

Utilization of Literacy Strategies for the Development of Students' English Language Proficiency

Mechell B. Ramirez^{1*}, Angela Gabrielle B. Bacang²

¹Camanjac National High School, Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental, Philippines

²Foundation University, Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental, Philippines

*Corresponding Author email: mechell.ramirez@gmail.com

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Abstract. This study investigated the effectiveness of literacy strategies on students' English language proficiency in vocabulary, reading comprehension, and written expression. It also sought to determine whether the students' perceived effectiveness of these strategies influenced their English language proficiency. The researchers employed a quasi-experimental and descriptive-correlational design. The participants were the 10th-grade students of Camanjac National High School. The study used parallel 45-item English pre-and posttests and a survey questionnaire to fit the purpose of the study. These tests and survey questionnaires were subjected to content validation by experts. The respondents underwent the entire procedure: the pretest, the utilization of literacy strategies, and the posttest. The researchers used weighted mean, percentage, *t*-test, and Spearman rank correlation coefficient in treating the data. In the pretest, the students scored below expectations in vocabulary, reading comprehension, and written expression, with mean scores of 73.42 percent, 69.27 percent, and 70.58 percent, respectively. The posttest revealed that the level of English proficiency after using literacy strategies improved to 82.19 percent in vocabulary, 81.72 percent in reading comprehension, and 82.08 percent in written expression. Furthermore, the *t*-test results indicate that the students' performance significantly improved. In addition, the data disclosed a significant relationship between reading strategies and the students' reading comprehension levels. However, there is no significant relationship between vocabulary strategies and the students' vocabulary level, nor between writing strategies and the students' written expression level.

Keywords: Literacy strategies; English language proficiency; Reading comprehension; Vocabulary; Written expression.

1.0 Introduction

English is crucial for communication, academic advancement, and professional success in a globalized world (Rao, 2019). It is the mediator of cultural, political, and economic exchange in the context of globalization (Mohammed, 2020). Since English is used for most global communication, it is essential for academic and professional activities (Rao, 2019). However, English proficiency has declined worldwide. A recent UNESCO study showed that the ability to learn English declined sharply between 2010 and 2015 in countries worldwide (UNESCO, 2018). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' reading comprehension has led to overall changes in achievement gaps within student groups (Ludewig et al., 2022). Additionally, the EF English Proficiency Index shows how levels of English proficiency are changing at different rates in different countries, including some countries with declining English proficiency (EPI, 2022).

Meanwhile, poor academic performance in English in the Philippines has also been a long-time concern. In fact, the English curriculum for grades K to 12 was developed in response to students' poor performance in NAT across

all subjects (Barrot, 2019). Furthermore, research shows a decline in English proficiency among Filipino learners. In the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 rankings, the Philippines ranked last in reading and second to last in science and mathematics among the 79 participating countries. Filipino students continue to underperform on PISA tests; over 80 percent do not reach even basic reading proficiency (OECD, 2019). Likewise, the Philippines ranked 22nd out of 111 countries in the EF English Proficiency Index (EPI) for 2022 (EPI, 2022). The declining proficiency levels among Filipinos are making their graduates less competitive globally (Bawa, 2020). Moreover, recent studies show a gradual decrease in English proficiency among Filipinos, attributed to the impact of inexperienced and ineffective teachers (Bernardo et al., 2022). With the Philippines no longer Asia's most English-speaking country, this has worrying implications for domestic and international companies, prompting the Department of Education (DepEd) to increase its efforts to improve students' English proficiency (Suelto, 2018). The decline in English proficiency highlights the need for effective English teaching and a clear strategy to enhance English proficiency tailored to the needs of Filipino learners (EPI, 2022).

There have been studies that examined the relationship between English proficiency and academic performance and found that there is a strong positive relationship between learners' English proficiency and academic performance (Devi, 2023) and that teaching and learning English in the Philippines has been largely successful, although there are areas for improvement (Santos et al., 2022). Some studies have focused on the general outcomes of literacy strategies in relation to language proficiency (Chen, 2022). Bawa (2020) has also shown that language learning strategies (LLS) have been proven to have a positive relationship with language proficiency. Since most studies have found that LLS use is associated with higher levels of language proficiency, this study focuses specifically on the role of literacy strategies and how they may contribute to the development of English language proficiency among Filipino students.

