



Triumphs and Struggles in Teaching the English Language

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Triumphs and Struggles in Teaching the English Language

Precious Domingo

Abstract

This study aims to explore the current situations of the teaching and learning of the English language at Visayas State University. It reveals the joys and pains of the teachers in teaching the target language. The key informant in this study is the teachers handling the English language subject and the data were gathered through interviews. Using thematic analysis, it was found out that teachers see teaching a satisfying job not mainly because of the salary but because they can practice their forte. The progress that they see in the students in the use of the English language provides self-satisfaction for the teachers. The pains that teachers experience in their current situation in English language teaching revolves around the attitude and motivation of the students in the learning process, the lack of resources that can be used in teaching, the learning environment such as the unconducive classroom and lack of internet. The support of the school administration for the teachers' training and professional development is seen as a problem and needs full support.

Keywords: English language, Teaching, Issues

Introduction

Education is necessary for an economy to become more productive. It is an agent of change that contributes to economic growth. In the 21st century, the new educational expectations for a graduate is to have the skills of critical thinking and problem solving, inter and intracultural communication, innovation, digital knowledge, effective oral and written communication, collaboration and teamwork (Shaaban, 2016). One of the 21st-century skill as mentioned is an effective oral and written communication. In an article, an interview with Andrew King, IDP Education director, mentioned that English remains the lingua franca of international business and diplomacy. Employers in today's global market want people that have international experience, good qualifications, and have high proficiency in spoken and written English (Marcelo, 2010). It is the responsibility of the educational system to train individuals to actively participate in political, economic, and social relations and it would be impossible for a person to actively contribute to a global field without the required proficiency in English.

In the era of globalization, the English language plays a major role in the progress of a country. It is the main language used in international banking and business. Everyone needs to learn the language to communicate at the international level. It is the main language of printed and non-printed media and more newspapers and books

are written in English than any other language. In the education sector, English is essential in the field even in countries where it is not a major language. It is the most dominant language in science, technology, and math. Most of the research and studies in any given scientific field is written in English (Naved, 2019). The need for English as a lingua franca of the global community becomes more critical in both developing and developed countries.

In the Philippines, Filipinos learned the English language when it was introduced by the Americans. They made English as the medium of instruction in the public school system, thereby spreading the language throughout the country. The Philippines was freed from the US but influence in the use of English is still present. Currently, English is a medium of instruction in primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. English is not a native language in the country, therefore it is the responsibility of the educational system to train individuals to develop skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in foreign languages, particularly English. Since it is difficult to compete in the global arena without a certain level of proficiency in English, English is regarded as not a foreign language to be learned, but a qualification an individual should possess (Wolff, 2003). English language teaching and learning in the Philippines can be reflected on the state of the English proficiency of the people. Getting a certain level of proficiency in English has been emphasized in numerous papers and report all over the world. The Philippines is recognized as having a large number of 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.

Looking closely at the language proficiency of the tertiary level graduates, the level of proficiency in the English language falls below what is expected. These can be seen in several articles (Jimenez, 2018; Morallo, 2018; Macasinag, 2011). Philippines advantage in English proficiency is fastly eroded by declining mastery of the English language of the graduates. In primary education, learners are expected to build a strong foundation in the English language and further develop it at the secondary level so that when learners reach the tertiary level they are assumed to have a required level of English proficiency. However, more than ninety-percent of college graduates in the Philippines are not yet equipped for English-speaking roles and with the recent test conducted by Hopkins, the average score of around 10,000 Filipino college students who took Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) is 631 out of 990, equivalent to B1 or intermediate level.

Another study conducted by HA Cervantes Knowledge Systems, Inc., which administers the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) took sample measurements of graduating students for the year 2001-2002 from selected educational institutions in Metro Manila. The study revealed that graduates' English language proficiency is only at the level of basic working proficiency. This level of proficiency indicates that "the person hardly understands native English speakers or speakers of English vis international meetings, or could they sustain fluency & accuracy. In IELTS 2008, the Philippines is no longer the top English speaking country in Asia (Marcelo, 2010).

In the SWS self-assessed survey conducted, Filipinos reported a decline in English proficiency from the ability to speak, write, and think in English (Salazar, 2007). Having this knowledge on the condition of English

proficiency of the tertiary graduates it becomes a common belief that Philippine education is not successful in teaching English (Tosun, 2012). The status of the English proficiency of students in the country is alarming. Several factors can be a reason for this such as lack of facilities, large class size per classroom, and inadequacy of learning materials. The current status of English language teaching and learning in the country are not achieving the necessary levels in reading, listening, writing, and speaking (Oktay, 2015).

To dig deeper into the problem will unlock the issues faced by teachers in teaching ESL at the tertiary level. Problems faced by English teachers at the primary or secondary level possibly differ from the problems faced at the tertiary level. Moreover, the status of ESL teaching in one of the universities in the region varies to other regions considering the location and technological progress. This research aims to give light to the difficulties in English at a higher education level. The issue is important because identifying the root problem is necessary to provide a suitable solution, prevent wastage of effort, time, and finances of the government. Results are useful to administrators, teachers, and students. Issues in teaching English at the tertiary level will be tackled to provide awareness to tertiary teachers and higher administrators of the current situations of ESL at Visayas State University. Further, results may be used as a guide in making decisions. Research findings can also be significant in describing overall issues in teaching English in the Philippines and in exploring the factors that influence the quality of teaching of the English language in the country. Further, the research result presents the current situations of ESL teaching and provides recommendations.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to determine the on-going problems regarding English language teaching in the Philippines, particularly in the higher education context. It aims to answer the central question of what are the issues in English language teaching. Further, this study also looks into the following:

1. What are the issues and concerns in teaching the English language do teachers encounter in the higher education level?
2. What coping mechanisms are employed by teachers in teaching the English language to the students at the tertiary level?

