



# A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION IN A LOCAL COLLEGE

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore and understand the lived experiences of the local college students when it comes to English language instruction, their coping mechanisms amidst the challenges they encountered, and their insights based on the experience they have gained. This study used qualitative research employing a phenomenological approach. The participants in this study were the students of Maco de Oro College. Both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were employed to get the data for the study. The result of this study revealed themes for the lived experiences of the students, such as Language Enhancement Skills, Difficulty in using English Language, and Multiple Teaching Methods in the classroom. For coping with the challenges encountered, themes drawn were Peer Support Systems and Mentoring, Reading of English Learning Materials, and Practice Speaking English Regularly. For the insights of the participants, themes are Career Development and Job Opportunities, Goal-oriented approach to Learning English, and Lifelong Learning Process. The result of this qualitative research and the analysis of its findings provide concrete evidence that, as far as the English language instruction in a local college is concerned, it is important to consider the students above all.*

**KEYWORDS:** *college, coping mechanisms, English, experiences, insights, instruction, language, phenomenological research, Philippines*

## INTRODUCTION

British and American agencies assert the dominance of English and persuade other countries to accept it as superior to any other language (Phillipson, 1992). It is believed that English has an economic role to play in the world that induces its spread independently of the political and cultural hegemony of one or more nations (Fishman, Cooper, and Conrad, 1977).

However, the instruction and improvement of proficiency in English have met quite a few challenges in recent years. Among many others, there are new laws emphasizing more mother-based instruction, a limited number of higher education institutions that offer specific academic preparation for the teaching of English to learners whose mother tongue is other than English, technological advancement, and limited instructional resources for some educators and learners.

In the Philippines, the use of the English language as a medium of instruction has long been a challenge to both teachers and students due to the country's rich linguistic diversity. With more than 180 languages currently recorded in the country, a linguistic power struggle is unavoidable, although it may be silent. The question that puzzles many is: is it best to have classes conducted in English?

Since the Philippines is a nation that is leading English proficiency in Asia in general, several English survey reports from both the academic world (Tupas, 2000) and the business world (Global English Corporation, 2012), and other aspects of life (Kirkpatrick, 2010) are pointing more and more to the importance that the English language and English proficiency are playing in the educational success and economic boom of the Philippines as well as other surrounding nations. Despite the great linguistic diversity of the country, English continues to receive high functional popularity in the different areas of daily life in the nation.

I have encountered limited study, which is the same with the present study undertaken, which centers the English language instruction based on the students' perspectives. Besides, it is observed by most of the teachers that students find difficulties in their lessons when instructions are in English. This paper will explore and understand the use of English language for instruction in classes, taking into the account the lived experiences of the local college students. Thus, this study is intended to fill this research gap and enrich this area of language and educational research.

## OBJECTIVES

This phenomenological study investigates students' lived experiences with English language instruction, their coping mechanisms, and insights. It focuses on students' experiences, challenges, and perceptions of the phenomena.

## METHODS

The researcher used qualitative research employing phenomenological approach that is concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of the individual, which purpose is to identify phenomena-the use of English language instruction through how they are perceived by the participants. With respect to phenomenological studies, sample size recommendations range from 6 to 10 (Creswell, 2013) were used in this study. The researcher conducted an in-depth interview which is designed to elicit a vivid picture of the participant's perspective on the research topic and focus group in which the researcher and several participants met as a group and discuss the given research topic based on the participants' insights and experiences.

The study used purposive sampling. In this type of sampling, the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research



problem and central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2013). Purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et. al., 2015). In this research, there were 10 purposefully selected participants who are first-year college students. The participants came from Maco de Oro College. There were three participants selected who underwent an in-depth interview, and seven participants joined in a focus group discussion.

The researcher gathers the data for the study by obtaining permission from authorities, obtaining consent from participants, and scheduling individual interviews. Audio-recorded materials were used during the interviews and note-taking is essential for data collection. A validated interview guide was used to gather information about students' experiences with English language instruction. Data was transferred to a computer, translated, and transcribed, and

secured for further study and interpretation.

