



Azal Arts and Humanities

Volume 3, Issue 1, 2026 | <https://azalpub.com/index.php/AAH>

OPEN ACCESS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Article Info

Received: 1/5/2026

Accepted: 3/25/2026

Published: 3/30/2026

English Language Acquisition and Classroom Literacy Experiences Among Elementary Learners

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Abstract

English language acquisition and classroom literacy experiences significantly influence learners' communication skills, reading comprehension, academic participation, and overall literacy development in elementary education. This study explored English language acquisition and classroom literacy experiences among elementary learners in the Santa Maria District, Isabela. Anchored on Sociocultural Theory and Emergent Literacy Theory, the study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to examine learners' literacy experiences, classroom participation, instructional interactions, and language acquisition processes in English instruction. Participants included selected elementary learners and English teachers from public elementary schools in the Santa Maria District. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, and document analysis. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach was utilized in analyzing the gathered data. Findings revealed that interactive literacy activities, contextualized instruction, collaborative learning experiences, and supportive classroom environments significantly contribute to learners' English language acquisition and literacy engagement. Learners demonstrated greater confidence and participation when teachers utilized storytelling, guided reading, peer interaction, visual learning materials, and learner-centered literacy activities. The findings further revealed that positive teacher support and meaningful classroom interaction strengthen learners' vocabulary development, oral communication, and reading comprehension. However, challenges such as limited vocabulary exposure, fear of speaking in English, insufficient reading materials, home language interference, and varying literacy abilities affected language acquisition and classroom participation. The study concludes that supportive and contextualized literacy environments significantly contribute to English language acquisition and meaningful literacy experiences among elementary learners. Strengthening learner-centered instructional practices, literacy-rich classrooms, and home-school literacy partnerships is recommended to improve English language learning and classroom engagement.

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Introduction

Language acquisition and literacy development are fundamental components of learning and communication in elementary education. English language acquisition, in particular, plays a vital role in strengthening learners' reading comprehension, oral communication, vocabulary development, writing skills, and academic participation. In the Philippine educational system, English serves as one of the primary languages of instruction and communication, making English literacy competence essential for learners' academic success and lifelong learning. During the elementary years, learners gradually develop foundational literacy competencies through exposure to oral communication, reading activities, classroom interaction, storytelling, vocabulary instruction, and meaningful language experiences. Classroom literacy experiences significantly influence learners' confidence, participation, and language development because literacy learning occurs not only through formal instruction but also through interaction, collaboration, and authentic communication within the classroom environment.

English language acquisition refers to the process through which learners develop understanding and competence in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in the English language. Learners acquire language more effectively when instructional activities are interactive, contextualized, meaningful, and supportive of their linguistic and socio-cultural experiences.

Classroom literacy experiences, on the other hand, refer to learners' interactions with literacy instruction, reading materials, oral communication activities, collaborative learning experiences, and literacy-rich classroom environments that contribute to language learning and literacy development. Positive literacy experiences help learners develop confidence, comprehension skills, communication competence, and engagement in language learning.

Within the Philippine educational context, the Department of Education emphasizes literacy development and language acquisition through learner-centered, contextualized, and inclusive instructional practices under the K-12 curriculum. Teachers are encouraged to create literacy-rich classrooms and utilize interactive instructional approaches that strengthen learners' communication skills and meaningful language use.

In the Santa Maria District, elementary English teachers continuously implement literacy activities and learner-centered instructional strategies to strengthen learners' English language acquisition and classroom participation. Teachers integrate storytelling, guided reading, collaborative discussions, visual learning materials, contextualized examples, and oral communication activities to improve literacy engagement and language competence among learners. However, despite these instructional efforts, learners continue to encounter difficulties related to vocabulary development, reading comprehension, oral communication confidence, and classroom participation.

Several studies emphasized that supportive and interactive literacy environments positively influence language acquisition and learner engagement. Krashen (2019) explained that language acquisition becomes more effective when learners experience meaningful communication, low anxiety, and comprehensible input within supportive learning environments. Similarly, Guthrie and Wigfield (2020) argued that literacy engagement significantly contributes to learners' motivation, reading comprehension, and language development.

