

CONSTRAINTS IN LEARNING SPANISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: A MIXED-METHOD STUDY

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the constraints faced by students in learning a foreign language at Camarines Sur Polytechnic Colleges. The researchers formulated two main questions in this study: (1) What are the constraints in learning Spanish as a Foreign language learning in terms of (a) learning differences, (b) learning language material resources, and (c) classroom activities?; (2) What are the factors that affect the constraints in learning Spanish along with (a) learning differences, (b) learning language material resources, and (c) classroom activities? To answer the research questions, the researchers utilized a mixed-method research design. The researchers used a survey questionnaire for the data gathering. The researchers tabulated and calculated the weighted mean of each student's perception based on the questionnaire result given to them. Moreover, the researchers interviewed students chosen based on the criterion to triangulate the study results. In addition, thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected data from the transcribed interviews. Research ethics was properly observed during data collection. Furthermore, the findings showed that the constraints faced by the students in Spanish language learning are negative attitude, low motivation, usage of the different learning styles of students, ineffective language material resources, and classroom activities giving less opportunity for students to practice or perform their Spanish speaking skills. The results also revealed the factors that cause these constraints.

Keywords: *Camarines Sur Polytechnic Colleges, Foreign Language Learning, Language Education, Mixed-Method*

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, learning a foreign language has enabled effective and efficient communication with people as well as participation in real-life scenarios using cultural languages. Learning a foreign language can also have the opposite effect, allowing students to gain a deeper understanding of their own mother tongue and

culture. One of the most surprising benefits of learning a foreign language is that the learner can become much more aware of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, in addition to cultural conventions. However, when learning a foreign language, students usually face common problems depending on what their native language is and various factors surrounding them. By definition, a constraint is a constraint imposed by a group of elements on the degrees of freedom of the elements of the system, or a constraint or burden imposed on the variability or flexibility of such elements (Oxford, Dictionary).

Students face certain challenges that hinder their oral communication skills. Anxiety, uncertainty, discomfort, dissatisfaction, fear of making mistakes, nervousness, lack of confidence and motivation are all related variables that limit foreign language learning. Students' problems with language learning are explained with special attention to foreign language learning. Therefore, language acquisition tools have been criticized for reflecting the learner's language learning ability as opposed to their language learning ability relative to their foreign language proficiency.

Students fear making mistakes and being embarrassed by their peers if they receive negative feedback from the instructor (Khamprated, 2012). As a result, there is a negative impact on them because they are not actively exercising their speaking skills. Emphasize the role of vocabulary learning subjects in language use. This demonstrates how important it is to develop vocabulary for understanding and encourages teachers to pay more attention to this topic during lessons..

Chomsky (1965) states that people learn language using a language acquisition device called a language acquisition device (LAD). Compared with learning the first language, the method of learning foreign languages is significantly different. Learning foreign languages is more difficult due to the many factors that need to be taken into account.

In addition, it is believed that difficulties in learning a foreign language arise from difficulties in learning the mother tongue. Thus, by understanding foreign

language learning difficulty as a language problem, students can define in detail what it means to learn a foreign language poorly. Spanish is taught as an elective or as part of a foreign language in many universities and high

In addition, students become multilingual a starting point for language pedagogy, focusing on the impact of existing linguistic knowledge on language processing, specifically how Indonesia speak languages (i.e. native language such as Javanese, Padangnese, Indonesian, and other native languages). affect the learning of English as a foreign language. Teaching and using different foreign languages contributes to international understanding. In general, knowledge of foreign languages plays a fundamental role in the professional career of graduates, as it is widely recognized and provides wider employment opportunities around the world. Students must have basic communication and interpersonal skills to fully understand and interact with people from different countries.

Individuals as learners and acquirers of first, second, and foreign languages face a variety of challenges and advantages in their endeavors to acquire and learn these languages Kormos (2020) claims that a learner's attitude has a significant impact on language learning since a positive attitude immediately affects language learning. Hence, as Honbolygó & Csépe (2019) pointed out, one of the obstacles foreign language learners experience in processing is cultural differences, which can make them feel dispersed; group learners master a necessary amount of vocabularies and have high command comprehension. Thus according Lightfoot (2010), the learning of foreign language is known as the second language acquisition (SLA), and wherein it is dependent on the child's social context and cognitive level during the learning process in his setting. Furthermore, Ahmadi & Keshmirkshekan (2019) claim that amongst the most prevalent issues faced by foreign language learners is a lack of comprehension of the language's spelling and pronunciation, which can lead to less-than-ideal outcomes.

