

Determinants of English Language Proficiency among Selected College Freshman Students of the University of Eastern Philippines: Insights to Language Teaching

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Abstract: *This study determined the motivation and demotivation of college freshman students in the University of Eastern Philippines as determinants in English language proficiency as insights to language teaching. It determined their profile and its relation to their English language proficiency. It ascertained the relationships and differences between the level of motivation and demotivation to their language proficiency. A total of 558 English 111 students served as the respondents. The descriptive-correlational design was utilized. The instruments of Gardner, Kormos, and Csizer were used to determine the level of motivation and demotivation and the DLSU Basic Grammar Test for English language proficiency. The researcher also conducted focus group discussion to gain an in-depth understanding of factors affecting the students' language proficiency. It revealed that the students were female, BS Criminology, and had an allowance of below P500. They were much integratively and instrumentally motivated and externally and internally demotivated. Moreover, they failed the language proficiency test. The integrative and instrumental motivations were related to the proficiency test, while teachers' personality, method, self-confidence, and attitude demotivation factors were related. There was a difference in integrative and instrumental demotivations whilst no difference in external and internal demotivations. Thus, English should be made simple, easy, and understandable. The syllabus and instructional materials used should suit to the learner's mental ability and motivation capitalizing the learners' interest.*

Keywords: Determinants, motivation, demotivation, English Language proficiency, language teaching

1. Introduction

It has been widely recognized that there are numerous determinants of English language proficiency and that students' motivation for learning is generally regarded as one of the most critical determinants, if not the premier determinant that has been widely accepted by both teachers and researchers as one of the key factors that influences the rate and success of English language proficiency. In fact, learning and teaching English as a second/foreign language is no exception in this respect. When teachers think how to encourage slow learners to work harder, how to create an attractive learning atmosphere or how to reward working students, they are dealing with motivation.

Motivation refers to the intensity of one's impetus to learn. Early studies put emphasis on integrativeness and instrumentality. An integrative orientation simply means the learner is pursuing a second language for social and/or cultural purposes, and within that purpose, a learner could be driven by a high or low level of motivation.

An instrumental orientation, learners are studying a language in order to further a career or academic goal. The intensity or motivation of a learner to attain that goal could be high or low.

As English has become more and more important as an international language, in most countries around the world, large numbers of students are being required to learn it through compulsory programs in schools and universities.

Yet, many students are failing to learn successfully (Brutt-Griffler, 2002).

Judging from what several teachers have generally said about poor performance and low levels of English proficiency, there seems to be lack of interest or motivation among students to acquire English proficiency.

In the Philippines, stakeholders are unanimous in expressing their dismay over the decline of the proficiency and competence in English among the Filipinos. It is sad observation that what used to be a course of national pride that the Philippines ranks the highest in English proficiency compared to its Asian neighbors no longer holds true because of the withdrawal of English as the sole medium of instruction and the corresponding expansion of the use of the Filipino in a greater number of subjects in the curriculum.

With the increasing reports of the rapid and extensive deterioration of the quality of English in the Philippines, no less than the Provincial Governor of Northern Samar, Paul A. Daza has noticed the erosion of English. According to him in his speech on one of the important occasions in the University sponsored by the Political Science Society (2010), most of the applicants who are college graduates could hardly communicate in English during the job interview.

As far as the English proficiency is concerned the students in this University frequently use the vernacular or Northern Samaranon in the classroom rather than the English language because they feel nervous in speaking English.

They feel they cannot perform better. The problem exists among learners of English from beginning to more advanced levels.

Many studies showed that motivation plays a significant role in attaining second/foreign language proficiency; however there also exist demotivating factors that impede learners' learning motivation and this lead to unsuccessful mastery of English language proficiency. It was also reported that the reasons why some motivated students become demotivated are multifaceted but teachers play an important role for that.

Demotivation, which is relatively new compared to motivation, is defined as specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention. It is supposed that demotivation might be a factor that would account for at least some of these problems, but its existence and scope have not yet been adequately investigated. A "demotivated" learner is someone who was once motivated but has lost his or her commitment/interest for some reasons (Dornyei, 2001).

