ghaleb 2013)

A study examined variability in learner progress through a pre-university intensive English-as-a-Second-Language program as it relates to 36 language learning background variables (e.g., formal English training and exposure, motivation, etc.) and four entry-level proficiency variables. Subjects were 201 Indiana University students. Success was measured by passage from one proficiency level to another/others over the period of program enrollment, and three groups were identified: high, medium, and low success learners. Analysis of the data resulted in identification of nine language learning background variables most closely associated with success patterns. These include: school levels at which English was learned; number of family



members who have studied in English-speaking countries; previous exposure to English as the language of instruction; number of years since English was last studied; number of years of university English; teaching focus in English class; first language; attitudes toward English class; and stated purpose for learning English. Results are summarized. The research method applied in this study was found useful for identifying significant variables associated with language learning. **(Identification of LL (Language Learning) Background Variables Associated with University IEP Success. Wilhelm, Kim Hughes 2014)**

## PARTICIPANTS

Sample size is forty (40) and they are all General Psychology students (from different courses: Nursing, IT, Social Work) 2<sup>nd</sup> Semester 2013 – 2014. Convenience sampling was used to determine the participants.

## METHODS

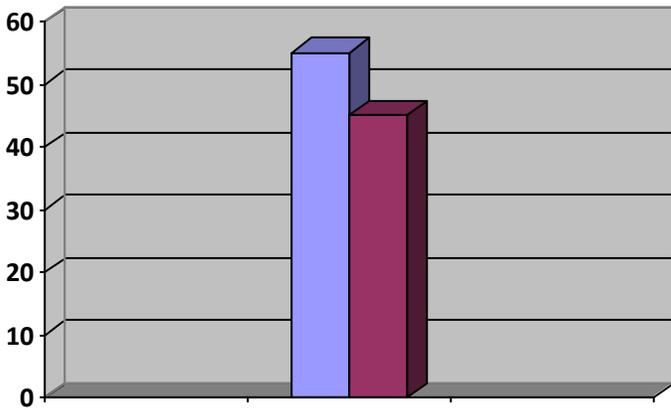
The students were given five (5) questions for them to answer. These questions involve the School they have studied High School, the frequency of Teachers using English in teaching, their insights on how much knowledge did they learn on English, their perception of themselves on their English competency, and their interest in the importance of English as a medium of teaching.

## DATA ANALYSIS

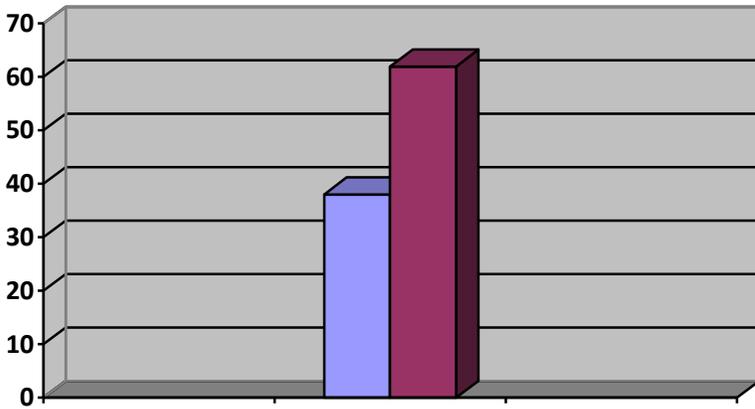
Their answers were coded into themes using pattern coding in Qualitative Research, identifying the common factors of the data and grouping them into themes or categories. The data was analyzed and thoroughly evaluated if there are other themes that may be identified as significant to the objectives of the study.

## RESULTS

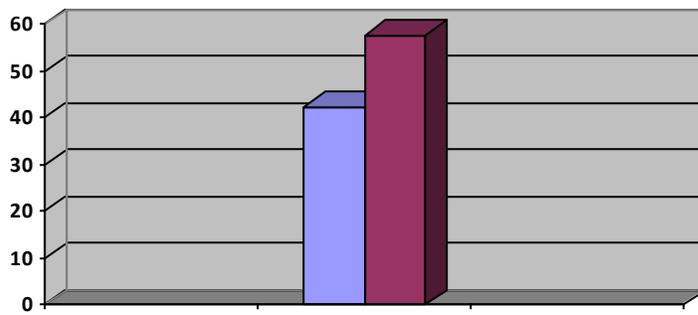
These Charts are presented to assist the reader and illustrate the findings of the study with a sample size of forty (40).



