

Challenges and Coping Mechanisms of High School English Language Learners and their PISA Performance

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the multifaceted experiences of high school English language learners (HS-ELLs) in a local public high school, focusing on their challenges, coping mechanisms, and institutional support systems. With a case study approach employing "qualitative" methods of data collection, the study conducted interviews with ten high school students. The researchers thematically analyzed the data to identify the common linguistic difficulties the participants faced, how they adapted to cope with them, and the effectiveness of their words in consolidating others' effectiveness. Findings showed that all students have the same struggles with the English language, grammar, and vocabulary, even though they often lack prior educational exposure. Effective coping strategies included using the material they were accustomed to, seeking self-improvement methods, and appealing to friends and teachers for assistance. Although students in general praised their teachers' teaching efforts, the study noted the neglect of systematic institutional programs dedicated to maintaining language proficiency. Also, there remained an obvious imbalance in the availability of PISA-aligned resources for learners. These findings have important implications for the language training industry and policy. It is necessary to develop a variety of teaching materials tailored to learners' needs, levels, and local conditions. In addition, schools should set up structured programs that allow students to practice English in academic exchanges with teachers and to communicate with peers outside class, further improving their fluency.

Keywords: *language learning, challenges, coping mechanisms and strategies, institutional support and resources, PISA performance*

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INTRODUCTION

In international assessments, Filipino students have consistently performed poorly, providing a window into serious problems in the Philippine educational system. It is then necessary to investigate the issues students face and determine how they struggle—especially when learning English.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2024), PISA results indicate that most countries score between 400 and 600 points. For example, Filipino students' marks across all domains are well below what is considered acceptable in national educational assessments. In mathematics, they scored 355%; in reading itself, a measly 347%. Something is going wrong on that score. This underperformance is particularly distressing in reading, a fundamental skill that supports learning in all areas. Goldenberg (2020) has shown that reading and writing are prerequisites for effective language use, underscoring the urgent need to understand why Filipino students struggle with these essential competencies.

Although there has been only a slight improvement in the scores since 2018, Philippine education is still beset by systemic problems. The other cities have made significant progress on PISA since joining in 2006, for example, Qatar and Colombia, yet we lag far behind (OECD, 2023). These problems lead to deficiencies in curriculum standards, teacher training, and learning resources. According to Susanto et al. (2020), English language learners who have mastered English face difficulty based on their proficiency level: active writers but passive listeners in speaking. This situation underscores the need to address distinct language skills individually (Kamaşak & Rose, 2021). Students face linguistic and academic challenges when taught in English in subjects other than languages. For example, AbdAlgane & Idris (2020) emphasize pronunciation as a basic requirement for attaining oral proficiency.

Furthermore, emotional and psychological barriers represent additional obstacles for English-language learners. As Rohman and Pane (2013) noted, language anxiety and low self-esteem reduce learners' involvement, particularly during spoken tasks. Aizawa et al. (2013) emphasize that motivation and helping alone do not guarantee success. External factors are also relevant. Haryadi and Aminuddin (2013) found that institutional support is limited, as is the ability to go international. Abdul and Maharida (2012) pointed out that, on the one hand, online tools like Zoom and Google Classroom are obviously quite helpful to learners; on the other hand, they reduce interaction between students and teachers and, little by little, constrain what can be done logistically.

In response to these challenges of online learning, students adopt various strategies. Many high school English language learners (HS-ELLs) study metacognitive techniques such as activating background knowledge and seeking resources (Lestari & Wahyudin, 2020; Kehing & Yunus, 2021; Yang et al., 2021), as well as social strategies such as asking for help or comprehending code. However, during online learning, some disengage, as reported by Pawlak et al. (2025), whereas Agum et al. (2021) observed greater self-reliance. Similarly, Ning and Tananuraksakul (2024) found that media support independent learning, while Skelly and Estrada-Chichon (2021) emphasized mindfulness, which can reduce anxiety and improve performance.

However, the previous English language achievement requires institutional support. Upara and Chusanachoti (2023) further argue that it is not enough to establish a positive atmosphere in the school; approaches also need to be taught. Slapac (2021) reported that there were few resources for teachers



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to train and work with schools, while both Goodman et al. (2022) and Wu and Tarc (2024) found that children from poor areas lacked basic learning materials themselves, which in turn led them toward an apathetic state of mind. Despite the many technological advances, pupils still require meaningful guidance (Hoi & Mu, 2021).