Considering the above premise, the researchers sought to investigate the effectiveness of literacy strategies on the students' English language proficiency, focusing on vocabulary, reading comprehension, and written expression. Thus, this study attempts to provide insights into the connection between these literacy strategies and the students' academic performance, with the goal of improving the English language proficiency of Filipino students.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study used a quasi-experimental and descriptive-correlational research design. It is quasi-experimental because the study evaluates the effects of interventions in real-world settings where randomization is not available (Shadish et al., 2002). Students' English language proficiency was assessed before and after the intervention, that is, the implementation of literacy strategies. The researchers evaluated any changes or improvements in participants' skills, knowledge, or outcomes due to the intervention. It is also descriptive-correlational because it seeks to describe the relationships between variables (Tupou, 2013). In this context, the study determined whether students' perceived effectiveness of these strategies influenced their English proficiency.

2.2 Research Participants

The participants were the Grade 10 students of Camanjac National High School enrolled during the academic year 2023-2024. In this study, cluster sampling was used to select the participants. Three sections (Beryl, Diamond, and Garnet) were randomly selected from the four Grade 10 sections. The resulting sample size was 118 students.

2.3 Research Instrument

This study used two instruments: a test and a survey questionnaire. This study used an adapted division-made English 10 test, while the researchers developed the other test items based on the third quarter's English 10 learning competencies. The test consists of 45 questions, which have three parts: vocabulary, written expression, and reading comprehension, each with 15 items. This test measures the learners' ability to understand and communicate effectively in the language. The entire test underwent content validation and cross-checking by three experts to ensure consistency with the specific problems of the study. The test was also subjected to a dry run to ensure its reliability, and a reliability test-retest of 0.876 was obtained.

The second instrument is the researcher-made survey questionnaire, divided into two parts. Part I contains the disclosure statement in which the students consented to the researcher collecting data/information while

maintaining data confidentiality. This also includes the purpose of conducting the study. Part II deals with the students' perceived effectiveness of the literacy strategies used, which consists of three components: strategies for building vocabulary (10 items), reading strategies (10 items), and writing strategies (10 items). It was subjected to expert validation and a dry run to determine the validity of the questionnaire. Moreover, Cronbach's alpha test was used to assess the reliability of the items. The following Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients were obtained: 0.844 for vocabulary, 0.844 for written expression, and 0.829 for reading comprehension.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The research procedure began with assessing the students' English language proficiency to establish their baseline language level, serving as the pretest of the study. Following this, classes were conducted over the third quarter of the school year 2023–2024, during which specific literacy strategies were employed to enhance the students' English language proficiency. The intervention consisted of 14 class sessions, each lasting one and a half hours per session, aimed at actively integrating these literacy strategies into the teaching-learning process to create a consistent and structured environment conducive to language development.

The implemented literacy strategies were explicit instruction and metacognitive strategies for reading comprehension, contextualized use and graphic organizers for vocabulary-building strategies, and contextual grammar and communicative language teaching (CLT) for writing strategies. The teacher-researcher seamlessly integrated these strategies into daily instructions and reflected them in lesson plans.

After each class session, formative tests were administered to evaluate the students' vocabulary, reading comprehension, and written expression. Following the completion of the intervention, the participants underwent a retest using the same English language proficiency test administered in the pretest. The primary focus of the data analysis was to compare the pre- and posttest scores, enabling the assessment of the impact of literacy strategies on participants' English language proficiency. Following the posttest, the participants completed the survey questionnaire, determining their perceived effectiveness of the literacy strategies utilized. During the questionnaire distribution, the researchers explained the study's goals and significance to the students. Upon completion of the survey questions, the questionnaires were promptly collected. The collected data were consolidated, processed using MS Excel, analyzed, and interpreted.