Theoretical Framework

This study aimed to identify the difficulties of teachers in teaching English as a second language in higher education. To do this the researcher looked into the different aspects which may impact the teaching and learning process. The researcher anchored into the different pedagogical theories in teaching a second language, the motivation and anxiety in learning the language, and the effect of the ideal learning environment in learning the English language as these are some factors that affect the teaching and learning process. Teaching a language has many different features. A teacher teaches not only the four macro skills but also encourages students to have enthusiasm, a good attitude, and motivation towards English. Furthermore, teachers have to understand the factors that play a role in students' learning (Songbatumis, 2017). Language teaching requires teachers to help students develop both academic and personal beliefs.

Pedagogically, teaching foreign languages has been performed via different methods, especially for adults who are learning a language in higher education: Grammar Translation Method (GTM), Direct Method, Audio-Lingual method, Communicative Approach, Lexical Approach. Grammar translation method evolved from the classical method of teaching which has a typical feature of being teacher-centered, vocabularies are taught through translation, memorization of grammar rules, and elaborate discussion of grammar rules. The direct method of teaching was established as a response to the Grammar-Translation method. It requires learners to immerse themselves in the same way as when a first language is learned. All teaching is done using the target language, grammar is inductively taught, there is a focus on speaking and listening, and only useful 'everyday' language is taught. The weakness in the Direct Method is its assumption that a second language can be learned in the same way as a first, when in fact the second language is learned in very different conditions

The audio-lingual method shared several features to direct method as both were reactions to the seeming failure of the grammar-translation method. The audio-lingual method bans the use of native language and prioritizes the skills listening and speaking over reading and writing. It anchors on the behaviorism and structuralism and prioritizes grammar over vocabulary and accuracy over fluency (<https://www.tefl.net/methods/audiolingual.htm>). Communicative approach on the other hand is different from the first three methods in English language teaching mainly because it is more learner-centered and emphasizes interaction as a way of learning the English language. It highlights role-play, pair work, and group work activities. Learning of specific grammatical rules is less emphasized. Obtaining native-speaker-like fluency and pronunciation is important. Communicative competence of students is assessed on their level rather than on their explicit knowledge.

Motivation and anxiety also play a role in learning English as a second language. Motivation is viewed as part of a general "affective filter" (Krashen, 1985). High intrinsic motivation and low affective filter may help a learner learn the English language while low intrinsic motivation and high affective filter may hinder the learner from learning the English language. The conducive learning environment, appropriate learning materials, and helpful learning facilities also key to learn a language, which in this is the English language. Developing a classroom environment conducive to learning involves providing the physical space, making the students cooperate, constructing a common environment, and maintaining an optimistic classroom climate and culture.

Review of Related Literature

English language teaching in the Philippines has faced several difficulties. In the early years, during the American occupation, some problems mentioned include funding and delay in the transport of instructional resources and materials and issues of pedagogy in language teaching. The instruction in the English language during this time highly emphasized on the grammar and structure and disallow the use of the first language which is inevitable for a non-native speaker of the English language (Arriola, 2017). Aside from the problems in pedagogy, it is mentioned in the article of Otaño cited by Arriola (2017) some other concerns in language teaching: short length of school session, lower number of years of instruction, low number of text and supplementary materials, high number of untrained teachers, large class size, unclear language models. These

problems however still exist today.

Problems in teaching English as a second or foreign language not only exist in the Philippines but also other countries. In Arab for example, Shaaban (2016) identified the challenges faces by Arab learners in teaching and learning the English language. These include the instructional materials which are not suitable and are not based on the needs of the learners. The cultural considerations are also taken for granted, in the textbooks for instance. The themes and values of imported foreign books are irrelevant or of little interest to Arab learners. Zughoul (2003) as cited by Shaaban recommended avoiding the inclusion of western values, lifestyle, ideals, etc. Instead, it should be used as a context of comparison and contrast between the native and the target culture. Teachers' qualifications also posed a problem in the teaching of English in Arab students. There is a faulty assumption of school administrators that teachers who have a degree in English don't need additional training or professional development, and those teachers who are given professional development think of themselves as not qualified enough. The language to be used as a medium of instruction, the choice between the use of first language or the international language is also an issue.

Other problems as cited by Shaaban is the study of Fareh (2010) which the problems he identified include lack of preparation of English teachers; using teacher-centered the method most often; students' lack of English language exposure outside the classroom. As cited also by Shaaban is the study of Bacha (2002), Tahaineh (2010), and Umair (2011) which have enumerated other sets of issues: failure to comprehend and organize resources, lack of time management, absence of peer work, lack of resources that could expose them to the target language, and lack of language planning. Kashikar (2016) identified problems and solutions in teaching English as a Second language in India. The concerns he mentioned include the heterogeneous nature of the classroom, ignorance about the use of technology, lack of interest, and presence of fear, lack of use of the English language in social communication. Students, different abilities, and backgrounds posed problems for teachers as (s)he has to keep rapport with every individual in the class. The lack of awareness on the use of new technology is also seen as a problem. There are rural colleges that though have established language laboratories, students never use it unless compelled, because they lack the knowledge on how to operate the technology. Students' lack of interest in learning the English language hindered them in taking initiatives in using the language. Shyness overpowers and restricts them from engaging in a communicative approach.

In the study of Yusob (2018) about the challenges of teaching grammar in Malaysia, he enumerated the challenges experienced by lecturers in teaching grammar at the undergraduate level. Findings show that lecturers faced six challenges namely the lack of experience of lecturers in teaching grammar, students' low or weak proficiency, lack of facilities, teachers' negative perceptions on the teaching of grammar, and preparation of grammar lessons. Yusob recommended giving an intensive course for English teachers who lack the necessary qualifications and experiences, providing better classroom facilities, and assessing students' proficiency before the first class.