Research has examined the challenges, strategies, and institutional factors that affect the acquisition of English. However, far less attention has been given to discovering what life is really like for high school students in the Philippines. Reports usually focus on general characteristics and typical situations worldwide, from the same basic beginning education schools. They ignore how much pressure Filipino HS-ELLs are under as students, young people, and poor compared with their classmates of rich international backgrounds. This study explores the lived realities of Filipino high school students in learning English through a context-sensitive approach, aiming to understand their challenges and inform more balanced, just, and learner-centred policies grounded in national values rather than externally imposed solutions.

This study also provides a textual description of Filipino English learning to aid teachers and learners in their practical work. It examines the linguistic and affective barriers learners face, as well as the technological and institutional means to overcome them. Findings support refining teaching, developing methodology, and implementing an orientation program. That takes learning into account. It will also add an entire set of materials to the literature about language learning and Filipino secondary schools in general.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to explore and understand the multifaceted experiences of high school English language learners (HS-ELLs) in a local high school. Specifically, it sought answers to the following:

1. To identify the common challenges that HS-ELLs encounter in English language learning.
2. To examine their coping mechanisms and strategies, and
3. To evaluate institutional resources and support, and their effectiveness in aiding ELLs in their language learning.

METHODS

In this study, the qualitative design of Creswell and Poth (2018) was used with a case study approach to uncover the reading difficulties, coping strategies, and insights of public high school students. The researchers conducted the study at one of the public high schools in Davao del Sur. Ten (10) students participated in the study. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), 1 to 4 participants are sufficient for case studies to provide deep and meaningful insights; however, this study involved 10 participants to capture greater variation of perspectives within the case, enhanced data saturation, and more robust triangulation of experiences, thereby strengthening the credibility and richness of the findings (Guest et al., 2006)

In this study, a purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants, enabling students with genuine reading difficulties to offer insights into the study's central issue (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants should meet the criteria set by the proponents: they were examinees in the 2022 PISA, aged 15–16 years, enrolled at grade 7 or higher during the examination, and willing to share their thoughts and experiences. The researchers obtained approval from the institution prior to any data collection. All



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interviewees provided informed consent and signed the document after the interview. Each interview was recorded, transcribed verbatim, and immediately analyzed for its content.

Interviews were held in private areas in the school where the informants felt most comfortable. The researchers used an open-ended questionnaire and face-to-face interviews. This allowed them to obtain an in-depth understanding of the students' reading obstacles, the adaptive techniques they use to address them, and what motivates them to learn. Data analysis was conducted in accordance with programmatic research, using thematic analysis to uncover, analyze, and interpret recurring patterns and underlying themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). When applied to case study research, one advantage of thematic analysis is that it organizes complex narratives and highlights essential elements relevant to answering questions or solving the problem under study (Nowell et al., 2017; Yin, 2018). The researchers wrote the interview guide in English, and each question directly related to the study's purpose. Researchers thoroughly developed it to ensure it was consistent with their research objectives and reviewed it by a group of experts for validation.

The transcribed data were then sent back to participants for member checking. Member checking is a qualitative research validation strategy in which researchers return data, interpretations, or findings to participants to verify accuracy and ensure that the results authentically represent participants' perspectives (Birt et al., 2016).

RESULTS

Common Challenges Encountered by HS-ELLs in English Language Learning

As the global lingua franca, fluency and proficiency in English have become a necessity for students to develop in the international world. However, English is widely regarded as one of the most challenging languages to master, especially for non-native speakers (Perdana, 2021). Table 1 shows this study's findings, illuminating three principal challenges encountered by HS-ELLs: (1) the difficulty due to linguistic factors, and (2) the gaps in language learning difficulty in relation to earlier educational attainment.

