

The Linguistic Journey: Lived Experiences of Graduating BAEL Students

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Abstract

This study explored the lived experiences of graduating Bachelor of Arts in English Language students at Tangub City Global College as they developed English language proficiency. Anchored on Cummins' Iceberg Model of Language Development, Krashen's Theory of Language Acquisition, and the Monitor Theory, the study examined students' linguistic journey, challenges, and coping mechanisms. A phenomenological-qualitative research design was employed, using a validated semi-structured interview guide administered through Google Forms. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, and responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that the BAEL program was both demanding and transformative. Students described their experiences as challenging yet fulfilling, shaped by interactive teaching, a holistic curriculum, and confidence-building activities such as presentations, debates, teaching demonstrations, practicum, and theater performances. However, they encountered difficulties involving low confidence, performance anxiety, pronunciation concerns, academic workload, research writing, time management, and balancing personal or work responsibilities. To cope, students used self-regulated learning, immersive English practice, digital tools, peer and faculty support, and a growth mindset. The study concludes that the BAEL program develops not only linguistic competence but also resilience, adaptability, confidence, and professional readiness. Recommendations include strengthening support programs in academic writing, oral communication, and time management, while expanding learner-centered and experiential learning activities. The study aligns with SDG 4 – Quality Education, SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth, and SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals. Its sustainability impact lies in supporting educational, institutional, socio-economic, and digital learning sustainability through improved language instruction, student support, and career preparation.

Keywords: BAEL Students, Coping Mechanisms, English Language Proficiency, Growth Mindset, Lived Experiences, Phenomenological-Qualitative Research, Self-Regulated Learning, Thematic Analysis

1. Introduction

English language proficiency is essential for students in English-focused programs because it shapes academic performance, communication competence, and career readiness. For graduating Bachelor of Arts in English Language (BAEL) students at Tangub City Global College, the linguistic journey is both demanding and transformative, involving challenges in confidence, oral communication, academic workload, and time management, alongside growth through immersive learning, peer and faculty support, digital tools, and a positive mindset.

English proficiency involves the ability to speak, write, read, and listen effectively in English. In higher education, especially among English majors, it supports academic success and professional preparation. However, achieving fluency remains challenging in non-native English-speaking contexts such as the Philippines. At Tangub City Global College, English is taught as a second language, yet students still encounter difficulties that affect academic performance, confidence, and future career readiness. Motivation is central to second language learning because it sustains learners' effort in overcoming linguistic difficulties (Siraji, 2024). Wang et al. (2023) emphasized that motivation, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar influence language proficiency, while insufficient interest, inadequate vocabulary, and limited training hinder progress. Jia and Cheng (2022) affirmed that positive attitudes toward English learning are linked to higher motivation, which is especially relevant for Filipino second language learners. However, Magno et al. (2024) noted that many Filipino ESL learners lack motivation to use or acquire English because they perceive it as irrelevant to their future.

Related literature indicates that English language learning is shaped by academic demands, affective factors, pedagogy, and learner agency. Students in English-focused higher education settings often experience growth when challenging coursework, performance tasks, and authentic language exposure support both linguistic and personal development (Chen et al., 2022). Teng (2021) found that students who adopted deeper approaches to English writing demonstrated stronger self-regulated learning and self-awareness. Effective pedagogy also matters. Learner-centered instruction, interactive tasks, and balanced curricula foster motivation, engagement, critical thinking, and language proficiency. In a study of Wu (2024), project-based learning combined with self-regulated learning improved motivation, metacognitive strategy use, and English

learning management. Authentic performance tasks such as debates, presentations, drama, and teaching demonstrations also strengthen self-efficacy; Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, as cited in Hartono et al. (2023), explains how socially visible performance experiences help learners build confidence. At the same time, anxiety remains a major barrier. Learners may hesitate to speak because of fear of errors, negative evaluation, pronunciation difficulties, or comparison with more proficient speakers (Tsang, 2022). Heavy academic workloads, deadlines, family expectations, and work responsibilities may also reduce time for language practice and increase stress (Tarrayo et al., 2021). Even advanced learners continue to struggle with academic writing, grammar precision, pronunciation, and lexical nuance (Esperanzate, 2025). Students respond to these challenges through self-regulated learning, immersive exposure, digital tools, and social support. Reading, listening, speaking practice, and exposure to English materials contribute to proficiency development (Zhang & Zou, 2022). Speaking self-regulation also supports confidence and fluency (Sun, 2022), while Bravo (2022) showed that stronger self-regulated learning skills are associated with better listening and speaking performance. Digital tools and feedback further help learners improve accuracy and confidence (Han et al., 2021). Psychological resilience is equally important, as growth mindset, perseverance, and positive attitudes toward mistakes support sustained learning (Jiang et al., 2024). Learners who treat mistakes as opportunities are more likely to persist and perform better (Zarrinabadi et al., 2022).