A realization of the vital role of these determinants of English language proficiency, and the shortage of studies on this area in the University of Eastern Philippines, has urged the researcher to conduct this study. She believes that the setting of this study provide a chance of focus as it examines whether the status of English language proficiency among NinorteSamarnon learners makes any difference in terms of students' motivation and that the respondents of this study are those who failed in the English Placement Test and who are now taking up English 111, during the second semester of School Year 2011-2012 after their Refresher English course.

2. Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to determine the motivation and demotivation determinants of English language proficiency among college freshman students of the University of Eastern Philippines, as insights to language teaching.

Specifically, this study aimed to: (1) identify the respondents' profile in terms of gender, course, and weekly allowance; (2) determine their level of motivation in English language learning; (3) determine their level of demotivation; (4) know their English language proficiency; (5) find out if there is a relationship between the profile and the English language proficiency; (6) find out if there is a relationship between the motivation and the demotivation and the English language proficiency; (7) find out if there are differences between the integratively and instrumentally motivated students and their English language proficiency; (8) find out if there are differences between the internally and externally demotivated students and their English language proficiency; (9) identify the determinants of English language proficiency of the respondents and (10) provide insights for language teaching derived from the findings of the study.

3. Methodology

This study was conducted in the University of Eastern Philippines (UEP), the only comprehensive state university in the Eastern Visayas Region, offering the largest number of programs in the undergraduate and graduate education among the universities in the region. Its flagship campus is in the municipality of Catarman, Northern Samar.

The College of Arts and Communication being the University College offers English 111 as General education course.

This study employed a descriptive-correlational method. Like a descriptive research which is concerned with the description of the current state and analysis of relationship between variables, the principal aim in employing this method is to determine the motivation and demotivation as determinants in English language proficiency among college freshman students in UEP, as insights to language teaching.

The variables of this study are composed of the independent and dependent variables. The independent variables composed of a) profile of the respondents in terms of gender, course, and weekly allowance; b) motivation of students on learning the English language as to integrative or instrumental c) demotivation of students in language learning as to internal and external attributes. This was measured using the 5-point Likert Scale scoring system, thus, the level of motivation was categorized into very much motivated, much motivated, motivated, less motivated, and not motivated and the level of demotivation was categorized into very much demotivated, much demotivated, demotivated, less demotivated, and not demotivated. The dependent variable composed of the English language proficiency of the students as determined and based on their scores in the English Language Proficiency Test which were categorized as follows: excellent (97-100), very good (70-96), good (53-69), fair (49-52), poor (45-48), and failed (0-44).

Five hundred fifty eight (558) freshman students enrolled in ten (10) English 111 classes during the second semester of SY 2011-2012 were chosen as the subjects of the study. The student-respondents were determined through the Sloven's formula and fish-bowl technique sampling.

Gardner's instrument was used to determine the students' integrative and instrumental motivation in learning English. The instrument of Kormos and Csizer in their study was used to generate the demotivating factors as to internal and external attributes. The internal includes students' negative attitude, lack of self-confidence, and anxiety. The external measured the teachers' personality, methods of teaching, and materials. To measure the students' English language proficiency, the De La Salle University Basic Grammar Test (BGT) was used. The researcher also conducted focus group discussion to gain an in-depth understanding of factors affecting the students' language proficiency.

Frequency counts, percentages, and weighted mean computations were used to analyze data obtained from the respondents. The Multiple Regression Analysis was used to

test the relationships while the T-Test for Two Independent Samples was used to test the differences.

4. Findings

Profile of the Student-Respondents

Out of the 558 respondents, 294 or 52.69% are female and 264 or 47.31% are male.

Regarding the course of the student-respondents, 90 or 16.13% were enrolled in BS Criminology, 40 or 7.2% in BS Agricultural Engineering, 36 or 6.5% in BS Fisheries, 35 or 6.3% in BS Mechanical Engineering, 34 or 6.1% in BS Civil/Electrical Engineering, 33 or 6% in BS Agribusiness, 31 or 5.5% in AB Public Administration/Sociology, 31 or 5.5% in BEEed Home Economics, 30 or 5.4% in BS Biology, 29 or 5.2% in BS cooperative Management, 27 or 4.8% in BS Hotel and Restaurant Management, 27 or 4.8% in BS Environmental Science, 26 or 4.6% in BS Business Economics, 24 or 4.3% in Business Agriculture, 20 or 3.6% in BS Agricultural Technology, and 18 or 3.2% in AB Political Science.

