

Phonological Processes and Oral Language Proficiency as Moderated by Ethnolinguistic Group

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ABSTRACT: In multilingual educational settings, such as the Philippines, linguistic diversity presents ongoing challenges to equitable oral language development. This study investigates the relationship between phonological processing and oral language proficiency among senior high school students at San Pablo City Integrated High School, with a particular focus on the moderating effect of ethnolinguistic background. While phonological awareness is widely recognized as essential for early reading and language acquisition, its role in secondary education, particularly in multilingual contexts, remains underexplored. This study aims to fill that gap by determining whether phonological processing predicts oral language skills and whether students' first language affects this relationship. Using a correlational research design, 60 students were selected, equally representing Tagalog and non-Tagalog ethnolinguistic groups. Data were gathered through the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) to assess both phonological and oral language proficiency. Statistical methods included Pearson correlation, independent t-tests, and moderated regression analysis. Results showed a significant positive correlation between phonological processing and oral language proficiency ($r = 0.591$, $p < 0.001$), with Tagalog speakers performing better overall. Moreover, regression analysis indicated that ethnolinguistic background significantly moderated this relationship ($\beta = 0.0425$, $p = 0.0137$), suggesting that non-Tagalog students rely more heavily on phonological skills to develop oral proficiency. The findings highlight the enduring importance of phonological awareness beyond early literacy, especially for students learning in a second or third language. This study extends current understanding of language development in secondary multilingual contexts and underscores the need for linguistically responsive teaching strategies. It calls for educational reforms that include differentiated phonological instruction and targeted support for non-dominant language speakers to address inequities in multilingual classrooms.

KEYWORDS: Phonological processes, Oral language proficiency, Ethnolinguistics, Philippine Informal Reading Inventory, Multilingual learners, English as a second language

INTRODUCTION

"Sir, I know the answer, p'ede po'ng Tagalog?"

This common remark from the researcher's senior high school students became more than just a simple day-to-day classroom encounter with his students—it became a question that sparked further exploration. Why is it that after more than a decade of being exposed to English, many Filipino students still struggle to speak the language clearly and confidently? This question arises from the researcher's daily interactions with different students in a typical Philippine classroom, motivating the exploration of this topic.

Even with an emphasis placed on catering to English in the education system, alongside professionally guided lessons, most learners struggle when faced with the expectation of expressing themselves adequately in English and engaging in productive conversations. This challenge stems from more underlying issues than a mere lack of words and structure. As the researcher noticed, it relates closely to how students articulate words, which is often influenced by their first language or local speech patterns. These phonological features, while perfectly acceptable in their ethno-linguistic communities, usually hinder the learners from achieving clear and fluent English speech.

The observations made have led the researcher to explore the Philippines' linguistics in more depth. English is considered the second official language in the Philippines, adopted during the American colonization. Although it serves as a medium of instruction at all levels, English is also widely used in business, government activities, and the media. The country once took pride in being home to one of the most English-proficient populations in Asia. But, not anymore. This view has changed quite swiftly. A recent shift in policies and educational reforms has changed the language teaching practices in the Philippines. The widely

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debated removal of Filipino and Panitikan from the college syllabus due to CHED Memorandum Order No. 20 [1], along with the recent Senate Bill 2457 doing away with mother tongue teaching at Grades 1 to 3 [2], seem to indicate a return to the use of Filipino and English as the predominant languages of the education system. Although these reforms are intended to rationalize the education system, they appear to neglect the development of first language (L1) and second language (L2) cognates, a concept that many linguists, such as Stephen Krashen, have argued for.

The consequences of these changes are emerging. Given the Philippines' reputation as an English-speaking country, the recent data is quite alarming. According to a 2023 study conducted by the British Council, only 55% of Filipinos can speak English [3], which is a concerning figure compared to other estimates. International rankings also paint a grim picture with the Philippines plummeting from 13th place in the EF English Proficiency Index in 2016 to 27th in 2020, only to slightly recover to 18th in 2021 and 16th in 2022 [4]. These data suggest that there is an ongoing concern regarding the English education system in the Philippines, alongside the development of socio-linguistic factors that impact the mastery of spoken language.

