

Demographic, Psychological Factors and English Proficiency of ESL Students

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Abstract

Difficulty in expressing oneself using the International language is a continuing issue in classroom situations. The descriptive research design using correlational method was employed in this study. Point-biserial correlation was used to determine the degree of relationship between sex and nature of parents' occupation and psychological and English proficiency. Considering the many factors that affect learners especially in the affective and cognitive domains, it is vital to consider researches that may be helpful for the development of instruction. In order to find the significant relationship between respondent's age, sex, nature of curriculum, household average years of schooling, anxiety, motivation and English Proficiency, the relationship between respondents' demographics and psychological factors, and the respondent's age, sex, curriculum and psychological factors, the researcher conducted a study among 95 students.

Results of this study showed that age, sex, curriculum, household average years of schooling, nature of occupation of parents and motivation have no effect on students' English proficiency, but household aggregate income has a significant relationship to students' EP, and household aggregate income affects anxiety of students. Age, gender, curriculum, household average years of schooling, nature of occupation of parents, and motivation to have no effect on respondents English Proficiency, simply because respondents were not engaged in intellectual activities at home which could have fostered their performance. Household aggregate income is related to their English Proficiency. Respondents have divided attention, it is their basic needs not education which was given priorities, since most of them come from low-income groups. Anxiety is a consequence of low-SES. Focused attention to learning is impossible for learners who are trying to make both ends meet

Keywords: English proficiency, demographic, psychological factors, descriptive-correlation, Cauayan City, Philippines

Introduction

The problem on students' low proficiency in English is becoming an immense problem not only among language teachers but among teachers in other disciplines. If English language becomes a great challenge to learners, it is expected that these learners will have difficulty in other subjects using English as the medium of instruction. Learners' ability to comprehend their lessons highly depends on their fluency in English. Better English teachers not only boost students' performance in the short term, but they also raise their students' *Math* and English achievement in future years. Teachers play an important role in students' academic achievement (Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain, 2005; Goldhaber, 2002). The researcher counted in the literature in a Christian worldview. Brumelem (2002) stated, "Worldview embraces what we believe about the nature and purpose of reality, human beings, knowledge, and life in society. Often, the worldview shapes how we view and conduct schooling. When God lives in the heart of His followers, He guides them into the image He has created. Christ lives in the heart of men":

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers of

authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Colossians 1:15-17, NIV).

Having God and Jesus in our heart helps us to perform the work well amidst all the adversities that can possibly obstruct us.

With the incessant problem on low language proficiency of learners, teachers should continuously work on English language development and development of English instruction. It is important to note other factors that contribute to the low proficiency of learners in English. Factors that are important to consider in this study are the demographic, socio-economic and psychological factors.

The relation of learner's proficiency and his/her age can be viewed when a learner enters schooling without reaching the required age. This happens in kindergarten and grade one levels where parents get too excited sending their children to school. Gender can also be viewed where males are given more tasks to do at home than females, thereby, giving less priorities in their studies. Instances when learners learning foundations such as the nature of curriculum can also be viewed as a factor in this study.

Learners generally have the ability to accomplish task. However, they get interrupted by some social factors. Socio-economic status of a family affects children's learning. In many studies, learners coming from low-SES develop academic skills more slowly compared to learners coming from high-SES (Morgan, Hillemer and Maczuga, 2009). Low-SES of family will have psychological effect on student's classroom performance. In many cases if not most, learners from low-SES have lower academic achievements. Cliché is the statement, "the only constant in this world is change". Curriculum changes so fast, school reforms come and go, and the only thing needed to make the education system strong is for teachers to be responsible enough to deliver quality education to all students. If quality education is to be achieved, it should therefore be a reciprocal relationship of the classroom and the society. It is clear that teachers' instruction is not confined within the hour inside the classroom but should exceed after the instruction period and outside the classroom.