The same issues are highlighted by Songbatumis (2017) in her study on the challenges of teaching English in Indonesia. The study investigates the issues of teaching English form the teachers' point of view. Results show

that challenges emerged partly from the students, partly from the teachers, and partly from the school facilities. Students are challenged by their lack of vocabulary mastery, low concentration, lack of discipline, boredom, and speaking problems. Meanwhile, teachers' challenges are a shortage of teachers' training, language proficiency issue, limited mastery of teaching methods, unfamiliarity to IT, and lack of professional development. Also, facilities issues including inadequate resources and facilities, and time constraint.

Michalak and Bavli (2018) have identified the challenges of teaching English as a foreign language in Turkey and Poland. Among the problems that emerged is the low motivation of students in learning English which can be seen by students less interested in their English classes. Another is teaching large class sizes, and the short time the students spend in learning English at school. Teachers also exclaimed their dissatisfaction in in-service development and activities that is out of focus. Further, teachers also experience system reform in education in Poland and Turkey.

Due to the difficulties and concerns in teaching and learning English to non-native speakers, the direct impact can be seen in the proficiency in using the English language. Though the Philippines is considered to have a certain level of proficiency in using and speaking the English language, it is still seemed to be problematic. In an article by Garcia (2007) he mentioned that the Philippines has not live-up the rank as being the third-largest English-speaking nation in the world. It is back-up by the result of the SWS survey in 2006 which shows a significant decline in the aspect of self-assessed English language proficiency compared to the result of the 1993 and 2000 SWS surveys. Similar findings are shown from the test result of the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). They conducted a proficiency test in the workplace context. More than 4,000,000 test-takers took the exam every year. The results of the test-takers showed that there is a need to improve their communication skills in English.

The Philippine government is providing solutions to intensify the quality of education in the country. These include the following decisions made: The Department of Education (DepEd) adopted the K-12 Curriculum that extended the years of basic education from 10 years to 12 years (13 including Kindergarten). The country has 10 years of basic education. The additional two years in high school (senior high school) aimed to capacitate the high school students in knowledge and skill for them to become better prepared not only for the tertiary level but also for work through enhancement of necessary skills. Through several programs of the government, education becomes more accessible. In 2015, Education for All (EFA) program was established with four objectives: to provide education options for all out-of-school adults and young people; eliminate drop-outs and repetition during the first three years of school; encourage the completion of a full cycle of basic schooling and commit to the attainment of basic education competencies for everyone (Education reform in the Philippines). President Rodrigo Duterte also signed Republic Act 10931 or the "Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act" granting free tuition and other fees for students in state universities and colleges, as well as local universities and colleges and technical-vocational institutions. There is also the Student Loan Program set up to help college students augment their financial needs (Fernando, 2019).

Examining closely on the solutions provided by the government, these aim to answer the issues in education in

general, but the issues specific for English language teaching was not given notice. Several studies have been conducted to explain the issues in English language teaching and learning but mostly focused on teaching English in pre-higher education levels. Consequently, the learners and teachers of English in higher education contexts have been overlooked. Teaching English at the tertiary level is naturally much different from teaching the language in other levels of education, in secondary school or elementary. The difference may be on the curriculum, learning environment, kind of students, and teaching approach or content delivery. Due to its difference from other levels of education, in all components, teaching English to young adult learners at the college level might come with many problems or constraints encountered by teachers. Lynch (2008) points out three most crucial problems of English language teaching and learning classrooms such as 1) lack of learners' motivation, 2) insufficient time, resources and materials, and 3) over-crowded English classes.

Study on teaching English at tertiary school has been a topic of research in another country. Yusob (2017) studied the challenges of teaching grammar at the tertiary level in Malaysia; Songbatumis (2017) researched the challenges in teaching English faced by English teachers in Indonesia; Anjaneyulu (2015) researched on the problems faced by teachers in teaching the English language in India. All the studies are conducted in the context of the neighboring Asian countries. This research however aims to give light to the difficulties in English in higher education levels in the Philippine context.

Scope and Limitations

The study was conducted in the second semester of the school year 2019-2020 at Visayas State University. The data gathered for this research was limited to the experiences shared by the participants through interviews and focus group discussions. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, individual voices of each participant were given weight. Participants were teachers handling English related subjects and do include non-English language teachers. One significant limitation of this study is that findings cannot be generalized. The findings apply mainly to the sample used in the research.

Methodology

This part of the study provides information about research design, research locale, participants and sampling procedure, scope and limitations, data gathering procedure, data analysis procedure, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

The qualitative research method was used in the study, phenomenological research study method in particular. Qualitative research searched for meaning in ways in which quantitative analysis cannot. Data collected doesn't necessarily contain numeric quantities. The qualitative data that the researcher gathered in the investigation draws a metaphorical image of the participants' take on the world. Qualitative research empowers participants to share their stories, especially those whose voices are infrequently heard (Creswell, 2013). The study utilizes a phenomenological approach. The key elements of phenomenological inquiry are to understand individual(s)

lived-experiences in a specific phenomenon which in this case is the English language teaching and learning at Visayas State University. The purpose of this design is to report the real status of the teaching and learning of the English language as experienced by English teachers in VSU. Phenomenological research depends heavily on participant (s) accounts which will be then interpreted by the researcher. According to Jasper (1994), a phenomenological study considers the “real meaning of phenomena as explored through the experiences described by the individual”.