Because speaking is one of the most immediate and valuable skills to master, it has been taught in many classrooms due to its effectiveness in social and occupational settings. However, it is still one of the most complex skills to acquire, especially when the learner's native language phonology interferes with their ability to form English sounds correctly. This is particularly true for a multilingual nation like the Philippines, which boasts over 170 languages and dialects that influence learners' speech perception and production. These languages do not exist purely as theoretical constructs; they directly affect students' academic achievement, potential career opportunities, and international competitiveness.

With this context, the concern becomes phrased this way: What influence do phonological processes, especially those resulting from an ethnolinguistic background of a learner, have on English oral proficiency? What degree do these phonological features restrict or aid the ability to communicate in a second language?

The researcher's first-hand encounter with learners whose English communicative competence is hindered due to their native phonological systems motivated this study. The problem is more complex than just grammar and vocabulary; it involves issues of intelligibility, clarity, and functionality in speech. The study aimed to fill the gap in the literature on the impact of local accents on the performance of oral English, considering language acquisition through an ethnolinguistic lens.

This research aimed to investigate the relationship between phonological processes and English oral language proficiency, while considering the moderating role of the students' ethnolinguistic group. The goal was to identify specific phonological tendencies that either aid or hinder oral proficiency, thereby providing evidence-based insights for educators, curriculum developers, and language policy makers. By understanding how students' linguistic backgrounds shape their English language skills, more inclusive and responsive instructional strategies can be developed.

Furthermore, this study aimed to contribute to the broader discourse on multilingual education, particularly in contexts where language diversity intersects with national goals for global competitiveness.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to examine the relationship between phonological processes and oral language proficiency among senior high school students, with particular attention to the moderating influence of their ethnolinguistic backgrounds. This aim stemmed from persistent classroom observations indicating that students from diverse linguistic communities demonstrate varying degrees of difficulty in English oral communication, often marked by issues in pronunciation, fluency, and grammatical accuracy.

The first objective of the study was to determine the phonological process levels of students. Phonological processes—such as substitution, omission, insertion, and vowel distortions—often occur unconsciously and reflect the learners' attempts to simplify difficult sound patterns. By evaluating the prevalence and intensity of these processes, the study sought to identify which specific phonological errors were most common among learners, and how these varied between Tagalog and non-Tagalog groups. This objective was essential for understanding how native language systems interfere with the acquisition of English sound patterns.

The second objective was to assess students' oral language proficiency, operationalized through five key components: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. These dimensions are widely recognized as critical to effective spoken communication, especially in academic settings. Measuring these aspects provided a multifaceted view of students' speaking abilities and allowed for a more accurate interpretation of how phonological competence influences broader oral communication skills.

The third objective was to establish whether there is a significant relationship between phonological processing and oral language proficiency. Drawing from the theoretical foundations of Natural Phonology and previous empirical studies, this objective tested the assumption that strong phonological awareness correlates with higher oral performance. A significant relationship would affirm the hypothesis that phonological skills are foundational to language production and could justify the inclusion of phonology-focused interventions in high school curricula.

The fourth objective was to explore the moderating role of ethnolinguistic background in the relationship between phonological processing and oral proficiency. This objective addressed whether the impact of phonological processes on oral language outcomes varies depending on the students' native language group. It was premised on the theory that language acquisition is

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shaped not only by universal linguistic mechanisms but also by the learner's cultural and linguistic context. By identifying whether non-Tagalog speakers, for instance, rely more heavily on phonological processing than their Tagalog counterparts, the study sought to contribute to more equitable and culturally responsive language instruction.

Finally, the fifth objective involved comparing the phonological process levels and oral language proficiency between Tagalog and non-Tagalog learners. This comparative lens allowed the study to highlight linguistic disparities and understand the role of dominant and non-dominant language groups in the context of English instruction. Understanding these differences can inform differentiated instruction, ensuring that all learners—regardless of L1 background—receive the support they need to succeed in oral communication.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive-correlational and comparative research design to examine the relationship between phonological processes and oral language proficiency and to explore the moderating role of ethnolinguistic background. A total of 60 Grade 11 students from San Pablo City Integrated High School were selected through purposive and stratified random sampling. The sample consisted of 30 native Tagalog speakers and 30 non-Tagalog speakers. All participants were enrolled in the subject Oral Communication in Context, which was taught by the researcher.

To identify non-Tagalog participants, the researcher conducted a comprehensive linguistic profiling of all senior high school students in the school. Thirty non-Tagalog students—both male and female—were purposively selected, while another thirty Tagalog native speakers were randomly chosen from the same population to ensure balanced group representation.