Table 1. Emerging Themes on Common Challenges Encountered by HS-ELLs in English Language Learning

Main Themes	Core Ideas/ Sub-themes	Sample Statements (ID#, Line#)
Linguistic Factors	Lack of Vocabulary and Poor Pronunciation	When we are tasked with writing essays or answering questions, there are words I cannot understand or have difficulty spelling. (Participant 3, Lines 9-10) Understanding complex and unfamiliar words and using context clues to find their meanings. (Participant 5, Lines 21-22) When I have to write sentences and come across words I cannot spell. (Participant 9, Line 14) Spelling and pronouncing some difficult words in English. (Participant 10, Lines 27-28)
	Difficulty with Grammar Usage	Usually, it is about grammar, since most of us students struggle with it. (Participant 4, Lines 15-16)



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		I realized that there are still grammar points and word spellings that are difficult. (Participant 6, Line 9)
		When I get too conscious of grammar, whether it is right or wrong. (Participant 7, Lines 8-9)
Gaps in Language Learning Difficulty	Earlier Education	I was in advanced classes in elementary, so we had advantages over other students, which is why it is easy for me. (Participant 6, Lines 5-6)
		High school English is more complex than elementary English, but it is manageable. (Participant 9, Lines 5-6)

Linguistic Factors

As shown in the table above, most HS-ELLs struggle with linguistic factors when learning English. Most students share the sentiment that they have difficulty understanding and using higher vocabulary. A participant particularly highlights this problem: "*When I have to write sentences, and there are words that I cannot spell,*" (Participant 9). Difficulties in spelling and pronunciation are emphasized alongside vocabulary problems, as noted by Participant 10 (Lines 27-28). Additionally, problems with grammar use are a common challenge among learners. Participant 4 specifies that "*a majority of [the] students struggle with grammar*" (Lines 15-16), which is echoed by another participant who "*gets too conscious about whether [their grammar] is wrong or not.*" (Participant 7).

Gaps in Language Learning Difficulty

The difficulties shown in the previous sub-themes reflect issues in learners' language acquisition, especially in their prior educational attainment. Some learners may gain advantage over others due to the admittance of specialized class sections in the elementary level (Participant 6, Lines 5-6) while students who come from general sections may not receive the same amount of support and access to resources like the former, resulting to a perceived significant gap in lessons when moving on to high school-level English (Participant 9, Lines 5-6).

Coping Mechanisms and Strategies of HS-ELLs in their English Language Learning

It is inevitable for students to encounter difficulties and struggles in the learning process. Some of the various ways they deal with such obstacles are reflected by the themes found in Table 2 below: (1) the reliance on existing material and acquired strategies, and (2) various help-seeking methods from different sources.

Table 2. Emerging Themes on Coping Mechanisms and Strategies of ELLs in their English Language Learning

Main Themes	Core Ideas / Sub-themes	Sample Statements (ID#, Line #)
Relying on existing material and acquired strategies.	Previously taught language learning strategies.	I read the questions before writing the essay because they might contain words I need to look up, or sometimes I study difficult words at home. (Participant 3, Line 15)
		I use a strategy of finding context clues, the way my English teacher taught me. (Participant 5, Lines 29-30)
		I write the sentence first in Filipino and then translate it into English [with a translator] to check the pronunciation and grammar. (Participant 9, Lines 15-16)



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Seeking help	Self-acquired study materials	I consult my notes. (Participant 6, Line 22) I study a bit here and there. (Participant 8, Line 14) I study. (Participant 10, Line 35)
	Teacher consultation	"I ask for reviewers from the teacher." (Participant 1, Line 25) If studying does not cut it, you cannot consult everything online either, so that is when I approach my teachers to explain things properly. (Participant 4, Lines 30-32)
	Peer help and collaborative studying.	"Sometimes I just ask my classmates for lecture notes." (Participant 1, Line 26) I seek help from my friends because it is hard to do it on my own. (Participant 6, Line 21) I ask my friends for help checking my grammar. (Participant 7, Lines 12-13)
	Other resources and materials	"I searched up the topic on YouTube." (Participant 1, Line 25) I study in advance by watching cartoons on Nickelodeon. (Participant 4, Lines 19-20) I searched on the internet. (Participant 6, Line 22) I research. (Participant 10, Line 35) Understanding sentences and conversations in English was hard before, but I watched [English] movies and other materials, like texts and books, on phones and other devices, and my English improved. (Participant 10, Lines 44-45)

Table 3. Emerging Themes on Coping Mechanisms and Strategies of ELLs in their English Language Learning

