



# ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE: STRATEGIES IN TEACHING ATA-MANOBO LEARNERS

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## ABSTRACT

*The study provided a comprehensive understanding of English when they study a new language. They become more aware of grammar, conjugation and sentence structures. The phenomenological approach was utilized in my research, as it is particularly suited for exploring the lived experiences of individuals and understanding the meaning they attribute to those experiences. In my study, the participants consisted of 10 English teachers, with five teachers involved in the in-depth interviews (IDI) and the other five participating in the focus group discussion (FGD). The implications of this study held significant implications for both educators and policymakers, especially in multicultural and multilingual contexts. One of the key themes of the Ata-Manobo English Acquisition Journey highlights the unique linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic realities that shape the language learning experiences of Indigenous learners. From a Social Constructivism perspective, this journey emphasized the importance of social interaction, community involvement, and culturally responsive teaching. Learners acquire language not in isolation, but through meaningful engagement with their peers, teachers, and broader communities, underlining the need for collaborative learning environments that respect and integrate indigenous perspectives*

**KEYWORDS:** Acquisition, English Language, Strategies in Teaching , Ata-Manobo Learners

## INTRODUCTION

There is a limited exploration of culturally responsive teaching methods tailored specifically to the Ata-Manobo context. While existing studies address general ESL strategies, there is a lack of research on how indigenous Filipino learners, particularly Ata-Manobo students, engage with and acquire English as a second language. More research is needed to identify and adapt effective teaching strategies that align with their cultural norms, values, and local linguistic features. Understanding how to bridge the gap between traditional indigenous languages and English can inform more inclusive and effective pedagogical approaches, contributing to both language acquisition and cultural preservation for Ata-Manobo learners.

In China communication between people not only enables us to understand one-another, but aids in developing relationships and allows us to communicate our problems, suggestions and plans (Harkness, 2024). I'm sure you can all agree that language is a crucial part of everyday life. Language Acquisition is something that can often be misunderstood, simplified, or even forgotten. The interactionist perspective suggests that a combination of biological and cognitive factors plus the linguistic environment are all necessary for the acquisition of language (Larsen, 2024). There are many distinctions between the processes of learning and acquisition.

The terms are generally used to separate first language acquisition from second language learning, and implied within this distinction is the gap between children of 0-5 years learning their mother tongue, and those beyond puberty who may begin at this stage to learn a second language, or more (Cheng, 2023). The process is a conscious one in learning whereas it is subconscious in acquisition and in language acquisition the focus is on communication or reception of a message as opposed to syntax and grammar as is the case in language learning. Moreover, the context is usually crucial and meaningful in language acquisition, but need not be important to the same extent in language learning.

In Russia, there are enormous challenges in raising English proficiency, and these affect both academic studies and social life. This may be because of several factors that influenced the adaptation to the English language (Strongman, 2019). Schools that offer ESL classes tend to be in urban areas with high concentrations of minority and economically disadvantaged students. According to Vicchiarelli (2019), ESL learners therefore are positioned to be highly segregated from English-speaking students. This lessens their opportunities to hear from and interact with good models of English and peers who are native speakers. When it comes to literacy instruction, there is a lot of interaction, conversation, and value involved. Sometimes, topics covered in instruction may focus on something cultural that ESL learners do not understand, know about, or even value.

In the United States, a case study was conducted by (Wolf & Phung, 2019) explored the experiences of Chinese nurses when completing a graduate nursing degree taught in English as a second language in the United States over a one-year period. Their study explored language, academic, and social challenges perceived by the students, strategies used to overcome challenges, and academic support services designed to help students succeed in their



studies (Kurtz, 2024). The study identified participants' difficulty with academic writing, mixed experiences with speaking, moderate to high levels of strategy use, and appreciation of the support services offered. The study offered implications for improvements in pedagogies and programming for international students. At present, there are still difficulties as well as ineffective language learning strategies that others have used to conquer these challenges (Sukyng, 2021).

In the National Capital Region, Ancheta & Perez (2019) pointed out various challenges of language learning strategies that have not been given focus by most educational institutions and language teachers. The study showed that some students had difficulty of learning two languages at the same time, others were reluctant to communicate with them, some were not given qualified professors to provide enough time to teach them Filipino, while other reasons pointed out included the absence of any friend to assist them in translating Filipino sentences to English, the non-existence of a Filipino course to specifically address their language needs (Soliman & Gorospe, 2024).