The learning style of learners is affected by motivations and anxiety. The effect of learners' proficiency in English when English is for enjoyment and when there is a must to learn English is discussed in this research. With these factors as contributors to learners' low English proficiency, educators should take the initiative to address the problem through their instruction.

Generally speaking, in many cases if not most, high poverty rate affects learners in their studies or may even deprive them from studying.

This study may not be able to give direct solutions to problems about students' proficiency in English, but it may in the long run be able to offer indirect solutions to the problem.

This study sought to find the relationships between demographic, psychological factors and English proficiency of learners. The researchers compile the profile of students in terms of: age; sex; curriculum; household average years of schooling; nature of occupation of parents; and household aggregate income. The anxiety and motivation level of the students in English were also investigated and the proficiency level of students in English. Is there a significant relationship between respondent's demographic profile and English language anxiety and motivation level? Are there relationships between respondents' demographic, psychological factors and English proficiency?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework suggests that there exists relationships between age, gender, nature of curriculum, household average years of schooling, nature of occupation of parents, household aggregate monthly income, motivation, anxiety and English proficiency of learners.

Learners get affected by so many social factors in learning. Social factors like socio-economic status of parents, demographic, and psychological factors affect or hamper learning. By just knowing all these to be factors that affect learning may seem possible for anyone to adjust instruction.

The socioeconomic status of the family is grounded on income, education, occupation and its social status in the community. This includes contacts within the community, group associations, and the community's perception of the family (Demarest, Reisner, Anderson, Humphrey, Farquhar, and Stein (1993). The higher the socioeconomic status of families, the higher the success in preparing their children for school. This is because

they characteristically have equity to an extensive variety of means to encourage and sustenance children's growth. From these, they provide superior child care, books, and toys to inspire them in numerous academic exercises at home. Moreover, they have quick access to material regarding their children's wellbeing, as well as social, emotional, and cognitive development. In this regard, families with high socioeconomic status frequently pursue information to help them enhance their children for school. On the contrary, families with low socioeconomic status characterize the absence financial, social, and educational supports compared with families with high socioeconomic status. Furthermore, they have insufficient or inadequate access to community resources that encourage and support children's development and school readiness. Parents may have inadequate skills for such activities as reading to and with their children, and they may lack information about childhood immunizations and nutrition. Zill, Collins, West, and Hausken (1995) state that "low maternal education and minority-language status are most consistently associated with fewer signs of emerging literacy and a greater number of difficulties in preschoolers." Having inadequate resources and limited access to available resources can negatively affect families' decisions regarding their young children's development and learning. As a result, children from families with low socioeconomic status are at greater risk of entering kindergarten unprepared than their peers from families with median or high socioeconomic status.

Psychological factor such as high self-esteem and low-esteem is likely to develop on children. Children from high SES will develop high self-esteem and focus on growth and development while children from low SES will develop low self-esteem and focus on their mistakes and get troubled by failure and tend to exaggerate events as being negative.