Research Locale

The research setting of this study is the Visayas State University's main campus located in Baybay, Leyte. The university specializes in agriculture. It offers various programs- Agro-Industry, Engineering, Information Technology, Hospitality Management, Tropical Ecology, Veterinary Medicine, Forestry, Fishery, and Food Science and Technology, Education and Communication, and has produced quality graduates. The community where VSU is located is not fully urbanized. The adjacent city going south is Baybay--15 kilometers away and going north is Ormoc--42 kilometers away. The dialect used in the community is Bisaya, but then one can hear Waray-Waray speakers since a lot of students from the Waray speaking community are enrolled in the university, and Baybay is also near to Waray speaking municipalities. The language expected to use during classes in the university is the English language. Further, English as a general subject is compulsory to all courses in VSU, thus all students are required to enroll corresponding units. The medium of instruction is English which the students and instructors, like in any other university in the Philippines, are expected to use in communication.

Research Respondents

The respondents in this research were selected using the following criteria:

1. The participant is an English teacher at a tertiary level with 2 or more years of experience in the field of teaching.
2. The participant is in active service (not in study leave, etc) upon the conduct of the study.
3. The participant is an English major graduate.
4. The participant should be of legal age.
5. The participant is willing to be interviewed and serve in the study
6. The participant's educational attainment should fit in any of the following: a. Doctorate holder; b. With doctorate units earned at least 27 units; c. Master's degree holder.

With regards to the sample size for phenomenological studies, Creswell (1998) recommends 5 – 25 and Morse (1994) suggests at least six but ultimately, the required number of participants should depend on when saturation is reached, thus the researcher identified six participants.

Sampling Technique

The participant selection in this research study is purposeful sampling wherein the participants are selected

because they can best provide information about the research questions and enhance understanding of the phenomenon under study. According to Cresswell, purposeful sampling involves the identification and selection of individuals or groups of individuals that are knowledgeable about or experienced with the phenomenon (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Particularly, the researcher employed criterion sampling which according to Patton (2001) involves selecting participants that meet some predetermined criteria. In this research, the criteria for participant selection were predetermined by the researcher. Other than knowledge and experience, it is important to note the importance of participants' availability and willingness to participate and the ability to articulate experiences and opinions in an expressive and reflective manner (NCBI, 2020)

Research Instrument

The researcher prepared interview questions for the participants. These questions were open-ended questions that aimed to acquire as much information from the participants regarding the phenomenon of interest. The questions were reviewed for grammar and sentence by qualified persons.

Focused Group Discussion Questions

1. What are your experiences in English language teaching?
2. Do you find teaching English as a Second language enjoyable? Why or why not?

Semi-Structured and In-depth Interview Questions

1. Preliminaries
 - What are your degree and specialization?
 - How many years have you been teaching?
 - How long have you been teaching English?
2. What are your joys in teaching English as a second language?
3. What are your pains in teaching English as a second language?
4. What are the difficulties that you meet in teaching the English language as a second language?
5. What problems are common among the students in learning English as a second language?
 - How do you solve the problems that you encounter by yourselves?
 - What are the coping mechanisms in dealing with those commonly observed problems?

Data Gathering Procedure

This study aimed to recognize college teachers' perspectives regarding problems in the language teaching process thus a semi-structured interview was conducted to collect the data. An invitation for an interview was sent to the participants through e-mail. Before the interview, they were informed of the purpose of the study and assured that the data gathered would be confidential and that their names were concealed. The study had a face-to-face interview where participants will answer open-ended questions about the problems they have

experienced or observed during their language learning process and their suggestions for each problem they stated. The interview took place in the participants' own offices at the college or in a private conference room to offer them the most secure environment. Semi-structured interviews were employed to collect data for this study. This allows the interviewer or interviewee to generate data and discuss emergent issues throughout the interview (Horton, Macve, & Struyven, 2004).

In the interviews, they were asked to (i) discuss their joys and pains in the English language teaching process (ii) discuss the experiences, the challenges and issues with the teaching of English language (iii) converse how they overcome those challenges that they had in teaching the English language. Each semi-structured interview lasted for 15-25 minutes. The interviews were conducted in English though the native-tongue of the participants are either Sinugbuanong- Bisaya or Waray-Waray. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim at the semantic level to facilitate the analysis. The transcripts and analyses of the interviews were emailed back to the participants for member checking and edited by the researcher with their comments. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant in all written or digital files to ensure confidentiality.

Data Analysis Procedure

Phenomenological research uses the analysis of significant statements, the generation of meaning units, and the development of what called an essence description. This study is a descriptive phenomenology which concerned with revealing the "essence" or "essential structure" of a phenomenon under investigation (Morrow, Rodriguez, & King, 2015). The method of analyzing the data adheres to the steps of Colaizzi's (1978) distinctive seven-step process to provides rigorous analysis, with each step staying close to the data. These steps are Familiarization, Identifying significant statements, Formulating meanings, Clustering themes, Developing an exhaustive description, Producing the fundamental structure, Seeking verification of the fundamental structure. The final result is a concise yet all-encompassing description of the phenomenon under study, validated by the participants of the study. The method relies on the rich experience of the respondents; these may come from face-to-face interviews, diaries, written outputs, blogs, or focused group discussions.

The first step of Colaizzi's data analysis the familiarization where the researcher reads through all the participant accounts several times to be familiarized with the data. Then he or she identifies significant statements in the accounts that are of direct relevance to the phenomenon under investigation. These significant statements are assigned with meanings keeping in mind that the researcher must "bracket" personal pre-suppositions and stick closely to the phenomenon as experienced. After identifying the meaning, the researcher clusters the identified meanings into themes that are common across all accounts. Again bracketing of pre-suppositions is crucial. Next is writing a full and comprehensive description of the phenomenon, incorporating all the themes produced. Then, the researcher condenses the thorough description down to a short, dense statement that captures just those aspects deemed to be vital to the structure of the phenomenon. The researcher returns the fundamental structure statement to all participants (or sometimes a subsample in larger studies) to ask whether it captures their experience. He or she may go back and modify earlier steps in the analysis in the light of this feedback ((Morrow, Rodriguez, & King, 2015).

