

Language proficiency and soft skills of Senior High School: Basis for teacher development program

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the interplay between language proficiency and soft skills development. Specifically, it sought to answer the following statements; the language proficiency of the respondents in terms of reading, writing, speaking, and listening; the level of soft skill development of the respondents in terms of problem-solving skills, communication skills, teamwork and collaboration, and emotional intelligence; the significant relationship between the proficiency level of the respondents and their level of soft skill development; and the program that may be proposed to enhance the language proficiency. Using a descriptive-correlational design, data were gathered through an adapted EF Standard English Test and a researcher-made questionnaire to assess the soft skill development of the respondents chosen using purposive sampling technique in 360 Senior High School students. It is then analyzed with descriptive statistics, including means, percentages, and standard deviations and Spearman's rank correlation to determine the correlation of language proficiency and soft skills of the respondents. The findings indicate that while students demonstrate strong speaking and listening abilities, there is a need to improve reading and writing skills, and significant positive correlations exist between language proficiency and soft skills. These insights underscore the urgent need for an Advanced Literacy Instruction Training Program designed to equip educators with evidence-based strategies and interactive methodologies to enhance both academic and interpersonal competencies.

Keywords: Communication skills, Emotional intelligence, Problem solving skills, Soft skills, Language proficiency

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INTRODUCTION

In an era characterized by rapid globalization and evolving societal demands, the dual emphasis on language proficiency and soft skills in education has become indispensable. Educators are now expected not only to impart technical and academic knowledge but also to foster effective communication, emotional intelligence, and intercultural competence among their students (Smith, Jiang, & Peters, 2024). These competencies lay the groundwork for academic excellence and equip learners with the tools necessary to navigate the complexities of an increasingly interconnected workforce.

Studies show that language proficiency varies significantly across populations. For instance, in the Philippines, 75% of adult Filipinos are competent in Filipino, while only 47% are proficient in English (GMA Integrated News & SUNDY LOCUS, 2023). This highlights the need for targeted language development programs to enhance students' communication skills. Additionally, research indicates that 70% of executives consider intercultural communication skills crucial in a globalized market, emphasizing the importance of soft skills in professional success (Hosking, 2024).

Recent research highlights the critical role of robust language skills in promoting broader academic and interpersonal outcomes. For instance, Wagley, Marks, Bedore, and Kovelman (2022) demonstrated that language proficiency significantly contributes to reading and comprehension outcomes in bilingual settings, underscoring its multifaceted impact on learning. Similarly, Park, Solon, Dehghan-Chaleshtori, and Ghanbar (2022) critically examined current proficiency assessment practices and identified persistent gaps despite methodological advancements. Both studies suggest that a comprehensive approach encompassing both language and soft skills is paramount for nurturing well-rounded students.

The relationship between linguistic competence and soft skills among senior high school students is investigated in this paper. Its main objective is to give a teacher development program empirical foundation. The study seeks to promote creative educational practices that transcend traditional academic instruction by examining how language talents interact with interpersonal competencies. In the end, it aims to provide teachers with focused professional development tools that enable a generation ready for academic success to engage in efficient, sympathetic transnational communication.

Senior high school students must acquire excellent language abilities and fundamental soft skills according to the present educational scene to succeed academically and flourish in future professions. Proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension enables students to express ideas clearly and engage in rigorous academic discussions (Soliman & Gorospe, 2024), while soft skills such as effective communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and emotional intelligence, empower them to navigate diverse real-world situations (Alo, 2023).

Even though language proficiency and soft skills have been the subject of extensive independent research, little is known about how these competencies relate to one another in the senior high curriculum. Although research by Alo (2023) emphasizes the significance of soft skills and insights from Soliman and Gorospe (2024) highlight important aspects of language proficiency, there is little empirical data on how their interaction affects overall student outcomes. Additionally, despite the fact that Eslit and Valderama (2023) stress the importance of speaking ability in improving communicative competence, it has been relatively neglected to apply these findings to teacher development programs that incorporate both domains.