This encourages the researcher to narrow the investigation and analyze the constraints faced by Indonesian students in learning the foreign language. This study also aims to gain insight into difficulties that the learners of English as a foreign language for communication purposes experience when they are

performing a task in a classroom. As a result, the study was focused on Factors that affect the Constraints in learning English

The advantages of studying foreign languages are growing as the world continues to evolve, and multilingual is now perhaps the most significant real-world ability that ever emerged, rather than just a nice party gimmick. Studying a foreign language is about gaining the ability to interact and engage with others, which is a critical life skill which can only be gained through social contact. You can use your new superhuman capacity to understand what someone is saying, retain the right vocabulary and syntax, interpret that vocabulary and grammar, and answer everything on the spot and in a timely manner once you have mastered a foreign language. You've established contact, and that's exactly what should happen. Learning a foreign language is crucial especially for adult learners. When it comes to adult L2 learning, there is a twofold barrier to overcome. On the one hand, this obstructs the teaching - learning process; on the other side, humans are limited in their ability to communicate in a foreign language due to neurological limitations. Most adult students experience fear, reluctance, lack of excitement and confidence, low self-esteem, and language anxiety when learning a foreign language (Dornyei, Csizer & Nemeth, 2006; Dornyei & Ushioda, 2009)

The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) is a theory that is focused on the structure of the brain. Even though neurological shift are a characteristic of the brain, supporters of the CHP argue that the cortex's flexibility permits youngster to surpass adults in some ways. As a conclusion, youngsters and adults learn a language in diverse ways, and CHP appears to be a compelling theory when considered in this light. Shakouri and Saligheh (2012) claimed that phonological learning is influenced by one's age, which in perspective of Zhang (2009) and Munoz et al. (2010), in terms of pronunciation, children surpass adults. In their study they presented the age differences of young and adult learners in foreign language learning. Early adolescent cognitive flexibility permits children to adopt native-like articulation, but this skill quickly disappears as they mature. The idea is that learning a foreign language becomes more difficult as an individual grows older. As a result, more proficient learners develop a "foreign accent." Zafar and

Meenakshi (2012) suggested that self-consciousness, which increases with age, prevents learners from fully maximizing their linguistic talents, specifically communicatively.

Aside from the age difference of foreign language learning, we also found some studies from different countries tackling about some issues regarding foreign language learning. One example is the difficulties that global learners learning at a particular Australian university were investigated by Robertson et al. (2000). The researchers polled both international students and local employees to find out how they felt about the challenges. Language is identified as a primary source of difficulties in teaching and learning by both students and staff. The learners express uncertainty about their abilities to interact in English as a second language. They are disappointed with their communication skills in front of their Australian students since they have a vague grasp of lecturers' speaking English. Issues have also been expressed concerning the use of colloquial language, writing difficulties, and concerns with interpretation. Language challenges were the largest area of unsolvable problems for overseas students, according to Robertson et al. (2000).

Wong (2004) conducted an interview with students around the world as part of his research. Several foreign students found it hard to shift from passive to active learning in Australia because they were used to a pedagogical and teacher-centered setting with limited classroom interaction. Simultaneously, the students in his study admitted that a complete absence of English foreign language competency in class, combined with cultural barriers, was a major source of learning difficulties. While broad assumptions about "Asian students" should be avoided, research reveals that learners in various Southeast Asian and East Asian countries prefer a passive-receptive learning method than in typical Australian settings, especially at the tertiary level. As per Hellsten (2002), international students' inactivity is due in part to limits imposed by their previous education.

Hellsten and Prescott (2004) looked into the elements that influence international students' learning and reported on the linguistic barriers they face. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with Australian first-year

undergraduate students which lasted for an hour. They discovered that many Asian international learners seem unable to partake in class discussions for the reason that they felt insufficient in spoken English as their foreign language subject. While they accurately depict international students' English foreign language issues, they are more concerned with the symptoms than with the fundamental causes. So far, the research has primarily focused on language barriers that overseas students face upon starting their studies in a new social/academic context. Examining the impact of students' earlier learning experiences and their ideas about education is one technique to delve deeper into the challenges of international students.

