

*A Comparative Analysis of the Self-Perceived and Actual Grammatical Competence in English of Filipino Grade 12 Students in Metro Manila*

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**Abstract**

Is there a difference between a person's self-perceived and actual grammatical competence in English? This descriptive study uses a quantitative approach to compare the levels of self-perceived and actual grammatical competence in English of Filipino Grade 12 students in Metro Manila according to sex, income class, type of school attended, foreign travel experience, movie preference, and the use of English at home. A survey questionnaire was administered to 185 respondents to elicit their self-reported level of grammatical competence in English. Then, the same respondents were asked to answer the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) to assess their actual level of grammatical competence in English. The data were analyzed in relation to the concepts of Canale and Swain's Communicative Competence and Martin's Circles within Circle. Results showed that the respondents see themselves as having more skill than they actually possess which suggests that confidence in one's ability in using a language is a positive element in building communication skills. As the Philippines finds itself lagging behind with the dismal performance of Filipinos in international assessment tests, it is hoped that the relevant findings of this study will help educators and policy makers infer "teaching-learning effectiveness" and to provide impetus towards the further development of the English grammatical competence in the Philippines.

Keywords: Grammatical Competence, Self-Perceived, TOEIC

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## Introduction

Out of about 7.8 billion people in the world, almost 1.5 billion speak English (Statista, 2022). It is used as the working language of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other international organizations, as well as in international conferences (Pochhacker, 1994, p. 154; Basel, 2002, pp. 16-19; Neff, 2007; cited in Albl-Mikasa, 2010), international business, mass media, entertainment industry, communication platforms, and the social media.

In the Philippines, the United States introduced English to us in 1898 (Bernardo, 2009). Since then, English has become one of our official languages and the medium of instruction in both private and public schools nationwide. In the 1960s, the Philippine educational system was viewed as one of the most developed in Asia (Cardozier, 1984; Lande, 1965; Swinerton, 1991; cited in Maca & Morris, 2012). In 2012, GlobalEnglish Corporation named the Philippines as the world's best country in business English proficiency, even beating the United States (Mendoza, 2012), and in 2022, the Philippines was ranked 22nd worldwide in the English Proficiency Index and was ranked second in Asia, next only to Singapore (Yraola, 2022).

Nevertheless, there is an increasing perception that the Filipino's competence in the use of English is deteriorating. The 2018 results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) showed that among 79 participating countries, the Philippines was ranked last in reading and second last in both math and science (Mateo, 2019). Also in 2018, Hopkins International Partners, Inc. reported that the English proficiency level of college graduates in the Philippines is lower than the proficiency target for high school students in Thailand, as well as the competency requirements for taxi drivers in Dubai (Morallo, 2018). This alarming state of English proficiency of Filipinos happened despite the restructuring of the Philippines' basic educational system through the K to 12 program of the Department of Education with the goal of giving every student quality education that is globally competitive. The dismal results of PISA and other international assessment tests indicated that our educational system still falls short of being globally competitive.

It is important to know the current level of actual grammatical or linguistic competence of Filipino Grade 12 students because the results could provide impetus to infer teaching-learning effectiveness even though teaching effectiveness is not at all clearly observable behavior in my study. According to some studies, self-perception reports are not very useful if the researcher wants to know how competent a person actually is because the person very likely does not know (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1984). Therefore, objective proficiency tests such as the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) should be administered to assess a person's actual grammatical competence in a language.

The 2007 study conducted by the University of the Philippines College of Mass Communication (UP-CMC-Communication Research Department) yielded significant results relevant to my study: 1) that respondents consider themselves most competent in listening; and 2) that the higher the respondent's socio-economic status, the higher their perceived competence in communicating. Moreover, other studies showed that there is a significant relationship between socio-economic status and communicative competence (Sibayan and Gonzalez, 1996; Tupas, 2001; and Martin, 2014). Tupas (2001) noted that "those who attain near-native competence in the language because of excellent education belong to top five percent of the population and usually come from Metro Manila and other urban centers of the

country” (p.15). Tupas (2004) also argued that although Philippine English signifies the cultural and sociolinguistic signs of the entire country, scholars have generally reserved it only to the educated few (p.49).

Although grammatical competence is just one component of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1983), some studies revealed that grammatical competence is the most important aspect in communicative competence. Hinkel (2004) argues that in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL), the knowledge of grammar prescriptions or standard grammar rules is one of the top necessities for instructors. Hinkel (2004) also contends that for reasonable purposes, grammar teaching needs to address the standard rules of syntactic developments to empower students to prevail in education, career, or other social settings where formal use of prescriptive sentence structure is regularly preferred. Other studies pointed out that gender differences indicate the respondents’ attitude toward second language teaching (Baker & MacIntyre, 2003); and that objective measures are required by which one may assess the competence of a person in one or more languages by a common standard (Lehmann, 2007). Consequently, Hodgson (2014) used a mixed method of qualitative questionnaire and proficiency assessment results of the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) to investigate the degree to which native speaker models of communicative competence affect the linguistic self-confidence.

