



## A PHENOMENOLOGY OF ACADEMIC CONSTRAINTS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES LEARNERS

Guy Bless Fe Laroza-Velasco<sup>1</sup>,

Noe P. Garcia<sup>2i</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges,  
Graduate School,  
General Santos City,  
Philippines

<sup>2</sup>PhD, RGC, LPT,  
Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges,  
Graduate School,  
General Santos City,  
Philippines

### Abstract:

This phenomenological study dealt with the academic constraints faced by senior high school learners in the field of humanities and social sciences regarding their English language proficiency. The research aimed to explore the lived experiences of these learners as they navigated the challenges posed by limited English language skills in their academic pursuits. Through in-depth interviews and rigorous data analysis, the following were the essential themes: Constraints in English Language Learning, English Language Skills, English Language Learning Tools and Engagement, Sense of Utility, and Intrinsically Rewarding. This study sought to uncover the intricate web of factors that contributed to the difficulties these students encountered in mastering the English language and how these constraints impacted their educational journey. The findings of this research shed light on the unique perspective of learners within the humanities and social sciences, adding depth to our understanding of the multifaceted nature of English language proficiency challenges in diverse academic contexts.

**Keywords:** English language proficiency, experiences, senior high school humanities and social sciences learners, academic constraints, hermeneutic phenomenology, Philippines

### 1. Introduction

The English language proficiency of senior high school learners in the field of Humanities and Social Sciences has garnered increasing attention over the past few years. Certainly,

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<sup>i</sup> Correspondence: email [giediolarodriguez@gmail.com](mailto:giediolarodriguez@gmail.com)

English language proficiency is a crucial aspect of modern society. Let us delve into some relevant studies and insights like English Language Proficiency and Development: English is the third most spoken language globally and widely taught across the planet. It serves as a global language and the lingua franca of the modern era. Over 300 million people use it as their first language, and more than 600 million use it as their second language. English proficiency is essential for global commerce, accessing the latest science and technology, and exerting influence worldwide. Published literature predominantly appears in English, making it a critical language. The United States and other Anglophone countries should promote English use in regions where proficiency is not strong, including the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia (Alizadeh, 2019; Breene, 2019; Westin, 2019).

This study aimed to provide an overview of relevant studies conducted that delve into the experiences, challenges, and factors affecting English language proficiency among learners in this specific academic context. The literature reviewed generally focused on quantifying factors affecting the low-level English proficiency among second language learners both in foreign countries and in the Philippines. Moreover, it is observed that there is a need for replication of such practice and that the current study can help to surface the importance of advancing English language proficiency through empirical investigations for the teachers to formulate strategies on how to bring it into the class (Breene, 2019; Eisele, 2017; Margolis, 2020).

On the other hand, as a teacher in English subject, it has been observed that students view learning English as hard because they depend so much on the teachers as authorities in the classrooms, they display unwillingness and lack of motivation to learn despite acknowledging that proficiency in English is also essential for their future. Also, I have found that students considered learning English to be a tough subject because they place such a high value on English teachers as authoritative figures in the classroom. Despite their recognition of the importance of English for their future, many lack the drive and ambition to acquire it; hence, I decided to look into it further (Nishanthi, 2018; Nguyen, 2019; Wang *et al.*, 2020).

Meanwhile, the goal of this research was to describe the learners' English language proficiency at Datu Pangolima Integrated School. The study focused on an interpretive phenomenological examination of the diversity of perspectives and experiences of senior high school learners who were skilled in English and enrolled in first/star section. Furthermore, the population of Datu Pangolima Integrated School was growing. Each school year, an unexpectedly large number of learners who speak little or no English enter the classroom. As a researcher, my objective was that this phenomenological study on portraying English language proficiency as experienced by Datu Pangolima Integrated School students would help school administrators, instructors, and students solve difficulties linked to English language teaching and learning (Ahmed, 2019; Dilshad, 2019; Nausheen, 2019).

There was an urgency to conduct this study which could be a great help in the improvement of the English language proficiency of the learners especially for those

taking the National Achievement Test which showed a low result in the English Subject. With the findings of this study, teachers would be able to obtain critical feedback and information about their language teaching, which would provide guidance and direction for better English language skill development and improved language performance among students. They could also be directed to concentrate on any of the language proficiency skills identified as weak among them. Lastly, the current study could aid in bringing to light the importance of enhancing English language competency through empirical investigations for teachers to design strategies on how to incorporate it into their classrooms (Breene 2019; Eisele, 2017; Margolis, 2020).

## **2. Purpose of the Study**

This study set out to describe the experiences of the learners in developing English language proficiency at Datu Pangolima Integrated School. The study's interpretive phenomenological analysis of the many viewpoints and experiences of senior high school students who were proficient in English was the main focus. There was a need for further studies from the viewpoints of the participants since the reviewed literature revealed that there was a gap in knowledge and a substantial shortage of studies related to studying English language proficiency from the perspectives of the learners. Furthermore, this phenomenological study aimed to investigate details from participants' perspectives on English language proficiency.

### **2.1 Research Questions**

This qualitative study aimed to describe the experiences of the learners in developing English language proficiency at Datu Pangolima Integrated School.

This study intended to answer the following questions:

- 1) How do the students of Datu Pangolima Integrated School describe English Language Proficiency?
  - 1.1 What is English Language proficiency as experienced by the students of Datu Pangolima Integrated School?
  - 1.2 How do the students of Datu Pangolima Integrated School feel about their English language proficiency?
  - 1.3 How does English language proficiency affect the students of Datu Pangolima Integrated School?

### **2.2 Theoretical Lens**

The study was anchored on the theories of Threshold Theory of Cummins (2018) and Innateness Theory of Language Acquisition by Chomsky. The first anchored theory was the Threshold Theory, which is a second-language acquisition hypothesis proposed by Cummins (2018) in a study that stated that a minimum threshold in language proficiency must be met before a second-language speaker can reap any benefits from language. (Cabreros, 2020; Grisso, 2018; Ozowoba, 2018; Piage, 2020).