Although English language acquisition has been widely discussed in educational literature, there remains limited qualitative research exploring learners' classroom literacy experiences and language acquisition processes within elementary school contexts in rural Philippine districts. Thus, this study aimed to explore English language acquisition and classroom literacy experiences among elementary learners in the Santa Maria District, Isabela.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Sociocultural Theory by Vygotsky (1978) and Emergent Literacy Theory by Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998).

Sociocultural Theory posits that language learning occurs through social interaction, communication, collaboration, and guided participation within meaningful social contexts. Learners develop language competence through interaction with teachers, peers, and literacy-rich environments.

Emergent Literacy Theory explains that literacy development begins through learners' interaction with language, print materials, oral communication, and meaningful literacy experiences. Literacy competence develops gradually through guided instruction, social interaction, and continuous literacy exposure.

These theories provided the framework for understanding how classroom literacy experiences influence English language acquisition and learner engagement among elementary learners.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to explore English language acquisition and classroom literacy experiences among elementary learners in the Santa Maria District, Isabela. Specifically, it sought to examine learners' literacy experiences and

participation in English learning activities and identify instructional practices that contribute to English language acquisition and literacy engagement. The study further aimed to explore how learners demonstrate behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement during English instruction. Additionally, it intended to identify the challenges encountered by learners and teachers in English language acquisition and literacy instruction. Finally, the study aimed to derive insights from the participants' experiences that may serve as basis for strengthening English language instruction and literacy development in elementary education.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore English language acquisition and classroom literacy experiences among elementary learners in the Santa Maria District, Isabela. The qualitative approach enabled the researcher to gather rich and contextualized descriptions regarding literacy participation, instructional interactions, classroom experiences, and language acquisition processes within English instruction. Through qualitative inquiry, the study captured the lived classroom experiences of learners and teachers and examined how literacy environments influence language learning and classroom engagement.

The study was conducted in selected public elementary schools in the Santa Maria District, Isabela, Philippines. These schools operate under the supervision of the Department of Education and serve learners from diverse socio-economic and linguistic backgrounds.

The participants of the study included selected elementary learners and English teachers. Purposive sampling was utilized to select participants who possessed direct experiences and active involvement in English instruction and literacy activities. The selected learners represented varying literacy abilities, participation levels, and classroom engagement experiences.

The study utilized semi-structured interview guides, focus group discussion guides, classroom observation notes, and document analysis checklists as qualitative research instruments. Interview questions focused on literacy experiences, classroom participation, instructional practices, oral communication activities, reading experiences, learner engagement, and challenges encountered during English instruction.

Prior to data gathering, permission was secured from school administrators and ethical considerations including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were strictly observed throughout the study. Data were gathered through interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, and document analysis. All interviews and discussions were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The gathered data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach. Significant statements and recurring patterns were identified, coded, categorized, and organized into themes representing English language acquisition and classroom literacy experiences. Trustworthiness was established through triangulation, member checking, audit trails, and thick description to ensure credibility and dependability of the findings.

Results and Discussion

Theme 1: Interactive Literacy Activities Strengthen English Language Engagement

The findings revealed that interactive literacy activities significantly contribute to learners' English language acquisition and classroom participation. Participants consistently emphasized that learners become more engaged and confident when instructional activities involve storytelling, oral reading, games, songs, role-playing, peer interaction, and collaborative literacy exercises.

One learner participant stated:

"Mas gusto ko ang English kapag may storytelling at games kasi mas masaya at naiintindihan ko ang lesson."

Another learner shared:

"Kapag interactive ang activities, mas hindi ako nahihiyang magsalita ng English."

Similarly, another participant explained:

"Mas natututo kami kapag may group activities at reading exercises."

These responses indicate that interactive instructional approaches positively influence learners' behavioral and emotional engagement during English instruction. Learners become more attentive, participative, and motivated when literacy activities are engaging, collaborative, and learner-centered.

Teachers also emphasized that interactive literacy experiences improve learners' confidence and willingness to communicate using English.