Ethics Statement

Before the conduct of the interview, the researcher explained to the participants the nature of the study, what will be required of them during the conduct of the interview, and the approximate time requirement. They were also informed that the interview was recorded using the audio recorder of the researcher. Participants were guaranteed the confidentiality of their personal information such as names. Pseudo names were assigned to each of the participants. Their identity would not be divulged and all the data gathered handling, and storage process would protect their anonymity. It was clarified that the interview was voluntary, free of coercion, and autonomously exercised. The refusal to be interviewed would not affect the participants' status in the university.

Results and Discussion

The in-depth interview was conducted to explore the current situation in teaching and learning the English language at the tertiary level at Visayas State University. Two major questions were identified: 1.) What are the issues and concerns in teaching the English language do teachers encounter in the higher education level? and 2.) What coping mechanisms are employed by teachers in teaching the English language to the students at the tertiary level?

The challenges faced by the teachers at the tertiary level in VSU are connected to the classroom level, school level, and education-system level. Going through with thematic analysis, the researchers have identified these interrelated issues concerning English language teaching and learning and the coping mechanisms employed by teachers. During the focused group discussion, the participants of the research have shared their joys in teaching, that despite the problems that they are facing concerning their work, they feel satisfied when they see that the students gain learning from them. At the same time, they can see progress on their part. They can explore and strengthen their expertise and sharpen their capability in teaching and learn simultaneously. Satisfaction is one of the factors of the overall efficiency of work performed, is configured as a result of the relation between what individuals get from work (in terms of salary, status, appreciation, etc.) and their projected results. This construct can be defined as the events that give rise to a subjective feeling of relief, pleasure, which may be expressed or described by the individual who is experiencing it, but cannot be seen from the outside by another person (Mathis, 1997).

"My joy is to see my students learning and becoming achievers in their academic pursuits" (Respondent 6)

"when you love teaching there's just no limitations with your effort, with your strategies so you really do your best to make them learn so I think for me that makes me happy because it's my passion to teach" (Respondent 2)

"... I get to learn the new trends in teaching language and literature. And because I'm also studying, I also learned from my classmates and professors and I get to apply my learnings in the classroom." (Respondent 3)

"I can see the changes in my strategies, in my methods. Before when I was not yet studying, I tended to be very conventional and traditional in my approaches. But now for example, in teaching grammar, I

was too structural, but now I give way to communicative grammar language teaching.” (Respondent 5)

“It really gives joy to me when I learn that my student is at least master the skills in language especially in dealing with writing and speaking.” (Respondent 4)

1. What are the issues and concerns in teaching the English language do teachers encounter in the higher education level?

The Challenges Faced by Teachers in Teaching English Language (Classroom Level)

Teachers' problems in the classroom level revolve around students' lack of confidence in using the English language, students' lack of interest in learning the English language, students' weak foundation in the English language, and teacher teaching large classes. All of the respondents in the study have mentioned their concerns on the students' performance in learning the English language. Common answers tell about the attitude and motivation of the students towards English and the students' poor performance in class. This greatly reflects Krashen's Affective filter hypothesis that states negative feelings, anxiety, lack of motivation, or low self-esteem can prevent learners from successful acquisition of a second language.

Students' Lack of Confidence in Using the English Language

Based on the interview on the participants, one problem they encounter in class is students lacked a positive attitude towards learning English. *“...most of them are hesitant to learn the language because they think that they would sound funny. ...they would make mistakes and they're afraid that the instructor would give negative feedback”* (Respondent 3). According to the participants, students are timid when it comes to speaking the language. Copland, Garton, and Burns (2014) expressed that many children are shy in speaking a foreign language in front of their classmates because it can be face-threatening. Students' reactions like laughing, mocking, and teasing when someone mistakenly pronounces a word or committed error in his discourse to make a student hesitant to participate in an activity. Students' reluctance to speak English in front of their classmates can be exceedingly embarrassing. When students felt embarrassed, they withdraw themselves and not use the target language. The same issue emerged in the study conducted by Madalinska-Michalk & Bavli (2018). In their study, teachers pointed out students' low motivation in learning English, which became a stressor to the teachers. According to Broussard and Garrison, as stated by Abrar (2016), motivation is considered as “the attribute that moves us to do or not to do something” (p. 106). This term refers to the causes which underlie someone's behavior that is commonly seen from his/ her volition and willingness. In the classroom context, it deals with the students' willingness to participate in classroom activities. When the students have no willingness or feel reluctant to get involved in learning the language comfortably, it is an indication of a lack of motivation. Students are hesitant to use the English language, especially during recitation.

Students' Lack of Interest in Learning the English Language

Aside from hesitation to use the language, students' interests are seen as a problem. According to the

participants, students lack the attitude in learning, and most of the time are passive learners. Students inactively listen to classroom discussion. “... when I ask them questions they’re just look at me with having their attention so I thought that they’re listening but then their attention is focusing somewhere else.” (Respondent 1). This is backed up by the Respondent 4 “...they're not really interested. Some of them are not really interested in learning.” Students’ low concentration in the classroom causes challenges in grasping knowledge from the teacher. As described by the respondent, the class discussion is less lively when the student would just stare at her or nod and just agreed to everything she says.

English is enrolled as a minor course, some as an elective course, except for those who are English majors. Thus, most of the students do not take the subject seriously. Students do not have the internal motivation to learn English for other purposes other than getting a passing mark for the subject (Akbari, 2015). Students’ interest in a topic holds so much power. When a topic connects to what students like to do, engagement deepens as they willingly spend time thinking, dialoguing, and creating ideas in meaningful ways (McCarthy, 2014). Students’ interest is seen as problematic in the tertiary level. Participants mentioned that a lot of students are passive in English class. Students do not understand the purpose of learning English (Copland & Burns, 2014). Thus, teachers have the responsibility to motivate the students which can mean they expend a good deal of energy, both in planning a range of activities and in classroom teaching. The same idea was mentioned by one of the participants, that it is the task of the teacher to motivate the students to learn English: “I believe that it is the job of the teacher to motivate the students. When the teacher says the student is not motivated or do not have the right attitude, it’s the job of the teacher to engage the student.” (Respondent 6).