Globally, English proficiency remains important in education, employment, and intercultural communication. Nationally, the Philippines places strong emphasis on English, but many Filipino ESL learners continue to struggle with motivation, confidence, vocabulary, pronunciation, and academic communication. Locally, Tangub City Global College provides a relevant setting because BAEL students experience English as both an academic discipline and a practical communication tool. The study responds to the need for localized research on Filipino students navigating English as a second language in their immediate educational and community context.

The study is anchored on Cummins' Iceberg Model of Language Development, Krashen's Theory of Language Acquisition, and the Monitor Theory. Cummins' model explains the distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS), or conversational language, and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), or academic language. Cummins' Iceberg Model of Language Development, as cited in Arias-Hermoso and Agirre's (2023) research on interpersonal communication, is connected to Krashen's Model Theory because both emphasize dimensions of language proficiency. Krashen's Theory of Language Acquisition highlights comprehensible input, meaningful exposure, and the distinction between conscious learning and subconscious acquisition. Complementing this, Krashen's Monitor Theory, as cited in Lichtman and VanPatten's (2021) study on Krashen's Monitor Theory, explains that learners develop separate linguistic systems through conscious learning and subconscious acquisition. This idea aligns with Fraidan (2024) research, which emphasized that a low-anxiety environment supports effective language acquisition. Key concepts also clarify the study's scope. BAEL students refer to learners in a Bachelor of Arts in English Language program who acquire theoretical and practical English skills (Maine, 2022). Challenges are obstacles that hinder language acquisition and academic progress (Brown, 2001). English fluency involves effective and accurate communication through vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension (Schmitt, 2000). ESL refers to English learning among those whose first language is not English (Martínez, 2014). Language development is the process of improving language understanding and use (Main, 2022), while proficiency refers to effective English use through grammar, vocabulary, and communication skills (Christison et al., 2015). Subconscious acquisition refers to internalizing language naturally without deliberate effort (Ellis, 2008).

Although English proficiency is expected of English majors, limited research has explored the personal and lived experiences of BAEL students in local colleges such as Tangub City Global College. There is also a lack of localized research capturing how Filipino ESL learners experience English learning within their immediate institutional and community setting. This study addresses that gap by exploring how graduating BAEL students describe their linguistic journey, what challenges they face, and what strategies, resources, or coping mechanisms they use to improve their English skills.

This study aligns most directly with SDG 4 – Quality Education because it examines how English language learning, pedagogy, curriculum, and institutional support can improve students' academic development and communication competence. It also relates to SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth because English proficiency supports employability, professional communication, and readiness for future careers. SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals is also relevant in a limited educational sense because the study emphasizes collaboration among students, instructors, peers, and the institution in supporting language learning.

The study contributes to educational sustainability by identifying student experiences that can guide improvements in curriculum, teaching strategies, academic writing support, oral communication training, and confidence-building activities. It supports institutional sustainability by helping Tangub City Global College evaluate and strengthen the BAEL program based on student experiences. It also contributes to socio-economic sustainability because improved English proficiency can enhance students' academic achievement, employability, and professional readiness. The study further supports innovation and digital sustainability through its attention to digital tools such as online dictionaries, grammar checkers,

tutorials, and other technology-mediated resources used by students to improve their English skills. Its focus on confidence, anxiety, resilience, and growth mindset also connects to learner well-being within educational contexts. Constructive feedback remains important because it can correct errors while affirming progress (Gaerlan, 2016).

The study focuses on graduating BAEL students at Tangub City Global College and does not extend to other programs, year levels, or institutions. It used a phenomenological-qualitative design, which, according to Bouzioti (2023), explores phenomena through context and participant perspectives. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants whose experiences were relevant to the research questions (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015). Data collection continued until saturation, when responses began to overlap and no new themes emerged (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study also observed confidentiality, informed consent, voluntary participation, and privacy protection in line with Republic Act No. 10173, the Data Privacy Act.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a phenomenological-qualitative research design to examine the lived experiences of BAEL students in their English language learning journey. This design was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to explore how participants described their experiences, challenges, and coping strategies in depth. According to Bouzioti (2023), phenomenological research focuses on exploring the nature of phenomena, their contexts, and the perspectives of those involved.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Tangub City Global College, a higher education institution located in Maloro, Tangub City, Misamis Occidental. The college offers several academic programs, including the Bachelor of Arts in English Language program. Its location and academic environment provided the context for examining how BAEL students experience and develop English language proficiency.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents were Bachelor of Arts in English Language students from Tangub City Global College. The manuscript identifies them as 1st year to 4th year BAEL students and describes the focus as graduating BAEL students who had sufficient exposure to the program to provide detailed reflections on their linguistic journey, challenges, and coping mechanisms.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who possessed experiences relevant to the study. This approach allowed the researcher to intentionally identify individuals who could provide meaningful accounts of English language learning, proficiency challenges, and coping strategies (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015). The study initially targeted five participants, but interviews continued until data saturation was achieved, or the point when responses began to overlap and no new themes or insights emerged (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

