

Access to English materials: Its implications to the level of proficiency in reading and writing

Alvarez, Christopher ✉

Bicol University Graduate School, Philippines (christopher.alvarez002@deped.gov.ph)

Bautista, Renelyn

Bicol University Graduate School, Philippines (renelynbautista428@yahoo.com)



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Abstract

The study was conducted to determine the implications of pupils' access to English materials to their proficiency level in reading and writing. It identified the available materials that pupils have access to; determined the pupils' level of proficiency in reading and writing; investigated the relationship of access to English materials and proficiency level in reading and writing; and proposed a learning material to enhance the proficiency in reading and writing. It utilized qualitative quantitative research design to describe non-numerical data and to interpret numerical data. The Grade 6 pupils of Tigbao Elementary School were the respondents of the study who answered the instruments: survey checklist and reading and writing tests. Finally, it was found that the quantity of English materials were insufficient especially at home. In reading test, the pupils were under *Did Not Meet Expectation* level of proficiency, the lowest possible level and also *Did Not Meet Expectation* in the writing test. Using Descriptive statistics and Pearson Correlation Coefficient, the results revealed that there is a significant relationship between access to English materials and proficiency level in reading and writing with moderate to high positive correlation coefficient. The higher the access of pupils to materials, the higher the proficiency in reading and in writing. Finally, the study recommended that supplemental English material should be accessible both in school and at home, and since pupils tend to have more time in school for leaning, teachers should create more opportunities for reading comprehension and writing activities in school.

Keywords: access, proficiency level, English materials, frequency of access

Access to English materials: Its implications to the level of proficiency in reading and writing

1. Introduction

In the Philippines, the ability to read and write is one of the major goals of the Department of Education. Any thrust to promote literacy is well supported and celebrated. The DepEd has laid programs, activities and assessment schemes throughout the country to help learners in developing reading and writing skills. Every Child a Reader Program, Reading Festivals, Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), and Early Language Literacy and Numeracy Trainings are just a few of the renowned efforts of DepEd to ensure that every child can be a reader and able to write.

Reading is an intricate course of action of unlocking codes or graphical symbols which represents specific meanings and includes comprehension of what is read (Bernardo, 2010). On the other side, writing is one of the most important skills in learning a target language. It is a productive skill. It is the act of putting down on paper the graphic symbols that present a language with correct grammar in order to convey some meaning so that the reader can grasp the information which the writer tries to imply (Sapkota, 2012).

The education put so much emphasis on reading and writing especially in primary schools for these are fundamental macro-skills needed to further learning in the world of prints. Reading is used to facilitate learning among the learners, to instruct, to guide them with safe daily living, and to measure their cognitive skills in decoding symbols and comprehension. On the other hand, writing is used for social interactions, stating learning, academically communicating ideas, and assessment of learning. But these skills are more than phonemic awareness, recognizing symbols, writing letters or sentences. They greatly contribute something more significant beyond the four walls of the classroom. It is through literacy that one is empowered to interact in his community and realizes his worth, what he can do and eventually make him do things that contribute in sustainable development of his society. As stressed in the K to 12 English Curriculum Guide (2016) of DepEd, learners proficiency in language which involves the ability to read and write (Malone, 2006) in English enable them to access global information, to engage in broader and more varied communities beyond our boarder.

However, problem in eradicating non-readers and struggling writers is still prevalent among schools in the Philippines. The DepEd admits that learners have declined in reading and writing skills. Learners can read texts but they may be poor in reading comprehension. In the Phil-IRI conducted to the learners, in the locale of the study in 2017, before the conception of this study, only three learners achieved the *Independent Level* which means they can read and comprehend what they have read and the rest belongs to *Instructional* and *Frustration Level* which infer poor reading comprehension. Annual press conferences in the division level have shown that learners frequently commit errors in the grammar and have scarcity of ideas in mind about certain subject. Moreover, teachers and papers testified that only about 10 percent of a class can construct a few good sentences in English.

