| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The English Language Proficiency of Palawan State University Midwifery Students

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| ABSTRACT

The present study aims to respond to the necessity of research about the need to determine and assess the English Language Proficiency of allied medical courses and health sciences students. This study also paved the way for the discovery of reading comprehension problems in the students. The respondents are the thirty-five graduating students enrolled in Academic Year 2021-2022 under the Diploma in Midwifery program. A combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques was utilized. Questionnaires that tested the respondents' writing and reading skills were used. Another tool used was the respondents' journals and specified rubrics were used to gauge the outputs of the said tools. These reflective journals were considered by many language teachers to be one of the efficient ways of determining the language proficiency of a certain set of individuals. Their grades in their Related Learning Experience subjects where these journals constituted the majority of the computation, were correlated. Data showed that there is a significant correlation between the Related Learning Experience subject grades and the respondents' language proficiency which vastly affected their learning skills. The findings in the correlation showed significant interaction between the variables. The demographic profile of the respondents affects their language proficiency to a noticeable degree. This can also be observed in their Related Learning Experience subject grades. The English language proficiency of the participants greatly affected their grades as was exhibited by this study. From these findings, the present study recommends that the College of Nursing and Health Sciences assess further their language proficiency regularly which in turn will assist in their learning.

1. Introduction

Health science courses around the globe play a crucial role in society, serving as the foundation for training healthcare professionals who meet the diverse needs of communities. English, recognized as a global lingua franca, is the primary medium of instruction for these courses. This choice not only facilitates international communication but also enhances access to a wealth of academic resources and research, thereby enriching the educational experience for students worldwide.

As the landscape of health sciences continues to evolve, an expanding array of specialized courses emerges, reflecting the dynamic nature of the field. This evolution necessitates the development of tailored English language instruction that aligns with the specific demands of each discipline. By focusing on the unique language requirements of various health science areas, educators can optimize the learning experience for students pursuing specialized careers. For instance, medical programs such as Midwifery have long utilized English as the language of instruction, illustrating the longstanding recognition of its importance. This practice underscores the growing emphasis on English language proficiency, which is increasingly prioritized by faculty in health science education.

Basturkmen (2010) asserts that teaching English must effectively serve the disciplines of study, professions, or workplaces and should be a fundamental consideration in every teaching and learning scenario. This perspective is particularly relevant for midwifery students worldwide, who learn English to enhance their professional development and practice in their future careers. The emphasis on English in this context highlights the necessity of equipping students with the language skills required for their specific fields. Supporting this notion, Harmer (2004) notes that English language instruction is often tailored to meet students' specific needs, particularly when they have defined reasons for learning the language, such as mastering midwifery procedures. Furthermore, this targeted approach allows educators to identify learners' unique requirements, including the ability to write essential documents like patient records and journals.

Despite the importance of English language proficiency, it often occupies a marginal position in the health sciences curriculum. This oversight is concerning, as students' motivation and proficiency in language skills are crucial for maximizing their learning potential. In their study, Oducado et al. (2020) concluded that nursing students and those in allied medical courses, such as Midwifery, require additional support in academic reading and writing to articulate their knowledge within their chosen disciplines successfully. Their findings illustrate that students face a spectrum of academic writing needs, ranging from foundational skills to more advanced competencies.

However, the body of research addressing this critical area is notably limited, particularly within local contexts. Oducado et al. (2020) represent one of the few significant studies that explore the relationship between English language proficiency among nursing students and their performance on the Nursing Board Licensure Examination. Alarmingly, there is a lack of published studies focusing on the English language proficiency of health sciences students in the province, and specifically in the city.