2.5 Research Instrument

The primary research instrument was a semi-structured interview guide. It contained open-ended questions that allowed participants to describe their lived experiences, challenges in learning English, and strategies for improving proficiency. The flexible format enabled the researcher to ask prepared questions while allowing participants to elaborate on their answers in their own words. To ensure validity, the interview guide was reviewed by the adviser, dean, and editor, whose comments and recommendations were incorporated into the final version.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher first secured formal approval from Tangub City Global College before conducting the study. After approval, the validated interview guide was converted into a Google Form for easier distribution and accessibility. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and invited through official communication channels. The form included a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and informed consent. Respondents answered open-ended questions at their convenience, and their responses were later reviewed, downloaded, transcribed, and prepared for analysis. Data gathering continued until saturation was reached.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. The process began with transcription and repeated reading of the participants' answers to gain familiarity with the data. Significant statements, ideas, and recurring concepts were coded and organized into meaningful categories. These codes were then reviewed and grouped into broader themes that reflected

the students' lived experiences, academic and personal challenges, and coping mechanisms. This process allowed the researcher to identify common patterns while remaining faithful to the participants' authentic responses.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The study followed ethical procedures by informing participants about the purpose of the research and the intended use of the findings. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were allowed to withdraw at any time without negative consequences. Assent and consent forms were secured, and participants were informed that no risks were associated with their involvement. The researchers also protected confidentiality and privacy in compliance with Republic Act No. 10173, or the Data Privacy Act, which safeguards personal information.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Lived Experiences in Studying English

3.1.1 Transformative Academic Journey

The data showed that graduating BAEL students viewed their English learning journey as both challenging and fulfilling. They described the program as a process of academic and personal growth that strengthened their confidence, resilience, and ability to express themselves. Their experiences reflected a continuing movement from struggle to achievement as they adapted to coursework, performance tasks, and language-based activities. This finding suggests that the BAEL experience shaped students beyond linguistic development by also building persistence and self-awareness. Research supports that students in English-focused higher education settings often experience personal and academic transformation when challenging coursework and authentic English exposure are combined (Chen et al., 2022). Teng (2021) similarly found that students who engaged deeply in English writing developed stronger self-regulated learning and self-awareness.

3.1.2 Enabling Pedagogies and a Holistic Curriculum

The students emphasized that interactive teaching methods, approachable instructors, student-centered activities, and a balanced curriculum supported their English learning. They valued group tasks, role-plays, lectures, hands-on activities, and courses that connected language skills with critical thinking and practical use. These results indicate that effective pedagogy and curriculum design helped students connect classroom learning with real-life communication. Learner-centered instruction appears to strengthen engagement and confidence by giving students opportunities to apply English actively. Wu (2024) found that project-based learning combined with self-regulated learning improved motivation, metacognitive strategy use, and learners' ability to manage English learning.

3.1.3 Memorable Experiences that Fostered Confidence

Students identified presentations, debates, teaching demonstrations, practicum, and theater performances as meaningful experiences that improved their confidence. These activities pushed them beyond their comfort zones and allowed them to use English in authentic, performative, and socially visible situations. These findings show that experiential learning helped students bridge theory and practice while developing public speaking, teamwork, leadership, and self-assurance. According to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, as cited in Hartono et al. (2023), visible performance experiences are important in developing self-efficacy. Such activities allowed students to see English not only as a course requirement but also as a tool for expression and professional readiness.

3.2 Challenges Toward English Language Proficiency

3.2.1 Confidence and Performance Anxiety

The students reported that low confidence, stage fright, fear of grammar mistakes, pronunciation concerns, and anxiety during public speaking affected their English performance. Even after years of exposure, many still doubted their ability to speak clearly, especially in oral tasks, recitations, teaching demonstrations, and future job interviews. This result indicates that affective barriers can limit language use even when students possess linguistic knowledge. Fear of negative evaluation and concern over mistakes reduce participation and practice opportunities. This aligns with findings that EFL learners often experience anxiety in oral presentations, especially when pronunciation and speaking proficiency are involved (Tsang, 2022).