To address these problems, the DepEd provides classrooms, conducive school environment, training for teachers on communication skills and on teaching diverse learners, and learning materials for the learners that include textbooks, magazines and storybooks. Learners who lack access to prints or books at home achieve poorly in school and thus low-achieving learners need very good access to prints in school to compensate for this lack of books in the home (Krashen, 2004).

The goal to heighten the performance of learners is not an easy task for the past years. Based on the result of National Achievement Test (NAT) for School Year 2014-2015, the Department of Education in Masbate Province attained an average of 74.21 in English subject. In the locale of the study, is insufficient number of materials for

Grade 6 English as recorded in the 2017 School Report Card (SRC). Sufficiency means the 1:1 ratio of book to learner and the adequacy of the materials for a prolonged period of reading. The average rating of Grade 6 learners for the first quarter is 77.23, and 78.44 for the second quarter. In terms of writing and reading, approximately only 10% of the class can construct good sentences and can read texts with comprehension. These records have been prevalent for a long time according to the school head of the school. While there are many other factors of below average grades of the students, the lack of materials is always a concern of public schools throughout the country. Students have less access and exposure to print materials used in teaching-learning English such as textbooks, storybooks and authentic materials such as newspapers and magazines. These materials that compose the print-rich environment play a vital role in improving the English language proficiency of the learners, thus its absence is to more likely decline their performance in school (McQuillan, 2006).

These concerns have brought forth this study to look into the aspect of materials in English Grade 6 relevant to the learners learning.

1.1 Research Questions

The study was conducted to gain empirical data and clear understanding on the implications of Grade 6 learners' access to English materials to their proficiency level in reading and writing. In particular, this research sought to answer the following sub-problems:

- What available materials in English do Grade 6 learners have access to?
- What is the level of proficiency of Grade 6 learners in Reading and Writing?
- What is the relationship between access to English materials and level of proficiency in Reading and Writing?
- What learning materials may be developed to enhance the proficiency level along Reading and Writing?

1.2 Scope and Limitation

The study determined the existing English materials that Grade 6 learners have access to. These materials pertain to the English-print materials which exclude the audio and virtual resources. Print materials of other subjects such as Math and Science textbooks were included because they use English as medium of instruction and texts printed in them are sometimes utilized in teaching English subject. Further, access refers to the availability of English materials for the learners to freely read, and the frequency of use or reading time of learners using such materials.

The 70 Grade 6 learners in Tigbao Elementary School for school year 2017-2018 were the respondents of the study. Majority of the respondents are not so much exposed to environment where English is used, but in school only. The said school is situated in a coastal area, two (2) hours away from the city, with less than five (5) hours of electricity supply and not fully reached by network signal. It has no library nor learning resource center in school and community.

2. Methodology

This quantitative-qualitative method utilized a survey checklist to identify the available materials that Grade 6 learners have access to and their frequency of access; and reading and writing tests to determine their proficiency level.

The conduct of the study was approved by the Schools Division Superintendent, allowing the researcher to

access the records of the Division and school. The consent of the parents was also secured to get data from the Grade 6 learners concerning English materials available and accessible in school and at homes. Moreover, the parents also allowed the researcher assess their reading and writing skills through tests. The respondents were informed of how the research will work and the prospective results. Their rights to confidentiality of the answers are also protected.

