
***FACTORS INFLUENCING INDIGENOUS LEARNERS' IN ENGLISH
PROFICIENCY BASED ON PHIL-IRI RESULTS***

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DOI: <https://doi-10.1555/ijrpa.8788>***ABSTRACT***

This study investigated the English proficiency of Indigenous learners at Manalog Integrated School, focusing on their demographic profile, Phil-IRI reading performance, and the factors influencing English proficiency in terms of linguistic, socio-cultural, and educational dimensions. Specifically, it explored the significant relationships between Phil-IRI results and these factors, as well as differences in influence based on age and gender. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed, with 102 Indigenous learners from Grades 7 to 10 selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a questionnaire adapted from Cabaltica and Arcala (2021), which yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.742. Descriptive statistics, weighted means, standard deviations, Pearson correlation, and ANOVA were applied to analyze the data. Findings revealed that most respondents were aged 12 to 15 years, with a nearly equal distribution of male and female learners. The majority were classified at the Frustration Level in Phil-IRI, indicating low reading proficiency. Linguistic factors moderately influenced English proficiency, while socio-cultural and educational factors had high influence. No significant relationship was found between Phil-IRI performance and the influencing factors. Age significantly affected how factors influenced English proficiency, whereas gender did not. Conclusions indicate that Indigenous learners face challenges in reading comprehension and speaking, with age-related differences shaping how linguistic, socio-cultural, and educational factors affect proficiency. Based on these findings, recommendations include fostering active English reading and speaking among learners, encouraging supportive home and community environments, implementing culturally responsive instructional programs, integrating age-appropriate and interactive curriculum strategies, and conducting further research on additional variables influencing English proficiency.

KEYWORDS: Indigenous Learner, English Proficiency, PHIL-IRI Result.

INTRODUCTION

It is a widely accepted fact that English is the primary language of the world and it serves as a bridge between different peoples and cultures. The language is considered indispensable in education, business, science, and technology, thus determining and facilitating the world's participation and access (Rao, 2019). In the Philippines, English has been an official and a medium of teaching language for quite a long time consequently becoming a main instrument for academic success and professional development (Manalastas, 2022). English fluency has become a characteristic of the intellectuals and able people in the eyes of many Filipinos thus creating a professional and social mobility culture that respects the language (Santos, Fernandez, & Ilustre, 2022). However, English proficiency remains uneven, and many Filipino learners, especially those from Indigenous communities, continue to face challenges in using the language effectively. Nevertheless, despite the widespread teaching of English language in the country, the unequal access to learning the language remains a problem especially for the Indigenous community.

The Indigenous Peoples (IPs) of the Philippines are various groups that have distinct languages and customs. The native tongues serve as a connection between the communities and the different facets of life, nature, values, and collective memory (Tupas & Pefianco, 2017). For example, at the Manalog Integrated School, the Indigenous pupils are totally surrounded by a setting where their mother tongue prevails over English in daily activities. This creates a linguistic gap between the language of the family and that of the school. For these kids, English is just another subject and they are unable to use it naturally. Therefore, many Indigenous students have low English proficiency according to their Phil-IRI (Philippine Informal Reading Inventory) results, which are indicative of their struggle with English in terms of comprehension and usage in class. Thus, a big number of them are caught in the trap of language anxiety or fear of being criticized, when they have to talk in English; this, in turn, leads to their low self-image and non-participation in class (Salvacion & Napil, 2025).

The Department of Education discovered the issue through its various programs, including the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) and the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). The main aims of these projects are to produce literate individuals and to recognize and include various cultures by using the learners' first languages as the

foundation of education (DepEd, 2021). However, the struggles with changing from the native language to English teaching still affect a lot of the Indigenous children. Research indicates that flaws in teacher training and shortage of culturally suitable materials are the main factors that create an obstacle to English learning (Igarashi et al., 2024).

This implies that pedagogies and educational resources must be more culturally significant and responsive to the requirements of Indigenous learners. At Manalog Integrated School, teachers are often overwhelmed with the difficulty of making the lessons relevant to the students' culture which results in poor understanding and lack of interest (Tacio & Pelila, 2025).