As to the weekly allowance, 518 or 92.8% had an allowance of below P500, 23 or 4.2% of P500 to P749, 11 or 1.9% of P750 to P999, and 6 or 1.1% of P1000 and above.

Table 1: Profile of the Student-Respondents

Profile		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	294	52.69
	Female	264	47.31
Course	Criminology	90	16.13
	Agricultural Engineering	40	7.2
	Fisheries	36	6.5
	Mechanical Engineering	35	6.3
	Civil/Electrical Engineering	34	6.1
	Agri-Business	33	6
	Publica Admin./ Sociology	31	5.5
	Home Economics	31	5.5
	Biology	30	5.4
	Cooperative Management	29	5.2
	Meat Technology	27	4.8
	Hotel and Restaurant Management	27	4.8
	Environmental Science	27	4.8
	Business Economics	26	4.6
	Agriculture	24	4.3
	Agricultural Technology	20	3.6
	Political Science	18	3.2
Weekly Allowance	Below P500	518	92.8
	P500-P749	23	4.2
	P750-P999	11	1.9
	P1000- and above	6	1.1

Level of Motivation in English Language Learning

It showed that the student-respondents were “much motivated” as to integrative motivation as reflected in the grand mean of 3.85 and this indicates that the students showed positive attitude towards the second language and they were integratively motivated to learn the language and interested in the culture association as well. Moreover, the result also revealed that the student-respondents were “much motivated” as to instrumental motivation as shown in the grand mean of 4.1, which can be deduced that the students had higher degree of instrumental motivation which means

that English is important for utilitarian reasons such as meeting the requirements for school graduation and applying for a job.

Table 2: Level of Motivation

Level	Grand Mean	Interpretation
Integrative	3.85	Much Motivated
Instrumental	4.1	Much Motivated

Level of Demotivation in English Language Learning

The external attributes showed that that the student-respondents were “demotivated” when it comes to teacher’s personality, teaching methods, and teaching materials as reflected in the grand mean of 2.74, 2.74, and 2.78 respectively. As to the internal attribute, the student-respondents were “demotivated” when it comes to self-confidence as reflected in the grand mean of 2.84, negative attitude with 2.60, and anxiety with 2.72. This infers that the external and internal attributes influence one’s behaviors, inner mood, and therefore learning.

Table 3: Level of Demotivation

Level	Grand Mean	Interpretation
External		
Teacher's Personality	0.65	Demotivated
Method	1.59	Demotivated
Materials	0.43	Demotivated
Internal		
Lack of Self confidence	3.73	Demotivated
Negative Attitude	1.05	Demotivated
Anxiety	0.03	Demotivated

English Language Proficiency Test

It shows that 388 or 69.5% failed, 130 or 23.3% had a poor performance, 30 or 5.4% had a fair performance, and 10 or 1.8% were considered good. It indicates from this finding that the majority failed in the proficiency test.

Table 3: English Language Proficiency Test

Rating	Frequency	Percent
Failed (0-44)	388	69.50
Poor (45-48)	130	23.30
Fair (49-52)	30	5.40
Good (53-69)	10	1.80

Test of Relationship between Respondents’ Profile and English Language Proficiency Test

The regression analysis shows that the student-respondents’ profile in terms of gender, course, and weekly allowance were found to be significantly related to their English language proficiency test.

Table 5: Relationship between the Profile and English language Proficiency Test

Profile	F-ratio	Sig.F	Interpretation
Gender	19.47	0.00001	Significant
Couse	2.24	0.13504	Significant
Weekly Allowance	0.59	0.44151	Significant

Test of Relationship between the Level of Motivation and the English Language Proficiency Test

The regression analysis shows that the English language proficiency test was not found to be significantly related to the students’ level of motivation in terms of integrative and

instrumental. This means that this desire to study English did not influence their proficiency test in the said subject.