To measure the variables of interest, the study utilized adapted and standardized tools. Phonological processes were assessed using a modified version of the Phil-IRI tool, originally developed by the Department of Education for oral reading fluency. The modification was based on the phonological criteria outlined in Ken M. Bleile's *Manual of Articulation and Phonological Disorders* (1995), focusing exclusively on phonological patterns such as substitution, omission, and vowel distortion.

For evaluating oral language proficiency, the study adopted the standardized scoring rubric developed by David P. Harris in his 1969 book *Testing English as a Second Language*. Additionally, the structured interview questionnaire incorporated adapted elements from the Texas Oral Proficiency Test, designed to assess the oral proficiency of migrant students and teachers in Texas.

The questionnaire was composed of three sections: (1) ethnolinguistic background classification, (2) phonological processing, and (3) oral language proficiency. Its content was developed based on related literature and validated by English language experts. Revisions were made following consultations with school heads and a statistician to ensure content and construct validity. The instrument was also pre-tested with 10 senior high school students, who were not included in the final sample.

The data collection process began with securing formal approval from relevant institutional authorities, in compliance with ethical research standards. Once approved, the researcher and his team finalized the instruments after multiple rounds of validation by two Master Teachers and the Head Teacher of the English Department. A dry run was conducted with a group of students to identify and resolve any issues related to validity or reliability. Final adjustments were made based on the feedback received during this pilot phase.

Participants were scheduled for one-on-one oral assessments in a quiet, designated room within the school. Informed consent was obtained from each student, including permission to be audio-recorded during the assessments. The three instruments—the ethnolinguistic background survey, phonological assessment, and oral language proficiency test—were administered during these sessions.

A panel of three English teachers, including the researcher, administered and scored the assessments. All evaluators had graduate-level training or were currently enrolled in graduate programs related to language education. To ensure inter-rater reliability, each participant was rated independently by the panel, and their average scores were computed. All assessment data were meticulously tabulated and organized for statistical analysis.

Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics—frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations—were used to summarize the respondents' profiles, phonological processes, and oral language proficiency levels. These metrics provided an initial understanding of the distribution and trends within the dataset (Creswell, 2014) [5].

To determine the relationship between phonological processing and oral language proficiency, Pearson's correlation coefficient was employed. This test measured the strength and direction of linear associations between the two continuous variables, offering insights into how specific phonological traits—such as vowel omission or sound transposition—correlated with oral communication outcomes (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009) [6].

To compare the performance of Tagalog and non-Tagalog students, independent samples t-tests were used to determine significant group-level differences in both phonological processing and oral language proficiency. This comparative approach helped validate hypotheses concerning the impact of ethnolinguistic background on English language acquisition (Field, 2013) [7].

Finally, to explore the moderating effect of ethnolinguistic background, the study employed regression-based moderation analysis. This statistical procedure assessed whether the strength of the relationship between phonological processing and oral language proficiency varied depending on students' ethnolinguistic group. The analysis revealed whether phonological skills played a more

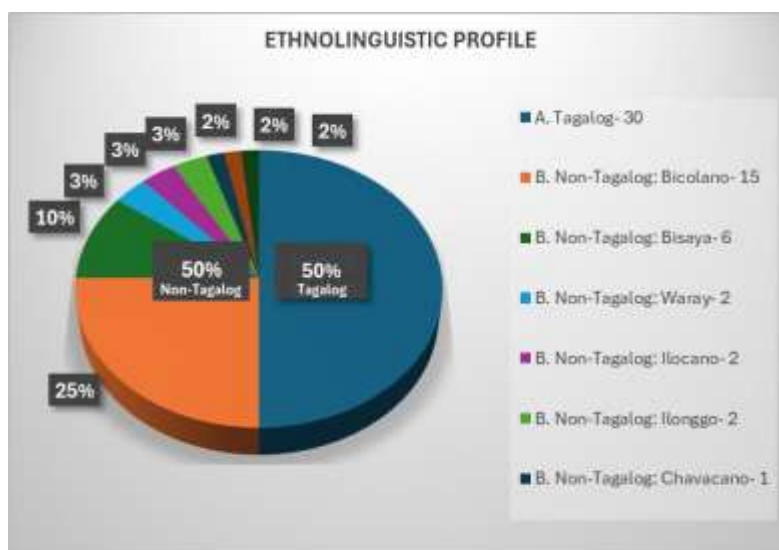
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critical role for non-Tagalog students in developing oral proficiency, as is often hypothesized in linguistically diverse learning environments (Hayes, 2018) [8].