Descriptive statistics was applied to provide general understanding of the collected data such as data presentation, frequency count, and mean scores. Specifically, deliberated in the study are tabular presentations and Pearson Correlation Coefficient. The latter was used to analyze if there is a significant relationship between the Grade 6 learners' access to materials in English and their proficiency level in reading and writing.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Available English materials that learners have access to

Table 1.1

Available English Materials

In school	Quantity
Encyclopedias	27
English Textbooks	47
Science Textbooks	21
Math Textbooks	50
Storybooks	25
Tabloids	5
At homes	
Math Textbooks	50
English Textbooks	47
Science Textbooks	21
Storybooks	15
Newspapers	13
Dictionaries	10

As shown in the Table, there are plenty of textbooks in Mathematics, Science and English that are available at home because these are existing materials lent to them by the school. Not all learners have the books but when they are in school, all of them have a chance to access because they share with others. Mathematics textbooks are the most accessible learning materials for the learners at home because it has the highest number of copies available in school, followed by English textbooks, Science textbooks, storybooks, newspapers, and dictionaries as the least material which learners have access to.

The data on the number of learners having access to the identified materials show how inadequate the materials are. It can be observed in the Table that the most appropriate materials for teaching English, such as English textbooks, storybooks, newspapers and dictionaries are not the most accessed resources because of their unavailability.

Table 1.2

Grade 6 Learners' Frequency of Access to English Materials

English materials in school	Frequency of access			
	High	Fair	Low	Never
Encyclopedias	0	1	10	51
English Textbooks	0	19	36	7
Math Textbooks	0	15	29	18
Science Textbooks	0	12	30	20
Storybooks	1	18	23	20
Tabloids	0	4	9	49

English materials at home				
Math Textbooks	0	0	3	47
English Textbooks	3	6	24	14
Science Textbooks	1	2	10	8
Storybooks	0	3	7	5
Newspapers	0	3	4	6
Dictionaries	0	0	2	8

With regards to how often do learners use or read the accessible materials, Table 1.2 shows the type of materials identified as accessible and the mode of learners' frequency of access to a particular material. The descriptions indicate that, *high* means high frequency of access to the material, wherein, a student reads the material habitually every day; *fair* means reading the material at least once a week; *low* refers to reading the material at least once a month, and *never* for not reading the material at all.

The Grade 6 learners access the English materials at different frequency. They tend to read more in school than at homes even with the same material. For instance, English textbooks are most read by the learners in school than at home. The same goes with other materials that are accessible in school and at home such Math textbooks, storybooks, and Science textbooks. One reason is the quantity and availability of those materials, learners can use them more in school because they share with others. According to Stephen Krashen (2004), lack of reading materials is a disadvantage to a child, not just about the availability of materials but the frequency of their access or reading time. Therefore, lacking reading materials which give disadvantage to a child is not different from not reading available and accessible materials. Sufficient materials would be useless if learners have no time and motivation to read. Regardless of the model adopted, reading theorists agree that extensive reading is essential for the development of reading comprehension which will eventually develop writing skills.

Birjandi and Alizadeh (2012) mentioned in their study that textbooks are an effective resource for self-directed learning, an effective resource for presentation material, a source of ideas and activities, a reference source for students, a syllabus where they reflect pre-determined learning objectives, and support for less experienced teachers who have yet to gain in confidence. Textbooks give positive contributions to learning provided that teachers select an appropriate textbook for a class (Soleimani & Dabbaghie, 2012). However, it can also be observed on the data given that authentic materials are the rarest, when in fact, those are proven to be useful even for non-native countries. Akbari and Razavi (2015) cited in their research that some studies have confirmed that using authentic materials has great influence on developing reading comprehension by presenting new words and expressions to students. While, the promotion of balanced reading instructions can also be helpful for young children (Chou, Wang, & Ching, 2012).

3.2 Learners' level of proficiency in reading and writing

Table 2 presents the summary of the results in reading and writing tests with the mean scores in the two tests, transmuted grades based on the Department of Education's standard on assessment (DepEd Order no. 8 s. 2015), adjectival descriptor on proficiency level and the learners' frequency of access to materials for English teaching.