Recognizing this gap, the present study aims to respond to the urgent need for research that assesses the English language proficiency of students in allied medical courses and health sciences. By investigating this area, the study seeks to uncover specific challenges related to reading comprehension among students. It has become increasingly clear that students' written outputs are closely linked to their levels of reading comprehension and overall language proficiency. Consequently, addressing these interconnected issues is vital for enhancing the educational outcomes of health sciences students and ensuring they are well-prepared for their professional responsibilities (Williams (2016), Cain (2020).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

This study primarily focused on exploring the relationship between the demographic profiles of Diploma in Midwifery students and their proficiency in the English language. Understanding this relationship is essential, as it can reveal how different factors may influence students' abilities to effectively communicate and comprehend English, which is crucial for their academic and professional success in the healthcare field. Specifically, this study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of the following:
    1.1 age;
    1.2 senior high school track; and
    1.3 related learning experience (RLE) course grade?
2. What is the level of proficiency in English of the of the respondents as to the following parameters and indicators:
    2.1 reading comprehension;
        2.1.1. Identifying main idea;
        2.1.2. Noting key details; and
        2.1.3. Making inferences?
    2.2 journal entry;
        2.2.1. Completeness and conciseness of content;
        2.2.2. Depth of reflection; and
        2.2.3. Vocabulary and spelling?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the demographic profile of the respondents and their language proficiency in English along with the following parameters and indicators:
    3.1 Reading Comprehension;
        3.1.1. Identifying main idea;
        3.1.2. Noting key details; and
        3.1.3. Making inferences?
     3.2 Journal Entry Writing;
        3.2.1 Completeness and conciseness of content;
        3.2.2 Depth of reflection; and Vocabulary and spelling?

2. Methodology
2.1 Research Design

To answer the research questions identified in this study, a quantitative- descriptive correlational study was employed. It is a methodological approach that focuses on quantifying relationships between variables while providing a detailed description

of those variables. This type of research primarily relies on numerical data, which can be collected through surveys, assessments, or existing records, allowing for statistical analysis to be conducted. One of its key features is its descriptive aspect, which offers a comprehensive overview of the studied variables, including their distributions, averages, and variability, thereby contextualizing the data. The main goal of this approach is to investigate the relationships between two or more variables, examining whether and to what extent changes in one variable are associated with changes in another, without implying causation.

To determine the significant relationship between respondents' demographic profiles—specifically age, senior high school track, and grades achieved in their Relevant Learning Experiences (RLE) courses—and their language proficiency using a descriptive correlational research design, the researcher would begin by clearly defining the variables of interest. The independent variables included the demographic factors such as age and senior high school track, while the dependent variable were the language proficiency levels, measured through assessments of reading comprehension and journal writing. This multifaceted approach not only enables a detailed exploration of the students' language skills but also facilitates the examination of potential correlations between their Related Learning Experience (RLE) grades and their proficiency in English. By investigating these relationships, the study aims to shed light on how academic performance in practical courses may influence language development among Diploma in Midwifery students.

Respondents of the Study

The respondents of this study consisted of thirty-five Midwifery students from the College of Nursing and Health Sciences at Palawan State University-Main Campus, specifically enrolled during the two semesters of the academic year 2021-2022. This group of students represents a diverse cohort that has undergone rigorous training in both theoretical and practical aspects of midwifery, preparing them for the complexities of maternal and child health care.

Instrumentation

The instrument utilized for this research comprised two primary sources designed to comprehensively assess the language proficiency of the midwifery students. The first source was a reading comprehension assessment questionnaire, which was administered directly to the students within the school premises. This assessment involved a face-to-face format, ensuring that participants could engage with the material in a conducive environment. The reading comprehension test was carefully constructed to evaluate various aspects of language proficiency, including the ability to understand and interpret written texts, which is essential for effective communication in the field of midwifery.

