

# Attitudes and Language Proficiency of College Students at Catanduanes State University Panganiban Campus

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## ABSTRACT

The study determined the attitudes toward the English language, the general proficiency level of 60 selected first-year college students, language structure, reading comprehension, and vocabulary. This was conducted to solve current issues of reading comprehension difficulties and poor linguistic competence in English subjects. It utilized descriptive research. Findings revealed “zero highly unfavorable” attitudes towards English; 2 “highly favorable.” For language structure, half of them were “slightly proficient,” 26 (43.33%) “Proficient,” 2 (3.33%) “Moderately proficient,” and 2 (3.33%) “Very poor.” No one obtained a “highly proficient” rating. The mean score: was 14.02, 4.59 standard deviation. The overall proficiency was “slightly proficient.” For vocabulary (context clues, antonym, analogy, denotation, and connotation), 29 (48.33%) rated “Slightly proficient,” 23 (38.33%) demonstrated “poor” performance, 6 (10%) were “moderately proficient” only 2 (3.33%) obtained “very poor” rating. The mean score is 13.52/ 4.15 standard deviation, a “slightly proficient” overall rating. “Connotation”- highest with a 3.50 mean score; lowest on “analogy” 1.42 mean. For reading comprehension, 29 (48.33%) had “Slightly adequate” proficiency, 25 (41.67%) had “Poor” performance, 4 (6.67%) had a “Very poor” rating, 2(3.33%)

had “Moderately proficient” - mean score 12.12, 3.51 standard deviation. “Poor” overall proficiency. “Forming opinions” - easiest; “drawing conclusion” - most difficult. The general proficiency level was “slightly proficient,” with a 42.23 mean. Respondent’s language structure and vocabulary are “slightly proficient, while “Poor” in reading comprehension.

**Keywords** — Education, language structure, vocabulary, reading comprehension, descriptive, Philippines

## INTRODUCTION

The value of language has remarkably been integrated into the curriculum for the badge of proficiency, which cannot be counterfeited, affirming the need to have a high command of English for the future workforce of students as a value for success is correlated (Casta & Cachuela, 2017; Durga & Rao, 2018).

In the Chinese context, Marjerison and Yang’s (2022) study opined on the relationship between language proficiency, dialects, and motivation in language learning towards socioeconomic mobility, which can be brought about through propensities on access to international language higher education. And that this mapping of the ecology of learner literacy assists in advancing theories on how native speakers of particular dialects learn and ultimately become proficient in English. In Spain, Baker et al. (2022) stated that meta-analysis research pointed to insufficiency in optimal comprehension of text due to varying effect sizes of reading components (i.e., phonological awareness, alphabetic principle, fluency, vocabulary, morphological awareness, and oral comprehension) where the purpose is to quantitatively summarize the strength of the relation between the essential components of reading and reading comprehension in children whose first language is Spanish and who are learning to read in a Spanish monolingual environment.

Among Africans, Yallem et al. (2021) discussed the internationalization of higher education with the increasing use of English as a medium of instruction and research in higher education. It unveiled the unfavorable views on the role English plays in specific contexts presenting critical and problematic uses of language in higher education. Hence, since English language use is one factor that requires in-depth research and transformations in higher education, there is a need to assess the challenges and opportunities with a healthy dose of pragmatism. On the other hand, Martirosyan et al. (2015) of the United

States examined the impact of English language proficiency and multilingualism on the academic performance of international students and implicated the role of English proficiency in academic achievement and as a barrier to cross-cultural adjustment. It was disclosed that limited language proficiency could put international students at risk and result in US departure without earning a degree, negatively affecting student retention and graduation rates.

The problem is similar among ASEAN countries, specifically Thailand and Bangkok, which continued to display lower English proficiency than most Asian nations. This threatens Thai competitiveness, where mastering English has been recognized among the middle class as a crucial skill for economic advancement (Franco & Roach, 2018). Oducado et al. (2020) shared the same sentiment regarding the importance of English language proficiency in determining students' academic and licensure success, hence a need for well-inclusion in the curriculum. Tarlani-Aliabadi et al. (2022) highlighted the significant role of language and background knowledge in reading comprehension among Iranian students. Implications of the study state that reading instruction should improve student engagement in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral and that teachers should optimize the activation of background knowledge and engagement with realistic expectations. Education systems in India and Pakistan face structural challenges beyond English education, given that English is used as the language of instruction despite most students not speaking the language (Ang, 2021).