Also, the semantic and interpretational differences between Filipino and English as well as the lack of knowledge on the structure of Filipino language and the inadequacy of language learning materials such as books, modules, etc. Above all those reasons was that students felt like being embarrassed when speaking in Filipino (Giangnan, 2024).

In Surigao City, the acquisition of English as a second language (ESL) among Ata-Manobo learners presents unique challenges and opportunities due to the community's distinct cultural and linguistic background. The Ata-Manobo, an indigenous group in the region, often face difficulties in learning English because of the significant differences between their native language and English. There is a need for ESL teaching strategies that are not only linguistically effective but also culturally sensitive. Tailored pedagogical approaches that integrate the Ata-Manobo's local context, values, and traditions could help bridge this gap. In Surigao City, research into the specific educational needs of Ata-Manobo learners, combined with strategies such as the use of their native language as a foundation for learning English, could lead to more effective teaching practices and improved language acquisition outcomes for this indigenous group (Ancheta & Perez, 2019).

Meanwhile, in Caraga, Davao Oriental, the acquisition of English as a second language (ESL) among Ata-Manobo learners presents distinct educational challenges, given the region's diverse cultural and linguistic landscape. The Ata-Manobo community, with its unique indigenous language and traditions, often struggles with learning English due to the significant linguistic differences between their native language and English. To improve English language acquisition, there is a pressing need for ESL strategies that are not only linguistically appropriate but also culturally relevant. Culturally responsive teaching methods, such as incorporating local stories, customs, and indigenous perspectives, could facilitate better engagement and learning outcomes for Ata-Manobo students.

In Santo Tomas College of Agriculture, Sciences and Technology, language learning strategies are supposed to be implemented in the teaching of English subjects. However, as observed, these have not been fully emphasized and adopted in class. It is with this consideration that the researchers were driven to conduct this study which served as the pilot on realizing the value of strategies in the teaching and learning of language. The researchers found it necessary to conduct this study to assess the skills, and capabilities of students enrolled in Santo Tomas College of Agriculture, Sciences and Technology, Davao del Norte, Philippines as the expected results of the integration of varied strategies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The acquisition of English as a second language (ESL) presents numerous challenges for learners, particularly those whose native languages differ significantly from English in terms of structure and phonetics. One of the major obstacles is language transfer, where learners apply the rules and patterns of their native language to English. This can result in errors in pronunciation, grammar, and syntax. For instance, learners from languages that do not have articles or plural forms, such as Chinese, often struggle with these aspects in English (Sung, 2020). The challenge of language transfer continues to impede language acquisition by creating persistent errors, which can be discouraging for learners and may slow their progress in mastering English.

Motivation also plays a critical role in the success of English language acquisition, as learners who are highly motivated tend to perform better. However, the role of motivation can be complex, especially in environments where English is perceived as a foreign or difficult language to master. According to Dincer and Yesilyurt (2020), intrinsic motivation where learners are driven by personal interest in English leads to better long-term outcomes. In contrast, learners who lack motivation or view English primarily as a tool for achieving academic or professional success may struggle to fully engage with the language. Such attitudes can limit exposure to English in everyday contexts, ultimately hindering the natural acquisition of the language.

Socioeconomic factors are another critical challenge in English language acquisition. Learners from lower-income backgrounds often have limited access to resources such as books, tutors, or technology that would facilitate language learning. A study by Chao and Lee (2022) found that socioeconomic disadvantages can restrict opportunities for immersion in English-speaking environments, which is vital for developing fluency. These learners may also face difficulties accessing quality education due to inadequate school facilities or lack of qualified ESL



teachers. As a result, they may struggle to reach proficiency levels that are expected in more affluent communities, further exacerbating the achievement gap in English language learning.

Cultural differences also present challenges in language acquisition, as English is often associated with a Western worldview that can conflict with the values and communication styles of learners from non-Western cultures. Zhang and Zhang (2023) highlighted how cultural differences embedded in language can influence learning behaviors. For example, learners from collectivist cultures may find it difficult to embrace the individualistic communication style commonly used in English, which values directness and assertiveness. These cultural barriers can create reluctance to fully engage with English, as learners may feel that adopting the language also requires adopting a foreign cultural identity. Overcoming these challenges requires a teaching approach that is culturally sensitive and recognizes the importance of learners' cultural backgrounds in the language learning process.