Filipino policymakers are giving reforms to the country's educational system top priority in response to changing educational trends and growing demands. Improving In-Service Training (INSET) programs, which are designed for the development of teachers' professional skills, is the

main objective of the programs. DepEd, in Department Order No. 42, s., realizes the importance of the programs in maintaining quality education and preparing teachers to meet the needs of the K–12 Program and the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST). (Department of Education, 2017). With high standards of instruction maintained and education reforms ensured, this framework ensures that teachers are responsive to the changing needs of learners and the overall education landscape (Magurate et al., 2024). It also investigates how this data can shape the development of inclusive teacher preparation programs required in constructing an integrated curriculum that mandates both academic achievement and corresponding soft skills of lifelong success.

This study examines the connection between language proficiency and soft skills among senior high school students. Its primary goal is to provide an empirical basis for building a teacher development program. By investigating how linguistic abilities intersect with interpersonal competencies, the research aims to guide innovative pedagogical strategies that go beyond conventional academic instruction. Ultimately, it seeks to equip educators with targeted professional development tools that nurture a generation capable of achieving academic excellence while engaging in effective, empathetic communication in a globalized context.

Problem statement

The research aims to determine the language proficiency level and soft skills of Senior High School.

Specifically, it sought to answer the questions below:

1. What is the language proficiency the respondents?
2. What is the level of soft skill development of the respondents?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the proficiency level of the respondents and their level of soft skill development?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to explore the relationship between language proficiency and the development of soft skills among Senior High School students in public schools within San Pablo City. The primary objective was to assess whether there is a statistically significant association between students' English language skills and their soft skill competencies. The descriptive aspect allowed for an objective presentation of students' language abilities and soft skills as they naturally occurred, while the correlational component facilitated the investigation of the strength and direction of relationships between these variables without manipulating any conditions.

The study focused on two respondent groups: 360 Senior High School students and their respective teachers, whose insights provided complementary data. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability technique ideal for selecting individuals with relevant experiences and characteristics directly tied to the research objectives. This ensured that participants had sufficient exposure to academic environments where both language use and soft skills development were observable and measurable.

To collect data, the research utilized two instruments. The first was an adapted version of the EF Standard English Test (EF SET), a globally recognized online assessment tool that

measures English proficiency across key areas—reading, listening, speaking, and writing—aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This instrument provided an objective benchmark for evaluating students' language abilities. The second tool was a researcher-made questionnaire designed to assess students' soft skills, which underwent pilot testing and achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.75, indicating acceptable internal consistency and reliability.

The data-gathering procedure was carefully planned and ethically executed. Permissions were secured from the Department of Education in San Pablo City. Formal letters were distributed to school heads and participants, accompanied by informed consent forms ensuring voluntary participation and data confidentiality. Clear communication of the study's objectives and ethical guidelines was provided, in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. After data collection, responses were tabulated and reviewed by a statistician to ensure accuracy and prevent bias in analysis.

For statistical treatment, both descriptive and inferential statistics were applied. Descriptive tools such as mean scores, standard deviations, and percentages summarized the central tendencies and variability of responses. These metrics helped profile students' language proficiency levels and soft skill competencies. To investigate relationships between the two main variables, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was employed, an appropriate method for assessing the strength and direction of monotonic associations between ordinal or non-normally distributed data. This approach provided a nuanced understanding of how one variable may correspond with changes in another without assuming causality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Language proficiency of respondents

The study's respondent language proficiency level, as provided and described in this area, includes skills in areas of reading, listening, writing, and speaking.

The findings present the language proficiency level of 360 respondents in terms of reading, listening, writing, and speaking. It shows that the highest percentage falls on the speaking proficiency with 59% and listening proficiency with 56%. This indicates that a substantial proportion of the students possess a commendable command of the English language, with the majority attaining an Advanced level of proficiency across the core language domains; reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Notably, Speaking (59%) and Listening (56%) emerged as the most proficient areas, underscoring the students' competence in oral communication and auditory comprehension. The lowest, yet significant, number of students achieved Superior and Distinguished levels, particularly in Speaking, where 102 students were classified as Distinguished. This implies the existence of a cohort with outstanding verbal expression and interactive communication ability.