One teacher participant stated:

“Mas nagiging active ang learners kapag participatory at enjoyable ang activities.”

Another participant explained:

“Kapag may games at collaborative tasks, mas nagiging confident silang magsalita.”

The findings suggest that interactive literacy environments strengthen learners' communication competence and classroom participation. Learners develop greater confidence in speaking, reading, and expressing ideas when literacy instruction encourages active participation and meaningful interaction.

The findings support Krashen (2019), who emphasized that language acquisition becomes more effective when learners experience meaningful communication within low-anxiety and supportive environments. Similarly, Guthrie and Wigfield (2020) argued that literacy engagement significantly contributes to learners' motivation, reading participation, and language development.

The findings further align with Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which posits that language learning develops through social interaction, collaboration, and guided communication experiences.

Classroom observations further revealed that learners demonstrated higher levels of enthusiasm and participation during storytelling activities, peer discussions, oral reading tasks, and collaborative literacy games.

One learner participant shared:

“Mas enjoyable ang English kapag nakakapag-participate kami sa activities.”

This finding highlights the importance of interactive literacy experiences in strengthening English language acquisition and classroom engagement among elementary learners.

Theme 2: Supportive and Learner-Centered Instruction Promotes Language Confidence

The study further revealed that supportive and learner-centered instructional practices significantly strengthen learners' confidence and participation in English language learning. Participants consistently described effective English teachers as patient, approachable, encouraging, and capable of simplifying lessons according to learners' abilities and needs.

One learner participant stated:

“Mas ginaganahan akong mag-English kapag supportive si teacher.”

Another learner explained:

“Kapag hindi namin maintindihan, inuulit ni teacher hanggang matuto kami.”

Similarly, another participant shared:

“Hindi kami natatakot magkamali kapag understanding ang teacher.”

These responses indicate that emotionally supportive classroom environments positively influence learners' emotional engagement and confidence during English instruction. Learners become more willing to speak, read, and participate in classroom discussions when teachers demonstrate patience, encouragement, and understanding. Teachers also emphasized the importance of creating non-threatening literacy environments to reduce learners' fear and anxiety during language learning.

One teacher participant stated:

“Importante na maging comfortable ang learners para hindi sila matakot magsalita.”

Another participant explained:

“Kailangan i-encourage sila palagi para magkaroon ng confidence sa paggamit ng English.”

The findings suggest that positive teacher-learner relationships significantly contribute to learners' language confidence and classroom participation. Learners become more motivated to engage in English learning activities when instructional environments are supportive and emotionally safe.

The findings align with Pianta et al. (2021), who emphasized that supportive teacher-learner relationships significantly influence learner engagement, participation, and confidence. Similarly, Fredricks et al. (2019) argued that emotional engagement increases when learners feel respected, supported, and encouraged within classroom settings.

The findings further revealed that learners become more motivated when teachers recognize their efforts and progress during literacy activities.

One learner participant shared:

“Mas gusto kong magbasa kapag pinupuri ako ni teacher.”

This finding highlights the importance of learner-centered and supportive instructional environments in strengthening English language acquisition and classroom literacy experiences.

Theme 3: Contextualized and Literacy-Rich Environments Enhance Language Learning

The findings revealed that contextualized instruction and literacy-rich classroom environments significantly contribute to learners' vocabulary development, comprehension skills, and meaningful literacy experiences. Participants emphasized that learners understand English lessons more effectively when instructional examples are connected to familiar experiences, community realities, and everyday situations.

One learner participant stated:

“Mas naiintindihan ko ang English kapag may examples na related sa araw-araw naming buhay.”

Another learner shared:

“Kapag simple at relatable ang examples, mas madaling maintindihan ang lesson.”

Similarly, another participant explained:

“Mas natututo kami kapag may pictures, books, at visual aids.”

These responses indicate that contextualized literacy instruction positively influences learners' cognitive engagement and language comprehension. Learners become more capable of understanding vocabulary, sentence structures, and reading passages when instruction is meaningful and connected to familiar experiences. Teachers also emphasized the importance of literacy-rich classroom environments in promoting language acquisition.