■ 55% studied in Public Schools  
■ 45% studied in Private Schools

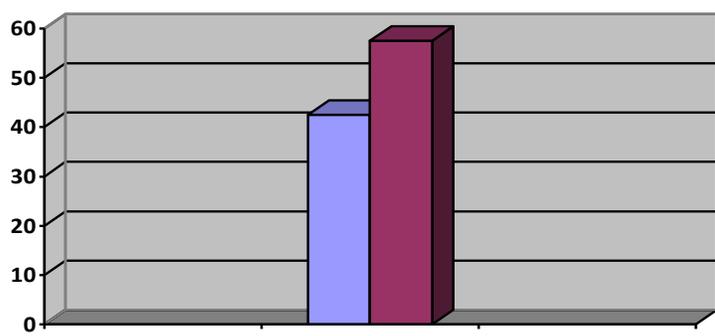


■ 38% reported that Teachers Use English all the time in lectures/discussions  
■ 62% Teachers do not use English all the time in lectures/discussions



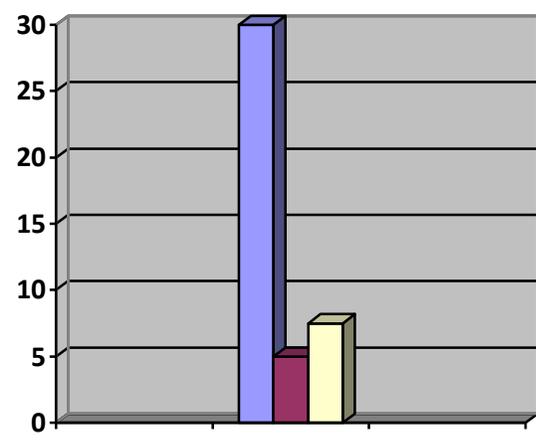
■ 42.5% reported that they learned a lot/English teachers were good

■ 57.5% reported that they did not learn a lot/English Teachers were not good



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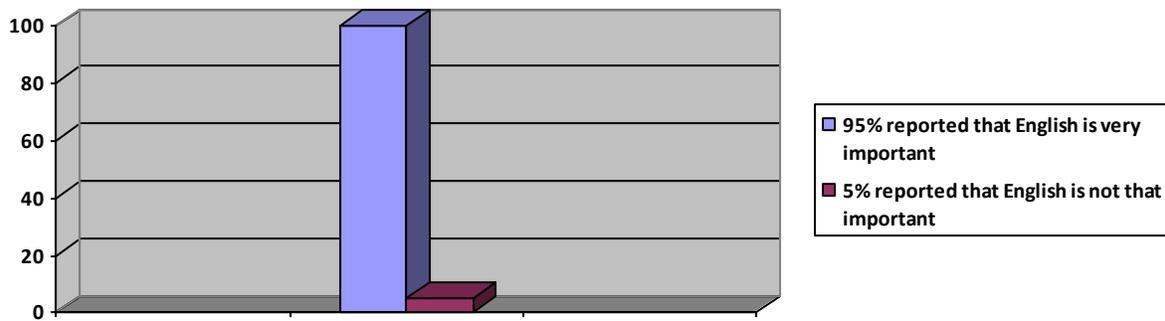
■ 57.5% reported that they did not learn a lot/English Teachers were not good



■ 30% cited that they were good in Reading English

■ 5% cited that they were good in Writing in English

■ 7.5% cited that they were good Speaking in English



## DISCUSSION

Results have shown that fifty-five (55) percent studied in Public Schools and the other forty-five (45) percent studied in Private Schools. Only thirty-eight (38) of the students reported that Teachers from their School use English all the time during their discussions and lectures. Sixty-two (62) percent said that their Teachers did not use English as a medium of teaching all the time. Out of Forty students, 42.5% reported that they learned a lot and their English teachers were good, but the other 57.5 reported that they did not learn a lot from their English teachers in High School. 32.5 % of the students believe that they are good in English and the other 67.5% do not think that they are competent in English. Majority of them, 95% accepts that English is very important and the remaining 5% do not accept that English is very important.

This study identified the factors on why Social Science and Humanities students (specifically in General Psychology) are hesitant in discussions, essays, conference, recitations and other activities that involve the English Language. Other studies on this topic may lead to determining the factors that affect critical thinking and critical analysis of students. In line with this, further studies should be implemented in order to validate this study and eventually recommend programs. The scope of this study focuses only on the personal opinion of the student about their English comprehension and communication, contribution of their school in learning English, and their confidence in using the English language in reading, writing and speaking. Further studies should be conducted in line with English competency of Social Science and Humanities students.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

English should be the primary medium of teaching so as to be globally competitive, in line with this English should be enhanced in all institutions. The researchers suggest remedial classes upon



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admittance of new enrollees if need be. The researchers acknowledge the fact that more studies should be conducted about this topic.

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