My study builds on the models of Canale & Swain and Martin’s Circles within Circle. According to Canale & Swain (1980), grammatical competence includes the knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology. In other words, a person with grammatical competence knows what words to use and how to put them into phrases and sentences.

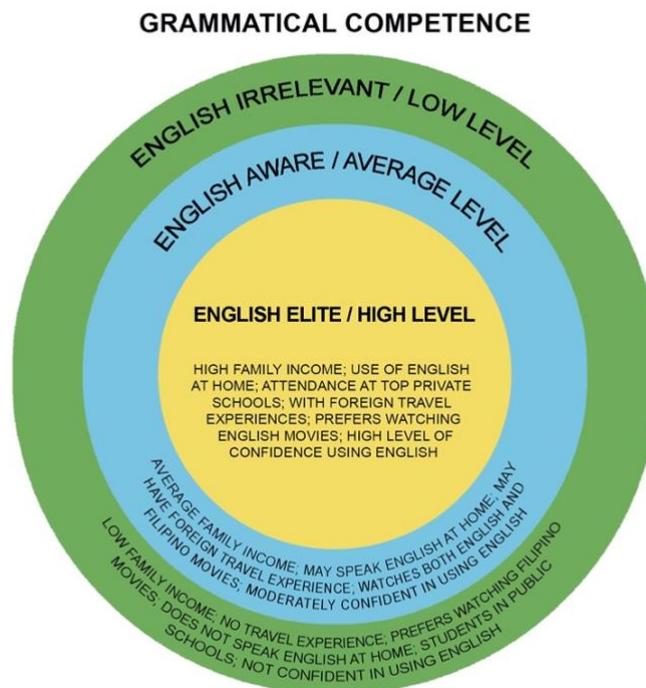
I. P. Martin (2014) reexamined the Three Circles Model of Braj Kachru in the context of the Philippines to better capture the linguistic realities of Outer Circle speakers of English (See Figure 1). Philippine English, an Outer Circle country can be thought of as a circle with many circles. Filipinos in the Inner Philippine English Circle have embraced the English language and actively promote it. Filipinos in the Outer Philippine English Circle know that Philippine variety exists but fall short of promoting it. Filipinos in the Expanding Philippine English Circle see that English is irrelevant.



**Figure 1. I. P. Martin’s Circles within Circle Model**

In my operational model, the Filipinos in the Inner Circle or English Elite have high family income, use English at home, attend top private schools, have foreign travel experience, prefer watching English movies, and are the most competent and most comfortable in

communicating in English. Those in the Outer Circle or English Aware have average level of grammatical competence in English while those in the Expanding Circle or the English Irrelevant have the lowest level of grammatical competence and least comfortable in communicating in English (See Figure 2).



**Figure 2. Operational Model integrating Canale & Swain’s Grammatical Competence and I. P. Martin’s Circles within Circle**

Drawing from the concepts of Canale & Swain and I. P. Martin, my study aims to answer the following fundamental question: How do the levels of self-perceived and actual grammatical competence in English of Filipino Grade 12 students in Metro Manila differ: 1) between male and female respondents; 2) among respondents from low, middle, and high socio-economic strata; 3) between respondents studying in private schools and those studying in public schools; 4) between respondents with foreign travel experience and those without foreign travel experience; 5) between respondents who prefer to watch Filipino movies rather than watch English movies; and 6) between respondents who speak English at home and those who do not.

This study aims to achieve the following objective: To compare the levels of self-perceived and actual grammatical competence in English of Filipino Grade 12 students in Metro Manila according to sex, income class, type of school attended, movie preference, foreign travel experience, and the use of English at home.

This descriptive study used a quantitative approach to elicit the answer to the research question. A survey was conducted to determine the level of self-perceived grammatical competence in English of 185 Filipino Grade 12 students in Metro Manila. TOEIC listening, speaking, reading, and writing tests were administered to the same respondents to determine the actual grammatical competence in English. Then, the results of the survey and TOEIC tests were compared and analyzed. I used criterion sampling because I had to set the criteria

and select all cases that meet those criteria (e.g., students who speak English at home and those with high family income). To determine if the scores in the long version of the TOEIC instruments are significantly different from the scores in the abridged version based on a sample of three subjects, the Fisher sign test was used. The Fisher sign test yielded a test statistic value of  $B = 1$  for the listening part and  $B = 0$  for the reading part with p-values of 1.0 and 0.25 respectively which were not significant at the 0.05 level. This result indicated there was no sufficient evidence to say that the scores from the two versions of the test significantly vary at the 0.05 level of significance.