Main Themes	Core Ideas/ Sub-themes	Sample Statements (ID#, Line#)
Relying on existing material and acquired strategies	Previously taught language learning strategies	I read the questions before writing the essay because they might contain words I need to look up, or sometimes I study difficult words at home. (Participant 3, Line 15) I use a strategy of finding context clues, the way my English teacher taught me. (Participant 5, Lines 29-30) I write the sentence first in Filipino and then translate it into English [with a translator] to check the pronunciation and grammar. (Participant 9, Lines 15-16)
		Self-acquired study materials
Seeking help	Teacher consultation	I consult my notes. (Participant 6, Line 22) I study a bit here and there. (Participant 8, Line 14) I study. (Participant 10, Line 35) "I ask for reviewers from the teacher." (Participant 1, Line 25) If studying does not cut it, you cannot consult everything online either, so that is when I approach my teachers to explain things properly. (Participant 4, Lines 30-32)



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Peer help and collaborative studying	<p>"Sometimes I just ask my classmates for lecture notes." (Participant 1, Line 26)</p> <p>I seek help from my friends because it is hard to do it on my own. (Participant 6, Line 21)</p> <p>I ask my friends for help checking my grammar. (Participant 7, Lines 12-13)</p>
Other resources and materials	<p>"I searched up the topic on YouTube." (Participant 1, Line 25)</p> <p>I study in advance by watching cartoons on Nickelodeon. (Participant 4, Lines 19-20)</p> <p>I searched on the internet. (Participant 6, Line 22)</p> <p>I research. (Participant 10, Line 35)</p> <p>Understanding sentences and conversations in English was hard before, but I watched [English] movies and other materials, like texts and books, on phones and other devices, and my English improved. (Participant 10, Lines 44-45)</p>

Relying on Existing Material and Acquired Strategies

English language learners tend to have their preferred learning styles and strategies as they learn a language. Self-reliance, reliance on existing materials, and consultation with peers and instructors, as well as additional materials, are two of the strategies students use to cope with their English language learning.

A prominent theme that emerged from the analysis is the reliance on existing material and acquired strategies. This emphasizes that learners often rely on prior language-learning experiences. One student quoted *"I read the questions before writing the essay because it might contain the word [I need], or sometimes I study difficult words at home"* (Participant 3).

Another strategy students use is to rely on self-acquired materials when studying. As students quote, *"I consult my notes."* (Participant 6) and *"I study a bit here and there."* (Participant 8).

Seeking Help

This theme highlights the effectiveness of having peers, instructors, and additional materials as supports for English language learning. This theme aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), particularly the space of what a learner can do with adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.

The learners recognized the need for consultation when they encountered difficulties in English language learning, as quoted: *"I ask for reviewers from the teacher"* (Participant 1). Sometimes, students tend to consult the teacher as a last resort to solve the difficulty, as one participant said, *"If studying does not cut it, you cannot consult everything online either, so that is when I approach my teachers, where they can explain things to me properly."* (Participant 4).

Learners do not just rely on teachers for consultation. More often, students consult their peers for collaboration in studying. Participants express this exact sentiment, saying *"Sometimes I just ask my classmates for lecture notes"* (Participant 1) and *"I seek help from my friends for help in checking for errors in my grammar"* (Participant 7). These lines make it clear that peer consultation and collaboration are ways to address students' difficulties in English language learning.



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People are not the only thing students can rely on when it comes to difficulty in learning English. Learners sometimes consult other resources, such as digital media and the internet, to learn English. One participant mentioned, "I search up the topic on YouTube" (Participant 1), and "I just search on the internet" (Participant 10), indicating that the internet is one of the few ways learners tend to rely on when difficulty arises in English language learning.

Institutional Resources and Support in Aiding ELLs in Their English Language Learning

When ELL learners succeed, schools and educational institutions play a significant role, as they are responsible for providing not only qualified teachers but also appropriate instructional materials, customized programs, and ongoing professional development for advanced language instruction (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). In the analysis of institutional input, Table 3 identified the following themes regarding how institutions help ELLs: (1) instructional efforts driven by individual initiative, (2) the absence of any organized institutional avenues for skills development, and (3) unequal provision in terms of PISA-relevant materials and support among learners for this purpose.