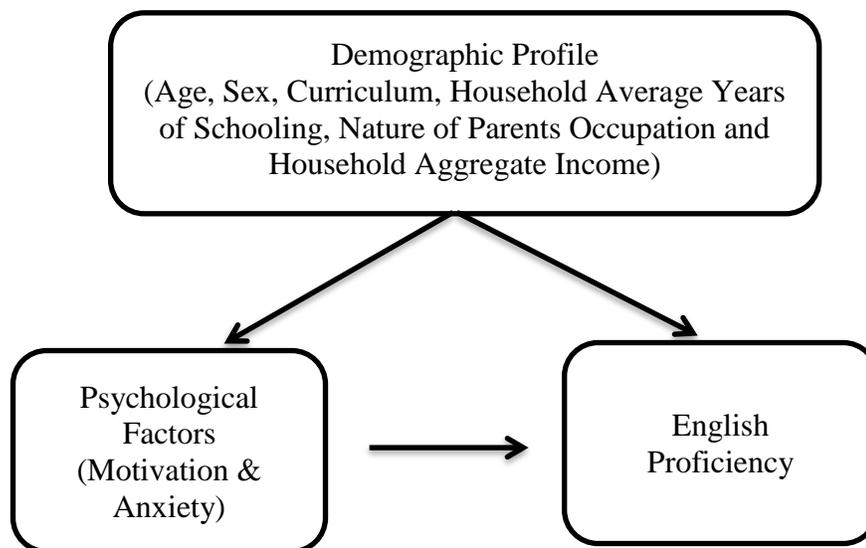


Fig. 1. The Research Paradigm

Research Methodology

Research Design

The descriptive research design using correlational method was employed in this study. Point-biserial correlation was used to determine the degree of relationship between sex and nature of parents' occupation and psychological and English proficiency. The survey questionnaire was used to determine the respondent's

demographic and psychological factors. An English test questionnaire was also used to determine the respondents' English proficiency level.

Respondents of the Study

The participants of the study were 95 students of the School of Arts and Criminology. This population was a total enumeration of two sections of Bachelor of Arts major in English who were enrolled in Philippine Literature. Ages of these students ranged from 15-36, there were 84 females and 11 males, 8 of them graduated from Science Class curriculum while 87 graduated from RBEC in their secondary education.

Research Instruments

Three instruments were used to collect data for this study. A survey questionnaire was used to gather respondents' demographics such as age, sex, curriculum, household average years of schooling, nature of occupation of parents and household aggregate income. To measure student's anxiety level, the researcher adapted an English language anxiety inventory test from FLCAS of Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1989). For Motivation Instrument, the researcher developed a 10-item motivation peer-validated English language motivation inventory test. Both instruments used the Likert scale where 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest. Scales for the anxiety were: 1 – Lowly anxious; 2 – Slightly anxious; 3 – Moderately anxious; 4 – Strongly anxious; and 5 – Very strongly anxious. Scales for the motivation were: 1 – Lowly motivated; 2 – Slightly motivated; 3 – Moderately motivated; 4 – Strongly motivated; and 5 – Very strongly motivated.

Data Gathering Procedure

To get on in this study, the researcher started coming up with needed instruments and survey questionnaires. The researcher made a survey questionnaire for the respondents' demographics. An adapted FLCAS of Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope instrument was developed to measure respondents' anxiety and motivation. The researcher also came up with a Test Question in English to measure respondents' English proficiency level. After having completed the needed questionnaires and instruments, the researcher sought the help of other language teachers for the validation of the EPT instrument to be used for this study. Not long after the instruments had been validated, the researcher sought the approval of the college Dean for the floating of questionnaires and instruments. A letter was also given to each of the respondents regarding their indulgence and participation to accomplish the survey questionnaire. The floating of survey questionnaires and the conduct of English Proficiency Test were done alternately. Gathering of data was done on the same date immediately after the respondents have finished accomplishing the instruments and questionnaires

Data gathered were tabulated and disaggregated and dichotomous coding was used.

Data Analysis

English proficiency, motivation and anxiety, and basic demographics were analyzed. The data were disaggregated, and an analysis was conducted to address each research question.

Data gathered were entered into a Statistical Package Software, a statistical software program. All statistical tests were conducted at $\alpha=.05$. Descriptive statistics were provided for all research variables. Frequencies and percent were calculated for all nominal variables. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for all of the continuous variables.

The researcher used a survey questionnaire for the demographics of respondents such as age, sex, curriculum, household average years of schooling, nature of occupation of parents and household aggregate income. A modified Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale was used to determine the motivation and anxiety levels of respondents. A 30-item peer-validated researcher-made test was used to measure respondents' English proficiency using the following scales: 1 – 10 beginning proficiency; 11 - 15 developing proficiency; 16 - 20 approaching proficiency; 21 - 25 proficient; and 26 - 30 advanced.

The questionnaire was composed of 10 items grammar, 10 items correct usage, 5 items vocabulary and 5 items reading comprehension.

