

Learning Difficulties in English among Grade 7 as Perceived by Teachers: Basis for Interventions for Higher Student Performance

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Abstract: *This study determined the extent of learning difficulties in English among Grade 7 as perceived by teachers of 6th Congressional District of Pangasinan, Pangasinan Division II, SY 2013 to present. Specifically, it sought to determine the profile of the English teachers in terms of age, sex, civil status, higher educational attainment, length of service; and relevant trainings. Likewise, it looked into the extent of learning difficulties in English among Grade 7 students as perceived by the respondent teachers, the significant difference between the learning difficulties in English among Grade 7 students across the profile variables and the significant relationship between the learning difficulties in English among Grade 7 students across the selected profile variables. The descriptive correlation method of research was employed and the questionnaire checklist was used in gathering data. The frequency counts, percentages, weighted average mean and ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) were the statistical tools used in the analysis of data. Based on the analysis of data, the following findings were yielded (1) The teacher respondents are within the age bracket of 21 years old to 60 years old and above; dominantly females, dominantly married. Majority are with Master of Arts units with 5 years and below to more than 21 years and more in the service, and have been attending trainings from division to international levels. (2) The teachers respondents perception on the extent of learning difficulties in English among Grade 7 students is generally in the “difficult” level as indicated by the grand overall weighted mean of 3.47 with writing and comprehension having the highest weighted mean of 3.61 and oral language fluency having the lowest overall weighted mean 3.31. (3) The null hypothesis of no significant difference in the teachers perception and learning difficulties in English among Grade 7 students across the profile variable in generally accepted at .05 level of significance in all areas. (4) There is no significant relationship between the extent of learning difficulties in learning English among Grade 7 students as perceived by the teacher and the profile variables. Conclusions were drawn and recommendations were offered.*

Keywords—learning difficulties, English subject, grade 7 students, descriptive-correlational study

vocabulary for daily living requires more time and is more difficult to master by foreign learners than English grammar.

1. INTRODUCTION

Different students can have different difficulties and problems in learning English. They can make different mistakes in English pronunciation, grammar, orthography and vocabulary usage. There is a connection between the native language of a learner and particular difficulties in learning and using English and the kind of mistakes a learner typically makes in English pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary as there is native language interference in learning and using English. Listening comprehension and speaking in English are the skills generally more frequently used than reading and writing in daily living in an English speaking country. Listening comprehension and speaking in English are more difficult and more important for learners to master than reading and writing.

When reading and writing a text, a learner has more time for thinking and pauses than when listening and speaking in English in daily living. A learner can also look up unknown vocabulary in English dictionaries and use other English reference books when reading and writing a text in English which is impossible when listening and speaking in English. Therefore listening comprehension and speaking in English are more difficult than reading and writing. English

2. RELATED WORKS

English as a second or foreign language refers to the use of English by speakers with different native languages. In recent years, teachers of English as a foreign language have been paying increasing attention to identifying the needs of their students, to students attitudes towards English and their reasons for learning it. The researcher investigated the answer to the following question: why do students still find difficulties in learning English although their teachers do their best to help them to achieve good results? The answer to this question lies in the fact that learning English or any other foreign language is difficult for all non-native speakers. The researcher observed that although teachers and students in the English department exerted their great efforts, still they face difficulty in achieving good results which made the researcher think that there are hidden elements behind the act of learning and that students are from a population with multi mother tongues aside from Filipino. Using mother tongue can be one factor on the difficulties of learning English as a foreign language.

English has an important role in the world as an international language. English is like a window to the world because by English, one can learn about and get more

information from the world. If one wants to be a knowledgeable person, English is important to be learned. Having good proficiency in English will also help the students to study because what he or she learned is not only limited to the one used in their country but also in the world. When educators know the importance of English for life, teachers also know when is the better time to learn English. English has several advantages when it has been taught as early as in an elementary school, since the elementary school age is a brilliant time to learn a second language, in preparation English in the junior high school, and in preparation to face the globalization era.

The first advantage is that an elementary school age is a brilliant time to learn a second language. Six to 13 years of age is the right age to learn a second language besides the mother language because, at that age, children have a good brain condition to receive something new. According to brain imaging technological research conducted in California, Los Angeles, children aged 6-13 years old who are commonly known as in the critical periods. Their research states that in this period, areas of the brain that organize a language skill has the most rapid growth. Hence, it is imperative to give them activities that correspond to their second language needs and ability.

The second advantage is preparation to face English in a junior high school. When the students have graduated from an elementary school and they enrol to a junior high school, English is not strange anymore to them because they had an English lessons in the elementary school. In a junior high school, an English lesson is a compulsory subject and English is a foreign language so the student should learn it to avoid academic difficulties. The most important thing of learning English is time. Students need a long time to understand the second language deeply so if they learn English in junior high school for the first time, it will be difficult for them. For example, a student needs a long time to comprehend the grammatical structures because he or she still does not have a basic ability related to those structures. The second important thing is patience. Students need to practice English everyday so they can master it well. For instance, a student will have a difficulty to speak English fluently if he or she does not practice every day. The last precious thing is that students must have a strong will to learn English. It is because the students who have a strong motivation will not give up easily. For example, while the students are learning English, they are going to make a lot of mistakes so that they need a strong will to learn it.

