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Learning Challenges in the New Senior High School English Curriculum in the Philippines

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Abstract. The Philippines has adopted the new K-12 program known as the "Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013" through Republic Act No. 10533. To this day, senior high school students use the new English curriculum. This study aims to understand and explore the experiences of the first batch of senior high school students when the Department of Education (DepEd) implemented the English language curriculum. The Researchers employed a case study design to acquire an in-depth analysis of the case of one or more students. Thirteen male and female students from a private non-sectarian school in the National Capital Region, Philippines, were selected using purposive sampling. Subsequently, the participants underwent face-to-face interviews with semi-structured and open-ended questions. The data collected from the interviews were analysed through thematic analysis using the six-phase framework by Braun & Clarke et al. (2006). The study findings revealed that most participants experienced challenges and considered the subject difficult because of its complexity. The challenges unveiled by the participants are insufficient knowledge and skills, low self-confidence, peer attitudes, and teaching instruction. They also mentioned that they overcome these by staying positive, enjoying their learning experience, and helping themselves through self-instructions. Moreover, the study also revealed that most of the challenges experienced by the participants come from their learning environments, such as peers and teachers. Therefore, understanding the challenges of students may help improve teachers' methodologies and approaches; likewise, the school administrators may develop and enhance their programs and policies for better implementation of the English curriculum.

Keywords: K-12 curriculum; English curriculum; English language learning; senior high school

1. Introduction

In 2013, the government implemented the Philippine 10-year basic educational platform as it transitioned to the K-12 program signed by President Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino III. The Philippines is now implementing the K to 12 Curriculum through the Republic Act No. 10533, otherwise known as the "Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013." The new curriculum focused on the mastery of learning

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and strengthened the core subjects such as Mathematics, Science, and Language. This program intensified the standards. They have been integrated for innovative instruction, and at the same time, they made the Philippines at par with the educational standards of foreign countries.

There was a comprehensive reform for the Philippines' basic education. However, the students who graduated from high school were lacked of competencies in several subject areas (Barrot, 2018). Thus, the Philippines has adopted the K to 12 curricula to address the problem. DepEd introduced the spiral progression approach to strengthen retention and mastery of topics and skills as students revisit learning in the next grade levels (Quijano, 2012). Integrating the 21st-century learning framework in this curriculum reform will strengthen the quality of high school graduates to make them more globally competitive to achieve more success and gain recognition in the international labor arena (DepEd Order No. 55, 2015).

The primary purpose of the K-12 program is to allow the two additional learning years to strengthen students' skills in their specific fields. The program offers two branches: One is academic, and the other is the technical-vocational branch. The program equips K-12 technical-vocational students to be workplace ready and prepares academic branch students for college. As the first batch of senior high school started in 2016, there are still objections from parents and other sectors of society, and they urge to defer its full implementation. Many Filipinos believe that the Philippine educational system is still being prepared for curriculum change because of its difficulties. According to reports, the senior high school curriculum lacks implementing guidelines, preparation, and materials, aside from being "too ambitious" because the design and content are for exceptional learners. The students need to submit research papers as basic requirements in the course. (Brilliantes, 2020).

As the Philippines welcomed the new administration after the 2022 election, there was a call to conduct a thorough evaluation of the K-12 program of the Department of Education (DepEd) to determine the program's accomplishments and failings. According to experts, the K-12 curriculum has many competencies that end up with no learning. The technical-vocational track, which concerns the training given to senior high school students in terms of time and technology, is another issue to be addressed in the K-12 curriculum assessment.

In implementing the senior high school programs, teachers and students experienced issues and challenges. However, the Department of Education (DepEd), Commission of Higher Education (CHED), Fund Assistance for Private Education (FAPE), the National Network of Normal Schools, including the Philippine Normal University, and the University of the Philippines prepared programs that would help the teachers and academic leaders to cope with these issues and challenges. Some of these programs focused on developing teaching guides, using the Senior High School Support Website for teachers, collaborative teacher training, and the higher education institution (HEI)-K12 School Adoption Model.

Unfortunately, these programs are mainly designed to address the concerns of teachers. More effort must be made to address the concerns of students who were significantly affected by implementing the K-12 program. (Dizon et al., 2019). With this, students find difficulty adjusting to the new curriculum; thus, their school performance is very much affected. Teachers should improve, modify, and contextualize their teaching approaches to address the current needs of students since they have various learning styles. With the new curriculum, the teaching-learning process becomes challenging in developing students' 21st-century skills and competencies.