Demographics were correlated to the Psychological Factors through the Motivation and Anxiety instruments. Basic Demographics and Psychological Factors through the Motivation and Anxiety instruments were correlated to the respondent's English Proficiency.

Descriptive statistics was used to find the significance of the learner's demographic, psychological factors and English proficiency.

Point bi-serial correlation was used to determine the degree of relationship between sex and nature of occupation of parents and psychological factors and English proficiency.

Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation was used to address the questions on the relationship of variables. Pearson correlation was used to determine if there were relationships between respondent's Demographics and Psychological Factors, and respondent's Demographics and English Proficiency and respondents' Psychological Factors and English Proficiency.

A two-tailed dependent samples *t*-test was conducted for each research question.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of respondents including (age, sex, nature of curriculum, household average years of schooling, parents' nature of occupation, and household aggregate income.

Majority (65.2%) of the respondents have ages from 17 to 18. Females (88.4%) outnumbered males (11.2).

Most of them (91.6%) graduated from the RBEC curriculum while (8.4%) graduated from Science Class curriculum.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Respondent Demographics

| Profile | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Age | | |
| 15 – 16 | 3 | 3.2 |
| 17 – 18 | 62 | 65.2 |
| 19 – 20 | 21 | 22.1 |
| 21 above | 8 | 8.6 |
| Sex | | |
| Male | 11 | 11.6 |
| Female | 84 | 88.4 |
| Curriculum | | |
| Science Class | 8 | 8.4 |
| RBEC | 87 | 91.6 |
| Household Average Years of Schooling | | |
| 1 – 6 yrs. | 9 | 9.5 |
| 7 – 10 yrs. | 43 | 45.7 |
| 11 – 14 yrs | 41 | 43.9 |
| 14 yrs. Above | 0 | 0.0 |
| Nature of Occupation | | |
| Mother | | |
| Blue-collar Job | 93 | 97.9 |
| White-collar Job | 2 | 2.1 |
| Father | | |
| Blue-collar Job | 93 | 97.9 |
| White-collar Job | 2 | 2.1 |
| Household Aggregate Income | | |
| 500.00 - 10,000.00 | 70 | 74.6 |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|----|------|
| 10,001.00 – 20,000.00 | 19 | 20.6 |
| 20,001.00 – 30,000.00 & above | 6 | 6.4 |

Most of the respondents (45.7%) reported that members in their households have an average years of schooling of 7-10 years which indicates that their academic achievements are high school levels or high school graduates. It is interesting to note that (0.0%) have undergone graduate studies.

Majority of the respondents also revealed that the nature of occupation of their parents fall under blue-collar jobs particularly farming, housekeeping, and selling. Table 1 also shows that all the respondents belong to low-income groups as shown by their incomes that fall under the poorest decile.

Table 2 shows the Anxiety and Motivation Mean Ratings of the Respondents. The table shows that most of the respondents are Moderately Anxious (2.82 Mean Rating or 1.062 Std. Deviation) and Strongly Motivated (4.07 Mean Rating or .856 Std. Deviation) in using the English language.

Table 2: Respondents' English Language Anxiety and Motivation Scores

| | Mean | Std. Deviation | Description |
|------------|------|----------------|--------------------|
| Anxiety | 2.82 | 1.062 | Moderately Anxious |
| Motivation | 4.07 | .856 | Strongly Motivated |

Table 3 shows the Level of Proficiency of the Respondents. Majority (53 or 57.7) of the respondents have Approaching Proficiency in English. Considering the educational history and economic status of the respondents where most of them come from low-SES. It is interesting to note that from among the 95 respondents, one (1.1%) is a Beginning in English Proficiency level and one (1.1%) is an Advanced level.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Respondents English Proficiency

| Score | Description | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------|-------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 – 10 | Beginning | 1 | 1.1 |
| 11 – 15 | Developing | 23 | 24.3 |
| 16 – 20 | Approaching Proficiency | 53 | 57.7 |
| 21 – 25 | Proficient | 17 | 17.9 |
| 26 – 30 | Advance | 1 | 1.1 |

Table 4 shows the relationship of respondents' demographics and psychological factors (motivation and anxiety) and their corresponding correlation coefficient and *p*-values.

