



## SPEAKING ENGLISH POLICY: IMPACT ON THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY OF THE ESL

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### **Abstract:**

Learning English for different purposes, especially in the workplace has drastically changed. English increases the chances of getting a good job in any local or multinational company. It is also the language of communication, it is used in the media and the internet community, so learning English is important for socializing and entertainment as well as work. It is essential for individuals and future professionals to have profound knowledge and understanding of the English language that is used in any respective field. The study was conducted to weigh up the English language proficiency skills of a selected private school in the City of Malolos, particularly the grade ten (10) students who implement the English Only Policy and another secondary government school in the same city of Bulacan who do not implement the English Only Policy. The impact and factors of the English-Only Policy on students were measured and identified. The researcher utilized an English proficiency test from Cambridge University as the research instrument, which was given to the 80 respondents. The study is comparative that utilized an independent t-test in analyzing the data gathered. The results showed that there is a significant difference in the English language proficiency skills of the students who come from schools that have an English-only policy and those students who come from a school that does not implement the said policy. The research recommends that the students be more engaged and motivated to increase their English language proficiency skills. The teachers should also motivate their students to not only use the English language but also encourage them to use their L1.

**Keywords:** speaking English policy; English language proficiency; ESL

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## 1. Introduction

Having a good command of the English language opens doors of opportunities to every individual in any area of one's life. It may be in any selected career, social, and political opportunities that require good communication skills. One would likely have more chances of having good prospects especially when one has acquired the needed required communicative competencies. The English Language is used in global businesses and organizations, it plays a very significant role in the success of any local, global undertakings and agreements.

In line with this, schools serve as a training ground for students by providing extensive knowledge and the necessary skills that the students need. Teachers identify the language difficulties of the students and at the same time implement the core competence. Learning through activities that are being done frequently was proven to be more effective and beneficial for students in learning L2. The English-only policy negotiates the learning process. The English-only policy is good classroom management that encourages respect among the learners.

## 2. Background of the Study

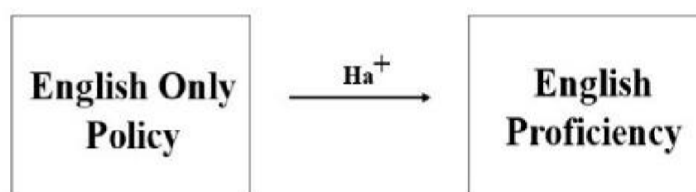
Some schools implement the English-only policy, and some do not. Fan (2013) concluded that academic achievements are one factor that affects the motivation of students to learn the English language. Wie (2013) suggests that students should not be restricted to using the English language only but code-switching, in particular, could help them learn and develop their English proficiency as well. While Shvidko (2017) found out that the best way to learn a language is to speak the language 100% of the time both in and out of the classroom. These studies tackle the motivation and other factors that can help encourage students to adhere to the English-only policy, thus enhancing their English language proficiency skills.

On the other hand, schools that do not implement the English-only policy are enrolled in the Department of Education's Specialized Programs. The Special Program in Journalism (SPJ) is designed to develop the learners' skills in mass communication, print, online, and broadcast media; the learners under this program are expected to demonstrate an understanding of the basic principles and theories of journalism, its practices, and techniques, and responsibly apply them as tools for effective communication and information. Special Program in Foreign Language (SPFL) helps learners develop skills in listening, reading, writing, speaking, and viewing that is fundamental in acquiring communicative competence in a second foreign language.

Racca and Lasaten (2006) conclude the effect of being proficient in the English language. The higher the students' English language skills, the higher their academic performance. This only proves how important for students to be proficient in the English language, which this research focuses on. Having provided these factors, it is easy to identify and improve the way the current study should be formulated.

The purpose of this study is to compare the English language proficiency skills of students who experienced the English-only policy and those who did not. To answer this question, these specific questions should be answered first: What is the English proficiency level of students in private schools with an English-only policy? What is the English proficiency level of students in public schools without an English-only policy? Is there a significant difference between the English proficiency of students from private and public schools?

In this research, the researcher aimed to identify and compare the English proficiency level of students in private and public schools and does having an English-only policy in their respective schools has a corresponding effect on it. Figure 1 shows the research paradigm of the study.