The additional two (2) years in the Philippine educational system have brought issues and concerns to educators, institutions, and students. Addressing these issues and concerns is the primary objective of this paper. Few studies have explored the challenges of Senior High School (SHS) students in their English classrooms. Consequently, the researchers aim to explore the senior high school students' experiences in accomplishing and complying with the requirements of their English teachers.

The main objective of this paper is focused on exploring the experiences of senior high school students in their English classes. This paper will also investigate their challenges and coping mechanisms for overcoming them. The result of this study will enlighten English teachers to address the concerns of their students appropriately.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Learning English

The Philippines is an English-speaking country acknowledged globally and enjoyed international recognition. English is one of the country's official languages and is used as a medium of instruction in education, with more than 14 million Filipinos using it (Cabigon, 2015). Although this country has several regional languages, it was ranked 14th in the global English Proficiency Index (EPI) in 2018. This rank means that the country has a "high proficiency" level in English, which enables Filipinos to make a presentation at work, understand TV shows, and read newspapers (Baclig, 2020).

With approximately 1.4 billion native and non-native English speakers worldwide, English has been predominantly used in international business, diplomatic relations, tourism, aviation, and technology. It also emerges as the most used language in scientific studies and one of the most-sought foreign languages to learn. Moreover, employers in the global market quickly hire people with high English proficiency (Domingo, 2020). Therefore, it is the language of opportunities and so the language of the world (Nanquil, 2021). However, despite the high proficiency rating in 2018, the Philippines ranked the lowest in reading comprehension among 79 countries in a global survey conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Results revealed that the Philippines has an average reading score of 340, meaning that one in four students cannot complete even the most basic reading tasks.

DepEd also acknowledged that it must regularly assess the curriculum for its applicability and that the provision of facilities needs to be sped up because these are two key elements influencing Filipino students' performance. Other factors affecting the nation's educational system, such as hunger and poverty, government spending on education, and class size, are listed after it.

Students learn English for many years in school; however, they cannot communicate in English effectively and efficiently. Despite all the government's efforts, Filipino students are less successful in learning English than expected. In other words, learning English as a second language remains a challenging task. Students and teachers need a shared and enduring effort (Ying et al., 2021). To fully develop and enhance the language competencies of Filipino students, the government is making efforts to improve the teaching and learning of English to achieve 21st-century skills in oral and written communication.

2.2 Senior High School English Curriculum

Oral communications in Context and Reading and Writing Skills are two English subjects offered in the senior high school curriculum. Both are taught for 80 hours per semester. In the Oral Communications subject, students are expected to develop listening and speaking skills for effective communication. On the other hand, students are expected to develop their reading and writing skills in the Reading and Writing Skills subject. Furthermore, in these subjects, Senior high school students are expected to develop the following skills: integrate communication and language skills in creating meaning using oral and written texts and utilize various genres and discursive contexts for personal and professional purposes. These subjects are expected to equip students with communicative competence before they graduate from senior high school.

English proficiency in the Philippines is weakening due to the graduates' declining mastery of competencies in the English language. The Philippines had the lowest reading comprehension in the 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the lowest in the 2019 International Mathematics and Science Study (Puente, 2022). If the students have a strong foundation in the English language during elementary and secondary education, they will achieve English proficiency in tertiary. However, more than ninety percent of college graduates in the Philippines still need to be equipped with English proficiency, as revealed in the test conducted by Hopkins (Domingo, 2020).

2.3 Challenges of Senior High School Students

In the Philippines, English is the medium of instruction in all subjects except Filipino. However, English speaking seems very difficult for most Filipino students, especially at the secondary level, even though it is used as a second language in the Philippines. (Canceran & Temporal, 2020), In some countries, several factors are associated with difficulty in English language learning in the school setting, including grammatical problems and a lack of motivation to practice (Novariana et al., 2018). According to Akay and Toraman (2015), grammar is commonly taught as one of the essential elements to help learners communicate in the target language. Parallel to this, a study by Schulz, as cited by Canceran and Temporal (2020), revealed that both American and Columbian

students deemed formal grammar study essential to mastering a foreign language. Despite the growing population of English language learners worldwide, little research has focused on understanding the challenges of English language learners within the context of the K-12 curriculum in the Philippines.