All variables: (age, sex, nature of curriculum, household average years of schooling, nature of occupation of parents, and household aggregate income) whose *p*-values are greater than .05 are not related to respondents' English language motivation level. Age, sex, nature of curriculum, household average years of schooling, and nature of occupation of parents whose *p*-values are greater than .05 are also not related to respondents' English language anxiety level. However, household aggregate income with *p*-value of .05 is related to respondents' English language anxiety level. This further explains that the lower the income of the family the more anxious the students will be in their language class.

Table 4: Correlation Coefficient between Demographics and Psychological Factors

| Variable | Motivation | | Anxiety | |
|---|------------|---------|----------|---------|
| | r -value | p-value | r -value | p-value |
| Age | -.105 | .312 | .053 | .613 |
| Sex | .078 | .451 | .111 | .268 |
| Curriculum | -.020 | .849 | -.049 | .639 |
| Household average years of schooling | -.116 | .266 | -.144 | .170 |
| Nature of Parents Occupation | | | | |
| Father | .005 | .965 | .077 | .459 |
| Mother | -.047 | .650 | -.075 | .469 |
| Household Aggregate Income | .023 | .824 | -.023 | .050* |

* Correlation was significant at .05 level (2-tailed)

In most studies, anxiety and motivation are a great deal in learners' achievement. Anxiety is viewed to be detrimental to performance on learning tasks that require attention and deliberate effort (Rocca & Brewer, 2002). On the other hand, motivation is one of the most significant factors that impact the rate and success of language learning (Dornyei, 1998) and it represents the most appealing variable used to explain the differences in learners during language learning (Pintrich and Schunk, 2002). These research findings support the findings of this research.

The table below shows the relationship of respondents' demographics and English proficiency and their corresponding correlation coefficient and *p*-values. Age, sex, nature of curriculum, household average years of schooling, nature of occupation of parents are not related to respondents' English proficiency while household aggregate income with a *p*-value of .024 is related to respondents' English proficiency.

The result of age and gender in relation to English proficiency disprove other studies which explain that as age increases proficiency progresses and that males are more advanced in academic than girls or vice versa. In the study of Dutchworth and Seligman (1997), girls have, in general, received better school grades in all major subjects than boys, and this trend continues through college. This means that girls graduate from high school with overall higher GPA than males. The philosophy of constructivism explains that learning is founded on the premise that, by reflecting on our experiences, we construct our own understanding of the world we live in. Respondents of this study obviously were not engaged in intellectual experiences at home which could have fostered their proficiency. Classroom intervention is not enough for the development and sustainability of learning. It is congruent with the result of age and gender that curriculum and household average years of schooling are also not related to respondent's proficiency in English, this is because, there is not much to expect from the families for intellectual influence since most of the members of the family are not degree holders. The idea of the influence from household years of schooling is that the more household members who are engaged into academics, the more influence the respondents get academically from home.

Nature of occupation of parents is also not related to respondents' English proficiency. However, household aggregate income has a significant relationship to respondents' English proficiency.

Jean Piaget's Brain-based Learning Theory explains that learning is based on the structure and function of the brain. As long as the brain is not prohibited from fulfilling its normal process, learning will occur. Learning involves both focused attention and peripheral perception. Piaget's learning theory best explains the reason on the proficiency of respondents. Focused attention to learning is impossible for someone who is trying to meet

both ends meet in schooling. Looking at the demographics of the respondents, it is too impossible for them to give full attention to studies. Much interruption takes place while learning is in progress. Deprived economically though, still education must be given a chance for them.