It is where ASEAN countries seek to expand into service and knowledge-based industries. As the growing middle class looks for more opportunities, improving English instruction in schools and for adults is essential. For instance, Tolentino and Santos (2020) marked in their study that at the Philippine State University, respondents who are Bachelor of Secondary Education majors in English were confident in speaking skills but not proficient in reading and writing. This only implies that universities must be stricter and more cautious in selecting students, especially those who apply for a specific area of specialization, so they can face the world of work and ASEAN integration.

Language learning, however, is an intricate process that requires the intellectual, social, and psychological perspectives of the learners, which are dependent on language. There is a gradual deterioration in the English proficiency of college students (Manuel, 2022), as indicated in the study of Casta and Cachueta (2017) on the decline of English proficiency in low-performance of schools in the National Achievement Test (NAT). Philippines ranked the lowest in reading comprehension among 79 countries (Santos et al., 2022) during the

2018 Programme for International Student Assessment by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), probably caused by language instruction and learning (Derakhshan & Shirmohammadli, 2015). As a result, the Philippines is no longer Asia's top English-speaking nation prompting the Department of Education to put efforts into programs and interventions to increase proficiency in English for a well-educated workforce, communication proficiency in English, and competitive wage levels (Mariñas, 2021). With Ramírez et al. (2022), exposure to electronic media impacts infants' linguistic, socioemotional, and cognitive development. This analysis is an important step forward in understanding infants' electronic media ecologies and their relation to language input and language development. Marjerison and Yang (2022) linked this language proficiency caused by the native dialects of the learner and the learner's reason or motivation for learning English, where President BBM remarked that upskilling among workers begins with a better grasp of English.

This study, therefore, contributes to both scholarly and practical endeavors. From a theoretical standpoint, this study is the first of its kind to examine closely and solely the attitude towards English language and general proficiency among college students in distinct schools: the Catanduanes State University, Panganiban Campus, Panganiban, Catanduanes, Philippines, and planning/suggesting for I-LED (Intervention for Language Enhancement and Development as extension training design to cater the learning needs of the students. It is in light of the foregoing gaps that this study was conceived. The researcher considered the problem a substantial contribution to the institution, especially when these students take their board examinations. Likewise, the body of knowledge and the field of research, new findings and realization have been unveiled in this study.

Likewise, it is anchored on the institution agendum 2 (Disciplinary Topics/ language). It is where Catanduanes State University Panganiban Campus, Philippines aims to develop the competencies on attitudes and language proficiency that educators must resolve in line with Executive Order 210 series of 2003, which aims to strengthen the use of the English Language as a medium of instruction in the educational system.

Additionally, this study intends to analyze the attitude of students toward learning English. This will allow the students to develop language learning skills in no way exceptional, serving as an eye opener for all academicians to improve their attitude towards English learning. Andini (2018) pointed out the urgency to bring about a highly positive attitude toward learning to influence behaviors where motivation, attitudes, and set of beliefs about learning the language are

factors that influence the efficiency of the students in language classes (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011).

And to find this end, the researcher fervently hopes to diagnose the attitude toward language learning, including the general proficiency of students in language structure, reading comprehension, and vocabulary for baseline in current teaching. Similar studies were reviewed, but no investigation with emphasis solely on determining the attitude towards the English language and the proficiency level conducted in Catanduanes- as a gap bridged by the present study.

## **FRAMEWORK**

The following theories on attitudes were found significant, providing anchorage for this study. According to new research, the theory of Leon Festinger on Cognitive Dissonance contends that while attitudes may often precede actions, actions can often precede the development of beliefs. Hence, one way to reduce dissonance is to bring attitudes more aligned with actions. The studies reverberate the relatedness of the learning approach to the level of performance of students in English (Vaidis, 2014). Likewise, the research is connected to the Schema Theory of Anderson and Pearson, which focuses on the role of schemata, or memory-stored knowledge, in text comprehension. It is where the interaction of old and new information anchors new information in schemata; previously stored knowledge interprets new information and allows it to enter and become part of previously stored knowledge (Samas, 2012). It aims to gain insight to the linguistic, cognitive, socio-affective, and educational aspects of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning). Understanding how the interplay between these perspectives may underlie second language acquisition processes (The National Table for French as a Second Language, 2023).