The second source of data came from the journal entries that participants maintained throughout their studies. These journals were an integral part of the students' educational experience, as they documented the students' reflections and learning outcomes from their Related Learning Experience (RLE) duties. Each student was required to write journal entries following their assignments in various areas of midwifery practice, capturing their experiences and insights after each duty. This practice not only encouraged students to articulate their thoughts and observations but also reinforced their learning through reflective writing. The journal entries, which were mandatory after every duty, included specific sections covering objectives, activities undertaken, and evaluations of the experiences. This structured format ensured that the students could systematically analyze their learning and provide a comprehensive account of their duties. Importantly, there was no limit to the number of paragraphs the students could write, allowing for flexibility in expression and depth of reflection. The faculty of the College of Nursing and Health Sciences had recognized the importance of journal writing as a critical component of the teaching and learning process for many years.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Respondents' Demographic Profile

The following tables presented on the succeeding pages show the distribution of the demographic profile of the respondents. This includes the age, senior high school track, and Related Learning Experience (RLE) course grade of the respondents. Moreover, frequency distribution was utilized to present the statistical data gathered. Other descriptive measures, such as mean and median, were also employed to clearly characterize the gathered data.

Table 1.1
Respondents' Demographic Profile: Age

Respondents' Age	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Mean	Median
17 years old and Below	6	17.14	20.4	20
18-19 years old	7	20.00		

20-21 years old	21	60.00		
22 years old and Above	1	2.86		
TOTAL	**35**	**100.00**		

As presented in Table 1.1, a significant majority of the respondents—21 individuals, or 60%—are aged between 20 and 21 years. This age group represents the largest segment of the sample, indicating a predominance of young adults within this study. Following this cohort, seven respondents, accounting for 20%, fall within the 18 to 19 age range. This demographic is also noteworthy, as it reflects individuals who are likely transitioning from secondary education to higher education or vocational training.

Additionally, six respondents, or 17.14%, are aged 17 years or younger, which may suggest a younger demographic that could be entering the midwifery program earlier than typical age expectations. Only one respondent is aged 22 years or older, highlighting that the study primarily focuses on younger participants. Further analysis employing descriptive statistics reveals that the mean age of the respondents is 20.4 years, with a median age of 20 years. These figures provide a more nuanced understanding of the age distribution within the sample, suggesting that the average respondent is just over 20 years old. The median age, being 20, reinforces the finding that most participants are clustered around this age.

In summary, considering age as a critical variable in this study, it is evident that the typical respondent is predominantly within the 20 to 21 age range. This demographic profile is essential for contextualizing the research findings, as it may influence aspects such as language proficiency, educational experiences, and social dynamics among the participants. Understanding this age distribution enhances the overall analysis and interpretation of the study's results.

Table 1.2
Respondents' Demographic Profile: Senior High School Track

Respondents' SHS Track	**Frequency (f)**	**Percentage (%)**
Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)	12	34.29
Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM)	4	11.43
General Academic Strand (GAS)	13	37.14
Technical-Vocational and Livelihood Strand (TVL)	3	8.57
Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS)	2	5.71
Non-K-12/ Second Courses	1	2.86
TOTAL	**35**	**100.00**

When the respondents were categorized based on the track they pursued during their senior high school education, Table 1.2 reveals that the largest group—comprising 13 individuals, or 37.14%—selected the General Academic Strand (GAS). According to the Department of Education (DepEd), GAS is recognized as the most flexible strand in senior high school. This flexibility allows GAS graduates to pursue a diverse array of disciplines, including science, humanities, and business-related courses, providing them with a broad foundation for further education.

Following this, 12 respondents, or 34.29%, chose the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) track. The STEM curriculum is designed to cultivate students' abilities to analyze both simple and complex societal problems, encouraging them to be proactive in developing solutions through the application of scientific, technological, engineering, and mathematical principles. This track prepares students for college degrees that delve into the mysteries of the natural world, positioning them to become future scientists, technological analysts, engineers, mathematicians, programmers, and more. Therefore, it is hypothesized that a significant portion of students enrolling in the midwifery course likely come from a STEM background.

Additionally, four respondents, representing 11.43%, pursued the Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM) strand, which equips students with the skills and knowledge necessary for careers in the corporate sector. Meanwhile, three respondents, or 8.57%, opted for the Technical-Vocational and Livelihood (TVL) strands, which focus on developing essential skills tailored to meet the varied demands of the workforce. Given the diverse educational backgrounds of the respondents, it can be inferred that these tracks significantly influence their English language proficiency, particularly in areas such as reading comprehension and journal writing. Understanding these educational trajectories is crucial for analyzing the factors that may affect their language skills and overall academic performance in the midwifery program.