Director of Educational Services at Landmark College, Linda Hecker (2006) discussed the language-based challenges faced by students who struggle in FL classrooms in her seminar presentation entitled "Teaching Foreign Languages to Students with Learning Differences" for faculty and staff at Brandeis University. Dyslexia is a unique learning disability, with language processing issues, native language learning difficulties, word recognition challenges, listening concerns, language difficulties or learning impairments, foreign language learning problems. Word recognition, decoding, and spelling difficulties are common symptoms. Dyslexic students learning a second language may experience "phonological processing issues," in which they change letters, jumble them up, remove them, add or omit syllables, and only understand the beginning and end of a phrase, but not the center. "Vito for vivo" and "extudiante for estudiante" are some of the common phonological errors made by students with significant phonological issues.

To examine the constraints in learning Spanish as foreign language faced by the students, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the constraints in learning Spanish as Foreign language in terms of:
 - a. learning differences
 - b. learning language material resources
 - c. classroom activities
2. What are the factors that affect the constraints in learning Spanish along with:

- a. learning differences
- b. learning language material resources
- c. classroom activities

Two major issues are addressed in these questions. The first research question is to determine different constraints faced by AB ELS Students of CSPC in learning Spanish as foreign language. The second question is to examine the factors that affect the learner's difficulties in learning the language in terms of learning differences, learning language material resources and classroom activities.

This study is significant as it assesses the most prevalent constraints faced by tertiary students in Camarines Sur Polytechnic Colleges when studying a foreign language, as well as evaluates the factors that affect the students in learning the language. This will be able to determine the facet being used by the non-natives in studying Spanish as a foreign language common to bridge one speaker to other languages.

The researcher believes that being able to assess the common constraints will be able to provide insights that have difficulty in learning the foreign language. Specifically, the study's findings will be extremely beneficial to students, teachers, Parents, curriculum developer, and Linguists, as well as researcher and Future researchers.

METHOD

This study used a mixed-method approach, which combines quantitative and qualitative methods. Mixed-methods research, according to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), is defined as a study that includes at least one quantitative and one qualitative strand. A strand is a component of a study that covers the fundamentals of quantitative or qualitative research, such as defining a research question, gathering and analyzing data, and interpreting the findings.

The researchers used the descriptive type for the quantitative part of the analysis. This method of quantitative research investigates the causes and consequences of factors under specific

circumstances. By this analysis, the researcher used quantitative methodologies to analyze the questionnaire results and evaluate them using a rating scale in an objective and methodical manner

For the qualitative part of the study, a case study method was used by the researchers. This was utilized to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. It allows a much better understanding of the subject at hand while also reducing the possibility of biases

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Constraints in Learning Spanish as a Foreign Language

1.1 Learning Differences

The findings of this study show that while teachers are not always to blame for adult students' lack of motivation, they must be held accountable for maintaining the interest of all students in the subject. As a result, specific methodological adjustments must be made to keep both younger and older students interested.

Language learning strategies are specific practices that students engage in to increase their abilities in a foreign language, frequently on purpose. Individual learners' language learning strategies are characterized as distinct ways or procedures that help them understand, retain, retrieve, and apply knowledge for language learning and acquisition (Oxford, 1990).

The researchers also found that there are the different learning strategies of the students. Those different learning strategies of the student are already considered as a constraint in learning. The students who study in a different way than the teacher may find it difficult to internalize the material. Teachers frequently convey material in the manner in which they are most comfortable, but these techniques may not be appropriate for all students.

1.2 Language Learning Material Resources

The researchers found that the factors that affect the learner's difficulties in learning the language is learning language material resources. Onyejemezi (1991) emphasizes that learning occurs when students are completely engaged in the process with the use of appropriate and diverse instructional resources. This

implies that the student's language acquisition is influenced by the quality and appropriateness of the learning resources.

1.3 Classroom activities

The researchers found that the factors affecting their learning of the Spanish language is their classroom activities. The given activities give more opportunity for students to practice the Spanish Language is one of the factors that gathered the highest of disagreeing. This is because of the reason that at the course level, the most difficult task is determining how to build intrinsic drive. Regular educational settings, contain teacher-dominated classes, rankings, assessment, and competitiveness, unfortunately promote external motivation and refuse to engage learners in the collaborative process (Brown, 1990). According to some study, Learners' natural excitement for an activity will subside if they feel forced to complete it to meet an extrinsic demand (i.e. they have to pass to graduate). In his examination of enrollment figures in FL programs, Sandrock (2002) discovered that graduation requirements do not encourage students to take FL courses, nor do they lead to enrollment in additional courses beyond the requisite number of years.

