

Performance and difficulties in English language macro-skills by freshman students in selected colleges in Bacgiang City, Vietnam

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Abstract- Knowledge in four macro-skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are needed by learners for effective communication. The consistent search for improvement on these macro-skills helps promote self-development, effective communication and success in many different environments and context. Learners are motivated by opportunities that may come during learning of macro-skills which in turn allow the skills to subconsciously grow and develop naturally within the learner. This study aims to evaluate the performance and difficulties in English language macro-skills of freshmen Vietnamese students in selected Colleges in Bacgiang City. It made use of the descriptive method of research. The subjects of the study are 299 first year college students taking up basic English course in the three colleges in Bacgiang namely: Ngo Gia Tu College, Industry and Technology College and Vocational College. The data gathering instrument used is a teacher-made test. Results of the study showed that the level of students' performance in the macro-skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking were all average. There were significant differences in the students' performance among the macro-skills indicating non-relatedness of the macro-skills to each other. Students encountered difficulties in comprehension for macro-skills in reading and listening; while sharpening writing skill is the difficulty encountered for the macro-skill in writing; and pronunciation for the macro-skill in speaking. The most serious among the difficulties in macro-skills are those that pertain to comprehension both in reading and listening. The findings of the study suggest that English teachers have to be encouraged to provide more language exercises for their students to improve their language deficiencies; intervention measures must be developed based on the language deficiencies identified; similar studies on English language macro-skills will have to be conducted in universities to determine their students' language performance and difficulties.

Keywords- English language macro-skills, listening, speaking, reading, writing and viewing, freshman students, Bacgiang City, Vietnam

1. INTRODUCTION

Four macro skills namely: reading, writing, listening and speaking are needed by learners of language (i.e., either foreign or dialect) to effectively communicate (Sarmiento, www.scribd.com). These skills are essential to make possible various communication activities like the conduct of one's daily tasks, the learning and gaining of information, the presenting, or holding of successful discussion or conversing with different individuals (King, www.blurtit.com).

Reading is one of the most important skills that students can acquire during language learning (Oberhalzer, UZSpace.Uzula.ac/zia). It helps students understand the world by enabling them to learn about the past and plan out the future. It is of vital importance to academic success and so well-integrated that either

educational or academic success are considered synonymous to reading success (Grove et al., 1982). As a receptive skill of the morphologic form of language, reading is regarded as a basic act of making sense of a text and constitutes a complex process (Hedge, 2000).

Writing is another important macro-skill that is used to preserve human thoughts, ideas and speech sounds, a way of getting things done (Hyland 2004). Certain grammatical rules are used to organize facts in writing and involve a thinking process (Finnochiaro, 1974). Writing in a foreign language requires the ability to use the structures, the lexical items and their conventional representations in the correct context and form (Lado, 1964).

Listening is a macro-skill involved in getting something or catching what a speaker says (Bozorgian, 2012a). It involves hearing the sounds, recognizing words, understanding variety of accents, understanding intonation,

coping with noise both from external influence and indistinct pronunciation, recognizing sentences, predicting the meaning and understanding or comprehending what English native speakers say (Lev-Ari, 2015; Ur, 1991).

Speaking is a macro-skill that concerns with the ability to effectively communicate orally, applying the two major elements of accuracy and fluency, where accuracy refers to the correct use of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation, and fluency pertains to the ability to keep going when speaking spontaneously (Harmer, 2001). In speaking, the main concern of language learners is how to improve speaking proficiency in general as well as the different component of speaking proficiency such as fluency, accuracy, accent, vocabulary, comprehension and communication (Gower, 1995).

The inter-relationship of the macro-skills have been a subject of a number of studies. Bozorgian (2012b) considered listening comprehension as the primary channel to a language and the most difficult and inaccessible to second and foreign language learners due to its implicit nature in a language learning process. The other macro-skills are labelled as secondary skills such as speaking, which cognitively precedes listening, the aural or oral skills which precede the graphic skills like reading and writing as they constitute the circle of language learning process. Meanwhile, Ahmed (2010) showed Egyptian student teachers of English to experience coherence and cohesion problems in their English writing such as difficulty in writing the introduction, the thesis statement, the topic sentence, writing concluding sentences and writing the conclusion. He reported that Arab students overused coordinate sentences and misused topic sentences which were the reasons of their incoherent and unacceptable quality of writing.

Students, while learning a foreign language like English, in a classroom environment can also be affected by factors such as the availability of appropriate pedagogical materials. Thus, a careful selection of instructional materials like books, visual aids and other school facilities that provide better background for learning is one of the key principles that guide the students' learning process (Kapunan, 2000). The oversupply of books not needed for the course (Lucas, 2002) and the lack of periodic inspection for their contemporary relevance necessitate a re-evaluation of the books and facilities available in the classroom for language learning (Danilo, 2004).