This study aimed to describe the English language proficiency of the students at Datu Pangolima Integrated School in order to gain proficiency in a second language, the participants must have achieved a certain level of competence in his or her first language at an age-appropriate level. Additionally, students with limited academic proficiency in the language of instruction would tend to fall further behind unless the instruction they received enabled them to comprehend the input (both written and oral) and participate academically in class. Before a learner can benefit from the use of a second language as a medium of instruction in school, a certain 'threshold' level of proficiency in that language must be attained (Katsiyannis, 2022; Miller, 2018; Nishanthi, 2022).

In conclusion, learners must be born with the ability to learn languages. The process is biologically determined, according to this theory, because the human species evolved a brain with neural circuits that contain linguistic information at birth. Hearing speech activates the child's natural proclivity to learn language, and the child's brain can interpret what s/he hears based on the underlying principles or structures it already possesses. This natural ability has been dubbed the Language Acquisition Device (LAD). Of course, Chomsky does not claim that an English child is born knowing anything specific about English. He states that all human languages share the same fundamental principles (Ahmed, 2019; Dilshad, 2019; Nausheen, 2019).

### 2.3 Significance of the Study

This research hoped that the findings of this study would be of help to the following:

- **Senior High School Learners.** The result of this study would bring them awareness of the basic concepts that could affect their English proficiency and academic performance so they could direct themselves towards better performance and exert additional effort in studying.
- **English Teachers.** This study would help them identify the weaknesses and strengths of their learners and would serve as their basis for which particular concept in basic education needs more focus.
- **Parents.** It would help them to know their children more to choose strategies to guide and motivate them to pursue their studies, and to develop more understanding and appreciation of their children's abilities and potential.
- **Future Researchers.** This research would serve and be used as a basis for other related studies and additional literature in their future investigation. Also, it would be a great help for her to understand the learner's English proficiency.

### 3. Delimitations and Limitations

This qualitative study aimed to describe English language proficiency as experienced by the learners of Datu Pangolima Integrated School. This research covered Senior High School Humanities and Social Sciences learners as the participants. This research which has laid out a parameter was strictly defined by the following qualifications: first, Senior High School Humanities and Social Sciences learners are enrolled at Datu Pangolima

Integrated School for the S.Y. 2021-2022; secondly, they are performing well academically and English Language proficient.

Additionally, the research included a total of seven Senior High School Humanities and Social Sciences learners and they were chosen through purposive sampling. On the other hand, the researcher delimited the conduct of the study among the Senior High School learners at Datu Pangolima Integrated School.

#### 4. Definition of Terms

The following terms were defined operationally:

- **Academic Constraints:** Refers to the limitations or challenges that can hinder the English language proficiency progress and outcomes.
- **Academic Literacy Skills:** The ability to read, write, and engage with academic content. In the context of the thesis, achieving a level of balanced bilingualism is seen as crucial for accessing academic written and spoken language.
- **Communicative Competence:** The ability to use language appropriately and effectively in various social and cultural contexts, encompassing not only grammatical accuracy but also sociolinguistic and pragmatic skills.
- **Curriculum:** Exhibiting the content's selection and arrangement for a certain purpose, suggests and displays specific learning patterns.
- **Datu Pangolima Integrated School:** A public school where the participants were studying and has Kinder, Elementary, Junior, and Senior High School located at Sapu Padidu, Malapatan, Sarangani Province.
- **Empirical Investigations:** Research methods that rely on direct observation, experimentation, or experience to gather data and draw conclusions. In the context of the thesis, empirical investigations are suggested as a means for teachers to design strategies for enhancing English language competency in the classroom.
- **English Language Proficiency:** It is the ability of the learners that implies having complete mastery of the English language, including proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing which requirement for the learner participants in this study.
- **English Language Proficient:** Learner participants who were competent and skilled to express their ideas in oral and written contexts were chosen in this study.
- **Language Acquisition:** The natural process through which individuals pick up a language, usually in an immersive environment, and develop linguistic skills without formal instruction.
- **Language Fluency:** The ease and fluidity with which a person can use a language, often characterized by the absence of hesitations, pauses, and struggles during communication.
- **Language Learning:** This is a dynamic process that starts at birth and lasts the entirety of one's life. As they express their ideas, feelings, and experiences, build

relationships with family and friends, and work to understand and organize their world, students pick up language skills.

- **Language Proficiency Levels:** Various stages of competence in a language, often categorized as beginner, intermediate, and advanced, indicating the learner's ability to understand and use the language effectively.
- **Proficiency:** The capacity of a person to communicate or act in target dialect. Four skills are developed from the ability itself, they are reading, writing, speaking, and listening.
- **Senior High School Learner:** Learners who were the participants of the study and in Grade 11 and Grade 12 level Humanities and Social Sciences Track.

#### 4.1 Organization of the Study

In this section, each chapter is being organized appropriately:

Chapter 1 the Introduction; clearly describes English language proficiency as experienced by the learners of Datu Pangolima Integrated School, the problem/issue was in relation to the English language proficiency as experienced by the learners of Datu Pangolima Integrated School; background as to results and implications of previous works leading to the rationale of this study, the evidence provided that the English language proficiency as experienced by the learners of Datu Pangolima Integrated School was important.

Chapter 1, the Introduction, clearly describes English language proficiency as experienced by the learners of Datu Pangolima Integrated School; the problem/issue was about the English language proficiency as experienced by the learners of Datu Pangolima Integrated School; background as to the results and implications of previous works leading to the rationale of this study; and the evidence provided that the English language proficiency as experienced by the learners. The second chapter is a review of related literature, which relates the study to previous research on English language proficiency as experienced by learners. The third chapter, Methodology, describes the chosen qualitative research approach, the researcher's role, research participants, data collection processes, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. In addition, Chapter 4, Results, presented the data in a realistic, accurate, methodical, and theme-based manner. Finally, Chapter 5, the Discussion, organized the findings' interpretations, theories for each primary theme created and thoroughly explored here, each important finding with its associated implications, and a summary of the discussion.