Data analysis consisted of three synchronized flows of action: data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions and verification. Data reduction refers to the process of coding, condensing the codes, and transforming the collected data into figures, tables, or a discussion. Data needed to be reduced to make it more accessible and understandable. Data reduction facilitates communicating findings simply and efficiently. This paring and sieving of data are often termed as thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a way of seeing and coding qualitative information (Creswell, 2007). Data display, on the other hand, refers to the organization of the collected data so that it enables conclusion-drawing. Conclusion-drawing and verification were the third components of the data analysis process. Conclusion-drawing meant taking a closer look at what the analyzed data denoted and assessing their repercussions for the questions at hand, while verification is an integral element of conclusions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

**Table 1**  
**The formulated theme and central ideas on the lived experiences of Local College Students in English language Instruction**

| Themes                                     | Central Ideas  |
|--|--|
| Language Enhancement Skills                | Participants experience to practice conversation skills, learn the proper pronunciation, understand grammar rules, enhance vocabulary, and incorporate active listening as English language is used as a medium of instruction inside the classroom. |
| Difficulty in using English Language       | The participants described their difficulty in expressing their ideas using English language, difficulty in understanding deep English terminologies, and difficulty in understanding the complexity of English grammar.                             |
| Multiple Teaching Methods in the classroom | The participants experience having teachers with multiple teaching methodologies used inside the classroom so students can effectively understand English. Teachers apply teaching strategies that are relevant and engaging to students.            |

### The Lived Experiences of Local College Students in English language Instruction

From the data collected, three (3) themes emerged: (1) Language Enhancement Skills, (2) Difficulty in using English Language, and (3) Multiple Teaching Methods in the classroom.

#### Language Enhancement Skills

The participants experience to improve their language skills as English is used as instruction inside the classroom. It makes them feel comfortable using the language and it helps them in their academic studies. Richard (2008) states that most students often evaluate their success in language learning as well as the effectiveness of their English course based on how much they feel they have improved in their speaking proficiency. In addition, Karunakaran (2011) mentioned that the use of English as medium of instruction set a good impact on the learner's attitude, learning styles and personality. Moreover, Wong (2009) mentioned that allowing bilingualism in English classroom will only deprive students of an excellent opportunity to use and learn English. How English-rich the teaching environment depends on how determined each English teacher is in maximizing the English exposure of students

through policy and its enforcement.

#### Difficulty in using English Language

English language instruction also meets negative views from the participants. The participants have trouble in using English Language. This experience is somehow inevitable considering that the participants are not using English language as their mother tongue and thus they have less exposure to the language. Hassan and Badi (2015) presented their idea that the use of English language as a medium of instruction meets several probable causes of difficulties. This could be the result of the students' lack of experience and knowledge of academic reading and writing. In addition, Tanaka (2002) who said that students lacking basic language skills can affect the development of other study skills such as note-taking, summarizing, synthesizing, critical thinking, paraphrasing, and so on. When students cannot summarize the main ideas, they cannot write or express their ideas effectively.

#### Multiple Teaching Methods in the Classroom

The participants experience multiple teaching methods in the classroom which allows them to find English language Instruction comfortable and helpful. Laughlin & Foley (2012)



said that MI based teaching strategies can help teachers identify their students' weaknesses and strengths (2013, p.23). With this knowledge, teachers can better help their students and succeed

in the classroom, while also letting them shine in areas they excel in and build their confidence.

**Table 2.**  
**The formulated themes and central ideas on how the Local College Students cope with the challenges in English language Instruction**

| Themes                                | Central Ideas  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Peer Support Systems and Mentoring    | Participants revealed that collaborative activities such as interaction with peers, having academic discussions, positive debates, and group projects are some of their ways of coping the challenges in English language instruction.   |
| Reading of English Learning Materials | Engaging oneself to reading which involves comprehension activities, immersing to various reading materials, and actively participate to reading activities in schools.  |
| Practice Speaking English Regularly   | Practice speaking through pair or group activities may it be inside or outside the classroom. Seeking opportunities for discussions, debates, role-plays, and presentations to enhance speaking skills. Paying attention to pronunciation and accepting corrective feedback for improvement. |

**How the Local College Students Cope with the Challenges in English language Instruction.**

From the data collected, three (3) themes emerged: (1) Peer Support Systems and Mentoring, (2) Reading of English Learning Materials, and (3) Practice Speaking English Regularly.