According to Bolton (2000), teachers encounter difficulty in dealing with college students especially in enhancing their oral and written communication skills due to fewer opportunities for classroom language practice for each student. This scenario is often observed in large classes where there is inadequate venue for exchange of ideas as well as in written and oral exercises, thereby affecting the students' English language performance.

This study aims to evaluate the performance and difficulties in English language macro-skills of freshmen Vietnamese students in selected Colleges in Bacgiang City. As the Vietnamese government engages into massive

improvement of English language learning and competency among its students and teaching professionals (Nguyen, 2011), this study is a timely response to profile the performance and difficulties encountered by students learning the English language, the data of which can be utilized as basis for the design of pertinent academic programs to enhance learning and improve their English language competency.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Environment

The site of the study is Bacgiang City, a small city in North of Vietnam located in Bacgiang province. The three colleges studied are: Bacgiang Ngo Gia Tu College, Bacgiang Industry and Technology College, and Bacgiang Vocational College with more than 15,000 students. Most of the students at Bacgiang colleges, who are at the age of 18 to 22, come from different areas of Bacgiang province. By the time they enter college, many of them have experienced three to seven years of English study in their earlier schools.

The biggest college in Bacgiang City is Bacgiang Ngo Gia Tu College, which is the only college at Bacgiang province responsible for training junior and secondary teachers of English, Mathematics, Biology, History and other subjects. This college is located in the Tan Yen district, Bacgiang province. It is about 8 km away from Bacgiang city. This is a college with about 7,000 students.

The Industry and Technology College under the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, formerly the Public Schools of Engineering II (referred to as the School II), was established 1966. This is one of the centers for the national education system of Vietnam that caters to the graduates of most public schools. The College has undergone over 47 years of construction and development, and provided school education, training and retraining for the country of over 35 thousand managers, qualified technicians and skilled workers. Currently, the College has over 5,000 formal training systems, maintains 1,500 students enrolled in its different colleges and 1,200 high school students under grades 10, 11, 12; and 500 trainees who are being prepared for studying in Japan, Korea, Taiwan.

Bacgiang Vocational College is a college with about 4,000 students. This college was established in 2007 under the decision No. 257/ QD-BLDTBXH by the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, with the purpose of upgrading the Technical High School. At present, Bacgiang Vocational College trains students in 12 different specializations that belong to five major fields: Electronics, Electrical Engineering, Information Technology, Mechanical Engineering, and Fashion Tailoring. There are 103 teachers in this college.

2.2 Research Design

The study made use of the descriptive method of research as this method supports the present facts concerning the nature and status of a group of persons, conditions, system of thoughts, a class of events or any kind of phenomena

(Aggarwal, 2008). The information pertinent were gathered through a teacher-made test.

2.3 Subjects of the Study

The subjects of the study were composed of 299 first year college students taking up Basic English course in the three colleges in Bacgiang City (Table 1). Slovin's formula was used to determine the number of respondents per class. In Bacgiang Ngo Gia Tu College where there were 476 respondents consisting of ten classes, the student respondents were arranged in numerical order from 1-50. In the first six classes, twelve students with corresponding odd numbers were selected from each class while in the remaining four classes, twelve students with corresponding even numbers were selected from each class. Similar process of respondent selection was done for the Industry and Technology College.

Table 1. Distribution of Student Respondents in the Three Colleges

Name of Colleges	Population (N)	Class	No. of Respondents (n)
Bacgiang Ngo Gia Tu College	476	10	120
Industry and Technology College	384	8	97
Bacgiang Vocational College	328	7	82
TOTAL	1188	25	299

For the Vocational College with seven classes, 11 students were selected from the first five classes and twelve students were selected from the remaining two classes. Responses from 298 students were subjected to statistical analysis as one answer sheet had incomplete answers.

2.4 Data Gathering Instrument

The teacher-made test was designed to determine the English language macro-skills of Freshman Vietnamese students (Ngô Thị Thu Hương, 2014). These macro-skills are evaluated based on the component skills of each macro-skill. One test question is formulated corresponding to the subcomponent items of each macro-skill. The component skills in reading include word recognition skills with six subcomponent items such as context clues, phonetic analysis, root words, contractions, compound words, and syllabication. In comprehension skills the six subcomponent items are finding the main idea, sequence, finding details, predicting outcome, recognizing cause and effect, and distinguishing between fact and opinion, and utilization skills with five subcomponent items namely: skimming for information, using titles in lessons, using index, classification, and outlining.