One teacher participant stated:

“Malaking tulong ang visual aids, storybooks, at reading corners sa language learning.”

Another participant explained:

“Kapag maraming reading materials, mas nae-expose sila sa English vocabulary.”

The findings suggest that literacy-rich and contextualized learning environments contribute significantly to learners' reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and oral communication development. Continuous exposure to meaningful literacy experiences strengthens learners' familiarity and confidence with the English language.

The findings support Whitehurst and Lonigan's (1998) Emergent Literacy Theory, which explains that literacy competence develops gradually through interaction with print materials, oral language, and literacy-rich environments. Similarly, Tomlinson (2019) emphasized that contextualized and differentiated instruction strengthens learner engagement and meaningful language learning experiences.

The findings further align with Sociocultural Theory, which posits that language acquisition occurs more effectively through meaningful social interaction and contextualized communication experiences (Vygotsky, 1978).

Participants further revealed that reading activities and visual learning materials help improve vocabulary development and comprehension.

One learner participant stated:

“Mas lumalawak ang vocabulary ko kapag madalas kaming nagbabasa.”

This finding highlights the importance of contextualized literacy instruction and literacy-rich classrooms in strengthening English language acquisition among elementary learners.

Theme 4: Language Anxiety, Limited Vocabulary Exposure, and Home Language Interference Affect English Language Acquisition

Despite positive literacy experiences, the findings revealed that learners and teachers encounter several challenges affecting English language acquisition and classroom participation. Participants identified fear of speaking English, limited vocabulary exposure, pronunciation difficulties, insufficient reading materials, home language interference, and varying literacy abilities as major barriers to language learning.

One learner participant stated:

“Nahihiya akong magsalita ng English kasi baka mali ang pronunciation ko.”

Another learner explained:

“May mga words na hindi ko maintindihan kaya nahihirapan akong sumunod sa lesson.”

Similarly, another participant shared:

“Mas sanay kaming magsalita ng Ilocano o Filipino kaya nahihirapan minsan sa English.”

These responses indicate that emotional and linguistic barriers negatively influence learners’ participation and confidence during English instruction. Learners often become hesitant to speak or participate because of fear of making mistakes and limited vocabulary knowledge.

Teachers also highlighted the influence of home language and limited literacy exposure on learners’ English acquisition.

One teacher participant stated:

“Challenge minsan dahil hindi exposed sa English ang learners sa bahay.”

Another participant explained:

“Kulang din minsan ang reading materials at literacy support outside the classroom.”

The findings suggest that learners’ language acquisition is influenced not only by classroom instruction but also by literacy exposure, home language environment, and opportunities for meaningful communication outside the classroom.

The findings support Krashen (2019), who emphasized that language anxiety and limited comprehensible input significantly affect language acquisition and communication confidence. Similarly, OECD (2019) highlighted that literacy exposure and socio-linguistic environments significantly influence language learning and academic participation.

Participants further revealed that learners with limited vocabulary often struggle with reading comprehension and oral communication activities.

One learner participant stated:

“Nahihirapan akong sumagot kapag hindi ko alam ang meaning ng words.”

This finding implies the need for continuous vocabulary enrichment, supportive communication environments, and increased literacy exposure to strengthen learners’ English language competence.

Despite these challenges, participants emphasized that supportive teachers and interactive literacy activities help improve confidence and classroom participation.

One learner participant shared:

“Kahit nahihirapan minsan, natututo pa rin kami dahil supportive si teacher.”

This finding highlights the resilience of learners and the important role of supportive literacy instruction in promoting meaningful English language acquisition experiences.

Conclusion

The study revealed that interactive, supportive, and contextualized literacy experiences significantly contribute to English language acquisition and classroom engagement among elementary learners in the Santa Maria District, Isabela. Interactive literacy activities such as storytelling, oral reading, collaborative tasks, games, and peer discussions strengthen learners’ participation, confidence, and communication skills during English instruction.

The findings further revealed that supportive and learner-centered instructional practices positively influence learners’ emotional engagement and willingness to participate in English language learning activities. Positive teacher-learner relationships help reduce language anxiety and strengthen learners’ confidence in speaking, reading, and expressing ideas in English.