On this note, the study was framed within the context of various local and foreign literature and studies of Casta and Cachuela (2017) and Gunobgunob-Mirasol (2019) on vocabulary size, reading motivation, reading attitudes and reading comprehension performance; Hartshorne et al. (2018) critical period for second language acquisition: evidence from 2/3 million speakers; Marjerison and Yang (2022) on dialects, motivation and English proficiency from China; Franco and Roach (2018) Assessment of English Proficiency of the Thai workforce.

This study determines the attitude towards the English language and the proficiency level of selected 60 first-year college students at Catanduanes

State University Pangnaniban Campus, specifically the Bachelor of Science and Agriculture (BSA) and Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED). With the specific objectives of the study formulated and data and information gathered through survey and questionnaire, the researcher hopes to generate important findings that be used as inputs to concerned individuals. The Inputs include the student’s attitude towards the English language, the student’s proficiency level along the different components such as language structure, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and the general proficiency level of students. The process instituted is a survey (attitudinal scale) and a research questionnaire (language proficiency test). Based on the findings of the study, an Extension Service Training Design was devised to serve as an intervention to cater to the language proficiency level of college students.

With the suggested recommendations, the students’ language proficiency is foreseen to improve as an envisioned outcome of the study.

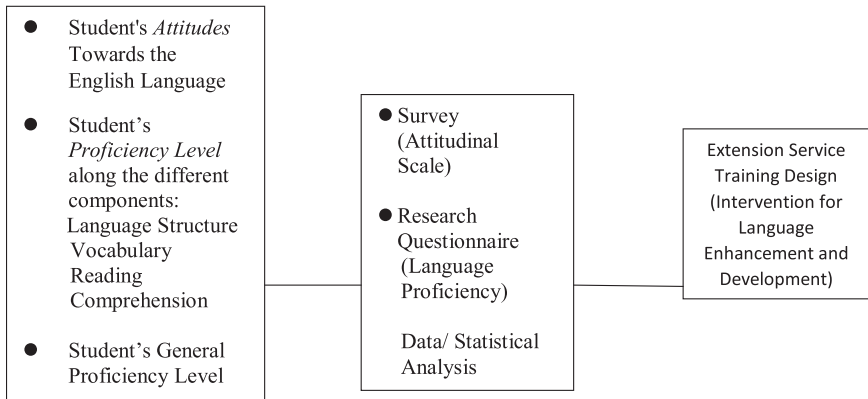


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of Conceptual Model

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study determines the attitude towards the English Language of 60 selected first-year college students at Catanduanes State University, Pangnaniban Campus, and the proficiency level, language structure, reading comprehension, and vocabulary of the respondents. The overall purpose is to diagnose and cater to the learning needs of college students in different language components.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The data were generated from a cross-sectional, self-administered research questionnaire of selected 60 first-year Bachelor of Science in Agriculture (BSA) and Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) college students at Catanduanes State University Panganiban Campus, Panganiban, Catanduanes, Philippines. A descriptive research design was selected to fulfill the aim of this study. It is descriptive in purpose, gathering salient personal and language assessment data to describe, record, analyze, and interpret the attitudes towards the language and the general proficiency level of selected college students at Catanduanes State University Panganiban Campus, Panganiban, Catanduanes, Philippines, using fishbowl sampling. Likewise, ethnomethodology was also applied systematically. The results of the language test were then treated using the frequency count, percentage, and weighted mean.

### Research Site

This study was conducted at Catanduanes State University Panganiban Campus, Panganiban, Catanduanes, Philippines. This university was chosen because this is considered a public, government-owned geared to address the quality education of the general population, most especially the Bachelor of Science in Agriculture college students.

### Participants

Selected 60 first-year college students with a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture and a Bachelor of Elementary Education comprised the study respondents. These 60 were screened using the sample size calculator in raosoft.com with the fishbowl sampling technique. Every name chosen as a sample was referred to the list, the class schedule, and the professor handling the subject to determine the student's whereabouts. All those who formed part of this sample were asked to sign the informed consent for research ethics.