3.2.2 Academic Pressures and Multiple Responsibilities

The data showed that students struggled with heavy academic requirements, time management, personal obligations, family responsibilities, and part-time work. These overlapping demands caused stress, fatigue, and difficulty maintaining consistent language practice. This finding suggests that students' English learning was affected not only by classroom demands but also by social and personal responsibilities outside school. Academic workload and competing obligations can reduce engagement and increase stress. This is consistent with studies showing that course loads, deadlines, family expectations, and work responsibilities interfere with students' time and energy for academic and language learning tasks (Tarrayo et al., 2021).

3.2.3 Academic and Linguistic Barriers

Students also experienced difficulty with research writing, lengthy academic papers, oral fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and comprehension. These challenges persisted even in the later stages of the program, showing that advanced academic English remained demanding for graduating BAEL students. These findings suggest that language proficiency continues to develop even among students who have already gained considerable exposure to English. Academic writing, formal expression, pronunciation, and lexical accuracy require sustained practice and support. This is supported by research showing that intermediate and advanced learners still encounter challenges in academic writing, grammar precision, pronunciation, and vocabulary use (Esperanzate, 2025).

3.3 Strategies, Resources, and Coping Mechanisms

3.3.1 Self-Regulated Learning and Immersive Practice

Students improved their English skills through self-directed strategies such as reading articles and novels, writing journals, watching English movies, listening to podcasts, recording themselves, repeating phrases, and practicing with classmates. These activities showed their initiative in developing fluency beyond formal classroom instruction. This finding indicates that students relied on autonomy and repeated exposure to strengthen their English proficiency. Immersive practice supported familiarity, confidence, and skill development (Zhang & Zou, 2022). Speaking-oriented self-regulation also helped reduce hesitation and improve oral communication (Sun, 2022). Bravo (2022) likewise showed that stronger self-regulated learning skills were associated with better listening and speaking performance.

3.3.2 Digital Tools and Collaborative Support

Students used online dictionaries, grammar checkers, YouTube tutorials, Grammarly, and other digital platforms to support language learning. They also relied on teachers, classmates, peer feedback, and group study sessions for correction, encouragement, and motivation. These results show that students combined independent technology use with collaborative learning support. Digital tools helped them correct errors and access language resources, while teachers and peers provided feedback and emotional support. This aligns with findings that technology tools and feedback can improve writing performance, linguistic accuracy, and perceived self-regulated learning strategies (Han et al., 2021).

3.3.3 Positive Mindset and Adaptive Coping

Students coped with difficulties by treating mistakes as part of learning, turning failures into motivation, setting schedules, breaking tasks into smaller parts, and maintaining persistence. Their responses reflected resilience, optimism, and willingness to continue improving despite anxiety and academic pressure. This finding suggests that emotional resilience supported students' continued language development. A growth mindset helped them reinterpret mistakes as learning opportunities rather than failures. Research shows that growth beliefs and perseverance are important motivational mechanisms in EFL learning (Jiang et al., 2024), and learners who view mistakes constructively are more likely to persist and perform better (Zarrinabadi et al., 2022).

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that the BAEL program at Tangub City Global College provides a demanding yet transformative linguistic journey for graduating students. Their experiences were shaped by rigorous coursework, interactive pedagogy, curriculum design, and experiential learning activities such as debates, presentations, teaching demonstrations, and theater performances. Although students struggled with confidence, oral communication, academic workload, research writing, pronunciation, and balancing responsibilities, they developed resilience, adaptability, and communicative competence through immersive learning, self-discipline, peer and faculty support, digital tools, and a growth mindset.

Tangub City Global College is encouraged to strengthen structured support programs in academic writing, oral communication, and time management, while expanding learner-centered and experiential activities such as debates and teaching demonstrations. Faculty and staff should provide low-anxiety, confidence-building opportunities, small-group rehearsals, constructive feedback, and classroom tasks that connect conversational and academic English, including mock interviews, academic debates, and professional writing activities; feedback should correct errors while affirming student progress (Gaerlan, 2016). Students are encouraged to maintain discipline, resilience, and consistent study routines, while future researchers may further examine BAEL students' linguistic journeys across institutions or investigate the long-term impact of the program on graduates.

The study was limited to graduating BAEL students at Tangub City Global College and focused only on their lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms in relation to English language proficiency. It did not include students from other programs, year levels, or institutions, and it did not extend beyond the objectives stated in the study.

Compliance with ethical standards

This study was conducted in accordance with institutional ethical standards and with formal approval from Tangub City Global College. Participation was voluntary, and all respondents were informed of the study's purpose, their right to withdraw, and the intended use of the data before giving consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and all personal information was handled in compliance with Republic Act No. 10173, or the Data Privacy Act. The researchers acknowledge the guidance of the adviser, faculty, editor, institution, and respondents who contributed to the completion of the study. The authors declare full responsibility for the content of the research, affirm that there is no conflict of interest, and recognize that copyright ownership remains with the rightful authors and institution.

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