## 5. Methodology

This chapter presents the research design, the role of the researcher, research participants, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

### 5.1 Research Design

The study's qualitative phenomenology approach was not only concerned with unveiling the surface-level aspects of English language proficiency but was committed to unraveling the intricate layers that constitute the students' experiences. By employing in-depth interviews, observations, and rigorous analysis of participants' narratives, the study aimed to capture the spectrum of emotions, motivations, and cognitive processes that influenced the students' journey toward language mastery (Chen, 2019; Harsch, 2019; Manen, 2018).

Furthermore, the study's emphasis on hermeneutics introduced an interpretive layer that recognized the significance of context in shaping human understanding. This lens acknowledged that individuals' interpretations of their experiences are not isolated but are embedded within a broader web of meaning. By exploring the students' narratives within this interpretive framework, the study unveiled the intricate interplay between personal interpretations and the larger cultural narratives that shape those interpretations (Stevens, 2018; Silver & Steele, 2022 Wang, *et al.*, 2020; Wilson, 2017).

Likewise, the deliberate selection of participants based on their prior experiences was an insightful methodological choice. This tailored approach recognized that individual experiences were not generic but were shaped by personal histories, challenges, and triumphs. By inviting participants with a range of backgrounds and experiences, the study embraced the diversity inherent in language learning and strove to capture a comprehensive array of perspectives (Guba, 2017; Harsch, 2019; Ilysova, 2020).

Also, the research activities inherent in hermeneutic phenomenology, such as transcribing, rewriting, and considering parts and wholes, underscored the depth of analysis that this study aimed to achieve. This meticulous process emphasized not only the accuracy of the representation but also the researcher's responsibility to unearth the essence of participants' experiences. It also aligned with the broader ideals of qualitative research, which championed the immersion of the researcher into the participants' world, aiming to capture the complexity of their lived reality (Creswell, 2018; Manen, 2018; Miller, 2018).

This study used qualitative phenomenology research to describe the students' experiences with English language proficiency at Datu Pangolima Integrated School. This study employed a qualitative approach, phenomenology as a tradition, hermeneutics as a discipline, and interpretive interpretation as a method. This study used a qualitative approach to answer the research questions in this study, as it aimed to assist the researcher in gaining an in-depth understanding of English language proficiency as experienced by the students. The research questions assumed a focus on "how people interpret their experiences, how they created their worlds, and what understanding they attributed to their experiences". In general, qualitative research is usually described as a naturalistic, interpretative approach, focusing on the exploration of phenomena from within and its starting point is taking of the perspectives and shared experiences of research participants (Chen 2019; Creswell, 2018; Farook, 2020).

In conclusion, this study's methodological fusion of qualitative phenomenology and hermeneutics presented a compelling exploration of students' experiences with English language proficiency. By going beyond the surface and embracing the complexities of human cognition, emotions, and sociocultural dynamics, the research contributed to a deeper understanding of language learning. As the study continues to unfold, it has the potential to offer insights that resonate not only within the realm of education but also within the broader tapestry of human experiences and interactions (Chen 2019; Creswell, 2018; Farook, 2020).

## **5.2 Role of the Researcher**

This undertaking sought to describe English language proficiency as experienced by the Senior high school Humanities and Social Sciences students of Datu Pangolima Integrated School and as an inquirer and interviewer in this study, I explained the study's importance in accessing participants' experiences toward the English language proficiency. As an inquirer, I asked for the approval of the study through the adviser, the Research Ethics Committee of Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges, the schools' division superintendent of the Department of Education Sarangani Division, and the principal of Datu Pangolima Integrated School at Barangay Sapu Padidu, Malapatan, Sarangani Province.

As an interviewer, on the other hand, some questions were written in the interview guide questionnaire which facilitated the interviews using the In-depth Interview (IDI), where the researcher asked students about their experiences with English language proficiency. Also, the researcher asked all the questions in a friendly manner so the participants could answer confidently (Chen 2019; Creswell, 2018; Farook, 2020).

Besides, Vangeline O. Erum, PhD, transcribed and sifted through the data of all participants' responses; the researcher ensured that the data gathered from the participants remained confidential.

Finally, the researcher assumed the responsibility of thoroughly discussing the collected data, drawing comprehensive conclusions, and providing valuable recommendations and implications based on the findings. This multifaceted approach aimed to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on English language proficiency among Senior High School students, fostering a deeper understanding of the challenges and experiences faced in the pursuit of language proficiency (Chen 2019; Creswell, 2018; Farook, 2020).

## **5.3 Research Participants**

Datu Pangolima Integrated School was the research site, a public school in Barangay Sapu Padidu, Malapatan, Sarangani Province. As mentioned earlier, the students in the school are in kindergarten, elementary, junior high, and senior high school. In addition, the seven Senior High School Humanities and Social Studies learners enrolled at the said public school took part in this study.

The participants were chosen purposively using homogeneous sampling and enrolled in the first/star section. The rationale of purposive sampling depends on selecting the information for the in-depth study. When a great deal of learning regarding the issues of crucial role in the research arise, the data it gives is productive, and purposeful sampling is appropriate. Specifically, one type of purposeful sampling that fits in this study is homogeneous purposeful sampling, wherein the focus is to describe some particular subgroup with defining characteristics. Also, high school students with the same experiences were picked for this study since homogenous is a type of purposeful sampling wherein participants were selected for having the same features (Chen 2019; Creswell, 2018; Farook, 2020).

#### **5.4 Data Collection**

The following processes were observed in acquiring relevant data for this study to gain access to the research site and permission to conduct the research.