### Research Questions

The acquisition of English as a second language (ESL) among Ata-Manobo learners presented a unique set of challenges and opportunities. Therefore, the following research questions were formulated in order to achieve the main purpose of the study, to wit:

1. What are the experiences of Ata-Manobo students in acquiring the English language?
2. How did they cope up with the challenges in acquiring the English language?
3. What educational insights are drawn to improve their English language learning?

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

In my study, I employed a phenomenological qualitative design with the goal of describing the experiences of English teachers and the challenges they face when teaching English as a second language to Ata-Manobo learners. The primary objective of this study is to gain a deep understanding of, and explore, the challenges and experiences these teachers encounter in their teaching practices. I focused on the experiences of English teachers working in public schools in Santo Tomas, Davao del Norte, who will serve as the key informants for my research, providing the necessary data for the study.

The phenomenological approach was utilized in my research, as it is particularly suited for exploring the lived experiences of individuals and understanding the meaning they attribute to those experiences. In this study, I focused on the teachers' perceptions and the challenges they face in teaching English to Ata-Manobo learners. By using this approach, I intended to gain a deeper insight into the personal, emotional, and professional dimensions of teaching ESL to these learners and to seek potential solutions to the difficulties identified. Phenomenology, as a research method, focuses on the essence of experiences and events, minimizing the emphasis on external or physical realities, and instead prioritizing how individuals make sense of and interpret their experiences. This allowed me to gain a comprehensive understanding of the teachers' perspectives on the challenges they face in teaching English to Ata-Manobo learners.

### Research Participants

In my study, the participants consisted of 10 English teachers, with five teachers involved in the in-depth interviews (IDI) and the other five participating in the focus group discussion (FGD). The inclusion criteria for the participants are that they must be English teachers currently handling Ata-Manobo students. To ensure confidentiality, all participants and informants involved in the IDI and FGD were assigned codenames, which was used to protect their identities and maintain their privacy throughout the study. This approach safeguards the participants while allowing me to collect valuable insights for the research on the Acquisition of English as a Second Language: Strategies in Teaching Ata-Manobo Learners.

### Research Instrument

In my study on the Acquisition of English Language: Strategies in Teaching Ata-Manobo Learners, I employed qualitative research instruments to collect rich, descriptive data from the participants. The primary instruments I used are semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). The semi-structured interviews allowed me to delve into the individual experiences and perspectives of the English teachers working with Ata-Manobo learners. The interview guide will consist of open-ended questions designed to explore the teachers' strategies, challenges, and insights into teaching English language. These questions were flexible enough to encourage in-depth responses while ensuring that the key topics related to the research objectives are addressed.

In addition to the individual interviews, I also conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) with a selected group of teachers. The FGDs provided an opportunity for participants to engage in a collaborative discussion, allowing for the exchange of ideas, experiences, and strategies regarding the teaching of English to Ata-Manobo learners. The FGD guide included open-ended questions that encourage participants to reflect on collective experiences, fostering dialogue on the challenges they face in the classroom and the strategies they find most effective. Both instruments were used to capture the nuances of teachers' experiences and to provide a comprehensive understanding of the strategies used in the acquisition of English as a second language by Ata-Manobo learners.



### Data Analysis

In the process of qualitative data analysis, the researcher employed the simple five-step process according to (Cresswell, 2019). First, the researchers require organizing and preparing analysis through transcribing, scanning, and categorizing the data gathered. In this study, the raw data gathered from the In-depth interview and focus group discussions was transcribed verbatim and ensured that it is systematically organized based on the categorization and response of the participants.

Second, the researcher considered looking at or reading all the data to secure the overall meaning of the study. As the researchers in this study, the researchers ensured to check all the data being collected to avoid misinterpretation, and a detailed review was ensured so that no information was neglected.

Third, coding data was employed to organize and categorize through the labeling of collected data. In this study, the utilization of coding is essential so that the organization of data was easily traced and examined. Fourth, the coding process was utilized to describe the participants, categories, and settings to design detailed descriptions of the study.