**Peer Support Systems and Mentoring**

One way of coping with the challenges encountered by the participants in relation to English language instruction is using the Peer support systems and mentoring. Houlston et al. (2009) as: "whereby a relationship is formed between a peer mentor who acts as a role model to another pupil (usually younger) who is in need of support and guidance". Alternatively, a peer mentor may be assigned to work with a group of pupils, such as a tutor group of younger children (Cowie & Smith, 2010).

**Reading of English Learning Materials Practice**

Learn to read and read to learn. With the habit of reading English books or text students will be able to learn more. Gordon (2008) supported the idea as he said that reading books, journals, and even some websites are useful sources to enrich learners' lexicon with academic vocabulary and expressions that can enhance the ability to express their views and ideas in their own voice effectively. In addition, Krashen's (2004) view that extensive reading will build good literacy skills. He claims that the only way to become good readers and develop linguistic knowledge is to read extensively.

Moreover, Drew and Sørheim (2009) noted that reading beyond the textbook where language learners read a lot of books at an easy and age-appropriate level so that the reading is comprehended without the use of a dictionary.

**Speaking English Regularly**

The regular use of English language even in simple conversation helps participants to deal with the challenges they have encountered with English language instruction. It was evident from the participants responses that using English language in conversation makes them feel at ease with the language. Renandya (2002) mentioned that to be able to communicate meaningfully, speakers need to know the knowledge of communicative competence consisting of grammatical, discourse, strategic, and sociolinguistic competence. Grammatical competence is an umbrella concept including grammar (morphology, syntax), vocabulary, and mechanics. Regarding speaking, the term mechanics refers to basic sounds of letters and syllables, pronunciation of words, intonation, and stress. Grammatical competence enables speaker to use and understand English-language structures contributing to students' fluency. Richards and Renandya, (2002) added that discourse competence is concerned with speakers' relationships, formal or informal occasion, the rules of cohesion and coherence etc. Discourse competence contributes to turn taking in conve

**Table 3**  
**The formulated themes and central ideas on the insights of Local College Students in English language Instruction**

| Themes                                     | Central Ideas   |
|--|---|
| Career Development and Job Opportunities   | Learning English offers a wide range of opportunities both within and outside classroom settings. Having the knowledge and ability to use the language well provide greater chance of job openings and advances one's career. |
| Goal-oriented approach to Learning English | A student with goal-oriented approach to learning English can significantly enhance language acquisition process. If students are motivated and focused, they can be successful in learning and mastering the language.       |
| Lifelong Learning Process                  | English language instruction is not difficult as it is, understanding that learning takes time and continuous, and that staying curious, adaptable, and committed to growth is important in English language journey.         |



### **Insights of Local College Students in English Language Instruction**

From the data collected, three (3) themes emerged: (1) Career Development and Job Opportunities, (2) Goal-oriented approach to Learning English, and (3) Lifelong Learning Process.

#### **Career Development and Job Opportunities**

The participants believed that there are better job opportunities and career development for individuals who are taught English. Pandey and Pandey (2014) Enhanced communication skills in English can result to not only an improved social life, but also better job opportunities in the future. From job interviews to the actual professional world, communication skills are very crucial, and being proficient in English means being able to communicate clearly and effectively. In job interviews, most interviewers conduct interviews in English. Interviewers quickly make judgments and give great importance to first impressions. Poor skills in the language can mean smaller chances of landing a job. On the other hand, being proficient in the language can help one leave a good first impression which means higher chances of getting the position one is applying for. English is the most used language in the business world. Most job interviews are done in English. Most business contracts are written in English. Handling international business deals require effective skills in English. English is the preferred business language because it is an exact language. It allows a person to say what he or she wants to say without having to argue about the meaning. However, using incorrect tenses, prepositions, and the like will make one's statement less accurate. So, to have an increased competence in the professional world, one should have a very good grasp of the English language.