### Instrumentation

The research instrument was composed of two (2) sets of questionnaires with a 100-item language test from Samas (2012) based on the Table of Specification that underwent exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis. The said instrument was also piloted by Samas (2012) in Catanduanes State University-Main Campus, Virac, Catanduanes, Philippines, to all first-year college students

in all courses. As a replication, the researcher personally asked permission to use the instrument in another school. The first part of the questionnaire, which dealt with the attitude towards the language, was designed to elicit attitudes and perceptions towards the language measured using the attitudinal scale from the published study of Tutto and Ramos (2021); a proficiency level scale of which was adapted from Samas (2012).

It contained a four-point scale with corresponding descriptive ratings to determine the attitudes towards the English language: (4) 4.00-3.50=Highly Favorable (H.F.); (3) 3.49-2.50= Favorable (F); (2) 2.49-1.50= Unfavorable (U.F.); (1) 1.49-1.00= Highly Unfavorable (H.U.). For proficiency in each domain, namely language structure, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, the performance level descriptor is 25-30= Highly Proficient (H.P.); 19-24= Moderately Proficient (M.P.); 13-18= Slightly Proficient (S.P.); 7-12= Poor (P); 0-6= Very Poor (V.P). For general proficiency, the proficiency level is determined using: 80-100= Highly Proficient (H.P.); 60-79= Moderately Proficient (M.P.); 40-59= Slightly Proficient (S.P.); 20-39= Poor (P); 10-19= Very Poor (V.P). These criteria underwent a face and constructed validity by Samas (2012), considering existing constructs from previous literature and studies apart from consultation from several experts in the Department of Languages handling English subjects.

After the validation of the instrument, a reliability test was conducted to determine the consistency of the scores using the instrument measuring the same set of factors with a similar type of study established. In this study, the Test-Retest Method was used to examine the reliability of the questionnaire. The validated instrument underwent pilot testing to ensure reliability.

### **Data Gathering**

Given the established validity and reliability of the instrument, a request letter to the Office of the Campus Director endorsed by the ARES Director was properly secured in the conduct of the survey of the participants. The master list of the students officially enrolled at Catanduanes State University, Panganiban Campus, Panganiban, Catanduanes, was secured at the Office of Admission and Registrar Services. Data were gathered towards the start of the Academic Year 2022-2023. Each participant was formally introduced to the nature, purposes of the study, and confidentiality of the data gathered.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All participants were advised that their participation was voluntary and that data be kept private. The researcher secured Ethics Clearance from the Ethics



Review Committee with informed consent for all respondents.

### Statistical Analysis

Before tallying, the completed questionnaires were coded according to the course. The researcher mainly used descriptive statistics for data analysis. The data gathered were collated, treated, and analyzed by the objective of the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1. Attitudes of Selected First-Year College Students towards the English Language

Item Statements	Weighted Mean	Quant. Rating	Descriptive Rating
1. The English language provides an opportunity to learn values that are useful in daily living.	3.53	4	HF
2. I usually give up reading when I do not understand the English terms.	2.30	2	UF
3. The English language promotes my understanding of foreign cultures.	3.30	3	F
4. Studying the English language in schools is less enjoyable.	2.27	2	UF
5. The English language is difficult to understand.	2.25	2	UF
6. I am happier using English than in any other language.	2.68	3	F
7. English enables me to understand the world better.	3.07	3	F
8. English stimulates critical thinking in analyzing paragraphs.	2.97	3	F
9. I am able to write compositions without much difficulty.	2.62	3	F
10. Knowing the English language is a waste of time.	1.73	2	UF
11. I see the English language as something I won't use very often when I get out of school.	2.22	2	UF
12. The English language will not be important in my future career.	1.73	2	UF
13. Using the English language helps me to communicate ideas better.	3.40	3	F
14. The English language is difficult for me.	2.35	2	UF
15. When using the English language, I find it difficult to think logically.	2.37	2	UF

