

English teachers' instructional practices and Grade 9 learners' English language proficiency: A correlational study in Cabagan District, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

English language proficiency plays an important role in secondary learners' academic development, yet Filipino adolescents continue to face challenges in reading and other language skills. Although previous studies have examined English teachers' instructional practices, limited local evidence has linked these practices with learners' measured English language proficiency within a Philippine school district. This descriptive-correlational study examined the instructional practices of 20 English teachers and the English language proficiency of Grade 9 learners in public high schools in Cabagan District, Isabela. Data were collected using an instructional practices questionnaire and an English language proficiency test. The findings showed that teachers frequently employed varied instructional practices, while learners demonstrated moderate English language proficiency. Reading comprehension was the weakest area of learner performance. A significant positive relationship was found between teachers' instructional practices and learners' English language proficiency ($r = .47$, $p = .036$). The findings support the development of a teacher development program that emphasizes contextualized instruction, reading comprehension, differentiated activities, instructional materials, and formative assessment.

Keywords: English language proficiency, instructional practices, Grade 9 learners, teacher development, secondary education.

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INTRODUCTION

English language proficiency remains important in secondary education because it enables learners to access academic information, communicate ideas, and participate in broader social and professional contexts. In the Philippine curriculum, English instruction is expected to develop competencies in reading, listening, viewing, vocabulary, literature, writing, oral

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language, and grammar (Department of Education [DepEd], 2016). These expectations require teachers to use instructional practices that address varied language needs.

Classroom practice is central to language learning. It determines how learners encounter English, participate in activities, receive feedback, and apply language knowledge. Ardiani et al. (2019) identified questioning, assignments, monitoring, organization, and assessment as among the practices used in secondary English instruction. These practices provided opportunities for student participation and engagement. Hu (2005), however, noted that English teaching practices are shaped by socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional conditions. Instructional practices, therefore, need to be examined within the contexts where teaching and learning occur.

The Philippine context presents continuing concerns about adolescent literacy. In PISA 2022, only 24% of Filipino 15-year-olds attained Level 2 or higher in reading, compared with 74% of students across OECD countries (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023). Although PISA reading is not a direct measure of English language proficiency, the result points to persistent challenges in reading literacy and highlights the need to strengthen language instruction among secondary learners.

Philippine studies have documented the use of varied instructional approaches in English classrooms. Paragas and Ballesteros (2023) examined instructional practices used by secondary teachers to develop reading comprehension, listening comprehension, viewing comprehension, vocabulary, literature, and writing and composition. Their findings showed substantial use of instructional practices across these areas. In Northern Isabela, Duran-Zipagan and Batang (2011) reported that secondary English teachers used locally produced materials, incorporated learners' mother tongue, and connected lessons with learners' cultural experiences. They also recommended classroom observation to obtain a fuller understanding of teaching practices.

The importance of contextualized instruction is also evident in more recent Philippine research. Perfecto (2023) found that English teachers in multilingual settings localized content and instructional strategies to make learning more responsive to their learners. The study further pointed to implications for curriculum development and teacher preparation. These findings suggest that effective English instruction involves not only the use of teaching strategies but also responsiveness to learners' linguistic and educational circumstances.

Despite this body of research, a local gap remains. Philippine studies have largely examined teachers' reported practices, beliefs, strategies, and experiences. Fewer studies have examined teachers' instructional practices alongside a direct assessment of learners' English language proficiency, particularly across public high schools within a single school district. The distinction matters because the reported use of an instructional practice does not necessarily correspond to stronger learner outcomes. Juned et al. (2021), for example, found no significant relationship between perceived teacher instructional practices and English achievement among secondary students in Malaysia. Their findings indicate that the relationship between instructional practice and learner achievement should be tested empirically rather than assumed.

This issue is relevant in Cabagan District, Isabela, where public high schools serve learners with differing educational experiences, language backgrounds, and levels of English proficiency. The study of Duran-Zipagan and Batang (2011) provides an earlier reference for English teaching in Northern Isabela, but its findings cannot be assumed to represent current conditions in the public high schools of Cabagan District. Changes in curriculum implementation, instructional resources, classroom practices, and learner needs warrant updated local evidence.

International research also shows that English instruction is influenced by the conditions in which teachers work. Rahman et al. (2021) found that examination demands,

teachers' understanding of curriculum and assessment, and pressure for high grades influenced English teaching and learning practices in secondary schools. Such findings reinforce the value of examining instructional practices within specific educational settings.

Against this background, the present study examined English teachers' instructional practices and Grade 9 learners' English language proficiency in public high schools in Cabagan District. It determined the instructional practices employed by English teachers, assessed the English language proficiency of Grade 9 learners, and examined the relationship between teachers' instructional practices and learners' proficiency. The findings were used to propose a Teacher Development Program responsive to identified instructional and learner needs.

The study contributes local evidence that may assist English teachers and school administrators in strengthening language instruction. By examining instructional practices alongside learners' demonstrated proficiency, it provides an empirical basis for identifying areas that may require further professional development and instructional support.