This rigorous and layered methodological approach ensured a comprehensive and reliable analysis of how phonological processes and ethnolinguistic background interact to influence students' English oral language proficiency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure1: Ethnolinguistic Profile



The graph revealed a balanced distribution of Tagalog ($n = 30$) and non-Tagalog ($n = 30$) students, with the latter representing a variety of Philippine ethnolinguistic groups. The non-Tagalog group comprised students from Bicolano, Bisaya, Waray, Ilocano, Ilonggo, Chavacano, Sambal, and Kapampangan backgrounds. This diversity reflects the linguistic complexity of classrooms in the Philippines, where learners' first languages often differ from the languages used in academic instruction.

The heterogeneity of language backgrounds implies that students bring with them different phonological systems and linguistic structures, which can influence how they acquire oral language proficiency in the school's language of instruction, often Tagalog or English.

According to Sapir (2013), language is a reflection of the civilization that produced it, and the interconnection between language and culture influences how individuals comprehend and interact with the world [9]. Fishman (2015) notes that acknowledging such linguistic and cultural diversity is essential to enhance communication and prevent cultural misunderstandings in educational settings [10].

The diversity in students' linguistic backgrounds necessitates differentiated instruction and the inclusion of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategies. Teachers must be sensitive to these differences and use strategies that bridge students' first languages to the target language of instruction.

Table 1: Level of Phonological Process among the Non-Tagalog and Tagalog Learners

Ethnolinguistic Profile	Level of Phonological Process		Total	Overall Level of Phonological Process	
				M	Level
Non-Tagalog	30	0	30	74.86	Frustration
Tagalog	18	12	30	85.54	Frustration
Total	48	12	60	80.20	Frustration

The results revealed that both Tagalog and non-Tagalog students fell under the "Frustration" level in terms of phonological processing. At this level, learners experience significant difficulty with phonological tasks (Shaywitz, 2003) [11]. According to Ehri et al. (2001), such learners require intensive and individualized instruction through systematic phonological awareness programs [12]. Emphasizing gradual skill acquisition and building confidence through incremental success is essential for supporting students in this category.

Despite all students being classified under the Frustration level, Tagalog students demonstrated a higher mean score ($M = 85.54$) compared to non-Tagalog students ($M = 74.86$). This suggests that Tagalog speakers have stronger phonological manipulation

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skills, possibly due to their greater familiarity with the language of instruction, which they use both academically and in everyday communication. In contrast, non-Tagalog students may face cognitive interference from their first language (L1) when performing phonological tasks in a second or third language.

This result aligns with the researcher's firsthand observations of diverse phonological patterns among students within a single classroom. These variations have a significant impact on students' classroom performance, with many still struggling to express themselves in English, even at the Senior High School level. This outcome falls short of the expectations set by the Department of Education's funneling of competencies, which assumes that students at this stage should already demonstrate proficiency in English communication.

Linguistic background plays a key role in phonological processing. In non-English-speaking countries, pronunciation errors among second language (L2) learners are often influenced by the phonological structure of their L1. Some native languages lack specific phonemes found in English, which results in difficulties in sound production and, consequently, pronunciation errors (Udtu, 2016) [13]. Diani and Azwandi (2021) and Josef (2013) state that L2 learners often undergo phonological reorganization, which ultimately alters the way sounds are produced [14] [15]. Melienia (2021) also claims that mispronunciations are primarily caused by phonological processes, specifically omission and substitution, as a result of the contrast between native and target phonological processes [16].

Despite its importance in spoken communication, pronunciation is frequently overlooked in English language instruction (Suwartono et al., 2015) [17]. This neglect may stem from misconceptions about the content and approach of pronunciation education, as well as the perceived complexity of English pronunciation. Jones et al. (2021) emphasize that practical English-speaking skills require clear articulation and proper pronunciation—skills that are often not prioritized in formal language curricula [18]. Consequently, learners are encouraged to take personal responsibility for developing their pronunciation skills independently.