## Results and Discussion

The age of the respondents ranged from 15 to 21 years old, but a majority of the respondents were 16-18. There were more male than female respondents. Most of the respondents reported having average monthly family income of at most P50,000. However, it may be presumed for the private high schools that their monthly family income would be more than P50,000 given that the respondents were chosen based on the characteristics for this study. About 54% of the respondents came from one public school while 46% came from three private schools. Around 70% preferred watching both English and Filipino movies while only 24% preferred watching English movies only. Almost 23% had visited at least one foreign country, and only 2% reported using pure English at home.

The table below shows the levels of self-perceived grammatical competence of the respondents. Respondents felt most competent in listening to English conversations, but least competent in responding to different English accents orally because the approach in teaching English in the Philippines is focused more on grammar rather than oral communication. Overall, the respondents felt more competent in listening (4.076), followed by reading (4.016), then writing (3.7295), and finally speaking (3.373) (See Table 1).

**Table 1. Mean Scores of Self-Perceived Grammatical Competence**

Item/Situation	Skill	Mean Score	Average Mean
4.1 Read English materials	Reading	4.016	4.016
4.2 Write essays in English	Writing	3.735	3.7295
4.3 Write reports in English	Writing	3.724	
4.6 Listen to English conversation	Listening	4.076	4.076
4.4 Explain orally in English	Speaking	3.254	3.373
4.5 Reason orally in English		3.222	
4.7 Respond to different English accents orally		3.189	
4.8 Answer English questions orally		3.827	

Table 2 shows the summary of the levels of self-perceived grammatical competence in English. The level of scores was identified using the scoring system below:

<b>Level</b>	<b>Total Score Range</b>
Low	Less than 60%
Average	60% to 80%
High	More than 80%

According to DepEd Order No. 8, s. 2015, all grades in the K to 12 Basic Education Program will be based on the weighted raw score of the learners' summative assessments wherein the minimum grade needed to pass a specific learning area is 60, which is transmuted to 75 in the report card. Therefore, I used the same policy in grading the raw score of the respondents' self-perceived grammatical competence in English.

Table 2 below shows that only 24% of the respondents have low scores in communication skills such as reading, speaking, listening, and writing while 37% and 39% have average and high scores respectively. This shows that more respondents perceive themselves to have average to high grammatical competence in English.

**Table 2. Summary of the Levels of Self-Perceived Grammatical Competence**

Level	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Low	45	24
Average	68	37
High	72	39
Total	185	100

However, Table 3 shows that more than half of the respondents had low actual scores in speaking (67%) and writing (69%) tests, and no respondent scored high in these tests. Almost half (48%) had average actual scores in listening, and more than half (58%) had average scores in reading.

**Table 3. Levels of TOEIC Total Scores per Skill**

	<b>Level</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Speaking	Low	124	67%
	Average	61	33%
	High	0	0%
	Total	185	100%
Writing	Low	127	69%
	Average	58	31%
	High	0	0%
	Total	185	100%

Listening			
	Low	42	23%
	Average	89	48%
	High	54	29%
	Total	185	100%
Reading			
	Low	64	35%
	Average	108	58%
	High	13	7%
	Total	185	100%

Table 4 shows that the students' actual English grammatical competence did not necessarily match their self-perceived abilities. Their self-perceived scores tend to be higher than their actual test scores. Wilcoxon signed rank test was used to compare the respondents' self-perceived and actual grammatical competence in English.

**Table 4. Self-Perceived vs. Actual Grammatical Competence**

Statistic	Actual	Self-Perceived
Average	51.9562	58.2801
Median	50.0000	58.1818
Standard Deviation	22.5215	23.1236
Wilcoxon's W	5840	
Wilcoxon p-value	0.0002 (significant difference)	

A comparison of self-perceived and actual grammatical competence across various demographic factors follows (See Table 5). Mann-Whitney U Test was used for comparing two samples while Kruskal-Wallis Test was used for more than two samples. The results show that females have higher mean scaled scores for both self-perceived and actual grammatical competence. Also, those in private schools have higher mean scaled scores for both self-perceived and actual grammatical competence. The highest scores belong to those respondents who spoke predominantly English at home for self-perceived grammatical competence but for the actual grammatical competence, language spoken at home was not a significant factor. However, the results may be affected by the limited number of respondents for the language used at home variable. The family's monthly family income has a strong association with how confident the respondents were in their ability to communicate in English. The highest scores belong to respondents towards the higher income brackets. Expectedly, the lowest average scores were observed from respondents whose families earned below P6000 monthly. In terms of movie preference, students preferring English movies tend to score higher in both their self-perceived and actual English grammatical competence. Moreover, the more foreign countries the students visited, the higher their self-perceived and actual grammatical abilities tend to be (See Table 5).