Table 4. Institutional Resources and Support in Aiding ELLs in Their English Language Learning

Main Themes	Core Ideas/ Sub-themes	Sample Statements (ID#, Line#)
Instructional efforts driven by individual initiative	Valuable support and guidance from teachers	<p>Maybe it is because of how the teacher pushed me to become like this—the way they instruct and uplift us. By doing so, you will test your abilities and find your talents, which will leave you in awe of yourself.</p> <p>They contribute to our personal development in specific ways. (Participant 2, Lines 41-45)</p> <p>Sometimes, when I ask the teachers questions, they give the correct answers immediately. (Participant 3, Lines 24-25)</p> <p>I received a lot of support and guidance from my teacher, and I would not have learned as much without it. (Participant 4, Lines 35-36)</p> <p>The lessons my English teacher taught us really helped improve my English skills, particularly my grammar and proficiency. (Participant 5, Lines 45-46)</p> <p>Every time my teacher discusses the topic, they explain it explicitly. If we do not understand something, we can ask questions, and the teacher will explain it again. All we need to do is pinpoint which part of the topic we do not understand so the teacher can explain it again. (Participant 7, Lines 21-23)</p> <p>The teachers help us use proper English grammar. (Participant 10, Lines 51-52)</p>
	Quizzes and lesson reviews within a classroom setting	<p>It could be the quizzes. (Participant 5, Line 55)</p> <p>Our teacher facilitates activities or mini quizzes and awards points to participants. (Participant 6, Lines 34-35)</p> <p>"When we review the lesson at the end of the discussions." (Participant 1, Line 45)</p>



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Lack of structured institutional avenues for skill development	School-wide events with limited participation.	<p>"Just reviewing done after each lesson in class." (Participant 6, Lines 30-31)</p> <p>"Nothing other than reviewing my own notes from classes." (Participant 9, Lines 20-21)</p> <p>"There are school events for it, but they are limited only to one participant per class, like the spelling bee." (Participant 6, Lines 29-30)</p> <p>"Speech, choir, and role-playing activities." (Participant 7, Lines 26-27)</p> <p>"Reporting and extemporaneous speech activities." (Participant 10, Line 55)</p>
Unequal provision of PISA-relevant materials and support among learners.	Resource-based preparation with limited guidance	<p>"They provided additional lessons and resources on the subjects that will come out." (Participant 2, Lines 62-63)</p>
	Independent study in the absence of adequate resources	<p>"We reviewed a lot and read materials to prepare for the exam." (Participant 3, Line 33)</p> <p>"They introduced tests in the PISA format, but the problem was that we got bored because of the amount of reading." (Participant 4, Lines 47-48)</p> <p>"They provided additional resources like textbooks, laptops in ICT that we used during the PISA examination." (Participant 10, Lines 62-63)</p> <p>"We were just told the day before that there would be an exam, and we did not get to review. The topics were unfamiliar, but the multiple-choice format made it fine." (Participant 6, Lines 40-41)</p> <p>"We just relied on stock knowledge." (Participant 7, Line 30)</p> <p>"They did not provide anything. We were told about the exam just the day before, and I did not understand many of the topics covered. Some were familiar, but generally, most of the questions were not discussed with us yet." (Participant 9, Lines 35-36)</p>

Instructional Efforts Driven by Individual Initiative

In the classroom, the majority of instructional efforts come from teachers, who take it upon themselves to develop materials, create engaging lessons, and find resources to support their students. Participant 2 particularly states that *"they instruct and uplift us. By doing so, you will test your abilities and find your talents, which will leave you in awe of yourself"* (Lines 43-44). Similar sentiments are echoed by other respondents, including: *"I received a lot of support and guidance from my teacher, and I believe I would not have learned this much without my teacher's help"* (Participant 4). Other participants highlight the effectiveness of facilitated quizzes in assessing and improving their learning experience regarding the discussed topics (Participant 5, Lines 51-52; Participant 6, Lines 34-35). Regarded as equally effective is *"when we review the lesson at the end of discussions,"* as Participant 1 (Line 45) attests.

Lack Of Structured Institutional Avenues for Skill Development

There are actually few, if any, organizational initiatives that depart from the class, so most of our teaching activities rely heavily on teachers. Moreover, this lack of institutional intervention underscores the reality that students have few opportunities to apply the knowledge and skills they learn in the



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classroom. As observed by Participant 6, "There are school events for it, but they are limited only for one participant per class, like spelling bee," (Lines 29-30).