Mastery of English pronunciation is also crucial for the development of reading comprehension. English includes a broad range of phonemes that learners must master to pronounce words accurately, which, in turn, supports decoding and comprehension (Udtu, 2016) [13]. However, as Jones et al. (2021) note, mastering these skills is particularly challenging for students learning English as a second language [18]. Given the global status of Standard English, adhering to its phonological norms becomes both a challenge and a necessity.

The overall findings highlight the importance of explicit phonological instruction, particularly for non-Tagalog students in upper-grade levels. Moreover, it highlights the importance of integrating sound-based decoding and manipulation activities among students to strengthen their phonological foundations, which are essential for advanced language skills. Without targeted support, learners may continue to struggle with both spoken and written English, limiting their academic and communicative competence.

Table 2: Level of Oral Language Proficiency among the Non-Tagalog and Tagalog Learners

Non-Tagalog	M (raw score)	Phil-IRI score	Level
Pronunciation	3.61	72.13	Beginning
Grammar	3.31	66.13	Beginning
Vocabulary	3.39	67.87	Beginning
Fluency	3.21	64.13	Beginning
Comprehension	4.59	91.87	Advanced
Tagalog	M (raw score)	Phil-IRI score	Level
Pronunciation	4.12	82.40	Approaching Proficiency
Grammar	4.09	81.73	Approaching Proficiency
Vocabulary	4.01	80.27	Approaching Proficiency
Fluency	3.89	77.87	Developing
Comprehension	4.61	92.13	Advanced

In the assessment of oral language proficiency across five components—pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension—Tagalog students consistently outperformed their non-Tagalog peers in all domains except comprehension. Tagalog students were generally at the “Approaching Proficiency” level in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, while non-Tagalog students were at the “Beginning” level. Interestingly, both groups achieved “Advanced” levels in comprehension, suggesting that receptive language skills are more developed than expressive skills, particularly for non-Tagalog students. This discrepancy may be attributed to their ability to understand oral input while still struggling to produce accurate and fluent speech due to phonological and syntactic challenges in a non-native language.

This aligns with the findings of Cummins (2013), who defines oral language competency as a multifaceted ability that includes syntax, vocabulary, and pragmatic understanding [19]. However, Suwartono et al. (2015) and Jones et al. (2021) point out that

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pronunciation—one of the key areas where non-Tagalog students struggled—is often neglected in language curricula despite its vital role in communication [17] [18]. Moreover, Berowa and Regala-Flores (2020) explain that the Philippine context,

characterized by multilingualism and interlanguage phenomena, often results in variation in oral proficiency based on the learner's L1 [20].

For non-Tagalog learners, classroom instruction tends to be more effective when it places greater emphasis on oral production activities. Tasks that encourage spoken language output—such as oral recitations, interactive speaking exercises, and pronunciation practice—have been observed to support language development. Additionally, listening comprehension may serve as a foundational skill that supports the progression toward more complex oral language tasks.

Table 3: Relationship between Phonological Process and Oral Language Proficiency

Phonological awareness	Language Proficiency	
	Pearson Correlation	.591**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	60

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A significant positive correlation ($r = 0.591$, $p = 0.000$) was found between students' phonological processing abilities and their oral language proficiency. This indicates a strong and consistent relationship: students with higher phonological awareness also tend to perform better in oral language tasks. Phonological awareness likely supports the development of expressive language skills such as pronunciation and fluency by enabling learners to better encode and retrieve words during speech.

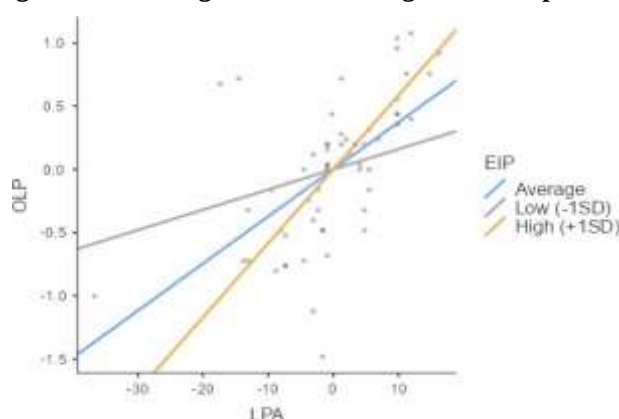
This is supported by research from Shao et al. (2019), who found that phonological awareness is a strong predictor of oral language success, particularly in multilingual learners [21]. Similarly, Roth et al. (2017) and Sánchez et al. (2016) found that unresolved phonological processes such as vowel fronting or transposition could lead to persistent problems in pronunciation and grammar, affecting overall proficiency [22][23]. These findings reinforce the theoretical model that phonological processing underpins expressive language development.