**Table 5. Summary of Self-Perceived (SP) and Actual (A) Grammatical Competence Across Various Demographic Factors**

	Sex				Type of School Attended				Movie Preference					
	Male		Female		Public		Private		English		Filipino		English & Filipino	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
SP	53.44	23.60	64.23	21.18	51.64	21.76	66.10	22.34	63.39	23.82	37.92	13.98	57.61	22.78
Significance: U = 3113.5, p <0.05				Significance: U = 2653, p <0.05				Significance = Chi-square = 8.807, p <0.05						
A	48.20	21.30	56.57	23.24	43.10	18.29	62.38	22.66	53.60	21.84	27.89	11.96	52.66	22.33
Significance: U = 3330, p <0.05				Significance: U = 2161, p <0.05				Significance: Chi-square = 8.605, p <0.05						

	Monthly Family Income											
	Below P6000		P6001-25000		P25001-50000		P50001-100000		P100000 +		Don't know	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
SP	47.05	19.92	55.71	21.52	66.81	15.78	74.03	18.69	65.97	25.96	49.89	25.19
Significance: Chi-square = 27.242, p < 0.05												
A	42.86	26.13	45.89	19.52	61.70	18.95	68.37	21.14	57.65	25.42	45.51	20.47
Significance: Chi-square = 28.010, p < 0.05												

	Language Spoken at Home								Countries Visited							
	Filipino		English		English & Filipino		Others		None		1		2-3		3+	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
SP	47.48	22.08	79.09	16.96	66.69	20.38	58.68	21.77	54.89	21.95	65.09	24.73	73.18	22.91	73.33	22.98
Significance: Chi-square = 31.684, p <0.05								Significance: Chi-square = 13.841, p < 0.05								
A	47.17	22.31	63.69	15.96	55.83	22.74	50	18.5	48.27	22.19	60.95	22.11	64.58	17.24	68.1	16.52
Significance: Chi-square = 6.936, p = 0.074								Significance: Chi-square 16.304, p < 0.05								

### Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

Is there a difference between the self-perceived and actual grammatical competence in English of Filipino Grade 12 students? The results showed that the respondents perceived themselves highly competent in their English linguistic abilities, but actual test results showed that more than half of the respondents had low scores in speaking and writing. Almost half had average scores in listening and more than half had average scores in reading. Relevant findings indicated that female respondents had higher mean scores than male respondents both in the self-perceived survey and actual tests. The highest mean scores for both the self-perceived survey and actual tests were recorded for respondents with monthly family income of more than P50,000. Respondents from private schools had higher mean scores than those from public school for both the self-perceived and actual tests. The higher mean scores were also found for respondents who preferred English movies and those who

spoke predominantly English at home compared to those who preferred Filipino movies and those who spoke predominantly Filipino at home. The mean scores also increased as the number of foreign countries increased. The results of running Wilcoxon signed rank test showed that the students' actual English grammatical competence did not necessarily match their self-perceived abilities. Self-perceived scores tended to be higher than actual test scores. This indicated that the respondents see themselves as having better English skills than they actually possess. It is interesting to note that generally higher self-perceived English grammatical abilities were linked to correspondingly higher actual abilities suggesting that confidence in one's ability in using a language is a positive element in building communication skills.

Assessing the current levels of English grammatical competence of Filipino students is one important step towards achieving teaching-learning effectiveness in both private and public schools in the country. Assessments aim to promote understanding of how well-equipped students are for their future lives and to measure their performance against that of their peers in other countries.

As the Philippines finds itself lagging behind with the dismal performance of Filipinos in international assessment tests, the most urgent task of the government and policy makers now is to reverse the current declining trend in basic education performance indicators. Nevertheless, my study doesn't claim that English language proficiency is in itself sufficient to make our graduates globally competitive nor does it claim that using English as the medium of instruction is the best means to create students with good English skills. The results of my study showed that the actual level of grammatical competence in English of Grade 12 students is low, so it needs to be addressed. The relevant findings of my study could provide a basis in launching an enhancement program from primary up to secondary, and even tertiary levels, or another restructuring of the K-12 program.

I strongly recommend that the Department of Education develop a new curriculum to enhance the students' grammatical competence in English by increasing the number of hours in the teaching of Language and Reading; create excellent learning materials; provide a speech laboratory in every school where students can practice and master their English listening and speaking skills; and adopt a policy on No Code Switching. It is also important to note that the competence of teachers in teaching English as a second language is an important factor in the development of the students' grammatical competence, so regular proficiency training should be provided to equip the teachers with the necessary skills to teach and communicate in English. Other researchers can administer the TOEIC and self-perceived survey to English teachers to assess their grammatical competence in English as basis for the proficiency training.

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