16. The English language is enjoyable and interesting	3.07	3	F
17. I used to avoid studying the English language during my college days.	2.33	2	UF
18. The English language helps me understand programs on computers.	3.13	3	F
19. Grammatical structures make me feel uneasy and confused.	2.58	3	F
20. I feel I don't have a good foundation in English.	2.55	3	F
21. English subjects promote creative thinking.	3.63	4	HF
22. I would enjoy using English outside of school and on the job.	2.95	3	F
23. English is one of the most difficult subjects I encounter.	2.77	3	F
24. I have more confidence in my ability to deal with English than in other Academic subjects.	2.32	2	UF
25. Performing well in English is not important for my future.	2.15	2	UF
26. The atmosphere of English learning in school is relaxed and comfortable.	2.78	3	F
27. Speaking fluently in English builds my personality.	2.62	3	F
28. The English language makes me feel uncomfortable.	2.25	2	UF
29. I need someone to interpret the language because it confuses me.	2.42	2	UF
30. English being the universal language on the internet, is useful.	2.97	3	F
Overall Weighted Response	2.64	3	F

**Legend:** HF-Highly Favorable  
 F-Favorable  
 U-Unfavorable  
 HU- Highly Unfavorable

The study revealed a “zero highly unfavorable” attitude from selected first-year college students is connected to the study of Obeidat (2019). He states that the more students deal with the language and go in-depth with it, the more they will understand its secrets, be interested in it, and have a better motivation to study it.

Furthermore, very limited “highly favorable attitudes” towards learning English is congruent with Herwiana and Laili’s study (2021) that student’s attitudes are mostly affected by six other variables such as teachers’ performance, teaching method, classroom atmosphere, material, media, and students’ competence. Similar to Ali Ahmed et al. (2021) study points that students have negative attitudes towards English, indicating “no awareness” of the significance of the English language.

**English Language Proficiency Level of Selected First-Year College Students at Catanduanes State University Panganiban Campus**

**Language Structure.** The study shows that respondents are “slightly proficient.” No one was rated “highly proficient,” with a mean score of 14.02 and a 4.59 standard deviation.

Table 2. English Language Proficiency Level of Selected First-Year College Students in Language Structure, Vocabulary, and Reading Comprehension

Writing Component	Range of Scores/ Performance Level Descriptor		Frequency	Percentage	Performance Level Descriptor
Language Structure (40)	33-40	HP	0	0	Slightly Proficient
	25-32	MP	2	3	
	17-24	SP	30	2	
	9-16	P	26	87	
	0-8	VP	2	3	
Total			60	100	
Mean			14.02		
Standard Deviation			4.59		
Vocabulary (30)	25-30	HP	0	0	Slightly Proficient
	19-24	MP	6	10	
	13-18	SP	29	48	
	7-12	P	23	38	
	0-6	VP	2	3	
Total			60		

Writing Component	Range of Scores/ Performance Level Descriptor		Frequency	Percentage	Performance Level Descriptor
Mean			13.52		
Standard Deviation			4.15		
Reading Comprehension ( 30)	25-30	HP	0	0	Poor
	19-24	MP	2	3	
	13-18	SP	29	48	
	7-12	P	25	42	
	0-6	VP	4	7	
Total			60	100	
Mean			12.12		
Standard Deviation			3.51		
Total: 100			Mean Score: 42.23 Average Mean: 14.07 (Poor)		

**Legend:** Highly Proficient (HP) - 25-30  
 Moderately Proficient (MP) - 19-24  
 Slightly Proficient (SP) - 13-18  
 Poor (P) - 7-12  
 Very Poor (VP) - 0-6

Turmudi et al. (2020) supported the findings that the Philippines' atmosphere of learning English is better because students are used to speaking English both inside and outside interaction. It is worth documenting how the English language is fostered and sustained from the primary to tertiary level in the Philippines.

This is also a corollary to the Global Data published in June 2022 showing an increased literacy rate in the Philippines with implication to Tolentino and Santos's (2020) findings on being not proficient in English Majors in reading and writing skills.

## **Vocabulary**

This comprised context clues, antonym, analogy, denotation, and connotation. The overall result is just “slightly proficient,” where students should be motivated to read further for vocabulary enhancement. Most respondents’ scores fall on “connotation,” the easiest topic, with a 3.50 mean score, while “analogy,” the most difficult, with a 1.42 mean score.

This vocabulary size indicates future success in reading and general academic execution (Afzal, 2019; Santillan & Daenos, 2020). Hence, vocabulary-learning problems cause to weaken students’ reading comprehension, writing power, and communication skills.