In writing, the skills involved are sharpening of writing skills with five subcomponent items such as spelling, using words effectively, making smooth transition, sentence,

paragraphs and messages, and structuring phrases and clauses and sentence correction each with five subcomponent items that include recognizing errors in mechanics, structural relationship, grammatical relationship, word choice, and identification of sentence that has no error. As for listening skill, this includes five subcomponent items namely; comprehension one, homonym, comprehension two, correct stress of the word, and the use of words.

In speaking, three subcomponent items are included. These are pronunciation, comprehension, and grammatical accuracy. A total of 32 test items are included in the test for reading, writing and listening. Three scoring areas are listed as additional items to capture the rating of the students in the speaking test. Their audio-recorded speech is rated based on the three scoring areas as they answer the three given questions. The Likert scale was followed for these three scoring areas where: 5- No error, Very proficient; 4- Few errors (1-3 errors), Proficient; 3- Moderate errors (4-6 errors), moderately proficient; 2- Several errors (7-10 errors), slightly proficient; and 1- Plenty of errors (>10 errors), Not proficient.

For the students' performance, the verbal interpretation of the percent (%) of correct items was determined from the percentile rank equivalent which was in the Standard Psychometric Conversion Table (<http://faculty.pepperdine.edu/shimels/Courses/Files/ConvTable.pdf>. Accessed 05/08/2014). In the analysis for the most difficult items to the students, the following rating scale was used: Rank of 1- Most Difficult (MD); Mean % of < 50% Difficult (D); and Mean % > 50%, Not Difficult (ND).

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

A test questionnaire for students was constructed and submitted to the adviser for review and comments. Through the help of the adviser, the final drafts were produced. The teacher made test was pilot-tested to College students of Batangas State University to test the strength and weaknesses of the test. The instruments were validated through letters of requests sent to the members of the panel and expert of the field to go over the research questionnaire, to give their comments and suggestions for improvement. After incorporating all the suggestions, final copies of validated test were produced for administration.

Another set of letters of request was written for the administration of Bacgiang Colleges for permission to administer the teacher made test to students. With the approved letter of the administrators, the questionnaires were administered to the 299 student respondents. Schedules of administration of the test were prepared. After the administration of the test, test papers were retrieved, checked, tallied and analyzed. The speaking test was conducted last with each participant taken to a separate room where they were asked to answer the questions one by one with their reply audio recorded. The recorded data were later scored following the scale above.

2.6 Statistical Treatment of Data

Cronbach alpha was used to measure internal consistency of the scores of the respondent while frequency distribution and percentages were used to provide meaningful description of the respondents' performance in macro skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Other statistics to quantify and compare the student's performance used were weighted mean, standard deviation and Student's t-test is 3.3".

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Reading

A seventeen-item test was formulated for the macro-skill of reading which were grouped under three major skills namely: word recognition skills which include six items such as context clues, phonetic analysis, root words, contractions, compound words, and syllabication; comprehension skills which include items seven to twelve such as finding the main idea, sequence, finding details, predicting outcome, recognizing cause and effect, and distinguishing between fact and opinion.

As shown in table 2, the percent correct score of the students in all the items is widely distributed across different values ranging from four percent to 96 percent with equivalent description of borderline to superior. This means that the macro-skill of the freshman students in reading are widely distributed and highly dispersed. This further means that the reading skills based on different component skills are heterogeneous. The high scoring component skills in reading include the word recognition skills where three items (i.e., item 1, 5 and 6) are above average; and comprehension skills where one item (i.e., item 12) is above average. This means that students have developed mastery in these four skill areas far better than the other component skills. The low scoring items in reading include comprehension skills where three items (i.e., item 7, 8 and 9) are below average; and utilization skills where one item (i.e., item 17) is below average.

A wide variability in the component scores under comprehension skills is noted. This is the area in reading where learning unpredictability among the students is greatest. Furthermore, it can be observed that the items under these areas include the following: finding the main idea, sequence and finding details. These items are fine comprehension skills that are particularly involved in the dissection of a selection. In the utilization skills, it is item 17 on outlining that has the lowest score. This component skill is also another fine utilization skill in reading that is related to deeper selection analysis. Thus, this implies that the students are weakest in fine reading skills and are strongest on gross reading skills.