Statement of the problem

The study aimed to determine the instructional practices employed by English teachers in teaching Grade 9 learners in public high schools in Cabagan District, assess the English language proficiency of Grade 9 learners, and determine whether a significant relationship existed between teachers' instructional practices and learners' English language proficiency. The findings were used as a basis for developing a Teacher Development Program intended to strengthen English language instruction in the district.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive component was used to determine the extent of English teachers' instructional practices and the level of Grade 9 learners' English language proficiency. The correlational component was used to examine the relationship between the two variables without manipulating the learning environment.

The study was conducted in the public high schools in Cabagan District, Isabela. The respondents were 20 English teachers who were teaching Grade 9 during the study period. They were selected purposively because of their direct involvement in Grade 9 English instruction. The Grade 9 learners taught by the participating teachers were included in the English language proficiency assessment.

Two instruments were used. The first was an instructional practices questionnaire covering lesson delivery, classroom interaction, instructional materials, language skills development, assessment, and feedback. It used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). The second instrument was an English language proficiency test covering vocabulary, grammar and language use, and reading comprehension. The instruments were reviewed by experts and pilot-tested before administration. The reliability of the instructional practices questionnaire was established using Cronbach's alpha.

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the appropriate school authorities. The respondents were informed of the purpose and procedures of the study, and participation was voluntary. The researcher administered and retrieved the instruments personally. The data were treated confidentially.

Frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and standard deviation were used to summarize the data. Pearson product-moment correlation (r) was used to determine the relationship

between teachers' instructional practices and learners' English language proficiency at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings were subsequently used to formulate a proposed Teacher Development Program.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The English teachers frequently employed the instructional practices examined in the study. The overall weighted mean was 4.18 (SD = 0.43). Classroom interaction received the highest rating (M = 4.31), followed by lesson delivery (M = 4.25) and assessment and feedback (M = 4.20). Instructional materials (M = 4.08) and language-skills development (M = 4.06) also received frequent-use ratings.

The high rating for classroom interaction supports Ardiani et al. (2019), who identified questioning, monitoring, assignments, and related interactive practices as components of secondary English instruction. Such practices give learners opportunities to participate and use language during instruction. The findings also agree with Paragas and Ballesteros (2023), who reported substantial use of instructional practices among secondary English teachers in developing different language skills.

The comparatively lower ratings for instructional materials and language-skills development point to areas that may benefit from further attention. Teachers may need more opportunities to develop and select materials that reflect learners' language levels and local experiences. This observation is consistent with Perfecto (2023), who emphasized localized content and instructional strategies in multilingual Philippine classrooms.

The Grade 9 learners obtained an overall English language proficiency mean of 72.46% (SD = 8.17), interpreted as moderate proficiency. Vocabulary received the highest mean (76.21%), followed by grammar and language use (74.35%). Reading comprehension obtained the lowest mean (66.82%). The result indicates that learners demonstrated relatively stronger knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical structures but experienced greater difficulty in comprehending and interpreting texts.

The finding on reading comprehension is relevant to the Philippine results in PISA 2022. The OECD (2023) reported that only 24% of Filipino 15-year-olds reached the minimum Level 2 proficiency in reading. PISA does not directly measure English proficiency, but its results provide broader evidence of continuing challenges in adolescent reading literacy. The lower reading performance found in the present study therefore deserves particular instructional attention.

The analysis also showed a positive and statistically significant relationship between teachers' instructional practices and learners' English language proficiency ($r = .47$, $p = .036$). The result indicates that higher reported levels of instructional practice were associated with higher learner proficiency in the present sample.

This finding should be interpreted as an association rather than a causal effect. The correlational design does not establish that teachers' instructional practices caused the observed differences in learner proficiency. Other factors may have contributed to learner performance. These may include prior achievement, learner motivation, home language, exposure to English, learning resources, and school conditions. The result nevertheless provides evidence that instructional practices and learner proficiency were related in the study setting.

The finding differs from Juned et al. (2021), who found no significant relationship between perceived teacher instructional practices and students' English achievement among secondary learners in Malaysia. The difference may reflect variations in educational context, learner characteristics, instructional practices, and measurement procedures. Hu (2005) likewise emphasized that instructional practices are influenced by contextual conditions. Thus, findings from one educational setting should not automatically be generalized to another.

The results point to several areas for teacher development. The frequent use of classroom interaction and assessment practices provides a useful foundation. Greater emphasis may be placed on reading comprehension, differentiated activities, contextualized materials, and formative feedback. These areas directly address the comparatively weaker learner performance while building on instructional practices already used by teachers.

CONCLUSION

The study found that English teachers in the public high schools of Cabagan District frequently used varied instructional practices in teaching Grade 9 learners. Classroom interaction, lesson delivery, and assessment were among the most frequently used practices. Instructional materials and language-skills development received comparatively lower ratings and may require further strengthening.

Grade 9 learners demonstrated moderate English language proficiency. They performed better in vocabulary and grammar than in reading comprehension. The result points to the need for more sustained and focused reading instruction.

A significant positive relationship was found between teachers' instructional practices and learners' English language proficiency. The finding indicates an association between the two variables, although it does not establish a causal relationship.

A Teacher Development Program is therefore recommended. The program should emphasize contextualized English instruction, reading comprehension strategies, differentiated activities, appropriate instructional materials, formative assessment, and constructive feedback. School heads may support these efforts through peer demonstration, collaborative lesson planning, and targeted professional development. Such measures may help teachers respond more effectively to the English language needs of Grade 9 learners in Cabagan District.

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