Students’ Weak Foundation Skills in English

A strong English foundation is necessary to learn and acquire a higher level of skills in English. It is easier for a native speaker to speak a grammatically correct sentence, however, a struggle for non-native speakers whose mother is another language. For such students, comprehending the grammar rules may seem to be a difficult task. Participants retaliated that students’ basic skill is weak that it is one of the issues that emerge in teaching and learning English, particularly in grammar and structure. One of the participants points out that she has to go back teaching the basics to the student. “... most of my students cannot identify the verb in the sentence also the subjects...and also the rules of capitalization” (Respondent 1). One of the respondents even compared the English skills of the tertiary students to that of the elementary level. “they’re not really very good. I mean their level is elementary (Respondent 3). Students’ weak foundation in English particularly in grammar and the macro skills are reflected in their English aptitude. When asked to submit write-ups such as essays, errors in writing are observable. The problem is also true in the area of speaking skills. This corresponds to Mukattash (1983) who found that most inaccuracies are in pronunciation, morphology, syntax, and spelling. “mostly my students have no strong foundation in grammar.... So that's one of my problems, especially when they when I require written papers or written requirements. When I read their work, I notice grammatical errors.” (Respondent 2). Another participant also agrees that her students need to build a good foundation in English as required to a college student especially to those who are majoring in English. “... most of them don't have a strong foundation of the language”. “I think that's very important than skill or knowledge, especially when students major in

English” (Respondent 5). Due to the weak foundation of the students which is observable in their outputs, students’ overall proficiency in the English language is affected. Participants agreed that their students’ proficiency is low. *“I have observed that the English proficiency level of the students right now is much low than previous students especially with I think listening, reading and also with speaking, the four macro skills, and their writing too because it seems like I am reading an elementary output.”* (Respondent 2), *“... They don't have the Expected competency. And they don't have these so-called prerequisite skills to learn the course”* (Respondent 3). Differences in student’s background knowledge can be due to a lot of factors. Some of them are trained in rural areas, some are taught in urban areas, some have access to various English learning materials, and attended private language institutions while others are limited to textbooks only. The differences in foundation skills in English are significantly affected by the socioeconomic factor (Akbari, 2015).

Teaching Large Classes

Participants particularly highlighted a large number of students per class as an issue in language teaching. A classroom is a learning area in the school wherein the lessons are given. One of the problems often encountered by English teachers is that “overcrowded classes and the effect of such condition can have on teaching and learning” (Emery, 2012). Tanner (2009) concluded the ideal class size in the primary level is 17 students or less. It needs to be implemented to achieve the goal of learning. Some of the participants however mentioned that they have handling over-crowded classes. Over-crowded class is denoted by the overcapacity of the classroom or too many students in a class. An overcrowded classroom may create a problem for teachers. Nurkamto (2003) included the size of the classroom as one of the challenges in teaching English. *“As of now yes (over-crowded classroom). I don't want my class size to be more than forty. Because it impedes interactive participation”* (Respondent 6); *“...one problem that I think should be addressed is class size. I think 25 students. That number is ideal”* (Respondent 5). This condition affects the teacher’s feelings and expectations. Teachers don’t want to handle the overcrowded class as teaching becomes ineffective and not all students can participate in class. As classes are crowded, the chance of accommodating all the students to practice English is limited to less. Though teachers can apply strategies like group work, having an activity with a large number of students per group is not fitting. Group work in an educational setting involves a few numbers of students working together on a particular task (Akbari, 2015).

The Challenges Faced by Teachers in Teaching English Language (School Level)

The rapid change in the increasing quality of education all over the world requires teachers in the local area to be abreast of these changes. Participants in this study articulated the challenges they experienced in teaching the English language. These issues- shortage of teacher training, low hours of contact time for students, insufficient resources, and uncondusive facilities are reflected as challenges in the school level.

Shortage of Teachers Training

Common comments on the concerns about teaching the English language in the higher education level are the

teachers' professional growth. Participants believed that there was a shortage of training experienced by them. They agreed that English teaching training is in dire need. Some participants reacted that it is difficult to join a seminar or conference since the university provides a limited slot to the faculties and that if someone is interested, (s)he has to pay for his own. Among the six participants, four agreed that they lack training and seminars about teaching the English language. *"I think I need more training"* (Respondent 2). Two of the participants shared that if they wanted to join a seminar or conference and the school administration failed to support the funding, they have to pay for all the expenses. *"I spend my money on Professional development, so I joined seminars and participate in training."* (Respondent 3). The school administration funded regular faculties to attend seminars but to a limited time only. *"...Not accessible because we have to pay. The university they're only allowed to go to a conference. Once a year so, I think that's not enough"* (Respondent 4). It is a policy in the university to give funding to faculties who wanted to attend a seminar or conference and training but they only fund those in the regular position and not the part-time or visiting instructors. Further, there are guidelines that the university follows before they allow a faculty to attend the desired training or seminar. *"When I was hired as a part-time instructor during those days in my first years of the teaching I spend my money in Professional development"* (Respondent 3). This issue of shortage of training is also true to other countries (Songbatumis, 2017).

The lack of training and seminars experienced by the four out of six respondents is similar to the concerns raised by the respondents in the study of Yusob (2018) wherein lecturers claimed that they lack experience, training, and seminars in teaching English which becomes a disadvantage for them. Teachers whose teaching training is not enough might affect the teaching methods effectively (Littlewood, 2007). Since teachers play vital roles in being students' second parents or guardians and students' role models, more is expected among teachers. While students come to school to study and so that their learning continues over time, teachers must also not stop learning themselves. Thus, teachers are required to attend training and seminars that can increase their academic faculty, enhance their teaching skills, and develop their teaching personality (Ibao, 2017).