In addition, Loewen et al. (2009) concluded that grammar is a basis for participants to build up the information they learn about the language and help them develop their writing, reading, and speaking skills. Similarly, Incecay and Dollar, as cited in Akay and Toraman (2015), revealed that students consider grammar an essential aspect of language learning; however, they believe that English should be taught more communicatively. Interestingly, several studies were conducted on grammar teaching and language learning, but few on the learners' attitudes and perceptions towards grammar.

The study by Akbari (2015) stated that learning English becomes difficult because the students do not feel the immediate need to use English outside the classroom, and no environment will make them familiar with the language. Furthermore, many students disregard learning and mastering a foreign language, and only a few succeed because they use strategies to learn the language.

Learning a second language entails the right attitude, and it is revealed in the study of Blas et al. (2018) that attitude, motivation, emotions, and the learner's background could affect English Language proficiency. The study showed that the highly motivated student learning the language could achieve more than the less motivated student. Correspondingly, a study by Zhou (2009) concluded that participants were very motivated to develop their grammar and especially needed to learn grammar to avoid making mistakes while writing. Gardner (as cited in Cancaran & Temporal, 2020) also identified learners' attitudes toward learning another language as having a critical role in enhancing and motivating students to learn the language. Correspondingly, it also influences students' language performance and increases positive attitudes toward language learning (Kara, 2009).

Moreover, most students reportedly encountered communication problems that affected their studies (Alhassan et al., 2021). Communication problems included speaking skills related to oral presentations made by students and classroom participation, while listening skills consisted of lecture comprehension and note-taking skills. The skills mentioned above relate to the competencies necessary to master English.

According to Rahayu (2015), students must master four skills in learning English: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Speaking is the most essential of the four because it is a crucial aspect of English learning. Success is measured in the ability to carry out a conversation in a language. In the same study, Rahayu (2015) concluded that the common problems faced by students in speaking English include fear of making mistakes, incorrect pronunciation, lack of understanding of grammatical patterns, limited vocabulary mastery, minimum opportunities, students' interest, mother tongue use, seldom to practice, and less discipline.

Moreover, the study by Blas et al. (2018) revealed that self-confidence and self-esteem contribute to the success of learning the language. Therefore, students' performance in the classroom may depend on their level of self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Teachers or instructors may also partake a role in students' English language learning. A case study by Alhassan et al. (2012) revealed that teachers have difficulty teaching the subject because of their slow understanding of basic concepts. However, they are very committed to teaching them. Meanwhile, a study by Novariana et al. (2018) also revealed that students failed to write better because the teacher did not provide feedback on their writing. Teachers only correct the paper and give a score, but no feedback is shown on the paper. The study suggested that teachers should provide positive feedback and encourage students to practice writing and reading rather than judge students' mistakes.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study used qualitative design and a case study approach to acquire an in-depth analysis of the case of one or more students. This paper used a case study design through interviews with open-ended questions. A case study, as posited by Creswell (2013), "explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection to report a case description and case **themes**" (p.73). Since the challenges of the senior high school students as the first batch in the implementation of the new curriculum are interesting, the case study design is deemed most suitable for this study as it sought to explore the challenges faced by the students as they engage in the implementation of the curriculum.

3.2 Research Questions

This paper aimed to explore the experiences of senior high school students in implementing the new English curriculum. The following questions were asked: (1) What are the experiences that the Senior High school students encountered in the implementation of the new K-12 English Curriculum? (2) What are the students' challenges and coping strategies in dealing with these difficulties?

3.2 Research Participants

This study involved thirteen senior high school students from a non-sectarian private school. They were male and female students aged between sixteen and eighteen and were selected using a purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is a technique to identify and select the participants that have experienced the phenomenon. Also, these participants are willing to participate and can communicate their experiences and views (Palinkas et al., 2015).

3.3 Data Collection

The study employed a semi-structured and in-depth interview process. The interview guide consisted of seven open-ended questions that helped the students describe their experiences and share their challenges and coping strategies in learning English.