**Figure 1:** Research Paradigm

### 3. Respondents and Data Gathering

The paper utilized comparative fact-finding. It employed a non-probability sampling approach which is voluntary sampling. The research instrument that was used in this study was an online questionnaire. This was modified from the Cambridge Assessment website entitled "Test your English" under the category of General English. The test is specifically outlined for school-age learners.

The total number of Grade 10 learners from the selected private school is 184 with five sections divided by five (5). While the total number of grade 10 learners from the special program of a public school is 147 with four sections divided by four (4). The said figure of participants served as the community of the study and was set as the standard deviation of 50%, the margin of error of 8%, and the confidence level at 85% to obtain the sample size of 80 testees.

Microsoft Excel was used in running the independent t-test as the inferential statistics since the aim of the paper is to identify the significant difference between two unrelated groups ("Independent t-test for two samples," n.d.).

### 4. Results and Findings

Wei (2013) found out that students made progress in English speaking and listening proficiency because of the English-only policy. The selected private school in Malolos implements an English-only policy for elementary and high school students.

**Table 1:** English Proficiency Level of Students with English only Policy Selected Private School

Frequency of English subject meeting per week	1 hour a day = 5 hours a week
Mean	17.25
Median	17.50
Mode	18.00

The figures show that the mean and median of the results of the English proficiency test of all 40 students from this private school is 17. It is above half of the total number of items of the questionnaire that the researcher used which is the “Test your English” by Cambridge University with 25 items. On the other hand, the mode; which is the data value that is most frequently observed is 18. It means that most of the respondents got a score of 18 out of 25. Additionally, two students from the said school got the highest score of 23 out of 25, and one student got the lowest score of 8 out of 25.

According to Cambridge English, a score of 17 and 18 is equivalent to B1 Preliminary. It shows that the students have mastered the basics of English and have practical language skills for everyday use.

Humanistic Theory of A. H. Maslow (1954), students who feel they are loved and that they are capable are more likely to have a stronger motivation. This contradicts the idea of English only as a policy. According to Business Dictionary, a policy can be principles, rules, and guidelines formulated or adopted by an organization to reach its long-term goals. Policies may not give a person the feeling of being loved and capable, because they are being restricted to something that they may not want to do. English only as a policy may not be an effective motivation to the students, thus not being able to fulfill its goals.

**Table 2:** English Proficiency Level of Students  
 without English-only Policy Selected Government School

Frequency of English subject meetings per week	1 hour a day = 5 hours a week
Mean	19.10
Median	19
Mode	19

The Special Program for Journalism (SPJ) has different objectives for its students. These are to identify areas of development in various aspects of journalism and to enhance students’ and teachers’ journalistic skills and competencies. Therefore, concludes that the student's English skills and competencies are given the focus of this program. This government school offers this special program along with SPFL or the Special Program in Foreign Language.

The data above illustrates that the mean, median, and mode of the results are all 19. This denotes that most students from this got a score of 19. Additionally, one student from this school got the highest and perfect score of 25 out of 25, and three students got the lowest score of 14 out of 25.

In consonance with Cambridge English, a score of 19 is also equivalent to B1 Preliminary. It shows that the students have mastered the basics of English and have practical language skills for everyday use.

Behavioral Theory by B.F. Skinner (1953), learning motivation is a result of reinforcement like receiving good grades and praise from people that are important to them. The anticipation principle plays a significant role in bolstering their communicative competencies. This supports the idea of the Specialized programs as a way to improve the English proficiency skills of the students. Integrating and focusing on the English skills of the students in their education can motivate them to further enhance their English skills and to utilize and integrate the English language into their everyday life.

**Table 3:** The significant difference between the two schools

	Private School	Government School
Mean	17.25	19.10
Standard Deviation	3.60	3.10
P-two tail	0.02	

Fan (2012) said that learning motivation is a key factor in learning English as a foreign language. He stated that learning motivations are influenced by learning achievements and vice versa. Also, his study showed that teachers who give his/her students high grades enhance the students' learning motivations. Since this government school is enrolled in DepEd's special programs, learning and studying English is being administered intensively. The use of the English language is more than just conversational rather, it is being used and academically given focus. Hence, proves the point that the motivation of students in learning English is greatly influenced by integrating it into the student's academics.