Low Hours of Contact Time for Students

One participant mentioned that the time provided was not enough to apply teaching ideas in the classroom. The time provided to teach English was only 60 minutes in every meeting, whereas, the participant expects that the ideal time to teach English is 90 minutes for each meeting. The teaching process was limited to only one hour, or three hours a week. It impacts learning since teachers and learners need to squeeze the time given. Some topics were also not covered during the school duration, so students are expected to do self-study especially those topics which were not discussed in the classroom. *"... this subject is not good for 1 sem, it should be divided into two. So the first part should be taught in the first semester, and the other part could be taught in the second sem."* (Respondent 1). This issue is the same as experience in schools in Turkey and Poland. The amount of English classes the students have each week is not enough, teachers felt that increasing the contact hours in teaching English provides the opportunity for individualized teaching and reduced pressure to the student. Both parties benefit if a change is made (Madalinska-Michalk & Bavli, 2018).

Insufficient Resources

Resources mean things which are used by someone or organization to function effectively (Abrar, 2016). In teaching, these are materials that teachers use to deliver instruction. Teaching materials help students learn and increase their success in learning. The teaching materials are tailored to the goals and content, to the students learning preferences, and the teacher. Teaching materials come in many shapes and sizes, but they all have in common the ability to support student learning resources is the key to succeed in doing things (Ministry of Education, Guyana, 2019). Without sufficient materials, participants feel discomfort in teaching. “There’s no availability of resources so I need to search it in google so as an English teacher it’s very hard for me to teach English especially that if there’s no availability of materials” (Respondent 1); “... I found looking for materials a challenging job” (Respondent 2) “... lack resources and references materials that could help them to teach better” (Respondent 4)

Participants, based on the excerpts, perceive looking for teaching resources an additional task. They primarily considered the equipment such as the LED projector and internet as the main teaching resources that they need. “...in one LED projector there would be eight teachers assigned to use it so most of the time I could not get a hold of the projector so even when I am so prepared with all my materials for examples PowerPoint, movie, clips, but I would not be able to utilized them for my classes” (Respondent 2); “We are only limited to power point presentation and internet cannot reach the classrooms” (Respondent 3); “...one limitation that the institution has to address that internet should be provided in the classrooms so that students can use them again when they do their requirements.” (Respondent 5) “...we could not access sites that can even enhances more our lessons” (Respondent 1).

Unconducive Learning Facilities

The quality of a facility is one of an important predictor of teacher retention and student learning. The physical and emotional health of students and teachers is affected by the quality of the physical location, which makes establishing safe, healthy buildings essential. The quality of learning space in the university is an issue as stated by the participants. “It’s an issue, especially in the classroom. The classroom here in the university is not very good” (Respondent 4). Concerning teachers, school facilities affect teacher recruitment, retention, commitment, and effort in teaching. Concerning students, school facilities affect health, behavior, engagement, learning, and growth in achievement. Thus, facility quality is an important predictor of teacher retention and student learning (Interioravenue, 2017). This finding is similar to the finding of O’Connor and Geiger (2009) mentioned by Abrar in 2016. In their paper, they mentioned resource was one of the problems faced by primary school teachers in their research sites in which most of the teachers – around 92, 5% - expressed for the need for specific language teaching resources for teaching the learner.

The Challenges Faced by Teachers in Teaching the English Language (the System Level)

The system-level challenges identified is the wrong interpretation of the policy implemented in the primary and

secondary level. One of the participants mentioned the “no child left behind” policy which was interpreted incorrectly. *“this policy, no children left must be left. So all of them must graduate to the next level or just go to the next level. Even without mastery, even without emphasizing and mastery and ensuring that they already are equipped to go or they're already equipped with the necessary skills that they need to go on to the next level. And for me, that is the root cause of the issue”* (Respondent 5). No child left behind particularly aims to improve access and quality of basic education for the indigenous population in the Philippines. A wrong interpretation of it is allowing a pupil to pass a level even without passing the metrics.

2. What coping mechanisms are employed by teachers in teaching the English language to the students at the tertiary level?

The solutions implemented and the coping mechanisms employed by teachers to lessen the difficulties they are experiencing in teaching the English language includes being resourceful and flexible in developing instructional materials, providing alternative activities to enliven and engage passive learners, balancing the use of both technology and library books.

Students' Lack of Confidence and Interest in Learning and Using the English Language

Mastery of the subject taught is also highlighted to prevent further issues about teaching the subject. When teachers master the topic, there is a smooth flow of the teaching-learning process. They can ensure that they are teaching the right ideas, theory, and other matters to the student. With this, teachers can match the learning activities to be used if the lesson is already mastered by the teacher. The connection between learning activities and subject matter cannot be neglected. One of the participants said that as a teacher, she has to spend time studying the lesson *“You spend more time. And. Spend more time with. Your lessons.”* (Respondent 4). Teachers do change their teaching styles to encourage passive learners and participate in class discussions. One of the participants mentioned that she shifted to the communicative approach which requires the student to speak. *“I tended to be very conventional and traditional in my approaches. But now for example, in teaching grammar, I was too structural, but now I give way to communicative grammar language teaching”* (Respondent 5). They also provide activities wherein students can relate and allows them to share thoughts. *I let them have lots of activities for them to participate and to engage in my lesson so in that way they're not just only gaining information but also they are engaging, they are developing their skills in terms of their communication skills.* (Respondent 1); *“so I developed the activities that these could get their attention so especially that they are of different types of learners”* (Respondent 3).

