

First Language (L1) Vocabulary Performance of Grade 1 English-Speaking Cebuano Students

BUSTAMANTE, Jeson

(i)  0000-0002-9600-3438; Cebu Normal University, Cebu City, Philippines. bustamantej@cnu.edu.ph.

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ABSTRACT

English is the medium of instruction in school as early as in Grades 1 to Grade 3 in some private schools. Some students have English as their second language (L2), especially those graders who are taught Mother Tongue – Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in public school, while some students even if they are non-native speakers use English as their first language (L1). In Cebu, there are students who are non-native speakers of English but English is still their first language (L1). This phenomenon paved this paper to investigate the L1 performance of English-speaking Grade 1 Cebuano students. Vocabulary is vital to the process of learning English because if learners lack enough vocabulary it would be hard for them to express their ideas and understand other people. Thus, this study focused on the L1 Vocabulary Performance of Grade 1 English-speaking Cebuano students. Through descriptive design, this study identified the vocabulary performance of three (3) Grade 1 students in a private school in Cebu City based on their classwork performance only as its limitation. To identify their vocabulary performance, the vocabulary exercises in their class work in one grading period were used. The findings revealed the following conclusions. English-speaking Cebuano students performed well in their English vocabulary classwork based on their high percentage scores. The students have a good vocabulary performance in their first language (L1) which is evident from the consistently good scores in the vocabulary tasks from the first grading period to the second grading period. The findings also rejected the assumption that the Grade 1 students will have low performance in their English vocabulary classwork being non-native English speakers.

RESUMO

Em algumas escolas particulares, o inglês é a língua de instrução já a partir do 1º ano do ensino fundamental. Alguns alunos têm o inglês como segunda língua (L2) — especialmente aqueles que, na rede pública, recebem instrução baseada no modelo de Educação Multilíngue com Base na Língua Materna (MTB-MLE) —, enquanto outros, mesmo não sendo falantes nativos, utilizam o inglês como primeira língua (L1). Em Cebu, existem alunos que não são falantes nativos de inglês, mas que, ainda assim, têm o inglês como sua primeira língua (L1). Esse fenômeno motivou a realização deste estudo, que investigou o desempenho na L1 de alunos de Cebuano do 1º ano que falam inglês. O vocabulário é fundamental para o processo de aprendizagem do inglês, pois a falta de um repertório lexical adequado dificulta a expressão de ideias e a compreensão do outro. Assim, este estudo concentrou-se no desempenho de vocabulário na L1 de alunos de Cebuano do 1º ano falantes de inglês. Por meio de uma abordagem descritiva, o estudo avaliou o desempenho de vocabulário de três (3) alunos do 1º ano de uma escola particular na cidade de Cebu, limitando-se exclusivamente ao desempenho em atividades realizadas em sala de aula. Para avaliar esse desempenho, foram utilizados os exercícios de vocabulário das atividades de sala de aula de um período letivo. Os resultados levaram às seguintes conclusões: os alunos de Cebuano falantes de inglês apresentaram um bom desempenho nas atividades de vocabulário em inglês, conforme evidenciado pelas altas pontuações obtidas. Os alunos demonstraram um bom desempenho de vocabulário em sua primeira língua (L1), o que se confirmou pela consistência das boas notas nas tarefas de vocabulário do primeiro para o segundo período letivo. Os resultados também refutaram a suposição de que alunos do 1º ano teriam um desempenho baixo nas atividades de vocabulário em inglês pelo fato de não serem falantes nativos do idioma.

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Introduction

The first language (L1) becomes the first source for the learners to understand the mechanism of how a language work, especially for the young learners in the concrete operational phase when they monitor how they have acquired and learned the languages they speak regardless of the country where they are (Romero and Manjarres, 2017). Language acquisition is defined as the process where the children reach fluent control of their mother tongue or native language (Varshney, 2003:307). They learn a language, not because they are exposed to a somehow similar conditioning process, but more so it is because they have the inborn capacity which permits them to acquire a language as a normal maturational process.