This study aimed to understand the factors that influence the English proficiency of Indigenous learners at Manalog Integrated School based on their Phil-IRI results. It deals with the language background, culture, and learning environment of the students and how these aspects affect their English usage and comprehension. The research also examines the link, if any, of these factors with their Phil-IRI performance. The intended outcome is to facilitate the teaching of English in such a way that it becomes more meaningful and personalized for the Indigenous learners. Through the factors' comprehension, teachers, and schools can set up a learning environment where students are self-assured to communicate, acquire English proficiency, and be proud of their language and culture.

Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which states that language acquisition is a social process done through interaction, cultural events, and the assistance of people who are more knowledgeable than the learners (McLeod, 2024). The latter is called the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)- the area where a student can reach with help and where a student can get alone. Therefore, when help is provided to the student according to the student's needs, the student not only improves but also gets the confidence in using the language.

The influence of Vygotsky's theory on the understanding of the English proficiency of Indigenous students through the lens of linguistic, socio-cultural, and educational factors is the main point of the study. Among the linguistic factors, the following are highlighted: the interference of the mother tongue, a limited vocabulary, and grammar difficulties which all impact on the scaffolding of the English language for the students. Rarely do the learners get to practice using English if their mother tongue is used more often than English, and hence their ZPD stays static as their improvement is slowed down by the limited practice.

The socio-cultural factors consist of aspects such as family background, where the community language and cultural beliefs stand in regard to the learners, and by these factors' learners' attitudes and behavior in relation to English are created. In case the family and the community are non-English speaking, the exposure of the learners is almost nonexistent. On the other hand, the cultural practices that may disallow the speaking or correction of the learners by others may make the learners less likely to use English in classes due to their fear of being wrong.

The educational factors include teaching techniques, learning resources, and the classroom atmosphere. They are the facilitators that help the learners move from the point of what they can do now to the point of what they can do with the help of others. If the teacher gives step-by-step directions, uses straightforward and meaningful materials, and establishes a friendly and supportive classroom, the learners will be more inclined to practice and thereby improve their English skills.