## **Reading Comprehension**

The respondents are “poor” in reading comprehension, noting details, forming opinions, making inferences, drawing conclusions, and giving titles. It’s hardest to conclude while easiest to form opinions.

This has relevance to Santos et al. (2022), with the global survey conducted in 2019 by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) through the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), where the Philippines ranked the *lowest* in reading comprehension. Reading instructions allow students to acquire the necessary skills to be proficient readers apart from the reader’s will and attitude to read (Gunobgunob-Mirasol, 2019).

The study of Baker et al. (2022) explored the role of age, geographical context, and the type of reading comprehension assessment as moderators of the relationship between early reading components and reading comprehension.

## **General Proficiency Level of Selected First-Year College Students in English**

Most of them are “slightly proficient,” as reflected in the 42.23 mean results. The findings are linked to the Schema Theory of Anderson and Pearson on the role of schemata, or memory-stored knowledge, in text comprehension (Samas, 2012).

Table 3. General Proficiency Level of Selected First-Year College Students in English

Scores	Proficiency level	F	Description	Percentage
80-100	5	0	Highly Proficient	0
60-79	4	3	Moderately Proficient	5
40-59	3	35	Slightly Proficient	58
20-39	2	22	Poor	37
10-19	1	0	Very Poor	0
Weighted Mean		60		100%
				42.23 or 3 (slightly proficient )

The said theory is relevant since what students can write and analyze is related to their prior knowledge. With a strong foundation is a vast horizon of knowledge, as Yuliana (2022) opined on content analysis studies that summarize and present a synthesis of these studies to reveal study trends in the language.

## CONCLUSIONS

The respondent's language structure and vocabulary are slightly proficient while poor in reading comprehension. In this context, the researcher's objective as research output is to design instructional material for intervention to the least learned competencies based on needs analysis through an extensive training program. The result of the study manifests the need for quality access to international higher education as a type of motivation for language learning proficiency (Marjerison & Yang, 2022). Likewise, the significant role of language knowledge and background knowledge is highlighted towards better reading comprehension (Tarlani-Alaibadi, 2022) with the established relationship between having a good vocabulary towards better reading comprehension (Baker et al., 2022).

It is therefore significant for the teachers, especially the language teachers, to encourage curiosity on the meaning and use of unfamiliar words and promote reinforcement activities like print-rich, intensive repetition, word wall, reading aloud, vocabulary journal, word sorting, and literacy-related play for vocabulary building.

In addition, the teachers, even the non-language teachers, should perpetually use English as a medium of instruction. They should not tolerate

students using Bikol or Tagalog dialect in reciting, reporting, or even answering written exams in adherence to Executive Order No. 210. s. 2003. Similarly, the administrators need to provide and encourage the faculty to plan and implement reading programs and extension activities to develop the reading skills of the students aligned with the Communicative Language Approach. They should be the voice for the collaborative planning process to improve school efficiency with accessibility to all major needs, like updated quality references.

Furthermore, parents should encourage all types of reading by having reading materials at home. There should be a family book club where parents allot time to model reading, stopwatch reading, read aloud, and other reading techniques. Most importantly, the students are advised to get rid of gadgets for time management and to improve their language skills.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

No research is without limitations, and in the case of this study, the sample size is one. Replicative research on a larger sample size would strengthen the findings. It is recommended that further studies include more than one institution to have a larger sample size. While this study focuses on the attitudes and proficiency of college students, similar research at other levels, like in elementary and secondary, would provide valuable insights, and if the results were similar, increase the value and generalizability of this study. Furthermore, other studies are needed to collect data through other ways, such as observation, to present a comprehensive picture of the effects of language and background knowledge in reading comprehension of the specific-purpose test.

### **TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH**

The findings of this study could be translated through a journal article for international publication, newsletters, radio, social media, and other media for information dissemination and revisiting institutional policies. Additionally, external and internal stakeholders might be able to translate it into a more comprehensive administrative policy and enhanced intervention to the community to conduct an extensive training program, I-LED (Intervention for Language Enhancement), geared to cater to the learning needs of the students. Finally, an avenue to design and create an instructional module appropriate to the needs of the students with a more aligned curriculum design.

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