These results confirmed that the student group has strong language abilities, especially in modalities that enable interaction between people. The dominance of high-level speaking and listening abilities also suggests the readiness of the students for successful real-world communication, public discourse, and collaborative discussion. This is substantiated by Alharbi (2019), highlighting that highly proficient English-speaking students can better interact within academic discourse and understand complicated texts, strengthening their learning achievements.

Likewise, Taguchi et al. (2016) investigated the connection between listening ability and understanding and concluded that advanced learners exhibit an increased capacity to process oral English, resulting in better communication. This is in line with the conclusion of Nation (2020), who posited that vocabulary learning has a direct influence on proficiency in all areas of language.

Level of soft skill development of the respondents

The results of the study revealed that Senior High School students demonstrated an "Advanced" level of soft skills development across all assessed dimensions. With mean scores consistently ranging between 2.97 and 3.10, the findings indicate that learners possess well-developed competencies that are crucial for academic and workplace readiness, though not yet at an "Expert" level. This consistent "Advanced" rating suggests a solid foundation upon which educators can further cultivate mastery.

In terms of problem-solving skills, students exhibited strengths in generating creative solutions, analyzing potential consequences, and remaining calm under pressure, with an overall mean of 3.04. The highest-rated indicator was the ability to seek constructive feedback to improve solutions (mean = 3.08), highlighting the students' openness to reflection and growth. Conversely, identifying root causes and adapting strategies when initial solutions fail received the lowest, albeit still advanced, ratings (mean = 2.97). These findings support Antonopoulou (2023) and Md-Nawi et al. (2023), who emphasized the role of emotional intelligence and empathy in navigating complex social and analytical situations.

For communication skills, the students again scored at an advanced level (overall mean = 2.99), particularly excelling in presenting ideas confidently (mean = 3.08). While all indicators met the threshold for "Advanced," the ability to provide constructive feedback scored lowest (mean = 2.95), indicating room for improvement in reciprocal communication. This aligns with Mart (2020) and Ahshan (2021), who found that integrated speaking and listening activities significantly improve students' clarity and audience awareness. However, it also contrasts with Miller and Warner (2020), who reported that many students struggle to coherently express complex ideas without formal communication training—underscoring the need for more structured development in this area.

The domain of teamwork and collaboration also reflected strong outcomes, with an overall mean of 3.02. Students were most recognized for valuing and respecting the input of team members (mean = 3.09), suggesting high regard for inclusivity and cooperation. The lowest-rated indicator was assuming leadership roles when necessary (mean = 2.94), suggesting potential hesitation in taking initiative. Nevertheless, the overall results indicate that students demonstrate reliability, adaptability, and a collaborative spirit, resonating with findings from Keržič et al. (2021) and Peker Ünal (2020), who highlighted the importance of digital collaboration and peer engagement. However, challenges in sustaining interpersonal connections in online contexts, as noted by Hollister et al. (2022), remain a consideration for further skill enhancement.

Lastly, in the area of emotional intelligence, students once again performed at an advanced level (overall mean = 3.05), with their highest competence shown in building positive relationships through support and understanding (mean = 3.10). While all indicators were

favorably rated, demonstrating empathy received the lowest score (mean = 3.00), implying a need for deeper cultivation of perspective-taking and social awareness. These findings echo those of Tesoro (2020), who noted students' adaptability and emotional regulation, while contrasting with Cao et al. (2020), who emphasized emotional challenges faced by learners in high-pressure environments, particularly during disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Relationship between the proficiency level of the respondents and their level of soft skill development

The research investigated the correlation between Language Proficiency Level and Level of Soft Skill. As seen in table 3, the most powerful correlation was between Reading Proficiency and Problem-Solving Skills ($r = .98$, $p < .001$), noting the pivotal role of reading comprehension in cognitive reasoning and analytical thinking.