Chomsky (2009) presented that language acquisition is about the growth and maturation of related capacities under certain stimuli or external conditions. The use of language and the form of acquisition being acquired is dominantly identified by internal factors and it is due to the basic correspondence of all human languages, because “human beings are the same, wherever they may be”, that any language can be learned by a child. Meniado (2016) studied how the first language acquisition of a 3-year-old Lebanese child happens and determined the factors behind the influence of L1 acquisition. The findings revealed that the Lebanese child acquired Arabic as his first language biologically. The study further confirms Chomsky’s theory that the subject has a very functional Language Acquisition Device (LAD) that makes the child acquire the language he was exposed to. Language acquisition is a holistic aspect that covers learning a language through reading, speaking, listening, comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary.

Vocabulary is basically defined as the words of a certain language which includes items and phrases or even chunks of words that convey a certain meaning. Vocabulary is essential to learning the English language because without enough vocabulary learners cannot efficiently express their thoughts and understand other people. English vocabulary has very complex characteristics, it has main concepts related to meaning, use and form, together with the layers of these meanings connected to the roots of words (Nation and Meara, 2010).

Crystal (2002) mentioned that the English language has the biggest number of vocabulary in the world. The English native speakers are expected to be familiar with almost 20,000 word families or 70,000 words (Nation, 2001); but non-native speakers of the English language know less than one-quarter of the native speakers’ vocabulary (Laufer & Yano, 2001). Thus, non-native English speakers should improve their vocabulary to be successful in their academic field of discipline in English-medium educational setting.

The Philippines is an English-speaking country and English is the medium of instruction in school as early as in Grades 1 to Grade 3 in some private schools. Some students have English as their second language (L2), while some students even if they are non-native speakers use English as their first language (L1). In Cebu, there are students who are non-

native speakers of English but whose first language (L1) is English. This phenomenon paved this paper to investigate the vocabulary performance of English-speaking Grade 1 Cebuano students.

This study made assumptions that there are students who have a difficulty in comprehending English words in their classes even if these Cebuano students speak English (L1) at home and use the English language in their day-to-day conversations. This study further assumes that the students' English (L1) vocabulary performance in their English classes will be non-satisfactory because they are Cebuanos and they are not native speakers of English.

The main research question is how is the L1 vocabulary performance of English-speaking Cebuano students in their classes from the start of the first grading to the second grading? Related Questions: Specifically, this paper answers the following questions: How is the vocabulary performance of the English-speaking Cebuano students in their English class regarding the number of words learned from the first to the second grading period?; What English words do the English-speaking Cebuano children find difficult to understand?; What English words can the English-speaking Cebuano children use in an L1 (English) utterance?

This study is anchored on the Nativist theory of Chomsky which suggest that children are born with the innate ability to understand the laws of language. This ability makes the children learn a native language easily. This theory further emphasizes that children indeed have language-related abilities that guide them as they go on mastering a language. From an early age, children understand the basic mechanisms of language. Chomsky also concluded that children must have this inborn faculty needed for language acquisition. In this study, Chomsky's theory would signify how English-speaking Grade 1 Cebuano students acquire English vocabulary in their first language (L1).

Related Studies

Studies on language acquisition have been of major interest among language researchers who investigates language performance and language abilities. A number of case studies have been published about the first language (L1) acquisition of students. Eslit (2019) investigated the first language influence on the linguistic competence of Grade 10 students. The findings showed that their linguistic competence was slightly correlated to the first language influence. This means that the first language (L1) has direct significance in the competence of students. This linguistic competence is necessary to improve the language use of students be it reading, writing, speaking, comprehension, and vocabulary.

The case study of Romero and Manjarres (2017) also analyzed the L1 of a student, but the study focused on the influence of the L1 on the learning a foreign language of an Arabian student. The results revealed that contrastive analysis (CA) and error analysis (EA) were effective ways to investigate and analyze how the L1 of a learner might influence the learning process in a foreign language. The result also revealed that the first language (L1) has an effect

on the learning process of the Arabian learner. This means that for a student to have an effective learning process in language, the first language must be investigated.