A letter was sent to the Schools Division Superintendent of the Department of Education of Sarangani Division and to the School Principal of Datu Pangolima Integrated School, wherein I requested access to the research site and approval of the study's conduct. Following approval, I emailed the participants an informed consent letter. Participants were also told that they could decline the researcher's invitation at any time. When all the participants agreed, the schedule was created with their availability. In addition, the participants were briefed on the interview and discussion process and the need to maintain the anonymity of their comments. The participants were also informed that the researcher would videotape, record, note, and transcribe the in-depth interview. The participants were also handed consent certificates, which they were requested to sign as proof that an in-depth interview had occurred (Creswell, 2018; Manen, 2018; Miller, 2018).

Before collecting data, I created and devised a semi-structured questionnaire with the adviser's help. Participants' descriptions of their English language proficiency as experienced were elicited through semi-structured questions. The following data collection was observed after the study's conduct was approved. The participants' English subject teachers for the previous and current school years were asked to validate the participants' grades and performance for their qualifications (Creswell, 2018; Manen, 2018; Miller, 2018).

Also, the venue and the equipment/materials were also prepared by the researcher, such as a video camera, audio recorder, writing materials, and a copy of the interview guide needed for the interview. The audio recorder and the camera were checked and positioned accordingly to ensure quality results for the recordings. I ensured that the venue was conducive to the interview, every participant was comfortable, and each was reminded about his/her voluntary decision and freedom to refuse to participate if he/she changed his/her mind. Then, I discussed and handed the participants the interview protocol forms, which contained background questions and the house rules for the interview sessions (Creswell, 2018; Manen, 2018; Miller, 2018).

Also arranged were the location and the necessary equipment/materials, such as a video camera, audio recorder, writing supplies, and a copy of the interview guide. The audio recorder and camera were both verified and appropriately positioned to guarantee that the recordings were of high quality. I ensured that the interview environment was favorable to the interview, that each participant was at ease, and that each participant was reminded of his or her voluntary decision and right to refuse to participate if he or she changed his or her mind. Next, I reviewed the interview protocol forms with the participants, which included background inquiries and the house rules for the interview sessions (Creswell, 2018; Manen, 2018; Miller, 2018).

In addition, copies of Informed Consent Forms (Appendix B) were supplied for the participants to sign. The form's contents included the study's aim, methodology, benefits, and confidentiality. The participant agreement form (Appendix G), which was included with the informed consent form, comprised an agreement between the participants and I who conducted the entire interview procedure as well as the development questions, which included probing and elucidating questions about participants' perspectives and experiences with English language proficiency (Creswell, 2018; Manen, 2018; Miller, 2018).

Furthermore, the interviews were conducted during the participants' free time in one of Datu Pangolima Integrated School's classrooms. Each participant was assigned a precise date and hour for their interview. All of the interviews were taped on both audio and video. Each session's conclusion expressed appreciation for each participant. After each interview, the participant was asked to review and listen to the recorded interview to ensure that the information he/she presented was accurate and precise. All audio and video recordings from the interview were retained so that there would be a record of what transpired. Participants' intonations, facial expressions, and gestures, recorded in the field notes, were also incorporated into the transcribed narrative texts during the interview (Creswell, 2018; Manen, 2018; Miller, 2018).

I asked each participant to read the transcription for accuracy and dependability. They signed after examining to confirm the authenticity of the data acquired, careful record keeping manifesting a clear decision chain, and offering consistent and transparent data interpretations. Vangelina O. Erum, PhD, then transcribed the audio-video recordings of the information supplied by the participants. Following the transcription, the data was organized for analysis (Creswell, 2018; Manen, 2018; Miller, 2018).

The individuals were chosen through purposeful homogeneous sampling. The logic of purposeful sampling is founded on the facts for in-depth study selection. When much data on topics that are significant to the research comes up, the data it gives is valuable, and purposeful sampling is an appropriate method. Homogeneous intentional sampling, which focuses on characterizing a specified subset with distinguishing qualities, is one type of purposeful sampling that fits this study. Senior high school students with comparable experiences were also recruited for this study because homogenous sampling is a type of purposeful sampling in which participants are chosen

for having the same features or set of attributes. Using this sampling strategy, the inquirer chose a place and participants for the study to understand the research topic and primary phenomena better. Who or what should be sampled, how the sampling should be done, and how many people or sites should be tested were all decided (Creswell, 2018; Manen, 2018; Miller, 2018).

### **5.5 Analysis of Data**

The Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was used in this investigation. It involved a thorough examination of personal stories, including the presentation and discussion of common experiential themes and the researcher's interpretation – a type of double hermeneutics. Thus, as claimed by its proponents, this research aligned the data in Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis with its theoretical principles – phenomenological, hermeneutic, and idiographic. Since this research adopted a qualitative approach, the study's validity was defined according to the validity of the lens and paradigms. Furthermore, one method of demonstrating reliability was to document the research decisions made along the way, as they were made, perhaps in a research diary (Creswell, 2018; Manen, 2018; Miller, 2018).

To ensure the credibility of the gathered data, strict record-keeping manifested a clear decision trail and ensured that interpretations of data were consistent and transparent. Additionally, Anney (2017) and Argote (2017) cited that a researcher should prepare appropriate research instruments – in-depth interviews and observations – to ensure the validity of the collected data. Throughout the interview process, participants' intonations, physical expressions, and gestures were recorded in the field notes and integrated into the transcribed narrative texts (Anney, 2017; Argote, 2017; Creswell, 2018). Subsequently, this was a qualitative study. The study's validity was determined by the validity of the lens and paradigms. Moreover, documenting the research decisions made along the way, possibly in a research diary, was one method to demonstrate trustworthiness. Thorough record-keeping, manifesting a clear decision path, and providing consistent and transparent data interpretations were necessary to ensure the reliability of the acquired data. Anney (2017) and Argote (2017) also stated that to ensure the data's validity, a researcher should prepare proper research instruments, such as in-depth interviews and observations. Participants' intonations, physical expressions, and gestures were recorded in the field notes and included in the final analysis (Anney, 2017; Argote, 2017; Creswell, 2018).