Moderate correlations were also observed between Listening and Emotional Intelligence, and Speaking and Communication Skills, indicating that oral and auditory skills can develop emotional and social involvement. Greenberg (2023) also supports this, indicating that social and emotional learning (SEL) programs are not just crucial to increasing students' emotional and social capabilities but also are vital to developing their academic engagement and relationships. In the same vein, Brush et al. (2021) project how SEL, if utilized globally, constructs positive learning environments and strong social outcomes. Additionally, Sunogan and Ong (2024) show that tailored strategies for enhancing oral communication in secondary education provide significant improvements in students' speaking abilities and social interactions. These results imply that although auditory and oral abilities may increase social and emotional engagement, other forms of participation and communication must be taken into consideration. Policymakers and teachers need to use a balanced method that supports varied learning styles and participation approaches.

Total language ability reflected strong correlations within each of the soft skill categories from $r = .79$ on problem solving through $r = .18$ on working in teams all statistically significant. These findings document implies a strong correlation between linguistic capability and interpersonal ability. Specifically, robust reading appears to foster critical thinking and deepens emotional intelligence, which is an indication that better language teaching might also build strong soft skills.

Cabell and Hwang (2020) concluded that reading comprehension is central to the cultivation of cognitive reasoning and analytical thinking, as systematic reading habits enable students to process and analyze information better. Likewise, Capodieci et al. (2020) showed that the use of new technologies in reading instruction can further enhance these higher-level cognitive skills. But Johnson and Wilson (2020) caution us that cognitive reasoning is multifaceted influenced too by digital literacy and visuospatial skills suggesting that only reading might ignore other essential pieces of cognitive development.

The results reveal that although students exhibit strong speaking and listening skills, there is a need for improvement in their reading and writing abilities, with a significant positive correlation observed between language proficiency and soft skills.

These findings imply the critical necessity for an Advanced Literacy Instruction Training Program that equips educators with evidence-based strategies and interactive methods to boost

both academic performance and interpersonal competencies.

CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the relationship between language proficiency and soft skills development among Senior High School students, revealing a meaningful connection between linguistic competence and the ability to navigate academic, social, and emotional contexts effectively. The analysis of language proficiency indicated that the majority of students reached an Advanced level across all core domains—reading, listening, writing, and speaking—with speaking and listening emerging as the most developed skills. This suggests that learners are well-equipped for real-world communication, public discourse, and collaborative engagement, which are essential for academic success and workplace readiness.

Parallel to this, students also demonstrated an Advanced level of development in various soft skills, including problem-solving, communication, teamwork and collaboration, and emotional intelligence. Among these, the highest competencies were observed in areas such as seeking feedback, presenting ideas confidently, valuing team input, and building supportive relationships. These findings underscore the students' readiness to apply their knowledge in collaborative, emotionally intelligent, and socially interactive ways, although some areas—particularly leadership in group settings, empathy, and constructive feedback—show room for improvement.

The correlation analysis further substantiated the interconnectedness between language proficiency and soft skills. A particularly strong relationship was observed between reading proficiency and problem-solving skills, highlighting the critical role of reading comprehension in cognitive reasoning and analytical thinking. Moderate correlations between listening and emotional intelligence, and speaking and communication skills, affirmed that oral and auditory competencies support interpersonal engagement and emotional regulation. These results validate previous findings in the literature that emphasize the value of integrated literacy and socio-emotional learning approaches.

Moreover, total language ability exhibited statistically significant correlations across all soft skill domains, affirming that strengthening language instruction can serve as a catalyst for holistic learner development. These outcomes reinforce the importance of designing curricula that not only enhance linguistic competence but also foster essential life skills. As such, the study recommends the implementation of an Advanced Literacy Instruction Training Program aimed at equipping educators with evidence-based strategies to reinforce both language acquisition and soft skills formation.

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