



# Language acquisition: The lived experiences of students in acquiring second language

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## Abstract

This phenomenological study was conducted to describe the context of acquisition of second language among the students. The seven participants were purposely selected to answer the interview questions. In terms of their lived experiences in the acquisition of second language, the majority of the participants experienced fun, tough, and challenging yet rewarding encounters. In terms of the challenges encountered; 'English is a crazy language' is one of the top problems shared by the participants. English learners had a tough time in identifying the rules since there are some exemptions to it. In terms of their coping mechanisms, generally, there were numerous coping mechanisms developed in order to address the challenges they encountered. This only substantiated that the participants aimed to vanquish the intimidating effects of these challenges deep into every essential aspect of their lives. This also confirmed that the participants' perspective towards the problems which they encountered was openly noted and not afraid of addressing it with solutions they developed by themselves or with the assistance of other professionals.

**Keywords:** *phenomenology, lived experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, second language, language acquisition*

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## Introduction

English is regarded as not a foreign language to be learned, but a qualification an individual should possess. The Philippines is recognized as having many Filipinos who at least have some degree in speaking the English language. However, a couple of researches show that proficiency in the English language of the country is deteriorating. According to Thomson (2015), Second Language (SL) is defined as a non-native language that is broadly used for purposes of communication, commonly as a medium of education, government, or business which significantly means that any language acquired after mastering the mother tongue or the Lingua Franca. According to a report released by the International Education Company Education First (EF) (2020), the Philippines suffered a 7-spot drop in the English Proficiency Index, now ranked 27<sup>th</sup>. Problems on improving students' competency in learning English language have become a concern for teachers in Union National High School, raised in one of the School Learning Action Cell (SLAC) regularly conducted by the School's English Department.

This study argues that embarking on this study would somehow give light on the language learning in relation to the learning strategies used by the students to obtain academic success. The researcher is challenged to describe and recommend relevant strategies in dealing learning second language. This endeavor was necessary because it could be noted that researches show that proficiency in the English language of the country is waning.

The study described the contexts wherein native speakers learn second language through communicative tasks. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions;

1. What are the lived experiences of native speaker students in learning second language?
2. What are the challenges encountered by learners in learning second language?
3. What are the coping mechanisms used by the learners in acquiring second language?
4. What training program can be crafted based on the result of the study?

## Methodology

In this study, phenomenological qualitative research design was utilized in order for the researcher to comprehensively capture the research questions appropriately and adequately. Phenomenology is concerned with revealing the “essence” or “essential structure” of a phenomenon under investigation (Morrow et al., 2015).

The study was conducted at Union National High School. Union National High School is considered one of the big secondary schools in the district of Nabas. The school is strategically located at Barangay Union, Nabas, Aklan, Philippines, and it is located in the northwest part of the province of Aklan. The participants for this study were seven students, one from each Grade level in Junior High (Grade 7-10) and three students from Senior High coming from different strands (GAS, TVL1, and TVL2), of Union National High School who are currently enrolled in the school year 2023-2024. Seven participants were purposively chosen using the inclusion criteria set by the researcher as basis. Criterion number 1, must be a student of Union National High School; Criterion number 2, shared the characteristics of having good educational background in English with the recommendation of their English Teachers and; Criterion number 3, must divulge/disclose their experiences fit to the study being conducted to answer the research questions.

The data gathering instrument used in the study was the in-depth interview that was validated by English teachers at Union National High School who have extensive knowledge and expertise in English. In-depth interview is a systematic process collecting information on what people say and do and create in their natural setting to discover the world as the people themselves and experience it. The interview guide was divided into three parts. Part I gathers information on the experiences of students in English language acquisition. Part II discusses the challenges and issues with the acquiring of English language. Part III converses how they overcome those challenges that they had in the acquisition of English language. Each semi-structured interview lasted for 15-25 minutes. The interview was conducted in English though the native-tongue of the participants are either *Nabason* or Filipino.

Colaizzi’s method of data analysis was used in interpreting the qualitative research data gathered to identify meaningful information and organize it into themes or categories. The following steps represent the Colaizzi process for case study data analysis (Sander, 2003,

as cited in Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). Each transcript was read and re-read to obtain a general sense of the whole content of the study. For each transcript, significant statements that pertained to the case under study were extracted. These statements were recorded on a separate sheet noting their pages and line numbers. Meanings were formulated from the significant statements. The formulated meanings were sorted out into categories and cluster of themes. The findings of the study were integrated into a description under a phenomenological research design. The fundamental structure of the phenomenological design will be described. Finally, validation of the findings was sought from the research participations to compare the researcher's descriptive results with their experiences.

## **Findings**

There were six (6) themes emerged as lived experiences of students in acquiring second language. Some of the participants described their learning experiences as fun and enjoyable since they learned new things. Other participants revealed that learning foreign language was tough because it was not the language, they used every day. One participant described her experience as bittersweet as it was challenging and worthwhile. Other participant revealed that she had a weak foundation of the foreign language, and it caused her to lag during the process. Other participants revealed that language is used to communicate with people building relationships and understanding their identity.

In terms of the challenges and issues encountered by the students in the acquisition of foreign language, there were six dominant themes. Learners get confused of the rules of language saying that English is a crazy language. The conflict of the first and second language became a hindrance to learners because of its different structures in terms of grammar and wordings. Students felt anxious when using the language, they were not familiar with. The pressure from people to not commit mistakes contribute to anxiety and limit the learners to use the foreign language. Students tended to code-switch the language to complete the discourse, but it was quite devastating as they were incompetent in the language. Another concern was; while learning second language, students might divulge fully in the process and possibly forgot their first language.

The coping mechanisms adopted by students were encapsulated into five themes. Two participants said learning language can be achieved with the help of people around you, with the help of parents or the teachers. Technology also contributed in the acquisition of language especially watching English movies or other with English subtitles. Some of the participants revealed that language should be put into practice. Four macro skills should be exercised for the language to be fully learned. Conversing with the native speakers of the language was a big help. Listening and speaking with them improve one's communication skill. Other participants revealed that learning second language came from within. It was your motivation that served as driving force to learn the language.

The study proposed a program designed for the learners and teachers with the title: Language Matters: A new vision of life starts with a new Language. The proposed program had the following objectives: identify the eight parts of speech, understand the rules of grammar, develop the receptive skills- reading and listening, develop the expressive skills- speaking and writing, familiarize with the sounds of English, improve vocabulary skill and use technology as aid in learning English.

## **Conclusions**

Learning second language could be tough yet rewarding. The process may be hard since it was not the language, we used every day but learning it was an opportunity to connect with people. Participants encountered both positive and negative experiences while acquiring the language which made them appreciate the differences of languages and opened a bigger world for them to explore. There were serious problems encountered by students in learning the language. Hindrances may come from within or outside. Anxiety confined students to perform in a communicative task. The first language might restrict the acquisition of the second language because of its differences. The values and character of being innovative, positive, and resourceful were very evident among the seven participants for they were able to come up with varied ways and means to remedy the problems they encountered while learning the foreign language. Problems in the acquisition of second language can be solved with the accumulative help and cooperation among members of the society which includes the government, teachers, learners, and families.

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