2. Factors that affect the Constrains in learning Spanish

2.1 Learning Differences

Learning differences among students such as attitudes, motivation and learning styles have been the indicators that affect the students in learning the Spanishish language. The researcher found that the factors that lead to constraints in learning differences of students are the self-confidence, fluency in speaking the language, low motivation, and the different learning strategies of the student.

2.1.1 Negative Attitude towards learning English Language

One of the most significant aspects of teachers' ability to create an efficient and meaningful environment for learning is learners' attitude towards learning.

Determining the factors that affect the negative attitude of the students towards language learning provides information that is useful in language teaching and learning. Negative attitudes can restrict or constrain language learning because they occur when students are unmotivated, uninterested, or having troubles with the teacher (Ellis, 1994, p. 197-201). Sub theme 1 and 2 will show the factors affecting the negative attitude of the students.

2.1.1.1 Self-confidence

.Self-confidence is one of the key to determine whether the student has negative or positive attitude towards learning a language. Unsurprisingly, lack of confidence is identified as one the factors why students can't express themselves in speaking Spanish language. R6 and R15 made the following comments in relation to fluency.

"I had a hard time expressing my emotion in Spaniish because I'm not that confident in using the language and I might mispronounce a word/ while talking."
R6

"I am not confident in speaking the language because I'm still studyingit." R15

According to Benabou & Tirole (2002), there is one major problem that students face as a learning weakness is a lack of self-confidence, which can have a negative impact on the learning of the students. Lack of confidence makes student show negative attitude towards language learning process of the student.

2.1.1.2 Fluency in Speaking English Language

When it comes to expressing oneself, speaking fluently is essential. Fluency in speaking refers to a speaker's ability to convey a thought quickly. Being not fluent in speaking Spaniish language affects the student to have a negative attitude towards learning the language. In regards to fluency, R1 and R14 said the following.

"I can't freely express myself in English because I'm not that fluent in speaking Spanish language." R1

“For the reason that, I'm not that good at speaking the said language. However, I know some basic words but not to the extent that I can use it whenever I communicate with other people.” R14

The narratives of these individuals indicate that fluency in speaking the language is one element in why they are unable to express themselves in English, which results to a negative attitude towards language learning. According to Tornqvist (2008), during the classroom process, there were certain aspects that influenced students' speaking fluency, a friendly classroom environment; students' personality, group discussions, engaging lessons, students' passion, teacher support, and students' commitment are just a few examples. Students should try to gain more confidence in order to become fluent speakers, not be afraid of making mistakes.

2.1. 2 Low Motivation of Student in learning English language

Motivation is the major drive for learning foreign language and, afterwards, the driving force for continuing the extensive and difficult learning process. However, low motivation of the students lead to lack of interest in learning the language. Statement from R2, R3, R9, and R11 show the factors why they are demotivated in learning and that is because of difficulties in learning the English language.

“This is not the word we are used to, so it is difficult to study and understand sometimes.” R2

“English language is hard to study. Although some Bikol words are from Spanish, the grammar is very much different.” R3

“Since my first language is Filipino and Indonesia is my second language, it would really be hard for me to learn another new language. Deep understanding and many applications are needed to fully learn the Spanish language. Its' grammar rules is too complicated and too fancy to easily understand.” R9

“Spanish Language is not a part of our native or even Indonesia; it is really hard to study a language that we don't even know. Spanish Language is really different from Filipino languages although there are some words that are similar, it may be the same in meaning but if we use it in a sentence we will see the big differences of these two languages. That's why I can say that studying Spanish Language is not an easy task.” R11

The result implies that the factor that causes the low motivation in language learning is due to the difficulties faced by the students in understanding the language; they tend to feel the lack of interest towards the language. This is supported by Japari School (2018), where in students, has encountered low motivation, which is a circumstance in which a student refuses to study because the course is difficult to follow

2. 1. 3 Different Learning Style of the Students

Language learning style are the processes or behaviors that language learners take to improve their ability to acquire, store, retain, recall, and interpret new information (Oxford, 1990; Rigney, 1978). The following statements from the respondents determined how different learning style affects their language learning.

“Every individual have their own pathways of learning and acquiring a language. There may be people that are fast learners and thus acquires the language instantly. While others can be the opposite of it, requiring to get involved with other Spanish speakers to successfully acquire the language. These differences affect an individual through making their own easy ways of language acquisition.”
R5

“Students have its own way to learn a lesson. Some may easily learn in just one sitting while others need more time to process the lesson. In this case, students should be provided with learning materials and proper guidance from the professor to make sure that all students will understand the lesson well.” R7

This indicates that different learning styles of the students are cause by the learners’ differences in acquiring the language; each individual has their own and unique way of learning. One can be a fast learner some may be having difficulties to catch up the lesson. Learning style is, in reality, a criterion for identifying differences between individuals (Carson, & Longhini, 2000)

2, 2 Language Learning Materials

Learning resources assist in teaching and learning. It helps in the transition from verbalization to practical application in teaching and learning. However, ineffective learning materials affect the student in language learning whether it

will gain or hold the attention of thereaders.