#### **Goal-oriented approach to Learning English**

The Goal-oriented approach to learning English measure motivational orientation toward the value of English language as a mean of daily communication. English goal orientation of a student describes the goals that he/she chooses, and the methods used to pursue those goals. When they achieve their goals, students feel accomplished, and this feeling of accomplishment boosts their enthusiasm in learning. As a result, they are more likely to establish new goals and employ productive tactics (Lipstein & Renninger, 2007). The reasons or goals for studying the language influence the choice of learning techniques, and motivated learners attempt to utilize more strategies than less motivated ones. Negatively inclined people frequently employ fewer self-controlled behaviors (Turner, & Purpura 2016).

#### **Lifelong Learning Process**

The last theme is lifelong learning. Klug, Krause, Schober, Finsterwald and Spiel (2014) and Ozcan and Uzunboyulu (2012) described lifelong learning as a process that includes a rapid change through which individuals acquire competencies in different areas during their lives. Ozdamli and Ozdal (2014) stated that every individual needs lifelong learning for both their occupational and individual needs; they also indicated that changing world conditions and developing technology makes lifelong learning essential for all individuals.

### **Implication for Practice**

The result of this qualitative research and the analysis of its findings provide concrete evidence that as far as the Language Instruction in a Local College is concerned, it is important to consider the language used by students. It also implies that, during the discussion of the lesson, and the employment of strategies, teachers must be sensitive to the needs of the students. In language teaching, it is the common notion that English language must be used as the medium of instruction to students, however, since students are not often exposed to the language, teachers must be able to welcome the difficulties of the students in understanding the terms.

The result will also help teachers to internalize that as a teacher to a non-English speaking classroom, one should have the flexibility in dealing with the students. It will help the teacher realize that teachers need to embrace the background of the students so that teachers will be able to vary their teaching strategies.

It was also in this study that teachers will be refreshed with the flexibility in teaching. With this, teachers will be reminded that students who are our clientele must be considered above all. We must put into consideration their being and their capabilities before employing your standard because if this happens, anxiety will be developed in the teaching-learning situation which could possibly hinder learning of the students.

The result of this qualitative research will offer an opportunity for the institution to render or facilitate trainings and seminar-workshops that will enhance and upgrade the quality of teaching of the teachers. Trainings that will enable the teachers to widen their knowledge and skills in handling students with difficulty when it comes to the use of English language as a medium of instruction.

### **Implication for Further Research**

The results of the individual interview and the focus group discussions and the analysis of the data will provide an avenue for other students and faculty members who will be researching related studies. This research could be a reference for more studies that have relevance to Language Instruction in a Local College.

Moreover, research with regards to employment of strategies which will aid in language teaching particularly in students with difficulty in understanding English language, they will certainly have an overview of this study. The results of this study can be the basis for other research that discusses about the lived experiences, coping mechanism, and insights of students in relation to Language Instruction.

### **CONCLUSION**

The use of the English language in instruction met with both positive and negative views from the participants. And I could conclude that as numerous as the fun-filled and fruitful experiences in teaching using the English language were the tough encounters also when it came to students with a different language as their mother tongue.



There were times when complexities in the classroom due to the use of the English language led to commotion and bullying among students. In this case, the teacher not only acts as a plain teacher but also as a disciplinarian and guidance counselor to calm the situation. Based on my firsthand experiences and the experiences shared by the participants, I could conclude that the use of the English language as a medium of instruction requires the teachers to explore more of the teaching strategies to meet students' needs.

Therefore, teachers should be able to accept the fact that while students learn from us, we will also learn from them. Embracing their experiences, both positive and negative, will enable us to widen and broaden our knowledge in dealing with their difficulties, while they will also be able to familiarize themselves with and thereby apply the use of the English language that we have introduced to them.

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