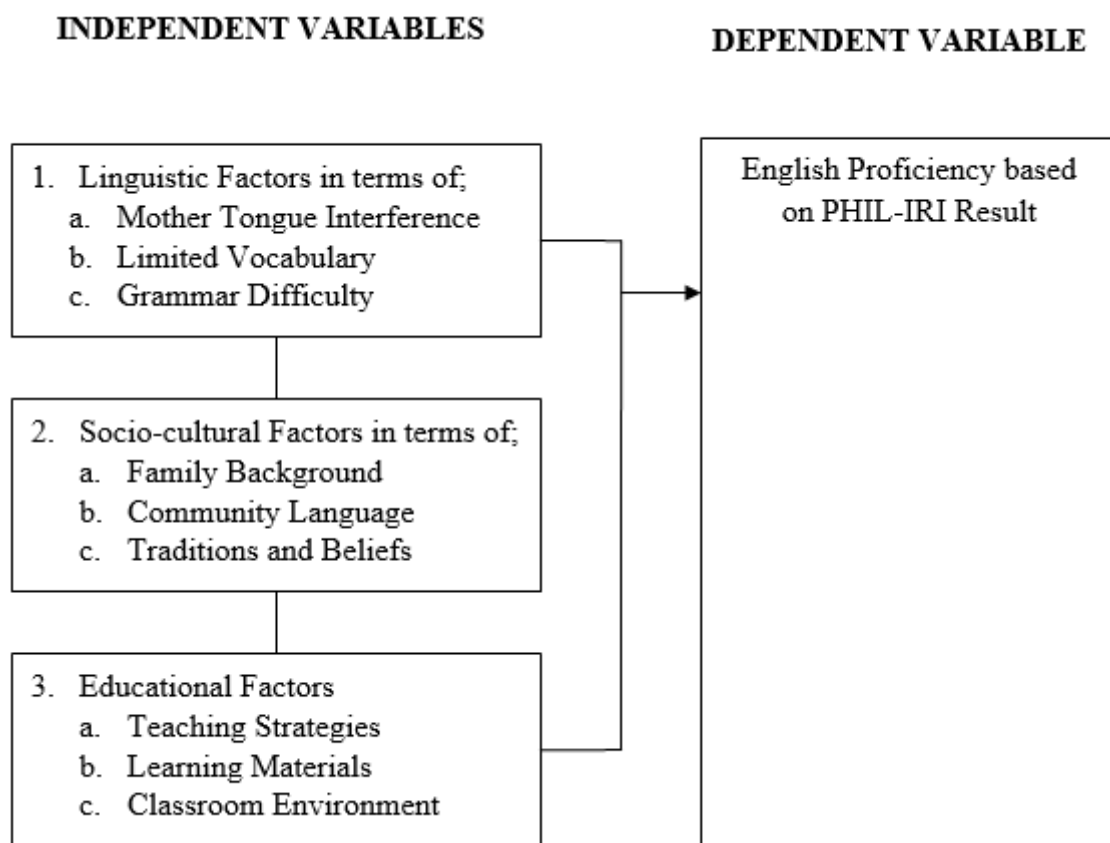


Figure 1. The diagram shows the relationship between linguistic, socio-cultural, and educational factors (independent variables) and the English Proficiency based on PHIL-IRI Result (dependent variable).

Statement of the Problem

This study sought to determine the factors that drive or impede the Indigenous learners' proficiency in the English language at Manalog Integrated School, based on their Phil-IRI performance. Specifically, it sought to answer the following sub problem:

1. What is the demographic profile of the indigenous learners in terms of: age and gender?
2. What is the level of Phil-IRI results of the Indigenous learners?
3. What are the factors influences on English proficiency level in terms of: linguistic, socio-cultural, and educational factors?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the demographic profile of the respondents when they are shaped according to age and gender?
5. Is there a significant difference between the linguistic, socio cultural and educational factors based on the Phil-Iri Results?

Significance of the Study

This study was important because it explains why Indigenous learners at Manalog Integrated School find it hard to speak English. The findings would help teachers, school leaders, and other stakeholders improve how English is taught and learned, especially for Indigenous learners.

For the Learners, this study can help Indigenous learners understand the reasons behind their struggles in speaking English. Knowing these factors can motivate them to practice more and gain confidence in using English in class and daily conversations.

For the Teachers, the results can guide teachers in using better teaching strategies that fit the needs of Indigenous learners. It can also help them create lessons, activities, and materials that are simple, meaningful, and related to the learners' culture.

For the School Administrators, the findings can help school leaders plan programs and training that support both teachers and learners. It can also help them make a more inclusive school environment where Indigenous learners feel comfortable learning and speaking English.

For the Curriculum Developers and Policymakers, this study can give useful information for improving English language programs in schools with Indigenous learners. It supports the creation of lessons and materials that value both English learning and Indigenous culture.

For the Future Researchers, this study can serve as a reference for other researchers who want to study language learning and Indigenous education. It can also inspire new studies on how to help students overcome difficulties in speaking English in different cultural settings.

Delimitation of the Study

This study will be limited to teachers' perceptions in the Impasugong 1 District. The findings may not be generalizable to other contexts. The study will focus specifically on the effectiveness of the Marungko Approach and the level of the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA). Other literacy interventions and assessment tools will not be included. The study will focus on the teachers' perceptions as the respondents.

The data on the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) will be limited to teachers in Grades 1 to 3 in the District of Impasugong 1, Division of Bukidnon, for the school year 2023-2024.

Review of the Literature

Linguistic Factors Affecting English Speaking Skills

The linguistic aspects of communication are, in fact, one of the most important factors in communication and performance in English of learners. One of the most serious linguistic problems is the interference of the mother tongue, the phenomenon in which the native language of the learner noticeably and sometimes even more than others, affects the learner's pronunciation, grammar, and usage of English. According to Irene et al. (2023), learners usually unconsciously transfer the sound patterns and the structure of the sentences from their native language, which consequently results in grammatical errors and mispronunciations. This kind of interference in communication takes a toll on the fluency of their ideas expressed in English. On the other hand, Dela Cruz and Angel (2025) reported that children who are taught in their mother tongue first encounter the challenge of unlearning its patterns when they begin learning English. Raut's (2024) study brought to light that the students, who resort to their vernacular more frequently than English outside the classroom, have less opportunity for practicing English and, thus, lower self-esteem and less motivation to talk.