The third advantage is preparation to face the globalization era. In this globalization era, everyone is supposed to be competent and improve one's self in order to face the challenges of life. Learning English since elementary school has many good effects for the globalization era. One effect is that a proficient English speaker will find it easier to get a job because one of the requirements of every good job is to have a good command in English. Another effect is they

will not become outdated because as time goes by, science and technology will evolve and with it, the need to learn English. For example, if someone wants to get more information from the internet, they need a skill in English since most of the information in the internet are written in English. Another effect is they will be readier to compete with others in the world as English is an international language. For example, if someone wants to work in developed countries with higher salary he or she needs to have an English skill.

In brief, English as an international language is important for human life because it becomes a bridge between countries in the world to interact so that in this modern era, one is supposed to learn English in order to face the challenges of life. Therefore, English is important in an elementary school education because the better time to learn a second language is at the age of elementary school. One with a firm grounding in the language in the elementary years, English has become a crucial tool for continuing education, employment and social status.

In the context of the foregoing insights, a study on learning difficulties in English among Grade 7 has been conceptualized to improve the teachers' craft in the delivery of quality instruction in English.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study determined the extent of learning difficulties in English among Grade 7 in the Sixth District of Pangasinan, Division of Pangasinan II SY 2013 up to the present.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the extent of learning difficulties among Grade 7 students in English along:
 - a. listening comprehension;
 - b. oral language fluency;
 - c. vocabulary development;
 - d. reading comprehension;
 - e. writing and composition; and,
 - f. grammar awareness structure?

4. METHODOLOGY

The descriptive method of research employed in this study aimed to gather information to describe and interpret the extent of learning difficulties in English by the respondent English teachers in the Sixth District, of Pangasinan, Pangasinan Division II. Descriptive research "describes and interprets what is, and reveals conditions and relationships that exist, practices that prevail or do not prevail, beliefs or points of view of attitudes that are held or not held,

procedures that are continuing or otherwise, effects that are being felt or trends that are developing.”

In view of the nature of the descriptive method of research, the researcher deemed it appropriate in the pursuit of this study to determine the extent of learning difficulties in English in the Sixth District of Pangasinan, Pangasinan Division II.

The respondents of the study included the sixty (60) English teachers in the Sixth District of Pangasinan, Division of Pangasinan II who are teaching from this SY 2013 to the present.

The researcher used the questionnaire checklist specifically made for the study based on the constructed problems. It was used to gather information from English teachers.

The questionnaire consists of two parts. Part I elicited the background information on the profile of English teachers namely, age, sex, civil status, length of service, relevant trainings and highest educational attainment. Part II of the instrument dealt with the extent of learning difficulties in English in the different learning areas.

The responses and the data obtained were kept confidential by the researcher of this study to encourage the highest degree of objectivity of response.

The following statistical tools were used to answer the specific problems of the study.

To determine the extent of learning difficulties in English, the weighted average mean was utilized. The responses were categorized into a five-point scale with corresponding numerical categories. The choices are classified as “Very Difficult”, “Difficult”, “Moderately Difficult”, “Slightly Difficult”, and “Not Difficult”. Descriptive values of 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 are assigned respectively.

5. RESULTS

The results were presented based from sequence and order of the questions raised:

Problem: What is the extent of learning difficulties among Grade 7 students in English?

Learning Difficulty in Listening Comprehension

Findings revealed the extent of listening comprehension. It could be seen that the computed average weighted mean is 3.31 described as “difficult”. The rating of these teachers in this area may be attributed to some factors. The item with the highest weighted mean is 3.50 equivalent to “difficult”. This is on the item “noting specific words or expressions that signal crucial details in the narrative listened to”. It implies that home teachers possess skills wherein learners listened for clues like pitch and volume. These teachers are equipped with instructional skills in listening for comprehension. The

item with the lowest weighted mean is “determining the effect of facial expressions and life contact in understanding a message” which is 2.97 or moderately difficult. It could be inferred that there are barriers to listening like teacher factor wherein she failed to portray the necessary action or inherent message she wants to convey.

Learning Difficulty in Oral Language Fluency

Oral language is one of the concerns of this study. It is the use of the language verbally. In instructional activities, it is an indispensable part of the teaching learning situation.

Results presented the data, which is the assessment of the teachers along this area with a computed average weighted mean of 3.31 moderately difficult. This means that the teachers are somewhat not competent in this area. They have rated a highest mean of 3.50 described as “difficult” on providing suggestions in addressing controversial problems, issues or concern in a selection or topic. This means that teachers have not demonstrated mastery of the skill in oral language and fluency. This can be attributed that these teachers failed to use high-tech materials in enhancing speaking and have not undergone trainings on this aspect.

The overall weighted mean of “moderately difficult” means that some of the teachers are competent in oral language.

Learning Difficulty in Vocabulary Development

Teaching Reading includes vocabulary development. It is the use of words in communication to convey ideas. As teachers it is very necessary to express variety of ideas, so there is a need to enlarge their stock of words.