Member checking was conducted to enhance the validity of the findings. Member checking focused on validating the research study participants' experiences, making it a critical approach for building credibility. This involved presenting data and interpretations to research participants for them to verify the accuracy of the data and the narrative account (Creswell, 2018; Manen, 2018; Miller, 2018).

Furthermore, the concept of "member checking" improved the data's validity. The raw data was presented to the study participants during member checking, allowing them to verify the accuracy of the overall description and the coherence of the topics or

categories with the evidence provided. After the analysis was completed and a final model was constructed, the researcher invited each participant to review the results and offer input. Examining the participants' responses played a vital role in the study, enhancing its validity (Creswell, 2018; Manen, 2018; Miller, 2018).

Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on interpreting texts. The researcher aimed to develop a meaningful and in-depth description of a phenomenon through intuition, emphasizing revelation over accuracy and amplification while avoiding preconceived notions. While bracketing presented a challenge within this approach, recognizing implicit assumptions and making them explicit could address it (Creswell, 2018; Manen, 2018; Miller, 2018).

Therefore, hermeneutic phenomenology sought to bridge the gap between the known and the unknown, bringing disclosure closer for better understanding. The process of interpretation maintained the quality of self-evidence and continuity, moving back and forth to create proximity. Hermeneutic phenomenology also involves unearthing non-obvious interpretations of meaning (Creswell, 2018; Manen, 2018; Miller, 2018).

Continuously collecting data until sufficient information is obtained is crucial to ensure consistency. As such, with the participants' cooperation, the researcher extended interviews as needed to gather the required information. Following the interviews, verbatim transcription was completed to systematically analyze the data. The researcher displayed integrity in the context of double hermeneutics by formulating quality and validity criteria. Once a pattern was identified, it was evaluated within the social theory in which it occurred. Thus, the qualitative researcher transitioned from describing historical events or social situations to a broader interpretation of their significance. Data collection and analysis occurred concurrently in an iterative process, which was a strength that allowed for theory-building based on empirical evidence (Anney, 2017; Argote, 2017; Creswell, 2018).

## **6. Results**

This section presented the findings of the study based on the gathered data taken from the participants.

### **6.1 Participants**

The participants in this study who voluntarily underwent separate individual interviews were all Senior High School learners of Datu Pangolima Integrated School in the school year 2021-2022. These students were identified as proficient in English based on their final rating in English subject of the last school year, 2020-2021, as confirmed by their subject teachers. To be marked as proficient, their final English grade must be 90-100, as affirmed by their subject teachers.

Moreover, these participants were also the ones who always represented their respective curriculum in written or oral, school-based contests and were willing to share

their experiences and perspectives about the study. Also, each Senior High School Humanities and Social Sciences learner participant was coded to maintain confidentiality as follows: ST1- Female, ST2- Male, ST3- Female, ST4- Male, ST5- Female, ST6- Male, and ST7- Female.

## **6.2 Categorization of Data**

Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on comprehending the sense of experience by seeking themes and interpretively engaging with the data, with less emphasis on the essences that were fundamental to descriptive phenomenology. When the approach to phenomenology, as in transcendental phenomenology, is regarded to be interpretive rather than just descriptive, it becomes hermeneutical. This orientation is evident in Heidegger's work, which argues that all description was already interpreted. Every aspect of human consciousness was interpretive. Poetry and art, particularly in Heidegger's later work, are increasingly introduced as expressive works for interpreting the nature of truth, language, thinking, dwelling, and being (Cabrerros, 2020; Grisso, 2018; Ozowuba, 2018).

Furthermore, we did member checking when producing a theme analysis table because it focused on the validity method directed at the research study participants to increase the validity of the findings. It was described as the most critical approach for building credibility. It involved providing data and interpretations to study subjects so that they could confirm the veracity of the information and the narrative account that was recorded by the note-taker or researcher (Creswell, 2018; Guba, 2017; Lincoln, 2017; Miller, 2018).

On the other hand, the participants' replies were categorized using concept mapping. As a result, the participants' responses were divided into three categories based on the three sub-questions created for the interview. The experiences of students with English language proficiency, their feelings about it, and the impacts on them are the three categories based on three aspects. Themes were created in tables to achieve unity, consistency, and rigorous data reduction. In more descriptive descriptions, discussion of 'developing' or 'being discovered' themes can only be deemed to 'bear witness to events' (Alizadeh, 2019; Breene, 2019; Westin, 2019).

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data acquired, careful record keeping with a clear decision trail and consistent and transparent data interpretations were required. In addition, the researcher's research instrument – in-depth interviews and observations – was required to confirm the validity of the data acquired (Ahmed, 2019; Anney, 2017; Argote, 2017).

Participants' intonations, physical expressions, and gestures were recorded during the interview and later incorporated into the transcribed narrative texts as field notes. This section dealt with the results of qualitative interviews; interpretations included emerging themes relating to students' lived experiences in developing English language proficiency (Biloon, 2017; Eisele, 2017; Trice, 2017).

### 6.3 Experiences of Students in Developing English Language Proficiency

The senior high school HUMSS students as English language learners in Datu Pangolima Integrated School shared their experiences in developing their English language proficiency based on the in-depth interviews conducted.

Three themes that emerged presented in Table 1 included: constraints in English language learning, English language skills, and English language learning tools and engagement.

**Table 1:** The Experiences of Senior High School Humanities and Social Sciences learners in English language proficiency

Clustered Themes	Emerging Themes
Lack of interest Lack of confidence speaking English Poor English vocabulary English language difficulty Poor reading comprehension	Constraints in English Language Learning
Ability to use English language Competency in spoken and written forms Understanding English language well Mass media engagement	English Language Skills
Mass media engagement Playing word games Involvement of people around Speaking English with colleagues English Language Learning Tools and Engagement	English Language Learning Tools and Engagement

### 6.4 Constraints in English Language Learning

For a second language student, proficiency levels appeared to have little relation to age. Proficiency has to do with functional language skills at various levels, as shown from the earliest phases to the most advanced uses of language. As a result, lack of enthusiasm, difficulties speaking English, and poor comprehension may limit pupils' English skills to only surviving communication demands.