In the end, although no one lends a hand, this study finds that students are very enthusiastic about role-plays and English activities. Active learning strategies such as role-playing and speech choir enhance students' creativity, self-expression, pronunciation, and overall English achievement, as supported by research showing improved language performance in engaging learning environments. Participants offered examples of different activities in English, like "fill in the blanks and such interactive activities" (P 4), " speech choir and role-play activities " (P 7). Another participant, meanwhile, noted the meaningfulness of "report and extemporaneous speech activities" (P. 10). However, despite their importance and effectiveness in providing routes for language learning and development, there is a relative shortage of opportunities for learners to participate in them.

School events give students a chance to actively participate in and take pride in the language-learning process. Such events require students to perform specific tasks in English, reinforcing and boosting the confidence they have gained.

Unequal Provision of PISA-Relevant Materials and Support Among Learners

The contradictions between support and resources are evident in the inherent preparatory problems HS-ELLs face. For some students, support after support is of benefit, while increasingly inequitable conditions hinder their performance.

Student 10 reported that he and fellow students received books and notebook PCs for PISA, while, with this information, Student 9 was informed of the exam day before they had to take the test. Schools often distribute materials but take no note of linguistic or cultural barriers. Then ELLs are left to adopt stock knowledge (Student 7).

Without support from schools or the government, expect students to continue struggling in English. Participant 4 thought that PISA practice tests were boring because he had to do so much reading (Lines 47 or 48). There is a serious mismatch between the study materials' design and learners' needs.

The fact that ELLs are not equally prepared for the PISA test points to a structural need. However, if schools use the scaffolding approach, encourage students to learn from one another, and ensure that resources are distributed equitably, it is possible to transform standardized test preparation into an inclusive process that benefits everyone.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the challenges, coping mechanisms, and institutional supports experienced by high school English language learners (HS-ELLs) in English language learning. The findings revealed interconnected linguistic, individual, and institutional factors that shape learners' experiences and outcomes. The discussion is organized thematically to reflect the significant findings.

Linguistic Challenges in English Language Learning

The results show that linguistic issues, such as a limited vocabulary, difficulty pronouncing words, and difficulty with grammar, remain the most significant problems for HS-ELLs. These problems make it hard for students to speak and write English with confidence, often leading them to hesitate and feel anxious when they have to do language tasks. These results align with earlier studies that highlight how



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vocabulary and grammar are fundamental yet ongoing challenges for ELLs, especially when they have limited exposure to English outside of school (Perdana, 2021; Komalasari, 2022).

Additionally, learners' increased awareness of grammatical accuracy indicates that the fear of making mistakes may hinder fluency and participation. This aligns with studies showing that placing too much emphasis on form can make learners less willing to communicate, especially among adolescent ELLs. So, language problems are not just technical issues; they also affect learners' confidence and interest in learning.

Gaps in Language Learning Due to Prior Educational Experiences

The results also show that students had very different experiences in school before. Students who had access to advanced or enriched English classes in elementary school found high school English easier, while those in general sections had a harder time learning. These results show how early educational opportunities affect language development over time and result in different levels of proficiency within the same classroom.

This pattern supports Amalia et al.'s (2024) claim that differences in the quality of instruction, teachers' knowledge, and access to learning materials make English language learning unfair. The results show that language learning is a gradual process and underscore the importance of providing all students with the same early instruction to prevent achievement gaps from widening at higher levels of education.

Reliance on Existing Materials and Acquired Learning Strategies

In response to language difficulties, HS-ELLs demonstrated they could adapt by using language-learning strategies they had already learned and by studying materials they had found on their own. Students used strategies such as using context clues, translating from their first language, reviewing their notes, and studying on their own. These actions show that the students are becoming more independent, which is widely seen as an important part of learning a language well (Lai & Zheng, 2020).

The results also align with Agustin et al. (2021), who stress the importance of strategic learning for improving language skills. The capacity of students to utilize prior instruction and self-directed resources demonstrates resilience and agency, suggesting that explicit strategy instruction may yield enduring benefits beyond the classroom.