3.4 Data Analysis

Coding was used to analyse the data. According to Creswell (2013), in coding, the researcher organizes data collected into segments and assigns a word or phrase to them as labels. It is the process of fragmenting and classifying text to create explanations and comprehensive themes in the data (Akinyode and Khan, 2018). The data collected from the interviews were analysed through thematic analysis using the six-phase framework by Braun & Clarke et al. (2006). The six-phase used are as follows: 1. First, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data by repeated reading to search for the meaning. 2. Second, the researchers generated initial codes after familiarizing themselves with the data; this was done by coding the significant ideas. 3. Third, they developed themes after sorting codes that showed a pattern of meaning from the data. 4. Fourth, they reviewed the themes to ensure that data within themes correspond meaningfully with clear distinctions between themes. 5. Fifth, they defined and named the themes. They also wrote a detailed analysis and explained the relevance of the data gathered to the research problem. 6. Lastly, they wrote the research report based on the findings of the data.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

Three experts in teaching, curriculum, and psychology validated the interview questions. The researchers conducted pilot testing to assess the research instrument's effectiveness and identify its weaknesses. After transcribing the interview result, the researchers reviewed each transcript using investigator triangulation to ensure accuracy and reliability. The researchers conducted a confirmatory analysis through three rounds of coding. First, the principal researcher coded the thirteen interview transcripts; in the second and third rounds, each co-researcher reviewed all the transcripts previously coded by the principal researcher. Thus, all three researchers coded and confirmed each interview transcript.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Since this study used human participants, an informed consent form was given to the students, and let their parents or guardians signed it. The consent letter was discussed first with the students before giving it to them. After the parents or guardians signed the form, the researchers started the interview process. The identity of the participants and the participating school in this study were treated with the utmost confidentiality and ensured that there was no harm or possible risks that could pose a danger in conducting the study because it involved only an interview.

4. Results and Discussion

Participants were asked to describe their experiences and share particular challenges in learning English in the new curriculum. The findings revealed that learning English is difficult and challenging because of its complexity; thus, for them, it is an everyday challenge to attend their English classes. However, only some students found it advantageous because learning English allowed them to learn, explore, and practice the language through the learning activities inside the classroom. This study's results presented four (4) main themes and nine (9) sub-

themes. The first theme covered the experiences of students in learning English, the second and third theme included their challenges, and the fourth theme covered their strategies for dealing with the challenges.

1. What are the experiences that Senior High School Students encountered in the implementation of the new K-12 English Curriculum?

Students were asked to describe their experiences in attending their English class.

Theme 1: English Learning Experience

Sub theme: A Challenging Experience

Most of the participants described their English learning experiences in the classroom as an everyday challenge. Though they find it necessary to learn the language, they find it difficult, especially in speaking. The participants stated that they have difficulties speaking due to unfamiliar words, grammar weakness, and sentence construction complexity. In addition, they also emphasized that learning and speaking English becomes more challenging than beneficial because they lack the opportunity for practical application in their daily lives.

English is not the language of many families in the country. In the case of some participants, English is not used at home because not all family members can speak and understand English, as the student shared:

"At home, I was not required to speak English. We only use Filipino at home, and I only use English in school. I am challenged." (SHS4)

This finding is similar to the results of Akbari (2015), which found that Iranian students' main obstacle to learning English is the unavailability of an environment that will help them use or practice English. Participants in this study also do not see the need to learn the language because they only use English in the classroom. In the Philippines, Filipino or Tagalog is used in many Filipino homes to communicate with family members, the community, and friends. Like the Iranian students, therefore, students' use of their mother tongue serves as a barrier to English learning as it creates few opportunities for practicing spoken English, which may result in low proficiency.

Subsequently, the content of English subjects presents itself as a challenge because they are relatively more profound and complex than what the participants have discussed in junior high. To some students, the complexity of topics was another challenge in their English classroom. According to SHS6:

"It's challenging because in junior high, topics were not so hard. In senior high, it got deep and more complex." (SHS6)

This atmosphere of difficulty that the students experience stems from the complexity of topics, lack of practice, and little motivation to learn. Learning the language and practicing it is a two-way process. The students tried their best to learn the English language in the classroom, but unfortunately, they did not have the opportunity to practice it outside the school, and the tendency is for them to forget what they have learned. According to the participants, it is more

challenging because English is a required course in all tracks in senior high school, and they need to pass it to finish senior high school.