Table 2

Proficiency Level in Reading and Writing

Test	Mean Score	Mean Percentage	Proficiency level
Reading	15.13	68	Did Not Meet Expectation
Writing	4	64	Did Not Meet Expectation

Learners perform better in reading test than in writing but scores on both tests are still not enough to pass the minimum required rating. Their computed grades are below 75 percent which is the least passing rate. As presented in the Table, they are on the *Did Not Meet Expectation* level of proficiency in reading and in writing. With this grade, the learners can be remarked as *failed* which subtly predicates that they do not possess yet the

target learning competencies set in the curriculum.

It can be implied that the kind of materials available may not be helpful enough to improve the reading skills of the learners, or their academic success as a whole. Other materials are textbooks in other subject areas. As cited by Gyasi and Slippe (2019) textbooks that are difficult to read relative to the academic level (of students could hamper their success by further dampening their motivation, thus, textbooks must be carefully selected to suit the abilities of learners.

3.3 Relationship of access to English materials and proficiency level in reading and writing

Table 3

Computed Value of Correlation Coefficient

Proficiency	Correlation Coefficient	Interpretation	Significance
Reading	0.722	High positive correlation	Significant @ t=0.250
Writing	0.640	Moderate to positive correlation	Significant @ t=0.250

The study utilized the Pearson Correlation Coefficient to determine the significant relationship between access to English materials and proficiency level of Grade 6 learners. In reading test, the r computed value of 0.722 is greater than the r tabular value of 0.250 at 0.05 level of significance with the 60 degrees of freedom. This leads to the confirmation of the research hypothesis that a significant relationship exists between access to English materials and proficiency level in reading of the Grade 6 learners with high positive correlation. In writing test on the other hand, the r computed value of 0.641 is greater than the r tabular value of 0.250 at 0.05 level of significance with the 60 degrees of freedom. This leads to the confirmation of research hypothesis which means that a significant relationship exists between access to English materials and proficiency level in writing of the Grade 6 learners with moderate to high positive correlation.

The correlation of access to reading proficiency has stronger correlation than in writing, but in general, a significant relationship exists between access to English materials and proficiency level in reading and writing of Grade 6 learners. It implies that the higher the frequency of access to English materials, the higher the proficiency level of learners in reading and writing. These two variables are statistically related, the increase or decrease of one variable is also the increase or decrease of the other variable.

3.4 Proposed learning material to enhance proficiency in reading and writing of Grade 6 learners

The result of the study showed the significant relationship between the learners' access to English materials and their proficiency level in reading and writing. The data showed that learners who have rare access to materials or with less reading time of approximately once a month by average have a proficiency on *Did Not Meet Expectation* level which meant that they did not measure up to the standards of Department Education for Grade 6. Hence, this study proposed a Supplemental Guide entitled *Enhancing Reading and Writing* as learning material to enhance the proficiency of the learners.

The learning material module has two parts for reading and writing. The Reading part involves thinking activities before, during and after reading a text. In an action research by Barth, Catts and Anthony (2009), there was a positive impact of pre-, during-, and post-reading activities. Students' connections to text prior to reading help them in sentence and text comprehension. One example of this is unlocking difficult vocabularies (Richardson, 2010). During-reading forces the learners to slow down and focus on the text and developing a proper attitude about reading. The texts in the module were also printed with pictures for better retention and comprehension because according to Levie and Lents (1982), adding illustrations aids comprehension and learning. Pictures facilitate learning by providing clarifying examples, extra-lingual information, contexts for interpretation, and redundancy which aids recall. On the writing part, there are examples of write-ups, and writing exercises. It follows the concept of comprehensible input (Krashen, 2003). Input pertains to the

information that a child acquires spontaneously without conscious learning of rules or structure.

The proposed material contains the following features, namely: contextualized—some texts were edited suit to the scope of understanding of the learners without distorting the original meaning of the texts; selections and essays with illustration for better comprehension; pre- activities to establish connection between learners and the text; during activities for learners to slow down and have focus on the text; and post activities to assess, rectify or reinforce understanding.