Help-Seeking and Socially Mediated Learning

Help-seeking became another important way for students to cope with stress, as they actively sought help from teachers, classmates, and online resources. This behavior highlights the social aspect of language learning. It supports Vygotsky's (1978) idea of the Zone of Proximal Development, in which learners improve their skills with support and through collaboration.

Teacher consultation was essential when self-study and online resources were not enough. This shows that teachers remain very important in helping students learn a language. Peer collaboration, on the other hand, helped everyone understand each other better and made it easier to learn on your own, which aligns with research showing that interacting with peers makes you more confident and better able to understand (Lee et al., 2015). The use of digital resources exemplifies the growing influence of technology in facilitating accessible, adaptable educational opportunities (Martin-Monje & Barcena, 2020).



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Instructional Efforts Driven by Individual Teacher Initiative

The results show that much of the help HS-ELLs receive from their schools comes from individual teachers taking the initiative rather than from structured programs available to all students. Teachers who gave clear explanations, fun activities, and regular feedback were very important to the students' language development. This shows how important it is for teachers to be good at what they do and how they teach, so that ELLs can do well.

However, individual effort also reveals problems with the system, as adequate support depends heavily on each teacher's dedication and creativity. Even though these efforts align with Alshareef's (2016) suggestions for meaningful language activities in the classroom, the lack of institutional structures makes it difficult to ensure fairness and sustainability across classrooms.

Lack of Structured Institutional Avenues for Skill Development

Even though students are excited about English-related activities, the results show that there are few organized, school-wide opportunities for language development outside of class. There were often limits on who could participate in events like spelling bees or speech competitions, making it harder for more students to get involved. Because there are no structured paths, there are fewer opportunities to use real language and apply skills.

According to Hattie's (2008) Visible Learning, meaningful participation in active and applied learning experiences boosts students' motivation and success. The scarcity of such opportunities indicates a lost opportunity to cultivate confidence, creativity, and communicative proficiency among HS-ELLs.

Unequal Provision of PISA-Relevant Resources and Support

Lastly, the results show significant differences in who can access PISA-related resources and in how well they are prepared. Some students learned more with extra materials and structured reviews, while others got little or no preparation. This led them to rely on what they already knew, leaving them more confused during tests. These differences are a sign of broader problems in how resources and support for teaching are distributed.

This aligns with the OECD's (2018) findings, which found that fairness in education requires not only resources but also targeted language and teaching support. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) also argue that teachers need ongoing professional development to learn how best to support ELLs. Schleicher (2018) and Goldenberg (2008) both argue that standardized tests could harm students with diverse language backgrounds if there is insufficient systemic support.

Overall Implications

Taken together, the results show that HS-ELLs can be resilient through self-regulation and help-seeking strategies. However, their success depends heavily on their language skills, past educational experiences, and the support they receive from institutions. To address these problems, we need to move away from relying on individual initiative toward comprehensive, fair, and well-organized institutional frameworks that support ELLs across all areas of instruction, social interaction, and assessment.



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CONCLUSION

IMPLICATIONS

In the second language, it is, of course, very hard, particularly for high school students, who have little choice but to attend school or college. In such situations where secondary education means accommodating different learning rates, different personal styles, and week-to-week struggles with various disabilities, traditional classroom instruction becomes inadequate. Language learning becomes empowering the moment you transform schools from nervous teachers desperately reading out dialogues to exercises that generate participation, confidence, and real-world application.

In addition, integrating differentiated materials and contextualized learning experiences benefits both low-achieving and high-performing students. By diversifying resources and creating authentic opportunities to use language, institutions can foster a climate where people take pride in being multilingual, resilient speakers of many tongues at once. This two-fronted approach – providing support for those who need scaffolding while enriching those ready to move on to even more difficult material – guarantees equity in language education and its forward momentum.

Based on the findings, the future direction for HS-ELLs is summarized here: the entire school system must build a tiered set of language education services into its curricular requirements (thus actually achieving a policy of differentiation) that offer personalized and responsive programming. This entails being able to draw on culturally specific and multimodal materials, run activities led by students themselves in pairs (such as acting out a conversation while reading), create diverse campuses, and conceive of specific interventions for those in trouble. Meanwhile, the school administrators should expand the options for high achievers should be expanded to include programs like advanced projects, mentorships, and global exchange. This platform will enable students, regardless of ability, to succeed in this diverse, connected world.

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