Sub theme: A Beneficial Experience

The result of the study revealed that only some of the participants felt that they were being challenged as they took their English subject. Some participants find English classes an opportunity to learn, practice, and enhance their English skills. According to them, it is challenging, but they viewed learning English as a beneficial experience because they gained knowledge and improved their communication and writing skills. The participants felt proud that they could do research now and express themselves in writing. The students considered this as their accomplishment as they say:

"My problem in junior high school was I could not do research. Now, I can do it." (SHS10)

"My subjects like Reading and Writing and Oral Communication enhanced my formal writing skills." (SHS13)

Students' attitude toward learning the English language plays a vital role in their learning process. If students find learning the English language beneficial, they quickly learn it, and if they enjoy what they have learned, they exert effort to enhance the skills they have gained. Unfortunately, not all students find learning the English language beneficial; some have a negative attitude toward learning the English language. Some of them stated that they do not see the importance of understanding the English language because they do not have plans to work abroad and do not need to speak and write in English fluently and accurately. More than teachers in senior high school, some students with this kind of thinking should work harder to enhance the students' communication, reading, and writing skills.

According to the k-12 curricula publicly available at the official website of Department of Education (DepEd), reading and writing skills will be enhanced and emphasized in the Reading and Writing Skills subject while listening and speaking skills for effective communication in the Oral Communications subject. Ironically, few students in this study mentioned that their English subjects in senior high enhanced their communication and writing skills. This only shows that students do not mind long-term learning; they study English to pass the subject. In other words, the student's perspective must be changed to experience joy in learning the language.

(2) What are the students' challenges and coping strategies in dealing with these difficulties?

Students were asked to share challenges that they encountered in attending English class since the subject were taken from the tertiary curriculum. The challenges were elaborated in themes 2 and 3 while coping strategies were elaborated in theme 4.

Theme 2: Intrapersonal Challenges

Sub theme: Insufficient Knowledge and Skills

Most students admitted that their English background is weak, and they have difficulty in understanding and using English in conversation inside the classroom. They cannot express themselves in English, especially during recitation. One SHS5 disclosed that she felt fear whenever she recited because her classmates might laugh at her if her grammar was wrong. According to her:

"I can't pick up straight English. I have trouble delivering in English. One of my challenges is speaking (English)." (SHS5)

It cannot deny that grammar is one of the essential elements of learning a target language (Akay and Toraman, 2015). Schulz (2001) emphasized the importance of the formal study of grammar in mastering a foreign language. Interestingly, this study's results suggest that grammar **is the most** inhibiting factor in English language learning. Parallel to studies that included grammatical problems (Novariana et al., 2018), particularly lack of understanding of grammatical patterns (Rahayu, 2015) is a common problem students face in speaking English. Grammatical structure is always challenging, especially for students, for English is the second language. Students in this study also revealed that their challenges involve confusion with grammatical rules, poor comprehension, and a weak background in English. Some students commented that:

"I'm confused with grammatical rules. When writing a research paper, I get confused with the structure." (SHS9)

"Constructing sentences, especially grammar. I don't know how to use 'neither,' 'either,' 'are,' 'is.'" (SHS11)

Based on the students sharing of language difficulty, the complexities of grammar rules, such as using "either" and "neither," sometimes affect their overall ability to speak and construct sentences in English. They also admitted that remembering basic grammar is difficult, so they experienced poor comprehension in class discussions. The present study agrees with the study of Domingo (2020), who found that there should be a solid English foundation to achieve higher skills in the English language. Students' weak foundation in grammar affects their speaking ability and sentence construction in English. Thus, they have a hard time comprehending discussions inside the classroom. According to Akbari (2015), the differences in foundation skills in English are significantly affected by socioeconomic factors.

Understanding basic grammar components help strengthen students' English language competencies. Applying correct grammar rules, such as correct tenses, allow students to practice and eventually form proper and correct sentences in both speaking and writing. Yet, based on the findings, insufficient knowledge of grammar concepts and skills necessary for English language proficiency, such as constructing sentences, serve as the biggest challenge for students in senior high school. According to the participants, English grammar consists of perplexing structures and rules, so they find it challenging to apply these rules in speaking and writing English.