2.5 Data Analysis

The data were treated and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including mean, percentage, weighted mean, independent samples *t*-test, probability value, and Spearman rank correlation coefficient. The percentage was used to present students' English language proficiency in the pretest and posttest. The mean was used to determine students' average performance during the pretest and posttest. The weighted mean was used to determine the extent of students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the literacy strategies used. Independent samples *t*-test was used to determine the significant difference between students' pretest and posttest performance. The *p*-value was used to determine the significance of the differences in the pre- and posttest averages. A significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ was applied. Spearman rank correlation coefficient was used to determine the degree of relationship between students' English proficiency level and literacy strategies.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The researchers followed the established protocols of the Ethics Committee of the University Research Office when conducting the study. Maintaining the anonymity of the participants' identities further upheld the assurance of information confidentiality. Moreover, the researchers maintained a nonjudgmental attitude during the data collection process to prevent condemnation.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Students' Language Proficiency Before the Utilization of the Literacy Strategies

Table 1 shows the students' level of language proficiency in vocabulary, reading comprehension, and written expression before the literacy strategies were utilized. As for the students' level of language proficiency in vocabulary, 6.78 percent obtained an outstanding rating, 0.85 percent received a very satisfactory rating, 7.63 percent were satisfactory, 20.34 percent were fairly satisfactory, and 64.40 percent did not meet expectations. The students' overall vocabulary proficiency is 73.42 percent, with a verbal description of "did not meet expectations."

This result is consistent with Susanto's (2021) study, in which students encountered various challenges in vocabulary, including selecting appropriate word meanings, using words in context, and distinguishing word meanings based on context.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of language proficiency level of the students before the utilization of the literacy strategies (n = 118)

Rating	Verbal Description	Vocabulary		Reading Comprehension		Written Expression	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
90 – 100	Outstanding (O)	8	6.78	---	---	---	---
85 – 89	Very Satisfactory (VS)	1	0.85	---	---	2	1.69
80 – 84	Satisfactory (S)	9	7.63	2	1.70	5	4.24
75 – 79	Fairly Satisfactory (FS)	24	20.34	11	9.32	20	16.95
≤74	Did Not Meet Exp. (DNME)	76	64.40	105	88.98	91	77.12
Mean		73.42% (DNME)		69.27% (DNME)		70.58% (DNME)	
SD		7.69		4.33		5.42	

On the other hand, in terms of students' proficiency level in reading comprehension, most students (88.98 percent) did not meet expectations; 9.32 percent were fairly satisfactory; 1.70 percent were satisfactory; and none obtained an outstanding and very satisfactory rating. The students' overall reading comprehension level is 69.27 percent, with a verbal description of "did not meet expectations." This result confirms the statement of Tomas et al. (2021) that studies show poor reading comprehension among Filipino students due to limited availability of quality reading materials, inadequate reading instructions, and a lack of focus on specific sub-skills. There is then a need to improve the reading comprehension of junior high school students through scaffolded instruction, focusing on students' perspectives and discussing the effectiveness of the intervention reading program, as demonstrated in the study of Muzammil (2021).

In terms of written expression, 77.12 percent did not meet expectations, 16.95 percent were fairly satisfactory, 4.24 percent were satisfactory, 1.69 percent were very satisfactory, and no student received an outstanding performance rating. Similar to vocabulary and reading comprehension, the overall level of written proficiency is 70.58 percent, with a verbal description of "did not meet expectations." This is the level where students need help understanding prerequisites and fundamental skills (DepEd, 2012). A similar finding was manifested in the study of Caraig and Quimbo (2022), who found that grammar in written expression among Filipino learners has identified several barriers that contribute to poor or limited language skills. Saavedra (2020) also confirmed that existing Filipino grammars have limitations in processing a wide range of sentence patterns, making it impossible to develop strong grammar manually, resulting in challenges with language structure analysis.

3.2 Students' Language Proficiency After the Utilization of the Literacy Strategies

Table 2 shows the students' language proficiency in vocabulary, reading comprehension, and written expression after the utilization of literacy strategies.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of language proficiency level of students after the utilization of the literacy strategies (n = 118)

Rating	Verbal Description	Vocabulary		Reading Comprehension		Written Expression	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
90 – 100	Outstanding (O)	25	21.19	6	5.09	8	6.78
85 – 89	Very Satisfactory (VS)	25	21.19	36	30.51	30	25.42
80 – 84	Satisfactory (S)	16	13.55	31	26.27	38	32.20
75 – 79	Fairly Satisfactory (FS)	25	21.19	27	22.88	24	20.34
≤74	Did Not Meet Exp. (DNME)	27	22.88	18	15.25	18	15.26
Mean		82.19 (S)		81.72 (S)		82.08 (S)	
SD		8.97		6.61		5.97	