Students' Weak Foundation Skills in English

For teachers to connect to the student s(he) has to set the standard which is achievable to the student. Because of students' weak foundation in English, their performance in college is affected, thus the participants need to alter the teaching method and make it appropriate to the level of the learners. One of the participants even started in teaching the basic to help the student. *“what I did as an English teacher was I taught them the basic*

one” (Respondent 1); *“the tendency is that you need to fill in and make them imitate”* (Respondent 3).

Teaching Large Classes

For the large class size, teachers do not have a hold on the number of students to be enrolled in one class, but participants have mentioned that they do change classroom activities and teaching methods and fit it also to the number of students in the classroom. One participant mentioned that to accommodate a large number of students, she gives role play, group activities, peer work. The teaching and learning process must require a comfortable and enjoyable atmosphere, otherwise, teachers might be in failure to fulfill students’ needs and achieve learning goals.

Shortage of Teachers Training

There is a policy being followed by school administration before allowing a teacher to attend a seminar or training. Aside from this policy the budget allocated for the professional development of faculties is also limited thus it becomes difficult for all the faculties to attend some training. One of the solutions shared by one of the participants is paying her expenses in the seminar. Participants mentioned that if there are some training and seminars held with the university, they are allowed to attend for free. *“It’s good because I already experienced attended training in Purposive Comm so it was good training for it will help to improve the skills in teaching purposive communication”* (Respondent 1); *“when I was promoted as a regular faculty there are chances given by the university (to attend a seminar)”* (Respondent 3).

Low Hours of Contact Time for Students

The number of contact hours a student spends for one semester to complete the course is predetermined, teachers do not have hold of it. Changing the teaching approaches by not limiting activities that are usually done inside the classroom and increasing their time exposure to the English language can benefit both students and teachers.

Insufficient Resources

Concerning difficulties encountered due to the lack of resources, participants opt to use the traditional method which includes the use of manila paper or flip chart and various teaching strategies. It is expected for teachers to be flexible in the teaching methods and strategies and tailor-fit these to learners' needs. According to Fatiloro (2015), teachers should practice a variety of teaching approaches to handling English teaching problems. Teachers used activities that appeal to the students and developed instructional materials in place of PowerPoint Presentations. In the absence of the technology such as projector, the participants opt to use alternatives. *“so I developed the activities that these could get their attention so especially that they are of different types of learners. And also with the material, well. Of course, I make use of the traditional method. For example, the DLP is unavailable so I will use the blackboard or flip chart or sometimes. Manila paper. And print pictures or*

printed materials.” (Respondent 1). This statement is supported by another participant who states that *“when you already prepared for a PowerPoint presentation but you don’t have the projector to go with it or to play it, then you have to have prepared tangible visual aids like writing it on manila paper, writing it on the board through chalk.”* (Respondent 2). English teaching will not achieve its objectives if the teaching tools are not backed up. Hence, efforts should be made so teachers acquired the necessary learning resources such as books and teaching (Pande, 2013).

Summary

The research study explores the range of issues faced by tertiary teachers in teaching the English language. By interviewing six college teachers, the researcher found out that part of the issues that teachers face come from the students, the learning environment, and the lack of training of the teachers. However, even with these challenges, the participants agreed that teaching is a satisfying profession not because of the salary but because of the changes they see on the students’ part. Students’ attitude in learning the language, their early foundation in English, and proficiency in using the language are the emerging difficulties in the students’ aspect while lack of learning materials and resources, the physical environment, and support from the school administration for teachers’ attendance in training and seminars are other issues raised by the teachers. There are also issues that respondents identified in the curriculum such as the promotion of the student to the next level in the primary and secondary years, and the amount of time a particular subject is taught at the tertiary level. To face these issues, this study also found the strategies implemented by the participants of the research. Teachers still utilize traditional materials such as the use of manila papers, print outs, and board and chalk since technology is limited and not everyone can use it at the same time. Further, teachers still require students to go to the library and not fully depend on the internet as a source of information. Each of them had his/her strategies in overcoming their teaching challenges. Despite various issues, respondents also identified joys in teaching particularly gaining satisfaction in the teaching profession.

Conclusions

This research highlighted the issues faced by the teachers in English language teaching. It also shows the joys that teachers experience in the field of teaching and the coping mechanisms they employed to lessen the difficulties they faced in the field.

1. The teacher participants claimed that they felt satisfied, and this satisfaction they gained allows them to stay in the teaching profession despite the challenges they faced.
2. The teacher participants experienced pains, difficulty, and problems when teaching the English language such as students’ attitudes and motivation, students’ foundation in English, inadequate time, resources and materials, and lack of teacher’s professional growth.
3. The teacher participants managed to handle these difficulties they are experiencing in teaching the English language through being resourceful and flexible in developing instructional materials, providing alternative activities to enliven and engage passive learners, and balancing the use of both technology and library books.

Recommendations

This section presents the recommendations on the themes that emerged from the responses during the conduct of the interview.

1. *Personal satisfaction*: Teachers should not limit themselves to extending their efforts for the benefit of the students. They should find passion in teaching the students so that a greater transformation will then be manifested from the students.
2. *Students' attitude and motivation*: Teachers should establish a positive environment toward leaning the language. They must also integrate the value of respect within the classroom so that they will be able to live up with that virtue and create a healthy learning environment.
3. *Students' foundation in English*: Teachers should understand that students come from diverse backgrounds. It is then unhealthy to overestimate the capacity of the students. Therefore, teachers then should sense the needs of the learners to fill in the gap.
4. *Inadequate time, resources and materials*: School managers should look into the problems of resources, materials, and the allotted time for instruction. They should collaborate with English teachers because ESL classes have different needs from other course subjects
5. *Teachers' professional growth*: Teachers should not stop learning. If training is not provided by the institution there should always be an initiative from the individual concerned. However, school managers should treat this as a major concern. Funds should be allocated for training to empower the teachers to ensure quality instruction.


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