Still another significant linguistic feature is vocabulary development, which is an indispensable tool for the unambiguous communication of thoughts. González-Fernández and Schmitt (2018) pointed out that vocabulary knowledge is much more than just knowing the words, they include awareness of pronunciation, meaning, spelling, and the way the words are used in context. Learners with a small vocabulary are often forced to use only the most basic or most repetitive words, thus limiting their capability to deliver complicated thoughts. According to a report by Cabaltica and Arcala (2021), the shortage of vocabulary results in hesitation, pauses, and very short replies during conversations. Indigenous students, who do not get much exposure to English outside of school, have to cope with slow vocabulary

development. This limitation in the number of words they know affects their fluency and overall ability to take an active part in English communication.

Educational Factors Affecting English-Speaking Development

The educational background of the students very much counts among the factors determining the level of English-speaking proficiency that a given student can reach. Ghafar and Raad (2023) state that effective English-speaking instruction requires grammar lessons and memorization but also and mainly means communicative approaches for the learners to use the language in real situations. Among the techniques used are role-playing, storytelling, and collaborative discussions which help learners build confidence besides their fluency and pronunciation being improved. These methods create an interactive environment where students can communicate their ideas without being afraid of making mistakes.

Rahmawati et al. (2025) pointed out the main features of a supportive academic environment, technology integration, and adaptive teaching methods. According to them, digital platforms, videos, and online discussions are making the speaking practice for learners more dynamic and motivating because they are providing the learners with very engaging spaces. Such environments not only promote linguistic flexibility but also enhance the students' willingness to talk.

Difficulties of Indigenous Learners in Speaking English

Indigenous learners have a difficult time as far as acquiring English-speaking skills is concerned. According to Leño et al. (2019), the major reason for many Indigenous students not being able to pronounce words correctly, build sentences, and pick good words is their mother tongue. The major phonological and grammatical differences between English and their native languages make it nigh impossible to acquire perfect speech patterns. Besides, the very limited exposure that the learners have to English-speaking environments makes overcoming the problem of not being confident and fluent in speech even harder.

Zhao et al. (2024) talked about how students from Indigenous and ethnic minority backgrounds have to deal with barriers that are multilayered, individual, familial, and institutional. To be specific, they suffer from a lack of English materials, lack of family support for language practice, and not finding enough English-speaking role models. The combined effect of these factors is an ecological system that hinders language development in both home and school settings.

Phil-IRI as a Measure of English Proficiency

The Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) is the reading appraisal done by the Department of Education (DepEd) aimed at evaluating students' skills to read and draw the meaning of texts in both English and Filipino. Additionally, it allows teachers to see student's performance areas clearly, such as word recognition, fluency, and comprehension. The DepEd Pangasinan (2024) stipulated that the Phil-IRI is the assessment tool for Key Stages 2 and 3 to classify students into three groups—independent, instructional, and frustration. This classification is a support for the teachers to know the level of help needed for each student through the reading and language skills development. The assessment is one of the most valuable resources, as it gives an unambiguous view of students' potential and also helps the teachers to devise the very lessons that would be suitable for the students' needs.

Llego (2018) described how the updated Phil-IRI has shifted its focus towards comprehension rather than just reading aloud. It consists of both oral and silent reading tests that assess students' understanding of what they read, rather than just their pronunciation skills. In addition, the Phil-IRI aligns with DepEd's objective of raising the literacy level of the students, particularly in English, which is the language commonly used in the civil primary across the nation. The outcome is that teachers' proper reading lesson planning, simple learning materials production, as well as the designing of remedial programs for the less privileged in reading and comprehending English texts, are supportive of the teachers' efforts.