The relationship confirms that phonological awareness should not be confined to early reading instruction but must be an integral part of oral language development at all levels. Teachers should integrate phonological activities such as sound blending, segmentation, and syllable manipulation into language instruction to improve both oral fluency and clarity.

Table 4: Moderating Role of Ethnolinguistic Group

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	5.7086	1.8694	3.0537	0.0035	1.9638	9.4535
LPP	-0.0265	0.0237	-1.1188	0.2680	-0.0740	0.0210
ETHNO	-3.2856	1.3762	-2.3875	0.0204	-6.0424	-0.5288
LPP*ETHNO	0.0425	0.0167	2.5449	0.0137	0.0090	0.0760

Figure 2: Simple Slope Plot Showing the Moderating Role of Ethnolinguistic Group



Regression analysis revealed that the relationship between phonological processing and oral language proficiency is significantly

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moderated by ethnolinguistic background ($p = 0.0137$). A simple slope plot indicates that this relationship is stronger among non-Tagalog students, suggesting that phonological skills play a more critical role in their oral language development. In contrast, the relationship is weaker for Tagalog students, likely due to their greater exposure to and familiarity with the language of instruction, which may buffer them against phonological deficits.

This statistical result aligns with the researcher's everyday classroom experiences. In a linguistically diverse classroom, it is consistently observed that non-Tagalog students face more pronounced difficulties in oral communication tasks. Many of these students struggle with pronunciation, fluency, and spontaneous speech, which often hinders their participation in classroom discussions. In contrast, Tagalog-speaking students tend to express themselves more confidently and fluidly in the same tasks. This contrast reflects the moderating role of ethnolinguistic background as indicated by the regression analysis, where phonological processing appears to have a stronger influence on oral proficiency among non-native speakers of the instructional language.

These classroom observations are further supported by previous studies. Wang and Kuo (2017) and Wells and Wells (2019) found that learners from different linguistic backgrounds exhibit varied phonological patterns and learning trajectories in acquiring oral proficiency [24][25]. Similarly, Gonzalez et al. (2020) noted that ethnolinguistic identity can influence learners' motivation and confidence, both of which are crucial to successful language performance [26].

The findings suggest that phonological instruction may be especially important for learners who are acquiring oral language skills in a language other than their mother tongue. While the researcher's Tagalog-speaking students appear to benefit from their daily immersion in the language of instruction, non-Tagalog students often require more targeted support to overcome the phonological barriers that impede their oral communication. Recent literature has increasingly acknowledged the moderating role of ethnolinguistics—particularly how a learner's first language and cultural background shape second language acquisition. For instance, Wang and Kuo (2017) reported that learners from tonal languages, such as Mandarin, exhibit different phonological patterns compared to those from non-tonal languages [24]. These structural differences lead to distinct challenges in acquiring pronunciation and fluency in a second language.

Cultural and linguistic backgrounds also influence academic language use. Lee (2016) emphasized that effective academic communication requires not only language proficiency but also cultural competence [27]. Cultural norms and discourse practices impact how learners structure their oral and written communication. Wang and Li (2015) similarly noted that grammatical and lexical structures of a learner's first language can either facilitate or interfere with academic English acquisition [28]. For example, Chinese learners have been found to struggle with article usage and academic vocabulary due to the limited equivalence between the Chinese and English lexicons (Chen, 2013) [29].

Wells and Wells (2019) observed that bilingual and multilingual learners frequently show more complex phonological errors, a result of interference from multiple language systems [25]. However, these learners also tend to develop more adaptive language learning strategies over time. Aronin and Singleton (2014) reinforced this, noting that multilingual students often demonstrate greater flexibility in handling phonological variation, even when faced with unfamiliar phonetic structures [30].

Finally, Gonzalez et al. (2020) highlighted the psychological aspect of language learning by showing that students who perceive their native language as devalued in educational contexts often experience reduced self-esteem and motivation [26]. This can further hinder their oral language development, especially when combined with phonological difficulties.