This is strengthened with the FGD which the students stated that they are afraid to speak English especially to English-speaking person because they might be laughed at because of their wrong grammar and they learned English for various practical reasons, including future career development, working abroad in the future, and travelling.

Table 6.1: Test of Relationship between the Level of Motivation and the English language Proficiency Test

Motivation	F-ratio	Sig-F	Interpretation
Integrative	0.47	0.49124	Not Significant
Instrumental	0.45	0.47195	Not Significant

Test Relationship between the Level of Demotivation and the English Language Proficiency Test

The regression analysis shows that the English proficiency test was found to be significantly related to the students' level of demotivation in terms of teacher's personality, teaching methods, lack of self-confidence, and negative attitude. However, teaching materials and anxiety were not found to be significantly related. This indicates that the teacher's personality and teaching methods clearly affects the student's academic performance.

At the focus group discussion, most interviewees responded that poor personality of teachers and method of teaching really affected their learning. Also, the students state that it is difficult to speak English because it has several meanings and that it is very confusing. Some stated that they hate English because they are confused with the verbs, how to use them in the present, past and future, and they lack vocabulary.

Table 6.2: Test of Relationship between the Level of Demotivation and the English Language Proficiency Test

Demotivation	F-ratio	Sig.F	Interpretation
Teacher's Personality	0.65	0.42097	Significant
Method	1.59	0.20836	Significant
Materials	0.43	0.51116	Significant
Lack of Self confidence	3.73	0.05407	Significant
Negative Attitude	1.05	0.30639	Significant
Anxiety	0.03	0.86534	Significant

Test of Difference between the Integratively and Instrumentally Motivated Students and Their English Language Proficiency Test

The result revealed that there was a significant difference between the integratively motivated students and the instrumentally motivated students in their English language proficiency test. Students under the integrative motivation had an advantage result and positive attitude towards English learning compared to those under the instrumental motivation.

Table 7: Test Difference between the Integratively and Instrumentally Motivated Students and Their English Language Proficiency Test

Motivation	T- Test		Interpretation
	Comp.	Tab.	
Integrative	-3.117	-1.959	Significant
Instrumental			

Test Difference between the Externally and Internally Demotivated Students and Their English Language Proficiency Test

The result revealed that there was no significant difference between the externally and internally demotivated students in their English language proficiency test. This indicates that the external and internal attributes are both demotivating factors to proficiency test and it means that a learner can be both internally demotivated and at the same time externally demotivated to affect their language proficiency test.

Table 8: Test Difference between the Externally and Internally Demotivated Students and Their English Language Proficiency Test

Demotivation	T- Test		Interpretation
	Comp.	Tab.	
External	-0.415	-1.959	Not Significant
Internal			

Determinants of English Proficiency

The factors that affect the learning of college freshman students are as follows: gender, course, weekly allowance, integrative and instrumental motivation, and demotivation which includes internal (lack of self-confidence, negative attitude, and anxiety) and external attributes (teacher's personality, teaching methodology, and materials).

Insights for Language Teaching

The findings of this study revealed that the college freshman students are women dominated. This gives the impression that women value education more than men. They are more responsible and more serious. Most of the students from different courses had an allowance of below P500. It means that they have limited allowance which can propel them to perform well in class.

For the integratively motivated students, the findings manifest that their desire to study English did not influence their proficiency in English learning, so with the instrumentally motivated ones.

Fear of teachers can lead to demotivated learners so with the poor method of teaching. This leads to the learners' negative attitude toward English learning and loss of self-confidence.

Considering the result of their English Language proficiency test where most of them failed, can make one think that they have not learned much in English and that English teachers are not good at motivating their students to learn English. Much is yet to be done in this area which necessitates extra exertion of effort and dedication on the teacher's part.

This is a point to consider by language teachers for them to capitalize on the experiences of the learners in their lessons to facilitate classroom interaction and active participation/recitation. The manner of testing and questioning should be in accord with where the learners are.

English has to be made simple, easy and understandable. The syllabus and instructional materials are those which are suited to the learners' mental ability and motivation, i.e., capitalizing the interest of learners.