According to the studies done by Berg, Hult, & King (2019), Cheng (2012), Hilliard (2015), and Song (2011) imposing a language policy that prohibits the use of learners' L1 assume power and inequality (as cited in Shvidko, 2018). This can be the reason why the results of the English proficiency test of the students from the selected private school are lower than students from the selected government school. The English-only policy might not be that effective in improving the English language proficiency skills of the students. Shvidko (2018), found out that the participants believe that the school administration should not impose the English-only policy and compel the students to follow; instead, they should respect the student's agency. Having an implemented English-only policy can dissuade some students rather than motivate or encourage them to adhere to the said policy.

To be proficient in English, the students must first achieve a level of proficiency in their L1. Threshold Hypothesis (Cummins, 1976) that for a child to achieve any benefits of bilingualism, they must have minimum competency and proficiency in either a first or second language. Imposing a policy that hinders the student to use their L1 can have a corresponding effect on their English language proficiency skills because it also hampers their proficiency in their L1 which is their core language.

Moreover, the English-only policy has the main goal to influence the students to use the English language all the time. Whether in daily conversations with their classmates or with school staff. This goal coincides with Shvidko (2017) that the best way to learn a language is to speak the language 100% of the time both in and out of the classroom. However, since the English-only policy came out ineffective, one factor that we can look at is that the students failed to use the English language all the time.

With a p-value of 0.02, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance, it revealed that there is a significant difference between schools that have an English-only policy and those that do not. However, as stated above, the students who have an implemented English-only policy in their school is not the one who has the higher result from the data. In this case, it shows that having a specialized program is more effective than the implementation of the English-only policy in increasing and developing the English proficiency skills of the students. This is true even after knowing that both schools have an equal number of subject meetings for English which is 1 hour per day, and 5 hours per week.

According to the "What is a Difference" (n.d.), one common problem with the use of p-value is that not all differences between the two groups may be considered as significantly different since they may be too small to be considered as such. Moreover, the standard deviation implies that the data are spread out and are significantly above the average. It means that the results were unusual and unexpected.

## 5. Conclusions

Language learning will always play a key role in the school's overall learning process. In this case, teaching English to students is to help them develop good communication skills alongside academic intellectualism. The conducted study together with the relevant results aims to know any of the relationships between the two variables or any of their significance if there are any. With or without the English Only Policy, both schools have the same purpose which is to encourage the students to learn the best way possible, they just differ in their mode of practice.

The results of the study also concluded that the English-only policy is not that effective anymore in enhancing the English language proficiency skills of students because of some factors that affect their willingness to oblige to the said policy. On the other hand, the specialized programs of DepEd were proven to be more effective in improving the English language proficiency skills of the students, since it holds specialized subjects in English.

The paper concludes that there is a significant difference in the English language proficiency skills of students between schools that have an English-only policy and those that do not. However, the significant difference showed that the school that does not have the English-only policy but rather enrolled in a specialized program is the one that got the higher mean in the data presented.

English is the universal language which is why nowadays, schools from all over the world are raising their nation's future hope with skills and competencies in globalization and foreign communication. It clearly states the importance and significance of the English language in the lives of the students, which schools are giving attention to. Racca and Lasaten (2006) conclude that students' English language proficiency could be a predictor of the student's academic performance in Science, Mathematics, and English. Thus, English language programs in schools should be prioritized.

## 6. Recommendations

Based on the findings the paper proposes that the students must be more engaged and motivated to increase their English language proficiency skills.

The teachers should also motivate their students not to only use the English language but also encourage them to use their L1. According to the study by Wei (2013), improper communication or ambiguity often emerged, and students usually had the status "rough guessing", instead of being in the status "clear and precise understanding" when they use the English language as their L1.

The administration of both schools ought to be aware of the effectiveness and the other implications of the English-only policy toward the English language proficiency skills of students. The research recommends strengthening and further developing the said policy, in a more effective and less regulating way. The research also suggests the introduction of projects and activities in line to improve the English language proficiency skills of students which caters to a more engaging and motivating environment.

Lastly, may this study serve as a guide for future researchers who plan to do a similar or related study. To yield better results, future researchers may incorporate a qualitative side for this topic. They can make use of face-to-face interviews, focus group discussion, direct observation, and a speaking and hearing test, rather than just using a questionnaire type of test.

## Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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