Overall, both empirical data and classroom experience underscore the importance of considering students' ethnolinguistic backgrounds in language instruction. Addressing the phonological dimension of language learning is essential in supporting the oral language development of all learners, particularly those for whom the language of instruction differs from their native tongue.

Table 5: Differences between Tagalog and Non-Tagalog Learners

Ethnolinguistic Profile		M	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Phonological awareness	Non-Tagalog	74.86	8.30	-5.741	58	0.000
	Tagalog	85.55	5.92			
Language proficiency	Non-Tagalog	3.62	0.55	-4.044	58	0.000
	Tagalog	4.14	0.44			

The study revealed statistically significant differences in both phonological awareness and oral language proficiency between Tagalog and non-Tagalog speakers, with Tagalog students scoring significantly higher in both domains ($p < 0.001$). These findings confirm that students whose home language aligns with the language of instruction hold a distinct advantage in language development.

This outcome underscores the presence of linguistic inequities in classrooms where instruction is delivered in a language unfamiliar to some learners. Such inequities are also evident in the researcher's teaching context, where students come from a range of ethnolinguistic backgrounds but are taught using a single dominant language. Although cultural aspects are occasionally

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considered during lesson planning, the inclusion of culturally relevant content often results in limited attention to the

ethnolinguistic background of students. Instructional practices and materials generally assume a common linguistic foundation, overlooking the phonological diversity that students bring into the classroom.

As a result, the specific phonological difficulties faced by non-native speakers of the instructional language often go unaddressed. This oversight is not necessarily a result of neglect, but rather a product of structural limitations, including inadequate teacher training in managing phonological diversity and a lack of institutional resources to support differentiated instruction. Consequently, many students are left to contend with language learning barriers on their own, thereby reinforcing unequal access to opportunities for oral language development.

These findings align with those of Lu and Wei (2016), who emphasized that native phonological structures play a crucial role in second language acquisition, with learners whose first language closely aligns with the target language demonstrating stronger performance [31]. Similarly, Chavez et al. (2018) and Martínez et al. (2021) noted that ethnolinguistic variation can lead to distinct phonological errors, which negatively impact pronunciation and fluency [32] [33].

The significant performance gap between Tagalog and non-Tagalog speakers underscores the need to extend mother-tongue-based multilingual education beyond the elementary level. To foster more equitable learning outcomes, educational institutions should consider implementing targeted support systems, such as language bridging programs and phonological remediation modules, that accommodate learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Additionally, assessment practices must be reevaluated to ensure they reflect the linguistic realities of all students, promoting fairness and inclusivity in language education.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study as summarized, the following conclusions were drawn:

- (1) There is a significant relationship between the level of phonological process of senior high school students and their level of oral language proficiency, as evidenced by the positive correlation found in the study. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.
- (2) Ethnolinguistic background significantly moderated the relationship between the level of phonological processes and students' level of oral language proficiency, as indicated by the significant interaction effect observed. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.
- (3) There is a significant difference in the level of phonological processes and the level of oral language proficiency between Tagalog native speakers and non-Tagalog native speakers. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations were presented:

1. Teachers may regularly integrate phonological awareness activities into their instruction, particularly for non-Tagalog speakers, to strengthen their decoding abilities, sound manipulation skills, and expressive language skills. Additionally, oral language instruction should strike a balance between fostering comprehension and developing expressive components such as pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary use to support well-rounded language proficiency.
2. Curriculum specialists from the Department of Education may develop and integrate culturally and linguistically responsive learning materials that reflect the diverse linguistic backgrounds of students. This includes providing differentiated instructional modules for Tagalog and non-Tagalog speakers, tailored to address the specific phonological challenges each group may encounter, thereby promoting more inclusive and effective language learning.
3. Training programs may be conducted to help teachers identify phonological and oral language development challenges, particularly in multilingual classrooms. These programs must equip educators with practical strategies for managing ethnolinguistically diverse learners and designing remedial interventions tailored to the specific language backgrounds of their students.
4. The Department of Education may establish institutional support mechanisms like language bridging programs for students transitioning into a second or third language of instruction.
5. Future studies may explore phonological and oral language development in other linguistic combinations (e.g., Tagalog-English, Bisaya-English) and at different educational levels.
6. Future researchers may explore an approach for experimental design to investigate longitudinal outcomes of phonological interventions on oral language development to determine long-term effectiveness.

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