Consequently, aside from language learning process, some studies also focused on some problems experienced by children in their first language acquisition. Hutaaruk (2015) discussed a case study of the problems of children in learning L1 acquisition at ages 1-3 years old in Balata, Indonesia. The study revealed some problems in learning the first language (L1) such as problems in L1 acquisition namely, phonological and grammatical errors, incorrect responses or utterances, repetition, imitation, etc. This would mean that in a classroom, a teacher must also consider these factors when teaching a language to their students.

A case study by Meniado (2016) focused about the L1 acquisition process of a 3-year-old Lebanese child and analyzed the mechanisms that influence the first acquisition. The findings revealed that the subject acquired Arabic as his first language. The study further affirmed that the child has a functional Language Acquisition Device (LAD) that makes him gain the language being exposed to him. This study would emphasize that children indeed have the natural ability to learn their first language effectively, much more if the particular first language is also taught formally in school, then there is a good manifestation of first language learning.

Some researchers focused their studies on the vocabulary aspect of language acquisition. Min (2013) studied the vocabulary learning strategies among students who have English as their L2 in enhancing their vocabulary acquisition and learning of English. The findings revealed that it is important for learners to have an explicit approach to learning vocabulary with reading practices to be able to maximize their English vocabulary. Moreover, vocabulary also affects L2 acquisition, and they should also be exposed to effective vocabulary learning resources and strategies. It can be interpreted from this study that in order to effectively teach vocabulary in a second language, there must be efficient strategies in the learning process. This can also be applied to vocabulary acquisition of the first language among students.

Camo and Ballester (2015) explored the role of first language (L1) to the retention and access to English vocabulary among young learners of 10-11 years old. Upon analyzing the differences between the groups in relation to retention and access, the findings suggested that providing students with the L1 equivalents of lexical items would result in more retention and more access to English vocabulary. This study puts emphasis on the essence of first language (L1) mastery of students in the other aspects of language acquisition processes.

These cited related studies on language acquisition and vocabulary learning helped this paper in establishing the need to investigate first language (L1) vocabulary acquisition from a different perspective. Moreover, these studies have contributed to guiding this paper in the right direction of this study.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study only discussed the L1 vocabulary performance of English-speaking Cebuano students in their English classes only because of the time constraints. With the limited time during the pandemic, the study did not extend to cover other factors such as parents' experiences and perceptions, students' experiences at home, and the technical processes of how their learning module was crafted.

The sources of the data were the teachers, and limited to the vocabulary class work performance of the Grade 1 students from the first grading period to the second grading period. The study was limited to gathering data from the teachers only because the data-gathering procedures were conducted during the Christmas break wherein Grade 1 students were not in school anymore. The vocabulary activities taken by the Grade 1 students in their English classes are also limited to online modality only because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Their classes were not held in person and only through online synchronous and asynchronous sessions.

Despite these constraints, the study may have only covered three (3) students, however, the data gathered covered from 1st grading (3 months) to 2nd grading period (3month). This study believes that despite the limitations of the participants, it was able to cover a rigorous amount and scope of data from the participants which is enough to supplement the analysis in this paper. The limitations mentioned in this study can be covered and expounded upon in future research investigations.

Research Methodology

The participants of this study were three (3) Cebuano children who speak English at home and are currently enrolled as Grade 1 students in a private school in Cebu City. The age range of Grade 1 students is from 6 to 8 years old. The mother tongue of the Cebuano children is English.

This paper used a descriptive design to answer the questions of this paper. To identify the English words that the children have difficulty in word comprehending, vocabulary exercises in their class works were used. This paper initially based the findings of the study on the classwork performance only as its limitation. A follow-up study may be conducted to expand the methodology in investigating vocabulary acquisition.

The students answered the activities in their class works from the first-grading period to the second-grading period which covers around six (6) months of task activities. The vocabulary exercises involve making the students group words based on synonyms, identify the name of each pictures provided, and rewriting sentences by replacing underlined words with its antonyms. The scores they got in the class works were the basis for determining the difficult vocabulary and the vocabulary they understand.