The study also found that contextualized instruction and literacy-rich classroom environments significantly contribute to learners’ vocabulary development, comprehension skills, and meaningful literacy experiences. Continuous exposure to reading materials, visual aids, and contextualized communication activities helps strengthen learners’ familiarity and competence in the English language.

However, the findings revealed that fear of speaking English, limited vocabulary exposure, pronunciation difficulties, home language interference, insufficient reading materials, and varying literacy abilities continue to

affect English language acquisition and classroom participation among elementary learners.

The study concludes that supportive literacy environments, contextualized instruction, interactive learning experiences, and positive instructional relationships play a significant role in strengthening English language acquisition and classroom literacy engagement among elementary learners.

Implications of the Study

The findings of the study provide important implications for English language instruction, literacy development, classroom engagement, educational leadership, curriculum implementation, and future research. The study emphasizes the importance of supportive, contextualized, and interactive literacy environments in strengthening English language acquisition among elementary learners.

Educational Implications

The findings imply that English language instruction should become more learner-centered, contextualized, interactive, and literacy-rich to strengthen learners' communication competence and literacy engagement. Teachers may integrate storytelling, collaborative literacy activities, oral communication exercises, guided reading, and contextualized learning experiences to improve learners' participation and language confidence.

The study further implies that literacy instruction should focus not only on grammatical competence but also on meaningful communication, vocabulary development, reading comprehension, and confidence-building among learners.

Additionally, the findings suggest that literacy-rich classroom environments significantly contribute to language acquisition and meaningful literacy experiences among elementary learners.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings imply that teachers play a critical role in shaping learners' confidence, participation, and engagement in English language learning. Teachers should demonstrate patience, encouragement, empathy, and instructional flexibility in supporting learners with varying literacy abilities and language backgrounds.

The study also highlights the importance of contextualized and differentiated instructional approaches in strengthening language acquisition. Teachers may utilize visual aids, contextualized examples, collaborative learning tasks, and scaffolded literacy activities to improve comprehension and communication skills.

Furthermore, the findings imply that emotionally supportive classroom environments reduce language anxiety and encourage learners to participate actively in oral communication and literacy activities.

Institutional and Policy Implications

The findings provide important implications for educational leaders and policymakers within the Department of Education regarding the strengthening of literacy instruction and English language programs in elementary education. Educational institutions may strengthen English instruction by providing literacy-rich classroom environments, reading materials, contextualized learning resources, and teacher training programs focusing on literacy instruction and language acquisition strategies.

The study further implies the importance of strengthening school-based literacy programs and reading intervention initiatives that support vocabulary development, oral communication, and literacy engagement among learners.

Moreover, the findings suggest the need for stronger home-school literacy partnerships that encourage literacy exposure and language learning opportunities beyond the classroom.

Social Implications

The findings imply that English language acquisition contributes significantly to learners' communication competence, self-confidence, academic participation, and future educational opportunities. Literacy development strengthens learners' ability to participate meaningfully in social interaction, academic learning, and community engagement.

The study also highlights the importance of creating inclusive and supportive literacy environments that recognize learners' linguistic backgrounds and socio-cultural experiences.

Implications for Future Research

The findings highlight the need for future studies exploring English language acquisition and literacy experiences across different educational contexts and learner populations. Future researchers may conduct comparative studies involving urban and rural schools to examine variations in literacy environments, language exposure, and instructional practices.

Longitudinal and mixed-methods studies may also be conducted to explore the long-term influence of literacy engagement and contextualized instruction on language competence and academic performance.

Future studies may likewise investigate the role of technology integration, multilingual education, parental involvement, and digital literacy resources in strengthening English language acquisition among elementary learners.

Conclusively, the study emphasizes that strengthening English language acquisition requires collaborative efforts among teachers, school leaders, families, educational institutions, and communities. Supportive literacy environments, contextualized instruction, learner-centered pedagogies, and meaningful communication experiences are essential in promoting successful language acquisition and meaningful classroom literacy experiences among elementary learners.

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