Table 1.3
Respondents' Demographic Profile: Related Learning Experience Grades

Respondents' RLE Grades	Qualitative Description	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Mean
96 - 100	Excellent	4	11.43	85.86 (Fairly Satisfactory)
91 - 95	Very Satisfactory	5	14.29	
86 - 90	Satisfactory	10	28.57	
81 - 85	Fairly Satisfactory	6	17.14	
76 - 80	Poor	8	22.86	
75 and Below	Needs Improvement	2	5.71	
TOTAL	**35**	**35**	**100.00**	

Table 1.3 presents the grades achieved by the respondents in their Related Learning Experience (RLE) course. The analysis reveals that a majority of respondents—10 individuals, or 28.57%—received grades ranging from 86 to 90, which are categorized as satisfactory. Following this group, eight respondents, representing 22.86%, performed poorly in their RLE course, with grades falling between 76 and 80. Additionally, six respondents, or 17.14%, attained grades in the range of 81 to 85, which are described as fairly satisfactory. Notably, two respondents, or 5.71%, received grades of 75 or below, indicating a need for improvement.

Further analysis shows that the mean grade for the RLE course among respondents is 85.86, suggesting that the overall academic performance in this course is fairly satisfactory. While it is encouraging to observe that some respondents excelled in their RLE course, it is equally important to acknowledge that a significant number did not meet the required standards. This highlights a disparity in performance, indicating that although many respondents successfully passed the RLE course, there remains a notable proportion of students who faced challenges and may require additional support to improve their academic outcomes in this area.

32. Respondents' Level of Proficiency in English

The following tables illustrate the respondents' proficiency in English, focusing specifically on two key parameters: reading comprehension and journal entry writing. The respondents' proficiency levels are assessed based on their performance in these areas.

For reading comprehension, three indicators were identified: (a) identifying the main idea, (b) noting key details, and (c) making inferences. In the case of journal entry writing, the indicators include: (a) completeness and conciseness of content, (b) depth of reflection, and (c) vocabulary and spelling. To characterize the respondents' English proficiency, frequency distribution was utilized.

In assessing the respondents' journal entry writing, six inter-raters were engaged to evaluate the entries based on the established indicators. The inter-rater reliability score of 0.932 signifies that the evaluations from the six raters were highly reliable and consistent. This robust reliability enhances the credibility of the findings regarding the respondents' English proficiency.

Table 2.1.1
Respondents' Level of Proficiency in English: Reading Comprehension

Reading Comprehension Performance Indicators		Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Identifying Main Idea	Very Satisfactory	4	11.43
	Satisfactory	19	54.29
	Unsatisfactory	12	34.29
	TOTAL	**35**	**100.00%**

Legend: *Very Satisfactory – got 4-5 items correctly; Satisfactory – got 2-3 items correctly; Unsatisfactory – got 0-1 item correctly*

Table 2.1.1 presents the respondents' levels of English proficiency in reading comprehension, specifically in identifying the main idea. The analysis reveals that the majority of respondents—19 individuals, or 34.29%—performed satisfactorily in this area. Notably, while four respondents (11.43%) achieved a very satisfactory rating, nearly one-third of the total respondents—12

individuals and 34.29%—exhibited unsatisfactory performance. This indicates a significant number of respondents who struggled to identify the main idea of the texts they read.

Identifying the main idea is a critical aspect of reading comprehension, as it significantly impacts a reader's ability to understand and summarize a text. Many readers encounter challenges in this area due to factors such as information overload, ineffective reading strategies, or insufficient prior knowledge. These findings align with the research conducted by Ad et al. (2014), which indicated that students often find it difficult to discern the main idea because they lack a clear understanding of what it entails and are hindered by unfamiliar vocabulary.