#### 6.4.1 English Language Skills

Being able to communicate in English, whether orally or in writing, appeared to be a sign of proficiency in the language. It appears that English language proficiency comprises a variety of factors, including knowledge of grammar rules and a broad vocabulary. To claim that one has a good comprehension of the English language, one must show both correctness and fluency. Each of these areas, like the spokes of a wheel held together by the rim with the tire rotating around the hub, must be secured for the wheels to move smoothly on the road, just as each of these areas must be secured for one to gain proficiency in English.

They believed that reading is the best approach to learning English since the more one reads, the more input one's brain receives about how the language functions.

Similarly, watching English movies exposed students to instances of English in circumstances outside of the classroom, particularly the language of real-life conversation, as the film depicts genuine expressions and speech flow. Furthermore, developing one's English writing skills entailed enhancing one's overall English abilities. Because it is both convenient and interesting, surfing the internet appears to be one of the most popular ways to learn English. Word games are a fun method to practice English and can be a motivating approach to learning a language. Finally, pupils do better and have better sentiments about learning when teachers, parents, and friends are involved in language acquisition. Whatever we say or do in our daily lives can assist children in developing good attitudes about learning and increasing their self-confidence as learners.

One participant also shared her experience to enhance her language skills. She shared with me that she liked to read a variety of articles and enjoyed playing word games in order to enhance her vocabulary. She shared this to me with excitement and joy in her face. Another participant also shared her experience in establishing language proficiency by watching English movies on television and social media.

English Language Learning Tools and Engagement. English proficiency is one of the most sought-after abilities in most workplaces, according to participants. Improved English communication abilities can lead to future travel opportunities as well as greater work opportunities—like being able to climb the corporate ladder. For these pupils, English proficiency is a must to help them increase their self-esteem and do well in school, because confidence is crucial to communication, as well as a meaningful stimulus to the entire process and enjoyment at each step.

### 6.5 Feelings of Students in Developing English Language Proficiency

The senior high school HUMSS students as English language learners in Datu Pangolima Integrated School shared their feelings in terms of developing their English language proficiency based on the in-depth interviews conducted. One theme emerged for this research question. Presented in Table 2 is the theme which is: *sense of utility*.

**Table 2:** The feelings of Senior High School Humanities and Social Sciences learners in developing English language proficiency

Clustered Themes	Emerging Themes
For better opportunities	Sense of Utility
A necessity	
English as basic and widely spoken	
Needed for involvement	
Rewarding skill	
Taps my interest	

#### 6.5.1 Sense of Utility

Learning and achievement are the major sources of human emotions today, examining the complete wide spectrum of emotions experienced in different circumstances appeared to be of significant value when it comes to English competence. Positive feelings appear to have made them more capable and ready to seek what they want to reach and achieve. These accomplished pupils appear to take pride in their ability to

communicate in English because it may provide them with an advantage in a global setting. The capacity to talk in front of others is a vital aspect of persuasion. Students are more likely to be aware of their skills and to demonstrate competence and active participation in school activities.

### 6.6 Impacts of Students in Developing English Language Proficiency

The senior high school HUMSS students as English language learners in Datu Pangolima Integrated School shared the impacts of English language proficiency based on the in-depth interviews conducted. One theme emerged for this research question.

Presented in Table 3 is the theme which is: *intrinsically rewarding*.

**Table 3:** The impact of Senior High School Humanities and Social Sciences learners in developing English language proficiency

Clustered Themes	Emerging Themes
Brings pride	Intrinsically Rewarding
Boosts self-confidence	
Makes me feel competent	
Makes me feel comfortable	

#### 6.6.1 Intrinsically Rewarding

Intrinsic rewards are psychological benefits that the learner receives for doing meaningful work inside the classroom well. Essentially, learners are expected to self-manage to a significant extent—to use their intelligence and experience to direct their work activities in order to achieve important organizational goals. This is how today's learners add value—by innovating, problem-solving, and improvising to achieve better grades.

### 6.7 Chapter Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study revealed that the participants had limitations in English Language Learning; they needed more interest, English language exertion, and deprived reading. In addition, learners had English Language skills in which they could use the English language in verbal and written forms and English language thriving. Lastly, they had English Language learning implements and rendezvous that mentioned mass media engagement, playing word games, and immersion of people around them.

In conclusion, the identified constraints in English language learning highlighted the complexity of acquiring proficiency, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive approach that encompasses various language skills. Proficiency, irrespective of age, involved not only functional language skills but also correctness and fluency in grammar, vocabulary, and communication. Like the spokes of a wheel contributing to smooth movement, each aspect of language proficiency must be secured for a holistic understanding of the English language.

The insights from students revealed diverse strategies for language acquisition, including reading, watching English movies, and utilizing online platforms and word

games. Engaging with teachers, parents, and friends is seen as a crucial factor in fostering positive attitudes and increasing confidence in language learners. These findings underscored the multifaceted nature of English language learning, with diverse tools and engagement methods contributing to overall proficiency.

Moreover, the exploration of students' feelings uncovered two significant themes: a sense of utility and intrinsically rewarding experiences. The sense of utility tied language learning to emotions, emphasizing the positive impact of proficiency on personal growth and readiness to achieve goals. Meanwhile, intrinsically rewarding experiences highlight the psychological benefits derived from meaningful work, showcasing learners' abilities to self-manage, innovate, and problem-solve for academic success.

In essence, the study provided a comprehensive understanding of the challenges, strategies, and emotional dimensions involved in developing English language proficiency among senior high school HUMSS students. The multifaceted nature of language learning is acknowledged and emphasized the interconnectedness of various skills and the psychological aspects that contribute to successful language acquisition.