“Some learning materials is ineffective because it is not that detailed and in my case, I need a teacher to explain the lesson clearly.” R3

“Because there's no application after learning the materials.” R8

“Some of leaning materials in Spanish may be not effective because some of it didn't have any translation, how can we use the learning materials if we can't understand it? That's why it is not that effective, self-learning is not enough to learn and understand English Language.” R9

“Because there is no clear explanation of the context, that's why it is ineffective.” R10

The data suggests that learning materials should be incorporated with the guidance of the instructor. As for the learners, self-learning is not enough to learn the language. According to Ullah, Khan, and Khan (2017), students expressed dissatisfaction with their ability to grasp online learning materials without proper guidance.

“Because the materials are boring to read and they are uninterested to the materials.” R4

“Because students aren't fond or uninterested with the learning materials” R12

Another factor that contributes to ineffective learning materials is the negative attitude towards the learning materials. Learners find the materials boring; this implies that they need materials that will attract their attention. The resources should be educational, interesting, and "useful" to learners, to draw their attention and motivate them to learn through their interactions (Wilson & Lianrui, 2007).

2. 3. Classroom Activities

Speaking skill is an important aspect of learning and teaching a foreign language it can be achieve through interactive classroom activities. However, if classroom activities give less opportunity for students to practice or perform their Spanish speaking skills, student will no be able to enhance their skills. Statement below will determine why it gives less opportunity for student.

"I think it's because the classroom activities given to us was purely written, so therefore we can't practice our speaking skill in Spanish." R10

"The activities were more on written than speaking." R8

"During the pandemic, the lessons in Spanish were asynchronous that is why we can't communicate directly with our classmates as well as the instructor, we just need to listen to the video." R13

The result implies that more concentration is given to reading, listening, and writing skills than the speaking skill of the students. The importance of practice in language learning cannot be underestimated, that is why there's a need for classroom activities that will let the students practice their oral skills. As a result, teachers should take a special desire of helping students improve their speaking abilities. In addition, learners must create scenarios in which they can interact not only in the classroom but also outside it.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that:

- a. A non-native speaker of the Spanish language students normally met constraints in studying the language, it is inevitable. Thereof, the negative attitude of students toward the Spanish language learning varies from the results of poor performance of both teachers and learner's in terms of learning the language wherein the attitude can influence one's behavior that will clearly result in the low motivation of the students in learning the language and the methods being used in teaching the language. Learners tend to acquire their own terms and strategies in learning a foreign language because each learner has a different learning style.
- b. In terms of the language material resources, one of the constraints met by the learners is that the learning materials being used and provided by the instructors are ineffective. It is found ineffective due to the use of inappropriate instructional materials, lack of interactivity cause of boredom, unclear instructions, uninteresting teaching style, and the ability of the teachers in a

classroom is limited.

- c. The constraints in the classroom activities are found that the activities give less opportunity for the learners to practice the Spanish language. The study found that classroom activities limit student connection because they lack opportunities to practice and perform their speaking abilities because reading, listening, and writing skills receive more attention than speaking skills

2. Factors that affect the constraints in learning Spanish

- a. One of the factors that affect the learning differences met by the students in learning the Spanish Language is self-confidence as they lack the motivation to practice and perform their speaking skills as well as fluency in speaking. It hinders the ability of the learners to produce and improve their communication skills because of insufficient time for communicative and interactive activities, learners tend to have difficulties in learning the language as they cannot express their emotions and opinions freely because their mother tongue is much comfortable to be used in learning.
- b. As for the language material resources the factors that affect the constraints met by the students in learning the foreign language is that it is found ineffective. This implies that the language materials being used while teaching the language are not effective in terms of the availability of students' interests, as it needs the guidance of the instructor.
- c. For the classroom activities the factors affecting the students' performance in classroom activities is that the opportunity of the student provides less outcome of the performance that affects the performance of the students in learning the Spanish language. It lacks opportunity because it is unable to provide the majority of the teachers' effective methods or strategies in teaching the language because the interaction of student-to-student and teacher-to-students is limited

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