Subtheme: Low Self-Confidence

Blas et al. (2018) emphasized the contribution of self-confidence and self-esteem to the success of learning a language. The more confident the learner, the more successful they will become in learning a language. However, in this study, some participants revealed they have low confidence in speaking and writing in English. They admitted that they could not speak in front of the class and feared class recitation because they could not express themselves in English fluently. These fears then inhibit the students from practicing and using the English language. According to the participants:

"I have low confidence when it comes to English. Speaking and writing." (SHS2)

"I have very low confidence when tackling lessons because I'm not fluent in English." (SHS11)

Moreover, students with low self-confidence need help to keep up with the discussions and may need help understanding and comprehending even small conversations. Another student emphasized that he can better understand arguments in a mixed Filipino-English language (Taglish) rather than in full English.

This scenario can be seen in the study by Domingo (2020). It supports the claim that students' lack of confidence in using the language and lack of positive attitude and interest in learning was one of the challenges for teachers in teaching English. It was revealed in the study that many students are nervous and unwilling to recite because of the fear that they might be embarrassed by their classmates when they commit mistakes.

The findings of this study also indicate that besides having low confidence, students tend to feel anxious when constructing English sentences because they fear being laughed at for incorrect grammar. Knowing basic grammatical structures allow a speaker to produce sentences that are both understandable and proficient in communication. Likewise, this finding revealed that fear of committing grammatical mistakes and societal pressure could be two main factors of students' poor communicative competency. According to some students:

"I'm anxious when it comes to grammar. Millennials or students are afraid to construct sentences because they fear the grammar might be incorrect." (SHS8)

"Then it's like you feel stupid. As a Filipino, I'm afraid that people would laugh at me because I'm not that good at English." (SHS 11)

Theme 3: Interpersonal Challenges

Sub theme: Peer attitudes

According to the students, they help each other by discussing lessons and doing the assignments. Similarly, in the study of Chand (2021), it was revealed that students learned many things from their peers by participating, collaborating, and planning various learning activities.

On the contrary, the senior high school participants unveiled that they are exposed to negative peer relationships, thus resulting in a behavioral shift such as

being distracted, unhappy, and having a demotivated attitude toward language learning (Aggarwal & Rajwanshi, 2020). In the present study, one of the participants revealed that she could not get along with her classmates; that is why she is always sitting at the back alone most of the time. According to her:

"My number one problem is my classmates, the people around me. I do not get along with them since I'm in grade 11. I find it difficult, and I'm unhappy. I get distracted because some of them aren't nice" (SHS 4)

Moreover, one participant also mentioned that there are peers who, instead of motivating their classmates to do better, try to persuade their classmates to be passive. As what SHS1 commented:

"One of the challenges is the people around me (I'm associated with). Their vibe is different; for example, sometimes I get influenced by their laziness." (SHS 1)

These results showed that attitude is one factor that may hinder students from accomplishing their goals. It only showed that being directly exposed to others who lack interest in language learning has a negative impact on the participants' attitudes toward language learning. Several studies revealed that students learn a lot from their peers. When students observe that their peers are highly motivated academically, they also become inspired to plan their learning activities, collaborate with others, and evaluate their learning styles. Learning with their peers is one of the students' most significant challenges. Students can be discouraged from achieving and enhancing their speaking and writing skills in English due to their peers' consistently demotivated attitudes.

Subtheme: Teaching Instruction

Teachers' commitment, motivation, and quality of instruction in teaching influenced the students' attitudes toward learning. Teachers are the source of knowledge and are expected to employ the best strategies to teach their students the appropriate skills and competencies. In this study, the participants mentioned that some teachers lacked content knowledge, demotivation, and non-facilitating behaviors. Some participants felt dismayed that their teachers lacked interest and motivation in teaching the subject aside from being not supportive of their learning. According to the participants, the teacher's motivation and passion for teaching are significant factors in their learning. Similarly, the study by Chand (2021) revealed that teachers' lack of motivation contributes to the speaking difficulty of students. Students considered teachers as one of their challenges in learning English. As the student shared:

"When you see that your teacher is uninterested in your class, you would also feel uninterested (lazy, unmotivated). It affects my learning and motivation." (SHS 1)

During the first year of the implementation of the new curriculum, many faculty in the tertiary level transitioned to senior high school because the majority of the English subjects in college were transferred to senior high. Therefore, they need to adapt to the new routines and create and experiment with new methodologies and activities for high school students (Aranda et al., 2018). At the same time, teachers from junior high transitioned to senior high because of the opportunity

for promotion. The scenario of teachers transitioning was one of the challenges for the students because their teachers who used to teach in college needed help finding methodologies that would meet the level of senior high students. Likewise, their teachers from junior high who were unfamiliar with the content added to their challenges. As students lamented:

"Sometimes the professors lack information on how to explain properly in front." (SHS 13)

"The first challenge is with the teacher; when reading contexts, for example, if there are difficult words, of course, you would feel shy to ask your teacher for the meaning of the word. There are other teachers who would explain and others who wouldn't." (SHS 1)

Teaching processes are within the context of learning on students, and when teachers espouse a dislike or uninterested demeanor toward language learning, students may take on this attitude. They are more likely to develop similar beliefs and exhibit a similar outlook that undermines positive language learning.