## **7. Discussion**

This chapter discussed the significant findings of the study's limitations and implications for future research, as well as the overall significance of the study based on the findings of this academic endeavor, which aimed better to understand students' descriptions of their English language proficiency as they experienced it.

Also, this chapter provided a comprehensive discussion of the study's significant findings, limitations, and implications, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of English language proficiency and its impact on students' academic journey. The qualitative phenomenological approach enabled a deep exploration of students' descriptions of their English language proficiency, offering valuable insights into their experiences.

### **7.1 Major Findings**

The findings highlighted various challenges faced by the participants in their English language learning journey. These challenges included a lack of interest, difficulty in comprehending the language, and struggles with reading. However, amidst these challenges, the participants displayed a range of English language skills that encompassed both spoken and written forms. It was evident that their linguistic abilities enabled them to understand and communicate in English effectively.

Furthermore, the study emphasized the significance of external influences on language learning. Exposure to media engagement, word games, and interactions with peers, teachers, and family members contributed to the participants' language development. This underscored the role of a supportive environment in fostering

language acquisition. Additionally, the research underscored the undeniable importance of English proficiency as a foundational skill for mastering other academic subjects.

The study also addressed a critical issue in the educational context of Sierra Leone: the mother tongue inference. This linguistic barrier has consistently posed challenges to both educators and students in their pursuit of English language proficiency. The impact of this issue on school dropouts further emphasized the urgency of enhancing English language instruction.

Engagement in various learning methods, such as reading, watching English movies, playing word games, and involving family and friends, contributed to a holistic language learning experience. This aligned with research that suggested a multi-dimensional approach to language acquisition. Moreover, the study revealed a direct link between English proficiency and students' academic performance, reinforcing the notion that English language skills were foundational for educational success.

The findings also delved into the intrinsic motivation of learners. The desire to access better opportunities and the sense of necessity in a global context acted as powerful drivers for language learning. This intrinsic motivation was further enhanced by the positive feelings associated with mastering a language, boosting learners' self-confidence and satisfaction.

This qualitative phenomenological study discovered that the participants had constraints in English Language Learning which they had a lack of interest, English language difficulty, and poor reading. In addition, learners had English Language skills that they could use in spoken and written forms and understand the English language well. Lastly, they had English Language learning tools and engagement that referred to mass media engagement, playing word games, and involvement of people around.

The value of English language instruction and learning as a foundation for mastery of other academic topics must be considered. Several significant obstacles that have stifled the efforts of educators and students in Sierra Leone include Mother Tongue Inference: mother tongue inference is a barrier to students in secondary schools learning the English language. The restrictions had nearly always caused issues for teachers and students in their steadfast determination to gain a solid understanding of the English language. Unfortunately, most school dropouts need more English language proficiency for cognitive and communication skills.

Due to the mother tongue restriction, which had in every way imaginable made it difficult for English language instruction and learning, they were appalling. In most secondary schools, evaluation led to a startling and ongoing deterioration in the caliber of the language taught and spoken in schools. The objectives were very different despite the various methods utilized in teaching and learning of English language. As a result, concerns about students' poor performance have been growing over the years (Argote, 2017; Merriam, 2019; Scarcella, 2018)

Still, reading is the most effective method of learning the English language. Similarly, watching English movies exposed students to natural expressions and the natural flow of speech, allowing them to see how English is used in real-life situations

outside of the classroom. This is especially true for interactive language, as the film exposes students to natural expressions and the natural flow of speech.

Additionally, improving one's English writing ability improves their overall English proficiency. Surfing is one of the most popular methods for learning English on the internet since it is convenient and entertaining. Playing word games was a fun way to practice English and a motivating approach to learning a language. When teachers, parents, and friends are involved in language acquisition, pupils perform better and have a more positive attitude toward learning English. It was also shown that skill levels for some second language learners might not match age at all. From the earliest stages to the most complex language applications, English competence is linked to functional language skills at various levels. As a result, pupils' English skills may be limited to survival necessities in communication due to a lack of enthusiasm, difficulties speaking English, and poor reading comprehension (Breene, 2019; Eisele, 2017; Margolis, 2020; Mohajan, 2018).

Besides, learners felt that developing English Language Proficiency was a sense of utility, which was a way to better opportunities, and necessity, perceived English as basic, widely spoken, and needed for involvement. Also, intrinsically rewarding, which rewarding, taps interest, brings pride, boosts self-confidence, and makes feel competent and comfortable on the side of the learners. English language proficiency is the ability to use English in speaking or writing as a manifestation of being proficient with the language. Proficiency with the language entails several factors, including mastery of grammar rules and an extensive vocabulary. Furthermore, to claim that one has a good comprehension of the English language, one must exhibit both correctness and fluency; to obtain competency in English, one must have the necessary skills (Said, 2022; Saini, 2020; Ozowuba, 2018)

Additionally, it was stressed that one of the most sought-after talents in an employee at most businesses was English ability. Improved English communication abilities can lead to future travel options and better career opportunities – gaining access to the success ladder. Positive feelings make individuals more capable and motivated to take action in order to accomplish their goals. These accomplished learners appear to take pride in their ability to communicate in English because it might give them an advantage in a global setting. The capacity to talk in front of others is a primary aspect of persuasion. There was a higher likelihood of skill awareness, competency, and active participation in class activities among students (Mohajan, 2018; Schwerdt & West, 2018; Ozowuba, 2018). Furthermore, the participants believed that knowing English was a requirement for boosting their confidence and doing well in school because it was essential for communication and a significant stimulant for the entire process and enjoyment at every step. That was why learning appeared to be a fascinating and pleasurable activity if students developed confidence and a sense of accomplishment in the process. Learning English may appear to be a complex undertaking due to numerous perplexing peculiarities, such as in grammar, that conspire to make English challenging to master, but it is also quite helpful. Learning English looked to be more than just learning the laws

of the language; it also allowed the learner to have input while playing around with words. These findings imply that happy emotions could help people learn more effectively (Ozowuba, 2018; Shams, 2018; Trice, 2017)

Moreover, it was also discovered that the participants appeared to have made full use of all available resources to develop their skills and raise their class ranking, resulting in them feeling confident in handling obstacles and fully participating in school activities. Self-discipline was a practical step toward bettering oneself and behaviors. Changes in study habits, routines, speech, and even cognition led to achieving specific goals, such as becoming fluent in English. Mindfulness considers students' need to create meaning, reflect on their learning, and apply what they have learned (McWhorter, 2020; Mohajan, 2018; Ontario, 2022).