Research Methodology

Research Design

A qualitative descriptive-correlational research method was applied in the study to explore the relationship among language, socio-cultural, educational factors and the English language proficiency of Indigenous students at Manalog Integrated School. The descriptive part of the study would show the learners' current situation and the challenges they face in learning English. The correlational part was show if these factors are considerably influencing proficiency in English as indicated by Phil-IRI scores. The approach is very appropriate as it lets the researcher obtain quantitative data and apply statistical methods to detect patterns, relations, and differences among variables. Thomas and Zubkov (2023) confirm that quantitative research supports researchers in gathering data that can be measured and also in using statistical methods to get a thorough understanding of how variables correlate. The research project that integrates both descriptive and correlational approaches seek to provide

a transparent and unbiased account of the English proficiency of Indigenous learners that is determined by these factors.

Research Locale

The research was conducted at Manalog Integrated School in Barangay Manalog, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon. The school primarily serves Indigenous learners from the Higaonon tribe and is situated in a mountainous and remote area where the local language is mostly used for everyday communication. This location is ideal for the study since it represents a community with limited exposure to English and a strong influence of the mother tongue on learners learning experiences.

Findings

Most of the respondents were in ages 12 to 15 years old. In terms of gender, they were almost equally divided into male and female.

Most of the respondents were in the Frustration Level in Phil-IRI results.

The Factors influences on English proficiency level in terms of linguistic was moderate, in terms of socio-cultural was high and in terms of educational factor was also high.

The test of significant relationship between the level of Phil_IRI and the factors influences on English proficiency level in terms of: linguistic, socio-cultural, and educational factors were not significant.

There is a significant difference on the factors that influence on English proficiency level when the respondents are grouped according to age. There was no significant difference when they were grouped according to gender.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the following conclusions can be drawn:

The respondents were primarily early to mid-adolescents, with most aged between 12 and 15 years old. It indicates that the study focused on learners at a critical stage of language development where exposure, cognitive maturity, and classroom experience play important roles in English learning. The gender distribution of the respondents was nearly equal, with both male and female learners well-represented.

Most respondents demonstrated low English reading proficiency, as reflected by the majority being classified under the Frustration Level in the Phil-IRI results. This implies that these Indigenous learners face challenges in reading comprehension and require additional instructional support to improve their English literacy.

The factors influencing English proficiency differed in impact, with linguistic factors rated as moderate, and socio-cultural and educational factors rated as high.

The level of Phil-IRI reading proficiency was not significantly related to any of the influencing factors which means that reading performance and the factors shaping English-speaking skills operate independently. This implies that even when learners face challenges in speaking, these do not necessarily affect their reading comprehension levels.

Age significantly affects how factors influence English proficiency, while gender does not. Learners of different age groups experience linguistic, socio-cultural, and educational influences differently, likely due to differences in cognitive development, exposure to English, and classroom participation.

Based on the conclusions of the study, the following research-based recommendations are proposed for learners, parents, school administrators,

Indigenous learners are encouraged to actively engage in both English reading and speaking activities, such as group discussions, storytelling, and vocabulary-building exercises. They should also practice self-directed reading at home, which can help bridge the gap between speaking confidence and reading comprehension, especially for those at the Frustration Level in Phil-IRI.

Parents are recommended to create a supportive home environment that promotes the use of English in daily activities. Encouraging conversations in English, providing reading materials suited to the learner's level, and modeling correct language use can strengthen both vocabulary and comprehension while fostering confidence in speaking.

School leaders may implement programs and activities that address both the linguistic and socio-cultural needs of Indigenous learners. This includes offering after-class reading and speaking clubs, providing additional instructional support for struggling readers, and ensuring culturally responsive teaching practices are in place to make English learning more inclusive and meaningful.

The curriculum may integrate strategies that combine reading and oral communication practice, tailored to learners' developmental stages. Age-appropriate and culturally relevant materials, interactive lessons, and adaptive teaching methods can help learners improve both English proficiency and reading comprehension simultaneously, addressing the moderate to high influence of educational and socio-cultural factors.

Further studies are recommended to explore additional variables affecting Indigenous learners' English proficiency, such as digital literacy, peer interactions, and motivation.

Researchers may also examine teaching strategies for enhancing both Phil-IRI performance and communicative competence.

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