The study presents the extent of difficulties of teachers along vocabulary development. The item with the highest weighted mean of 3.52 equivalent to “difficult” is “selecting an appropriate familiar words or idiomatic words as substitute for another word”. This could be attributed to the fact that there are teachers in the venue of the study who failed to develop keen interest in words, their associations and warnings. This mean that teachers failed to let their students learn synonyms and antonyms. The average weighted mean is 3.42 described as “moderately difficult”. This implies that the teachers are not fully equipped with the necessary skills in vocabulary development among their students. The students have poor choice of words that are correct and effective for the expression of their ideas.

Learning Difficulty in Reading Comprehension

Teaching strategies in reading include comprehension. It is getting meaning from printed words. It is meaning-getting process. It must begin and end with an understanding of the printed message.

The study presents the extent of learning difficulties in reading along Reading Comprehension. The rating of the teacher had an average weighted mean of 3.54 described as

“difficult”. It is remarkably observed that all the ten items under these indicators got a weighted mean ranging from 3.45 to 3.65. This could be attributed that the teachers failed to teach students mastery along skills on answering specific questions, restating important facts and giving details, sequencing of events and happenings, give details on directions. Further, this means the teachers overlooked teaching summarizing of ideas, predicting outcomes, inferring relationships such as cause and effects, drawing conclusions, and making generalizations which can develop effective reading comprehension.

Learning Difficulty in Writing and Composition

Writing is an integral part of the language teaching and learning in English. It is a thinking process which is characterized by purposeful selection and organization of ideas and experiences.

Findings show the extent of difficulties in this concern among Grade 7 English as perceived by teachers. To be an effective teacher, one must consider writing and composition to enhance the result of learning. It is noted from the table that all indicators got a weighted mean ranging from 3.43 to 3.82 described as “difficult”. The highest weighted mean is 3.82 which is “revising a piece of narrative writing in terms of content, style, and mechanics collaboratively and independently”. This implies that most teachers find this and considered it the most difficult skill to teach. Further, this could be attributed that some teachers in the venue of the study are not fully skilled in teaching writing and composition. It could also be inferred that there are teachers when failed to participate in writing competitions during English Festival which could enrich their competencies and skills.

Learning Difficulty in Grammar Awareness Structure

The extent of learning difficulties along grammar awareness structure is being presented. The item with the highest indicator of 3.75 equivalent to difficult is “employing a variety of cohesive devices in composing short personal narratives”. This is an indication that the teachers have low concern on this item. They failed to teach to write a series of sentences that are logically connected. They are not trained to recognize and use different sentence structures and sentence linking devices; as well as to write for a particular purpose.

The average weighted mean is 3.55 described as “difficult”. The findings imply that these teachers do not possess the instructional skills along the area of grammar awareness structure which is needed in effective teaching of English. This is also an indication that teachers are not accustomed by these activities in grammar awareness structure.

6. DISCUSSION

Based from the overall weighted mean for the six areas on learning difficulties in English among Grade 7 as perceived by teachers, a consolidated report is presented in Table 9.

Shown in the findings are the ratings of the teacher which is 3.47 or difficult. The area with the highest rating is on writing and comprehension which is 3.62 described as “difficult”. The lowest rating is on 3.31, “moderately difficult,” which is on oral language fluency. This manifests that teachers of the respondent venue are more of oral language fluency then writing and comprehension.

This is an affirmation that the Grade 7 English teachers in the K to 12 program experienced problems or difficulties in their instructional activities. Furthermore, the results imply that these teachers need more in-service trainings in teaching English to be equipped with the needed skills and competencies for effective teaching.

The teachers respondents’ perception on the extent of learning difficulties in English among Grade 7 students is generally in the “difficult” level as indicated by the grand overall weighted mean of 3.47 with writing and composition having the highest weighted mean of 3.61 and oral language fluency having the lowest overall weighted mean of 3.31.

In this view, principals really play vital role in increasing the performance of the school. This can be done by improving the self-efficacy of teachers towards their job [1] [2], innovate with technology in terms of instructional delivery [3][4], and promote new normal leadership which refers to the ability of teachers to adapt, decide, and implement necessary elements of learning while following health protocols [5].

7. CONCLUSIONS

The teachers respondents’ perception on the extent of learning difficulties in English among Grade 7 students is generally in the “difficult” level as indicated by the grand overall weighted mean of 3.47 with writing and composition having the highest weighted mean of 3.61 and oral language fluency having the lowest overall weighted mean of 3.31.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

All concerned teachers must be encouraged to enhance their professional growth by pursuing their graduate and post graduate studies in reputable institution to improve their skills in teaching English, thereby reducing learning difficulties among Grade 7 students.

Teachers teaching English in Grade 7 should improve their competencies along the different areas mentioned earlier to further enhance student performance and achievement.

3. More carefully selected variables should further be identified specially those strong indicators for effective English teaching. The teachers’ development activities should include enhancement training to reduce learning difficulties in English among Grade 7 students. Lastly, this study may be replicated in other schools or division to validate the results. Other studies should be conducted to look into other aspects of teachers’ extent of learning difficulties in English.

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