5. Conclusions and Implications

In the light of the findings of the study, the following conclusions and implications were drawn;

- 1) The University of Eastern Philippines (UEP) is women dominated. This implies that women are more interested to obtain a degree and they value education more than men do. Students enroll course that have accessibility to immediate employment. This implies that the students prefer courses where they can easily land a job. Many students in UEP are poor. It can be implied that their parents earn below the poverty line level.
- 2) Students are just outwardly not inwardly motivated. This implies that they are really motivated at all. The teachers can make or unmake the learners. This implies that s/he plays a vital role in learning.
- 3) Not much has been learned by the students in English as evidenced by their failure in the English proficiency test. This implies that they are not properly motivated to learn or the teachers do not impart fully the lessons to their students.
- 4) Regarding relationship between profile and proficiency test, gender is significant which can be implied that there are more failures in the female group. Course is significant which implies that there are failures with courses that do not impose admission policies. Small allowance affects performance. It can be implied that the students having lower allowance tend to lag behind their studies because they barely have money for books and other instructional materials.
- 5) The personality of the teacher, teaching method, self-confidence, and negative attitude are indeed determinants in the students' performance in the proficiency test. This implies that the absence of these determinants in the learning process can lead the learners to failure.
- 6) Integratively motivated students perform better than the instrumentally motivated ones. This implies that the integratively motivated students have better advantage compared to those students who are instrumentally motivated.
- 7) The determinants that affect the learning of English of college freshman students are gender, course, weekly allowance, integrative and instrumental motivation, and demotivation which include lack of self-confidence, negative attitude, anxiety, teacher's personality, teaching methodology, and materials.
- 8) Insights to be considered in language teaching are that English should be made simple, easy, and understandable. The syllabus and instructional materials should suit to the learners' mental ability and motivation, i.e., capitalizing the interest of learners.

6. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions and implications, the following recommendations were arrived at:

- 1) The male students should be motivated to enroll in college through proper career orientation programs for them to pursue their bachelor's degree.
- 2) Since most of the students failed the English proficiency test, the Department of Languages and Communication should be strict in their admission. They should be

conscientiously taught English grammar in English Plus.

- 3) More scholarships and loans be granted to poor but deserving students.
- 4) English teachers should raise the students' integrativeness by enhancing their positive attitudes toward English-speaking communities through several strategies, methodologies, approaches and techniques in learning English. They can tell stories which can change their lives.
- 5) Teachers and syllabus designers should be sensitive to learners' motives by recognizing their instrumentality.
- 6) English teachers should adopt a role as a facilitator rather than an authority figure in the classroom to increase students' motivation. The teacher should also create a tension-free atmosphere and positive learning climate.
- 7) English teachers should take into account the observance of high degree of professionalism.
- 8) Teachers should try new technology in teaching English. To realize this, schools should be equipped with adequate number of technological devices to enrich their students' learning experiences.
- 9) English teachers should coordinate with the University Learning Assistance Program for remedial classes, instructions and measures intended for slow learners. In response to the students' needs about tests, the coordination can reduce the students' demotivation by allocating few periods before the exams for review and training on test-taking strategies.
- 10) Revision of the curriculum by increasing more units in Basic English subjects in order to improve the performance of students in English language.
- 11) English teachers should be encouraged to attend seminar/workshops for them to get updated with newer concepts to motivate their students in the learning of English language. They should also enroll in masters and doctoral courses in English to upgrade and update them professionally.
- 12) It is recommended to conduct a study about teachers' demotivation to find out its effect on the learner's motivation.
- 13) This study could be replicated using other motivation factors.

7. Acknowledgment

The researcher wishes to express her heartfelt thanks to her dissertation adviser, Dr. Mindanilla B. Broto, her statistician, Dr. Antonio S. Broto, the Dean of the College of Arts and Communication, the English 111 students. Likewise, to her husband, Martin, her children, Mart Raven, Mack Arven, Manuel Keven, and Maricap, her granddaughters, Czareya and Czareka, for being her inspirations to fulfill and the reason to achieve success. And finally, to the Almighty God, the source and giver of all knowledge, wisdom, and strength to make all her dreams a reality.

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