The class records and other records of the teachers were also used to determine the vocabulary performance of students in terms of the number of words they have learned in their

classes based on the records of the teacher. A letter of intent seeking permission from the teachers was sought to establish ethical consideration and gave them the assurance that the data were used for academic purposes only and the name of the students were not disclosed.

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used solely to support language revision, including grammar, clarity, organization, and formatting. The author critically reviewed, verified, and approved all AI-assisted changes and assumes full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, interpretation, and final content of the manuscript. AI was not used to generate research data, conduct the analysis, or make scholarly decisions.

Results and Discussion

The following tables present the vocabulary performance of the three (3) Grade 1 English-speaking Cebuano students in their English classes. The three students in the tables are presented as Student A, Student B, and Student C. The data would show the scores they got from different vocabulary class works given to them both in synchronous and asynchronous online classes. The data covers their class work from the first grading period to the second grading period.

Table 1.

Vocabulary Classwork Scores in the First Grading Period

Student	S1	A1	S2	A2	S3	A3	A4	TOTAL
Perfect Score	15 (100%)	60 (100%)	10 (100%)	65 (100%)	12 (100%)	74 (100%)	58 (100%)	294 (100%)
Student A	15 (100%)	60 (100%)	10 (100%)	65 (100%)	12 (100%)	74 (100%)	58 (100%)	294 (100%)
Student B	12 (80%)	60 (100%)	10 (100%)	65 (100%)	12 (100%)	74 (100%)	54 (93.10%)	287 (97.61%)
Student C	15 (100%)	60 (100%)	10 (100%)	65 (100%)	12 (100%)	74 (100%)	58 (100%)	294 (100%)

Legend S- Synchronous; A-Asynchronous; S1-A4- 1st Grading Vocabulary Activities

The table shows the raw scores, as well as the percentage scores of the Grade 1 students in their vocabulary class work, during the first grading period. The first grading period starts from August to September. There were seven (7) English vocabulary activities performed by the students. These activities were S1 (synchronous activity 1), A1 (asynchronous activity 1), S2 (synchronous activity 2), A2 (asynchronous activity 2), S3 (synchronous activity 3), A3 (asynchronous activity 3), and A4 (asynchronous activity 4).

Student A got a perfect score in all the vocabulary activities from S1 to A4 with a total of 100% percentage score. Student B got a perfect score in most vocabulary activities, except for S1 80%, and A4 93.10%. The total percentage score of Student B was 97.61%. Student C also got a perfect score in all the vocabulary activities from S1 to A4 with a total of 100% percentage score. It can be interpreted that the Grade 1 students whose first language (L1) is English can

perform well in their vocabulary class work. Even though the students are non-native speakers of English, they are capable of vocabulary acquisition.

The vocabulary performance in this grading period in for the non-native English speaker students implies high scope of the vocabulary and the depth of how they understand the words in the tasks. Despite being a non-native speaker, the scores would indicate that students were able to manage the process of analyzing English words properly in order to perform the tasks.

Table 2.

Vocabulary Classwork Scores in the Second Grading Period

Student	S5	A5	S6	A6	S8	A8	S10	A10	TOTAL
Perfect Score	25 (100%)	56 (100%)	40 (100%)	45 (100%)	32 (100%)	40 (100%)	35 (100%)	32 (100%)	305 (100%)
Student A	25 (100%)	56 (100%)	40 (100%)	45 (100%)	29 (90.62%)	40 (100%)	34 (97.14%)	32 (100%)	301 (98.68%)
Student B	25 (100%)	56 (100%)	40 (100%)	45 (100%)	32 (100%)	40 (100%)	25 (71.42%)	32 (100%)	295 (96.72%)
Student C	25 (100%)	56 (100%)	39 (97.5%)	43 (95.5%)	32 (100%)	40 (100%)	35 (100%)	32 (100%)	302 (99%)

Legend: S- Synchronous; A-Asynchronous; S5-A10- 1st Grading Vocabulary Activities

The table shows the raw scores, as well as the percentage scores of the Grade 1 students in their vocabulary class work, during the second grading period. There were eight (8) English vocabulary activities performed by the students from November to the first week of December. These activities were S5 (synchronous activity 5), A5 (asynchronous activity 5), S6 (synchronous activity 6), A6 (asynchronous activity 6), S8 (synchronous activity 8), A8 (asynchronous activity 8), S10 (synchronous activity 10), and A10 (asynchronous activity 10). Student A got a perfect score in most vocabulary activities except for S8 90.62%, and S10 97.14%. The total percentage score of Student A was 98.68%. Student B also got a perfect score in most vocabulary activities, except for S10 71.42%, the lowest percentage score in all the activities.