The average percent score of 61.8 percent has a percentile rank equivalent of 50 percent. The verbal interpretation equivalent of this value based on the Psychometric Conversion Table is average. This means that the students' performance is on the average level based on this given population of student respondents. This implies that even if

the students' performance in reading is on the average level in the general population, students value the importance of reading in their academic success. This is in

Table 2. Performance of Student Respondents in the Different Skill Areas of Reading

Macro-skills	No. of Correct Items	Percent Correct Items	Description
A. Reading			
<u>A1. Word Recognition Skills.</u>			
(1) Context clues.	285	96	Superior
(2) Phonetic analysis	139	47	Average
(3) Rootwords	132	44	Average
(4) Contractions	205	69	Average
(5) Compound words:	269	90	High Average
(6) Syllabication:	264	89	High Average
<u>A2. Comprehension Skills</u>			
(7) Finding the main idea	74	25	Low Average
(8) Sequence	12	4	Borderline
(9) Finding details.	28	9	Low Average
(10) Predicting outcome	199	67	Average
(11) Recognizing cause and effect	250	84	Average
(12) Distinguishing between fact and opinion	272	91	High Average
<u>A3. Utilization skills</u>			
(13) Skimming for information	253	85	Average
(14) Using titles in lessons	219	73	Average
(15) Using index	232	78	Average
(16) Classification	233	78	Average
(17) Outlining	65	22	Low Average

Mean	172.4	61.8	Average
Number of respondents: 298; Cronbach alpha = 0.62			

consonance to the idea of Grove et al. (1982) which states that reading helps us to understand our world by enabling us to learn about our past and plans for the future; and that as a critical skill both with and beyond the walls of the classroom, it is important for the achievement of academic success wherein the school is unlikely to be contested by people.

Six items yielded a percent score of less than 50 percent. These are items on phonetic analysis, root, which belongs to the word recognition skills; finding the main idea, sequence, finding details that belongs to comprehension skills and outlining which belongs to utilization skills.

This means that this population of students is handicapped mainly in reading comprehension skills, moderately in word recognition skills, and slightly in utilization skills. Meanwhile, these students also performed better in context clues, compound words, syllabication which belongs to word recognition skills and in distinguishing between fact and opinion belonging to utilization skills where ratings of high average and superior were obtained. This means that the students have better knowledge and skills in word recognition as compared to the other skills such as reading comprehension and utilization skills. Word recognition skills are easier learned and developed being gross readings skills as compared to reading comprehensions and utilization skills, which takes time and effort to learn, and developed being fine reading skills.

This is consistent with the explanation of Brown (2002) that successful comprehension is attributed to effort more than to ability and that it is believed that there is understanding if right comprehension strategies are applied and that achieving this level of understanding requires effort.

The Cronbach alpha score, a statistical measure for internal consistency was 0.62. The acceptable value for Cronbach alpha is >0.6 , the value of 0.5 to <0.6 is considered poor, while the value of <0.5 is considered unacceptable according to George et al. (2003); and Kline, (2000). This means that the calculated Cronbach alpha score for this test is acceptable and indicates that the student's score in the reading test is consistent and reliable.

3.2 Writing

Ten items corresponding to 10 different component skills were formulated as a test to evaluate the writing skills of students. As shown in table 3, it can be observed that a range of scores was obtained by the student respondents from a percent correct score of 15 percent to 86 percent with equivalent ratings of low average to high average. Majority of the skills however had a rating of average that is six out of ten items. This is confirmed by the total score values where the percent correct score is 49.5 percent with a percentile rank of 49 percent and verbal equivalent of average.

This means that the students' performance in writing is on the average level for this given student population. When the skill items were grouped under two major skills in writing namely; sharpening writing skills and sentence correction, it can be observed that there were two high average scoring items that fall under sharpening writing skills and none from sentence correction.

Table 3. Performance of Student Respondents in the Different Areas of Writing

Macro-skills	No. of Correct Items	Percent Correct Items	Description
B. Writing			
<u>B1. Sharpening writing skills</u>			
(18) Spelling	171	57	Average
(19) Using words effectively	50	17	Low Average
(20) Making smooth transition	217	73	High Average
(21) Sentence, paragraphs and messages	89	30	Average
(22) Structuring phrases and clauses	255	86	High Average
<u>B2. Sentence Correction</u>			
(23) Recognizing errors in mechanics	150	50	Average
(24) Structural relationship	174	58	Average
(25) Grammatical relationship	46	15	Low Average
(26) Word choice	150	50	Average
(27) Identification of sentence that has no error	167	56	Average
Mean	146.9	49.3	Average
Number of respondents: 298; Cronbach alpha = 0.20			

This means that the students were performing better in this skill area than the latter. This implies that students had more exposure to writing activities, as they were able to use most of the sharpening writing skills. Further, through writing, students can express their thoughts and feelings better. This contention finds support to the ideas of Hyland (2004) regarding writing as a way of getting things done,

that through composition, ideas and evidences are conveyed to the reader for him to understand what one means. This implies that language produced from one's thoughts conveyed by writing through written forms and ideas are better explained through writing as language is represented in a textual medium using signs and symbols. There were two items that got percent correct score below 50 percent and these include using words effectively, and grammatical relationship. These items belong to different writing skill classifications; one on sharpening skills and the other on sentence correction. Thus, the student's weakness in writing appears to be distributed under these two skill components.