In terms of vocabulary, 21.19 percent of students demonstrated outstanding proficiency, while an equal percentage achieved very satisfactory ratings. In addition, 13.55 percent of the students were at a satisfactory level, while another 21.19 percent performed at a fairly satisfactory level. In contrast, 22.88 percent did not meet expectations. This is consistent with the study by Ghalebi et al. (2020), which revealed that students use vocabulary strategies to develop their vocabulary knowledge and understanding. Research shows that contextualized vocabulary learning improves retention and comprehension by using words in meaningful and memorable ways

(Godwin-Jones, 2018). Meanwhile, some studies show that implementing word mapping strategies can significantly improve students' vocabulary mastery, as evidenced by higher scores and successful results on vocabulary tests (Safitri, 2020).

Table 2 also depicts the students' reading comprehension after using literacy strategies. The results show a nuanced distribution of students at different proficiency levels, with 30.51 percent obtaining a very satisfactory level, 26.27 percent achieving a satisfactory level, 22.88 percent performing at a fairly satisfactory level, and 15.25 percent below expectations. Only 5.09 percent of the students had outstanding proficiency in reading comprehension. Reading strategies are targeted and systematic approaches that readers use to understand and interpret written texts (Bogaert et al., 2023). Likewise, Dikkatli and Kürüm (2023) showed that the use of explicit reading strategies led to a positive result in terms of second-language reading comprehension. In addition, a research study found that implementing metacognitive strategies in the classroom can significantly improve reading comprehension in the context of English as a foreign language (Iobidze, 2019).

Furthermore, the table displays data on the students' language proficiency in written expression after utilizing writing strategies. The distribution of students across proficiency shows that the majority were in the satisfactory range, with 32.20 percent displaying satisfactory performance, 25.42 percent obtaining a very satisfactory level, and 20.34 percent of students being classified as fairly satisfactory. Furthermore, 15.26 percent are classified as "did not meet expectations," while only 6.78 percent of students demonstrated outstanding proficiency in written expression. This result affirms the statement of Armea et al. (2022) that grammar instructions have been used to improve students' writing skills. In addition, Yang (2020) demonstrated that the use of contextualized materials as a pedagogical approach to teaching English grammar results in higher levels of writing proficiency. Mastery of grammar is, therefore, a fundamental aspect of language skills and plays a crucial role in improving effective written communication in the English language (Sioco & De Vera, 2018).

3.3 Difference Between English Language Proficiency Before and After the Utilization of the Literacy Strategies

Table 3 presents the analysis of the difference between the English language proficiency of the students before and after the utilization of the literacy strategies.

Table 3. T-test for the difference between the English language proficiency level of students before and after the utilization of literacy strategies (n = 118)

Areas of Proficiency	Pretest	Post-test	D	t-value	p-value	Decision	Remark
Vocabulary	73.42	82.19	8.77	9.178	<.001	Reject Ho1	Significant
Reading Comp.	69.27	81.72	12.45	17.162	<.001	Reject Ho1	Significant
Written Expression	70.58	82.08	11.50	17.168	<.001	Reject Ho1	Significant
Overall	71.09	82.00	10.91	18.852	<.001	Reject Ho1	Significant

Level of significance = 0.05

Using the *t*-test for dependent data, the table shows that all p-values are less than the level of significance (0.05), which means that there is a significant difference between students' pretest and posttest English language proficiency in terms of vocabulary, reading comprehension, and written expression. This further implies that the utilization of literacy strategies is effective and enables the students to score better in the posttest.

The finding confirms the claim of Habók et al. (2022) that there is a positive relationship between the use of strategies and the level of competence. Vocabulary strategies could lead to better performance in the posttest (Peery, 2021). Li et al. (2022) also supported the notion that the use of literacy strategies, particularly in reading comprehension, could lead to better academic performance and higher posttest scores. In addition, reading comprehension strategies improve students' ability to comprehend texts (Almutairi, 2018). Similarly, Yang (2020) emphasized the use of contextualized and realistic grammar instruction to help ESL teachers and students successfully achieve their learning goals.