The total percentage score of Student B was 96.72%. Student C got a perfect score in most of the vocabulary activities except for S6 97.5%, and A6 95.5%. It can be interpreted that the Grade 1 students still performed well in their vocabulary classwork during the second grading period. Even though the students are non-native speakers of English, they maintained their good vocabulary acquisition in the second grading period. Consistent with the result shown in table 1, the students had an outstanding vocabulary performance in their tasks. The students at a very young age have functional understanding of the English language. Being non-native speakers, these students could have meaningful engagement and productive exposure of the English language for having excellent vocabulary performance.

Table 3.

Summary of Vocabulary Classwork Scores

Student	First Grading	Second Grading	Average Percentage
Perfect Score	294 (100%)	305 (100%)	599 (100%)
Student A	294 (100%)	301 (98.68%)	595 (99%)
Student B	287 (97.61%)	295 (96.72%)	582 (97%)
Student C	294 (100%)	302 (99%)	596 (99%)

The table shows the summary of the vocabulary performance of the Grade 1 students from the first grading period to the second grading period. Student A and Student C both got a 99% of total percentage perfect score and Student B got a 97% of total percentage perfect score. The findings would show that the Grade 1 students have consistently performed well in their fifteen (15) vocabulary class works from the first grading period to the second grading period. Their percentage scores in every grading period did not go less than 95%, and some have even achieved a perfect 100% percentage score in the first grading period. The students are capable of learning English vocabulary since their first language (L1) is English even if they are non-native speakers. These findings relate to the cited related studies of this paper that first language (L1) acquisition is very essential in the language learning process of the students. Their mastery of the L1 is beneficial to their language capacity and acquisition.

Table 4.

List of Difficult and Easy Vocabularies to Understand

Student	Difficult words to understand	Words they can use in L1 Utterances
Student A	Crab Flag Lamp Manage Key Almighty Powerful Gratitude Untruthful Discourteous	Short Long Small Big Please Net Fan Cap Happy Pray
Student	Difficult words to understand	Words they can use in L1 Utterances
Student B	Return Snail Disrespectful Powerful Almighty Frightened Untruthful Manage Discourteous Gratitude	Short Big Long Small Buy Rain New Friend Play House
Student	Difficult words to understand	Words they can use in L1 Utterances
Student C	Rude Yell Lie Snail Almighty Powerful Discourteous Manage Gratitude Disrespectful	Short Big Long Small Morning Bag Outside Crayon Instrument Whistle

The table shows both the list of difficult English words and easy English words for the Grade 1 students to understand. These difficult words were taken from the vocabulary where the students mostly commit mistakes in their class works. Aside from the class record, the Grade 1 English teachers gave their insights during the data gathering that these words were difficult for the students since they cannot construct a sentence using these words, moreover, they mostly cannot expound or explain the meaning of the words.

Some of the identified difficult words were *almighty, powerful, gratitude, untruthful, discourteous, manage, snail, etc.* On the other hand, the Grade 1 teachers affirmed that the easy words identified in their records were based on the performance of the students who got correct answers in their class works.

In addition, the Grade teachers have expressed that in these words the students can utter sample sentences and can share their ideas and what they have understood about the words. These identified easy English words for them to understand were *short, long, small, big, happy, pray, rain, friend, morning, crayon, instrument, etc.* The data would further show that Grade 1 students have difficulty in terms of higher-level English vocabulary compared to the simpler ones. This would show that their language acquisition capacity needs more development in order to understand complex English words.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this investigation, the following conclusions were derived. English-speaking Cebuano students performed well in their English vocabulary classwork based on their high percentage scores. The students have good vocabulary skills in their first language (L1) which is evident from the consistently good scores in the vocabulary tasks from the first grading period to the second grading period. The findings reject the assumption that the Grade 1 students will have low performance in their English vocabulary classwork being non-native English speakers. The study further concluded that the Grade 1 English-speaking Cebuano students have English vocabulary manifested in learning objectives that made them classify words based on synonyms, identify the name of each pictures provided, and rewriting sentences by replacing underlined words with its antonyms even if they are non-native English speakers.