Fifth, the themes and description gave importance to be presented in tabular form. To give details about the theme, according to Clarke and Braun (2018), thematic analysis is the most widely accepted framework for analyzing a qualitative study. In conducting thematic analysis, it has a six-step process: first, familiarizing data; second, generating initial codes; third, searching for themes; fourth, reviewing possible themes; fifth, defining and naming themes and sixth, producing the report.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Implications

The implications of this study held significant implications for both educators and policymakers, especially in multicultural and multilingual contexts. One of the key themes of the Ata-Manobo English Acquisition Journey highlights the unique linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic realities that shape the language learning experiences of Indigenous learners. From a Social Constructivism perspective, this journey emphasized the importance of social interaction, community involvement, and culturally responsive teaching. Learners acquire language not in isolation, but through meaningful engagement with their peers, teachers, and broader communities, underlining the need for collaborative learning environments that respect and integrate indigenous perspectives.

The theme Motivation and Personal Goals revealed how deeply learners' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations influence their English acquisition. Cognitive Learning Theory supported this by showing how mental processes like goal-setting, attention, and memory play a vital role in language learning. For Ata-Manobo students, motivations are often tied to aspirations for education, employment, or communication beyond their immediate communities. This finding suggested that ESL programs should not only build language skills but also connect these to learners' personal aspirations, making the learning process more meaningful and sustained.

A central pedagogical implication lies in the theme Focus on Communicative Competence, which is aligned with both Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Theory and Social Constructivism. Communicative competence involves not just grammatical accuracy but also the ability to use language effectively in real-life contexts. This theme reinforced the SLA notion that interaction is essential to learning a second language, and it validated communicative language teaching methods. For Ata-Manobo learners, promoting real-world language use through role-plays, dialogues, and community projects can significantly enhance fluency and confidence.

The study brought to light the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy in ESL instruction. Rooted in Social Constructivism, this perspective asserted that learners construct knowledge best when new information is related to their cultural context and prior experiences. Teachers must, therefore, adapt their strategies to bridge the cultural gap between English instruction and the learners' indigenous identity. This had implications for teacher training and curriculum design, calling for inclusive content that affirms the learners' cultural heritage while equipping them with global communication skills.

Finally, the integration of Social Constructivism, Cognitive Learning Theory, and SLA Theory in analyzing Ata-Manobo learners' language acquisition journey underscores the necessity of a holistic approach to ESL education. It points to the need for educational policies that are inclusive of indigenous learners, support mother-tongue-based multilingual education, and promote learner-centered methods. The study advocated for a deeper understanding of learners' contexts, motivations, and interactional needs insights that are crucial for fostering effective, equitable, and empowering English language learning experiences.

### Future Directions

Ata-Manobo Learners should prioritize learner-centered approaches that recognize the unique experiences of Ata-Manobo students in their English acquisition journey. As seen in the theme Ata-Manobo English language Journey, future educational initiatives must be designed to build learners' confidence and engagement through culturally relevant content and practical application of English. Programs can include community-based learning activities, storytelling, and interactive tasks that reflect everyday life and promote active use of English. Emphasizing the learners' agency and giving them opportunities to express their voices in both English and their native language will encourage deeper learning and long-term motivation.





Ata-Manobo teachers, the study points toward the need for targeted professional development programs focused on effective, culturally inclusive ESL pedagogies. Under the theme Motivation and Personal Goals, future research could examine how teachers' understanding of their students' backgrounds influences motivation and outcomes.

School leaders could be guided to support flexible and inclusive curricula that accommodate indigenous learners' goals, using education as a bridge rather than a barrier. Additionally, collaboration with the school personnel should be strengthened to integrate indigenous knowledge systems into ESL instruction, ensuring respect for cultural norms and fostering community ownership of education.

Council of Elders can ensure that language instruction aligns with community values, making the school a place where both traditional wisdom and academic learning coexist harmoniously.

Future researchers are encouraged to delve deeper into the theme Focus on Communicative Competence by exploring innovative, context-based approaches to teaching English in indigenous communities. Studies could assess how peer-led discussions, role-plays, and community-based projects improve learners' speaking and comprehension skills. Further research might also explore the impact of technology, such as mobile learning or audio-visual aids in native dialects and English, to enhance accessibility and engagement. Ultimately, continued research and community dialogue should aim to create a sustainable, inclusive ESL framework that honors indigenous identity while opening pathways to broader opportunities.

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