Theme 4: Coping Strategies To Master The Subject

Participants were also asked to share their strategies for learning English despite their challenges. The results showed that students were trying their best to learn the language by looking for ways to motivate them.

Sub-theme: Optimism

The participants admitted that they need to face challenges and find ways to enjoy learning and practicing the language. From the participants' answers, positive psychology will surface on the role of enjoyment in learning. Positive emotions and their critical role in language learning have received increased attention as the discipline has progressed. A recent belief in applied linguistics is that emotions such as enjoyment and willingness are associated with the increased driving force and motivation for students' language learning success. When students enjoy their activities, they gain control and feel capable (Mierzwa, 2019). As revealed by the participants in the current study, they always face personal and social challenges as part of their education. As a consequence of their struggles, optimism emerges as an initial coping mechanism in their attempts to master the language. According to the participants:

"I enjoy it, and I'm really willing to study it. I always think to myself (tell myself) that "I need to do this. This is just a presentation, and I can do this." (SHS 3)

"I guess I just have to. Besides, through time, we learn how to enjoy, and from the teachings, they were all good." (SHS 7)

The participants believed it is not only that optimism could help them surpass the challenges in learning but also that facing their fears could help them achieve their goals. They also emphasized that their willingness to enjoy learning and practicing the language frequently is the key to opening the many opportunities for them to enhance their competencies in the language.

Sub-theme: Self-instruction

The participants realized that they must help cope with challenges and look for ways to improve themselves. One of the participants admitted that listening, speaking, reading, and writing are all part of learning English. Anyone who wishes to master the language can do so through self-study, which allows them to take control of their education. This learning method encourages language learners to research and find information to assist them with their studies. According to the participants, to help them learn the language, they need to go out of their comfort zone to express their feelings and accept corrections positively. They need to minimize the fear of being laughed at instead of enjoying what is happening in the class. As the student shared:

"I guess I have to. Through time, so we learn how to enjoy and too..." (SHS7)

Senior high school students who participated in this study admitted they struggled to speak simple English, understand complex English words, use grammatical patterns correctly, and understand vocabulary. For these reasons, participants devised several self-learning methods to overcome these difficulties. Many students shared that they watch English movies and YouTube videos and read books, English novels, blogs, and Wattpad to familiarize themselves with difficult words and improve their vocabulary. Students said:

"I would watch American series on Netflix to add words to my vocabulary and also read books. I would do this to familiarize myself with other words." (SHS 8)

"I watched YouTube; I read English vlogs and novels." (SHS11)

The participants also shared that aside from being independent in improving themselves, they patiently listen to the teachers' lectures and ensure they are always present in class and actively participating in the discussions. As what the students shared:

"I need to be independent; no one will help me except me." (SHS4)

"I listen attentively to my teachers." (SHS10)

Writing and speaking are also challenging for the participants, but they use different strategies to help them write a good paper. One of the participants mentioned that she used the internet to search online for the topics they needed to discuss, prepare their reports ahead of time, write the information on the index card before the presentation, and practice speaking with good voice, diction, and correct grammar. As the student disclosed:

"I will practice my report; I will write first in the index card so that I cannot forget the words. Also, I will practice my diction." (SHS3) "I am doing research online for my English requirements." (SHS4)

Aside from conducting research, the participants stated that taking notes on new vocabulary and practicing spoken and written language is one of their strategies. Likewise, they engage themselves in reading, listening, and watching activities in English. These findings showed that students are involved in self-directed

learning to improve their language skills and identify areas where they need to work harder. Self-study has evolved into an excellent way for English language learners to supplement their education.