Moreover, this supports the observations of Cain et al. (2020), who emphasized that reading comprehension is a multifaceted skill that encompasses various competencies, including vocabulary knowledge, metacognitive awareness, text structure understanding, and the ability to grasp the "gist" of a text. This underscores the urgent need for English educators to address students' difficulties in identifying the main idea. As Williams et al. (2016) suggest, teachers should provide a solid foundation for reading comprehension development by explicitly teaching strategies for main idea identification and summarization, both of which are essential for effective text understanding.

Collectively, these insights emphasize the importance of targeted instructional strategies to support students in overcoming challenges related to identifying the main idea, ultimately fostering better reading comprehension skills.

Table 2.1.2
Respondents' Level of Proficiency in English: Reading Comprehension

Reading Comprehension Performance Indicators		Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Noting Key Details	Very Satisfactory	6	17.14
	Satisfactory	15	42.86
	Unsatisfactory	14	40.00
TOTAL		**35**	**100.00%**

Legend: *Very Satisfactory – got 4-5 items correctly; Satisfactory – got 2-3 items correctly; Unsatisfactory – got 0-1 item correctly*

Table 2.1.2 illustrates the respondents' performance in noting key details. The data indicates that the majority—15 respondents, or 42.86%—demonstrated satisfactory performance in this area. However, it is important to note that while six respondents (17.14%) achieved a very satisfactory rating, a significant 14 respondents, or 40%, exhibited unsatisfactory performance in noting key details from the texts they read. This suggests that, in addition to challenges in identifying the main idea, respondents also struggled with recognizing key details as a critical component of reading comprehension.

Noting key details involves actively identifying, recognizing, and recording important information within a text. This process is essential for extracting and retaining crucial facts that enhance overall comprehension. Key details may include significant facts, supporting evidence, examples, definitions, or important events, all of which serve as foundational elements for understanding, analyzing, and interpreting the text.

According to Suson et al. (2020), this performance indicator is classified as falling within the literal level of reading comprehension. They emphasize that literal comprehension represents the basic understanding of a text, encompassing facts and information that are explicitly stated. As the most fundamental form of comprehension, it must be developed early in the literacy process. Therefore, it is concerning that some students struggle to achieve even this basic level, leading to poor overall performance in reading comprehension.

This finding is supported by Smith et al. (2020), who identified a positive correlation between students' ability to note key details and their overall reading comprehension skills. Their research indicates that students who excel in noting key details are more likely to achieve higher levels of reading comprehension. Thus, the ability to effectively identify and record key details is crucial for students' understanding of texts.

Furthermore, this study's findings align with Butarbutar (2021), who highlighted that difficulties in understanding the meanings of words and detailed information significantly impact students' comprehension abilities. Similarly, Fitri et al. (2022) found that students often struggle with reading comprehension due to their inability to locate essential details within a text. Together, these studies underscore the importance of improving students' skills in noting key details to enhance their overall reading comprehension.

Table 2.1.3
Respondents' Level of Proficiency in English: Reading Comprehension

Reading Comprehension Performance Indicators		Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Making Inferences	Very Satisfactory	3	8.57
	Satisfactory	7	20.00
	Unsatisfactory	25	71.43
TOTAL		**35**	**100.00%**

Legend: *Very Satisfactory – got 4-5 items correctly; Satisfactory – got 2-3 items correctly; Unsatisfactory – got 0-1 item correctly*

Table 2.1.3 depicts the respondents' reading comprehension skills in making inferences. The analysis indicates that a substantial majority—25 respondents, or 71.43%—performed poorly in this area, suggesting that most respondents struggled to draw accurate inferences from the texts they read. In contrast, seven respondents (20%) achieved satisfactory performance in making inferences, while only three respondents (8.57%) garnered a very satisfactory rating. Although a small number of respondents excelled in this skill, the data highlights that the majority did not perform well.