The findings also evidently confirm the Nativist Theory of Chomsky that children have a well-functioning language acquisition mechanism that mainly enables them to acquire the language they are exposed to. It can be concluded that from a very early age of Grade 1 students, they are able to understand the basics of vocabulary. The difficult words would affirm the theory that they would need more activation of their language acquisition capacity to further acquire complex English vocabulary.

This paper recommends to conduct another study using other methodologies, instrumentalities, and wider scope of participants in investigating vocabulary performance and vocabulary acquisition of young learners' L1. It is highly suggested to involve study habits of students, parents' intervention, other sociological factors in the future studies of vocabulary performance and acquisition.

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Appendix A

Sample Vocabulary Classwork Activities

Name: _____ Date: _____

A. Directions: Use the same color for the words that are synonym or has the same meaning. (20 points)

Example:



end		angry
wealthy		beautiful
unhappy		fast
big		finish
pretty		rich
mad		sad
happy		huge
yell		shout
tiny		wet
quick		small
damp		

Name: _____ Date: _____

A. Directions: Write the name of each picture. Color it if the sound produced is long /e/. (20 points)



B. Directions: Rewrite the sentences. Change the underlined word into its antonym. (15 points)

1. Would you please open the door?

2. You are late for the meeting.

3. This classroom is very neat.

4. I removed the purse in the drawer.

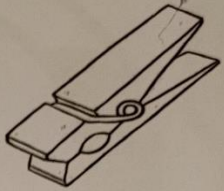
5. My dad is old.

Appendix B

Sample Answered Classwork of the Students

A. Directions: Write the name of each picture. Color it if the sound produced is long /e/. (20 points)

	
Key	Eagle
	
Bell	Net
	
Leaf	Meat

	
Beets	Clip

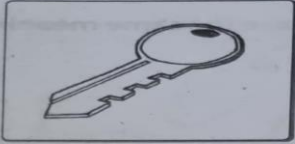
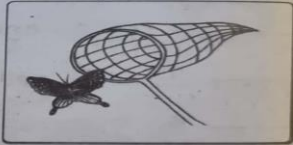
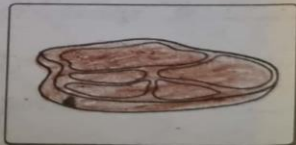
B. Directions: Rewrite the sentences. Change the underlined word into its antonym. (15 points)

1. Would you please open the door?
 Would you please close the door.
2. You are late for the meeting.
 You are early for the meeting.
3. This classroom is very neat.
 This classroom is very dirty.
4. I removed the purse in the drawer.
 I put the purse in the drawer.
5. My dad is old.
 My dad is young.

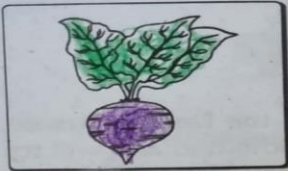
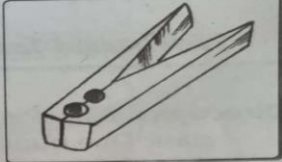
Read to Lead 1

Power Up #2

Directions: Write the name of each picture. Color it if the sound produced is long /e/.

	
key	leap
	
Bell	net
	
leaf	steak

Unit 1

	
beet	peg

Power Up #3

Directions: Rewrite the sentences. Change the underlined word into its antonym.

- Would you please open the door?
Would you please close the door?
- You are late for the meeting.
You are early for the meeting.
- This classroom is very neat.
This classroom is very untidy.
- I removed the purse in the drawer.
I put the purse in the drawer.
- My dad is old.
My dad is young.