The study of Morgan, et. al. (2009) indicated that children from the low socio-economic status households and communities develop academic skills more slowly compared to children from high-SES. Aiken and Babarin (2008), and Coley (2002), state that children from low-SES acquire language more slowly, exhibit delayed recognition and phonological awareness, while children from high-SES background were more likely to be proficient on tasks of addition, subtraction and ordinals sequencing. These related studies are congruent to this study that low-SES respondents displayed lower EP result while those coming from high-SES displayed higher EP result (table 5). SES also affects learners psychologically. The researcher found respondents coming from low-SES to be more anxious than those coming from high-SES.

To sum it up, household aggregate income with an $r=.232$ and $p=.024$ shows significance to respondents' English proficiency.

This further explains that the higher the income of the family where the respondent belongs, the higher is his/her proficiency level in English.

Table 5: Correlation Between Demographics and English Proficiency

| Variable | English Proficiency | |
|---|---------------------|---------|
| | r -value | p-value |
| Age | -.102 | .328 |
| Sex | -.025 | .814 |
| Curriculum | -.021 | .843 |
| Household average years of schooling | .100 | .338 |
| Nature of Occupation of Parents | | |
| Father | .122 | .924 |
| Mother | .010 | .238 |
| Household Aggregate Income | .232 | .024* |

* Correlation was significant at .05 level (2-tailed)

Table 6 shows the relationship between psychological factors (anxiety and motivation levels) and English Proficiency. Both anxiety and motivation levels do not affect respondents' English proficiency. The Control Theory of Motivation proposed by William Glasser contends that behavior is never caused by a response to an outside stimulus. Instead, the behavior is inspired by what the person wants most at any given time. Glasser further states that if students are not motivated to do their schoolwork, it's because they view schoolwork as irrelevant to their basic human needs. Taking into account the status of the respondents, it can be simply explained that priority is given to most of their basic needs at home (helping parent earn a living, earn for the sustenance of their education, etc.)

Research must be an integral part of an educator's life routine. Well-designed researches are ways for possible solutions to problems. There can be no more effective way of dealing with all issues concerning teaching/learning than knowing the learner's needs. A teacher must always make a reflection on how his/her teaching performance runs every day. Analysis and interpretation of data gathered through a research is a rich source of vast knowledge on learner's concerns and needs. It can then be an avenue for researchers/teachers to address issues concerning students who are in the citadel of learning.

With anxiety's $r=-.141$ and $p=.173$ and motivation's $r=.175$ and $p=.091$, these show that there is no significant relationship between respondents' English language anxiety level and English proficiency and between

respondents' English language motivation level and English proficiency. This however contradicts the study of Maleki and Zargani (2007) that there is a direct relationship between academic success and language proficiency and that there seems to be a correlation between first and second language proficiency, and academic achievement in the first and second language. Feast (2002) found a significant and positive relationship between English language proficiency as measured by IELTS test scores, and performance at university as measured by Grade Point Average (GPA).

Table 6: Correlation Between Psychological Factors and English Proficiency

| Variable | English Proficiency | |
|------------|---------------------|---------|
| | r -value | p-value |
| Motivation | .175 | .091 |
| Anxiety | -.141 | .173 |

* Correlation was significant at .05 level (2-tailed)

Conclusions

In summary, the higher the household aggregate income of students does not necessarily mean that they are proficient in English in the context of English as a Second Language in the Philippine context.

Filipino learners regardless of age, sex, curriculum, household average years of schooling, and nature of occupation of parents which is considered to be the bedrock upon which education is founded are learners with natural gift and love of learning only that their low-income impedes their desire to study.

Learners from low income groups lack exposure to books and other learning resources needed to augment and further learning skills.

The higher the level of motivation of students in English does not necessarily imply that they would achieve better.

The lower the anxiety level of students in English does not necessarily mean that the students will achieve better.

Low income household environments can be tumultuous and may bring high anxiety to learners and eventually affect their learning behaviors.

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