These findings align with the research by Wahyudi & Zainil (2024), which found that many students face challenges in making inferences. This is further corroborated by Fitri et al. (2022) and Warnidah (2016), who noted that the most significant difficulties students encounter involve reading for inference, particularly in narrative passages.

Making inferences is a crucial element of reading comprehension, often described as the ability to make logical guesses or "read between the lines." This skill enables readers to move beyond the literal information presented in a text, facilitating a deeper understanding of the author's intended message. Jumiati (2014) explains that readers make inferences when they integrate their personal experiences with the information gleaned from the text, resulting in new meanings or conclusions that are not explicitly stated (Zweirs, 2005).

When readers engage in inference-making, they enhance their comprehension by incorporating personal experiences, knowledge, and critical thinking. Inferences allow readers to make sense of ambiguous passages, grasp characters' motivations, predict future events, analyze cause-and-effect relationships, and identify underlying themes or messages. According to Davoudi and Moghadam (2015), a student's ability to understand a text correlates with their capacity to make inferences; the more successfully they read, the more fluent their comprehension becomes.

Furthermore, the findings of this study underscore the importance of implementing instructional strategies aimed at developing students' inference-making skills. Such strategies can explicitly teach and encourage these skills, thereby improving overall reading comprehension. This approach is supported by the study conducted by Lee et al. (2020), which investigated the effects of metacognitive strategy training on students' inferential comprehension skills. Their findings revealed that students who received metacognitive strategy training demonstrated significant improvements in their ability to make inferences compared to those who did not receive such instructional support.

Table 2.2
Respondents' Level of Proficiency in English: Journal Entry Writing

Journal Entry Writing Performance Indicators		Mean	Qualitative Description
Journal Entry Writing	Completeness and Conciseness of Content	3.06	Satisfactory
	Depth of Reflection	2.45	Fairly Satisfactory
	Vocabulary and Spelling	2.93	Satisfactory

Legend: *Very Satisfactory – 3.25-4.00; Satisfactory – 2.50-3.24; Fairly Satisfactory – 1.75-2.49; Unsatisfactory – 1.00-1.74*

Table 2.2 presents the respondents' proficiency in English as reflected in their journal entry writing. The analysis indicates that the respondents demonstrated satisfactory performance regarding the completeness and conciseness of their content, evidenced by a mean rating of 3.06. This suggests that the journal entries contained complete, accurate, and relevant information based on the respondents' experiences.

Regarding vocabulary and spelling, the mean rating of 2.93 also signifies satisfactory performance in this area. This implies that the journal entries generally featured correct spelling and appropriate vocabulary. However, further analysis reveals

that some students struggled with vocabulary and spelling. A limited vocabulary can hinder effective and precise self-expression, leading to repetitive language use and difficulties in conveying intended meanings. Similarly, spelling errors are common; students often grapple with the complexities of English spelling rules and patterns, which can result in mistakes in their writing. The English language's numerous exceptions and irregularities can further complicate spelling retention. Addressing these challenges necessitates targeted interventions and strategies. According to Smith et al. (2019), educators can enhance vocabulary through activities like word games, context-based exercises, and explicit instruction on word meanings and usage. Graham (2016) recommends using spelling drills, mnemonic devices, and word lists to improve spelling skills. Additionally, fostering regular reading habits and providing opportunities for practice and feedback are crucial for developing vocabulary and spelling proficiency.

Conversely, the mean rating of 2.45 indicates that respondents had fairly satisfactory performance concerning the depth of reflection. This suggests that they struggled to articulate their ideas, perceptions, and experiences effectively. This aligns with findings from Chen et al. (2020), who noted that students often encounter difficulties in engaging in deep reflective thinking. They highlighted that these challenges stem from surface-level reflection, limited metacognitive awareness, and a lack of strategies to facilitate deeper reflection. Their research underscores the necessity of explicit instruction and scaffolding to help students enhance their reflective depth. Baker et al. (2018) further emphasized the importance of promoting meta cognitive awareness, providing explicit prompts, and fostering a supportive learning environment to improve the depth of reflection.

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