## **7.2 Implications for Practice**

This study covered the participants' lived experiences at a specific institution, with the following implications:

- Considering the outcomes of this study, involving students' descriptions of English language proficiency because there were so few participants, it cannot be generalized. Subsequent investigations in different settings may be done.
- The results of this study led to developing intervention or enhancement programs like the utilization of media, technology, games, and interactive activities. Additionally, it could be utilized as a reference for anyone interested in investigating and exploring the viewpoints and lived experiences of people from many walks of life. Furthermore, the study's methodology would serve as a foundation for future student researchers interested in conducting qualitative research.
- Future studies might be undertaken at various schools at various levels to investigate broader issues related to English language competency to get additional insights and help pupils comprehend the advantages of learning the English language and help them become more motivated to do so.

## **7.3 Implications for Future Research**

In this study, the researcher has sought to respond to several research questions related to the experiences of senior high school humanities and social sciences learners regarding English language proficiency. The researcher briefly concludes some foregrounding implications of the study and directions for future research that stem from this study.

This qualitative study raised several opportunities for future research, both theory development and concept validation. More research would be necessary to refine and further elaborate the researcher's novel findings.

First, this study yielded many new insights into the experiences of the senior high school humanities and social sciences learners regarding English language proficiency, but very little discussed their situation. Consequently, researchers might do a similar study in other districts and divisions to confirm the findings of this one. This study could

be extended in search of statistical rather than descriptive qualitative results, as this study has sought.

Second, the opportunity to improve and validate the ideas and theories that the researcher's thematic analysis yielded was provided by this study.

Finally, as discussed in the study's limitations, further work was necessary to examine the experiences of the senior high school humanities and social sciences learners upon English language proficiency from the particular perspectives of the individual learners to the different schools, districts, and divisions. Further research on school administrators may shed light on the experiences of the senior high school humanities and social sciences learners upon English language proficiency.

#### **7.4 Concluding Remarks**

This phenomenological qualitative study would aid school administrators, teachers, parents, and students in better understanding the viewpoints and behavior of English language-adept students toward English language competence. As far-reaching implications of this phenomenological qualitative study extend into the very fabric of educational landscapes, advocating for a comprehensive transformation in how English language proficiency is conceptualized, taught, and embedded within institutional frameworks.

Firstly, the study presented an opportunity for a paradigm shift in educational policies. By unraveling the intricate tapestry of proficient learners' perspectives, policymakers could reevaluate and recalibrate language education policies. The study highlighted the necessity for policies that not only considered linguistic metrics but also encompassed the lived experiences of students. This holistic approach could lead to more inclusive, culturally sensitive, and globally relevant language education policies that acknowledge the diverse linguistic landscape of the contemporary world.

Secondly, the study contributed to the ongoing dialogue on the global significance of English. Policymakers could use the insights gained to foster a more nuanced understanding of English as a global language. Rather than a mere tool for communication, the study suggested that English proficiency should be viewed through a multifaceted lens, incorporating cultural awareness, effective communication skills, and emotional intelligence. This reevaluation could reshape the narrative around language education, emphasizing its role in fostering well-rounded global citizens.

Moreover, the research advocated for the continuous professional development of educators. English teachers, armed with a profound understanding of their students' perspectives, can actively engage in reflective practices to refine their teaching methodologies. Professional development initiatives, informed by the study's outcomes, can address specific challenges faced by educators, fostering a community of adaptable and informed teachers capable of navigating the complexities of language teaching in a dynamic educational landscape. Furthermore, the emphasis on empirical investigations underscored a commitment to evidence-based decision-making in education. Policymakers, administrators, and educators can utilize research outcomes to drive

targeted interventions and improvements in English language teaching. This research-informed approach aligned with contemporary trends in education, advocating for practices that were not only responsive to the needs of students but were also grounded in robust data and empirical evidence. Likewise, their comprehension could be one of the pillars on which schools build programs to improve student's English language ability. Furthermore, this research would benefit students and teachers by raising their awareness of the benefits of being fluent in English. This research could also assist English teachers in reflecting on their pedagogical techniques and developing strategies to stimulate and retain students' enthusiasm for studying English.

Also, through empirical investigations, this research could bring to light the need to improve English language competency for teachers to design strategies to introduce it into the classroom. In addition, this research would serve as a baseline for school administrators and instructors as they rethink policies relating to curriculum design and pedagogical practices in response to the challenge of global competitiveness in an era where English proficiency was an essential ability.

In conclusion, this study served as a catalyst for a more comprehensive and transformative approach to English language proficiency. Its implications stretched beyond immediate stakeholders, influencing educational policies, teacher practices, and the broader understanding of language education. The study called for a holistic, culturally sensitive, and evidence-driven approach that acknowledged the evolving nature of language education in a globally interconnected world.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors whose names are listed below certify that they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; membership, employment, consultancies, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

### **About the Author(s)**

**Guy Bless Fe Laroza-Velasco**, Teacher III. Academic education: Master of Arts in Education Major in English. Research interest: teaching and learning.

**Noe P. Garcia, PhD, RGC, LPT**, Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges, Guidance Counselor. Academic education: PhD in Institutional Development and Management Research interests: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods studies.

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