The study stressed that the proposed module is not a sole guarantee that learners' proficiency in reading and writing will be enhanced. But as supported by the input hypothesis and behaviorism theories, repetition, developing a good reading habit, having scientific basis, and with the guidance of teachers are also effective aids in enhancing the learners' proficiency in reading and writing.

4. Conclusions

In light of the findings, the following conclusions were deduced after analyses of the data:

- There is insufficient number of English materials in school and at home which affect frequency of access or reading for a prolonged period of time. Moreover, the learners have low frequency of access to the reading materials in school.
- Grade 6 learners have the lowest proficiency level in reading and in writing though based on their mean scores although they are slightly better in reading than in writing. In line with this, the lack of intervention or remedial activities contributed to their proficiency level in reading and writing.
- There is a significant relationship between Grade 6 learners' access to English materials and their proficiency level in writing and reading. Access to materials can be associated with their proficiency level in both reading and writing. The lower the access to materials, the lower the proficiency in reading and writing. An increased frequency on the access to materials for English, is also an increase in proficiency in reading comprehension and writing.
- A supplemental guide is appropriate in enhancing the proficiency level of Grade 6 learners in reading and writing by developing the varied reading taste or of more reading selections, comprehension practices, and writing exercises. Since learners in Grade 6 lack skills required for their grade level, remedial or supplemental activities are proposed to fill the learning gap. In increasing comprehensible input or exposure of learners to texts, activities, examples and exercises, learners can acquire better reading with comprehension and write with meaning.

4.1 Recommendation

Consistent with the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Additional appropriate and interesting materials for teaching English should be made available and accessible both in school and at home for the learners with sufficient quantity. The school and the Local Government Unit should provide assistance on this matter. This could uplift their interest to read more and their motivation to read simultaneously with others because there are enough materials for all.
- Since learners have more time to read in school, teachers should take advantage of this by creating more opportunities for reading activities. The teacher should be present during reading to monitor, guide and assess the comprehension of the learners. There should be pre-, during- and post-reading activity to avoid mere reading without comprehension. His/her presence during the activity should cultivate motivation among learners to read and understand what they are reading. Moreover, writing

activities also need constant assistance from the teaching to review, check and give inputs to the learners in writing.

- Select, compile, or design a contextualized supplemental guide for the learners to read regularly because not all materials in English that are accessible in school and at home can catch attention or interest of the learners. Worse, some are not congruent to their abilities. Materials should be within their context of understanding or comprehension level. This can keep them interested in reading activities, provided that conducive support from teachers, parents and even peers are felt by the learners.
- The learners are in Grade 6, yet, their ability do not match with their level at present, thus, teachers who are creating interventions should simplify the example sentences and paragraphs and the writing activities to keep learners motivated to continue. There should also be review on the rules of grammar to guide them in writing and a free use of dictionary. The review can be done through a deductive method, there is no need to reteach the lessons on grammar the way it has been taught previously.
- The school should allocate fund in reproducing and increasing the number of materials for English teaching that are accessible in school as emphasized in the Department of Education Order no. 13, s. 2016. Development of local learning resource materials for remediation should also be encouraged among the teachers because they are fully aware of the learning abilities and disabilities of their immediate learners. Teachers are the best persons to create learning materials for particular struggling learners because the resource development needs to be matched with the interest and ability level of the concerned learners.
- The School Learning Action Cell (SLAC) is a convergence of teachers in the school to learn, improve and plan with regards to the teaching-learning process to enhance their skills and the learning performance of the learners. The DepEd strengthened its implementation and ordered its conduct in schools once a month. Thus, SLAC should convene all the teachers in crafting materials to remediate problems in reading and writing, and other least mastered learning competencies of the learners.
- The present study focused on the access of learners to learning materials for teaching English and other aspects might have been left unexamined. There is a need for further research to investigate other areas or factors that affect the proficiency level of Grade 6 learners in reading and writing.

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