4.3 Consultation

The students find consultation with peers an excellent strategy for learning English. It was revealed in the study by Nuraeni (2019) that peer support helps and motivates students' learning; thus, challenging assignments become more manageable through peers' help. Participants in the present research mentioned that they frequently consulted their classmates to help them improve their English language skills. They also shared that before they submitted their assignment, they asked their peers if the grammar was okay before they offered it to the teacher.

"Well, I would ask my classmates, for example, "Is my grammar correct?", "Is what I'm doing right?" and other similar questions." (SHS 2)

"If I'm not that confident with the papers I wrote, I would ask my smart classmates to proofread my work and see if they're okay or not and if there is something they want to change." (SHS 10)

This study revealed that some participants consulted their peers more often than their teachers. Only a few students asked for consultation from their teachers, and they found it helpful because the teacher was willing to help. This study also revealed that most participants find peer consultation more accessible and relaxing. Though the teachers were accommodating, the participants felt shy whenever they asked the teachers.

Furthermore, understanding why language learners engage in peer instruction may be explained by how fellow students can be particularly effective explainers. It is believed that students can better understand their peers' perspectives than teachers. (Tullis & Goldstone, 2020). Peers may be better than educators at explaining concepts in simple terms. This way, peers are regarded as a valuable resource for language clarification and proficiency. It also allows students to gain confidence while listening and relying on one another.

6. Conclusion, Implications, and Limitations of the Study

The findings of the present study highlight the senior high schools' general experience with the new English curriculum in the Philippines, the challenges they encounter, and their strategies to cope with them.

Most students described their everyday English learning experience inside the classroom as "challenging" because of various factors. Since this group of students is the first batch to receive the new English curriculum taken from the tertiary curriculum, they first experienced the transitory period of the contents and topics of English subjects. This situation has posed a significant challenge to some

students because from a simpler and easier topic from junior high, they now have taken more profound and complex topics in senior high.

Secondly, students were also apprehensive about learning the English language as they did not see the need to study it because Filipino or Tagalog are generally used at home. On the one hand, only some students have recognized the benefits of the new English curriculum as they gained new skills and competencies from their English classes. As the Department of Education projected, subjects in the new curriculum, such as Reading and Writing and Oral Communication, contributed to newly developed proficiencies in students' oral speaking and research writing. Even if the students describe their general experience as challenging, the findings revealed particular challenges students experience in their English classes. This includes having intrapersonal and interpersonal challenges. Students' internal (intrapersonal) challenges include insufficient knowledge and skills, particularly grammatical rules and sentence construction. Students in this study also reported having low self-confidence when participating in their English classes because they fear committing grammatical mistakes. In addition, the findings also revealed how external (interpersonal) factors significantly influence students' learning outcomes. Students in this study reported having behavioral shifts that included being distracted and demotivated to learn due to negative peer relationships.

Meanwhile, since the new English curriculum consists of elements from the tertiary curriculum, the implementation of the new curriculum also involved an inevitable transition of faculty from tertiary to senior high and junior high to senior high. This transition caused most faculty to adjust and adapt new methodologies in teaching, which caused a negative toll on senior high school students. Despite the challenges, students did not fail to express their optimism in learning and practicing English as an attempt to master the language. With dedication, students engaged in self-studying habits and consultation with peers to improve their English proficiency.

In conclusion, the findings revealed that some students were unprepared for a sudden shift and curriculum change as they experienced difficulties keeping up with the complexity of the topics involved. It is also noteworthy that using the mother tongue. However, it promotes and preserves one's culture, which can be a barrier to learning English because students are presented with fewer opportunities to practice English. Consequently, as grammar and sentence construction are necessary for English proficiency, students' weak foundation in these areas affects their general ability to comprehend, construct, write, and speak English. Lastly, a supportive and motivating learning environment is crucial for establishing students' confidence in their English classroom, which may extend their proficiency and improve class participation.

The above findings proved that learning the English language challenges the participants. Understanding these challenges may help teachers and administrators develop and enhance the programs and policies to help improve the English curriculum's facilitation. Determining the experiences of senior high

school students may improve teachers' methodologies and approaches inside the classrooms. Moreover, the result of this study can enlighten teacher education institutions to emphasize the development of English learning materials and teacher training.

The only limitation of this study is there are only a few numbers of participants interviewed because some of the students were not permitted by their parents or guardians to involve in the study. Though it has a small sample size, the experiences of the senior high school students were revealed and analysed critically. Other researchers may conduct this kind of study in different disciplines.

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7. References

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