3.4 Perceived Effectiveness of Literacy Strategies and Students' English Language Proficiency

Table 4 shows the relationship between the perceived effectiveness of literacy strategies and the students' English language proficiency level. Using Spearman rank order correlation, the table reflects that the students' reading strategies and reading comprehension levels are significantly related ($p = 0.007 < \alpha = 0.05$). This finding implies that students who highly perceive the reading strategies utilized by the teachers tend to acquire a higher level of reading comprehension.

Table 4. Correlation analysis for the relationship between the perceived effectiveness of literacy strategies and students' English language proficiency level

Variables	rs	p-value	Decision	Remark
Vocabulary Strategies and Vocabulary Level	0.150	0.105	Fail reject Ho2	Not significant
Reading Strategies and Reading Comprehension Level	0.245	0.007	Reject Ho2	Significant
Writing Strategies and Written Expression	0.081	0.383	Fail reject Ho2	Not significant

Level of significance = 0.05

Research by Buterbaugh (2021) supports this notion that students' reading comprehension level influences their attitudes towards reading. Mohammed (2022) likewise revealed that students with excellent grades use a wide variety of reading strategies and vice versa. Pedagogically, teachers can use more reading strategies to increase their students' reading self-efficacy, which will lead to improvement in reading skills. This suggests that students perceive reading strategies as valuable and effective tools for reading comprehension. Similarly, Oranpattanachai (2023) exposed that there is a significant positive relationship between students' reading comprehension ability and their perceived reading strategies.

Meanwhile, Table 4 also reflects that the vocabulary strategies utilized by the teachers are not significantly related ($p = 0.105 > \alpha = 0.05$) to the students' vocabulary level. This means that regardless of how the students view the vocabulary strategies utilized by the teachers, the students' vocabulary levels do not vary. As stressed by Getie (2020), students have individual preferences for vocabulary acquisition that could influence their engagement and efforts to expand their vocabulary, regardless of their opinions on the strategies used by teachers. Additionally, students can choose different vocabulary learning strategies that suit their learning styles and preferences, allowing them to develop their vocabulary regardless of their opinions on the effectiveness of teacher-led strategies (Lin, 2019). Kassa et al. (2022) also found a moderately positive relationship between students' attitudes toward vocabulary learning and their English vocabulary knowledge's depth, breadth, and fluency.

Moreover, the table reveals that there is no significant relationship ($p = 0.383 > \alpha = 0.05$) between the utilization of the writing strategies of the teachers and the written expression level of the students. This result signifies that the changes in the level of student's perceptions of the writing strategies of the teachers are not associated with the shifts in the level of their written expression. In other words, several factors can influence the development of writing skills in students. As Myhill et al. (2023) noted, students responded well to teaching approaches that gave them more autonomy and choice. This positive response indicates that teaching strategies, rather than the specific writing strategies used by teachers, played an essential role in motivating students. Furthermore, Lundin et al. (2023) stipulated the effectiveness of writing consultations in increasing the student's confidence in their writing skills and emphasized that factors such as individual writing skills, practice, and commitment, in addition to their written expression skills, have a crucial part in students' perceptions of teacher-directed writing strategies. Chen and Hendricks (2023) also disclosed that students' perceptions of the writing strategies used by teachers may not be directly correlated with an improvement in their written expression level, suggesting the existence of additional influencing factors in improving students' writing skills.

4.0 Conclusion

It is evident that teachers' utilization of literacy strategies has a significant impact on improving students' English language proficiency, with notable improvements in vocabulary, reading comprehension, and written expression ranging from "did not meet expectations" to "satisfactory" levels after the implementation of these literacy strategies. This difference is statistically significant, indicating the effectiveness of literacy strategies in enhancing language skills. This finding highlights the importance of teachers actively integrating these tailored literacy strategies into their teaching practices to promote their students' language development and competence. Moreover, the findings emphasize the importance of teachers constantly refining their pedagogical approaches to ensure holistic language development for learners.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

The authors declared that they have no conflict of interest.

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