The Cronbach alpha score was 0.20, a value that is positive but below the cut-off value of 0.50. This value of <0.5 is considered unacceptable. This means that there are internal inconsistencies in the performance of the students in this writing test and thus, the results of this test must be considered with caution. Another way of looking at it is that the items included as component skills of writing are not equally learned by the students, that is why their performance is widely variable.

3.3 Listening

To evaluate the listening skill performance of the students, five test items were formulated and administered under the listening test. These skills tested include comprehension, homonym, correct stress of the word, and the use of words. As reflected in table 4, it can be observed that four out of five items got a percent correct score of greater than 50 percent. This indicates that the students performed better in this skill area.

Table 4. Performance of Students in the skill areas of the Listening test

Macro-skills	No. of Correct Items	Percent Correct Items	Description
C. Listening			
(28) Comprehension 1	225	76	Average
(29) Homonym	208	70	Average
(30) Comprehension 2	72	24	Low Average
(31) Correct stress of the word	245	82	High Average
(32) Use of words	236	79	Average
Mean	197.2	66.2	Average
Number of respondents: 298; Cronbach alpha = 0.21			

This is further confirmed by the total percent correct score of 66.2 percent that has a percentile rank of 50 percent and an equivalent rating of average. The item with the highest score is the item on correct stress of the word. This means

that the students can detect the proper way English words are delivered when listened to and have developed this sharpness in hearing. The item with the lowest score is the item on Comprehension 2. This means that understanding the meaning of the heard word is one major handicap for the students. Although, the students performed at an average level in the item on comprehension 1, this implies that higher level comprehension of heard words, need to be developed. It seems that the students were unfamiliar with some of the words and concepts in this item. This means that students find difficulty in understanding what has been conveyed perhaps due to some factors such as intonation or pronunciation.

This result finds support to the idea of Ur (1991) which indicates that listening involves hearing the sounds, recognizing words, understanding variety of accents, understanding intonation, coping with noise both external influence and indistinct pronunciation, recognizing sentences, predicting the meaning and understanding the whole course.

The Cronbach alpha score was 0.21, a positive value but below the cut-off value of 0.50. This indicates the existence of internal inconsistencies in the performance of the students and suggests that this observation be treated with caution.

3.4 Speaking

The speaking skills of the students were assessed using an interview approach and the answers of the students are rated based on three items namely: pronunciation, comprehension and grammatical accuracy. As indicated in table 5, it can be observed that in all skill items the mean percent score is above 50 percent indicating a favorable skill in speaking for this population of students.

Table 5. Performance of Students in skill areas of the Speaking test

Macro-skills	Number of Correct Items	Percent Correct Items	Description
D. Speaking			
(33) Pronunciation	161	54	Average
(34) Comprehension	173	58	Average
(35) Grammatical accuracy	185	62	Average
Mean	173	58.1	Average
Number of respondents: 298; Cronbach alpha = 0.74			

This is further confirmed by the total mean percent score of 58.1 percent which has a percentile rank of 50 percent and rating equivalent of average. Thus, these students have average speaking skills based on their performance rating. The skill with the lowest mean percent score is on

pronunciation. This indicates that among the speaking skills, this is the weakest area of the students. This implies that students do really experience this problem, as they are non-native speakers of the English language and may have difficulty in producing the correct sound pattern. Though students encountered this problem, they are trying to learn approximately the skill in speaking the English language as can be perceived from their percent correct score of above 50 percent. This conforms to the idea of Gower (1995) that one of the main concerns of language learners is how to improve their speaking proficiency in general, as well as on the different components of speaking proficiency such as fluency, accuracy, accent, vocabulary, comprehension and communication. Since speaking is a crucial part of the learning process, it usually must be understood immediately.

Furthermore, there are three areas of knowledge, which learners need to recognize in speaking. These include 1) mechanics such as pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary; 2) using the right words in the right order with the correct pronunciation functions; 3) transaction interaction which focuses on the clarity of the message, and social and cultural rules and norms, which deals with understanding on how to take account who is speaking to whom, and in what circumstances about what, and for what reason.

The Cronbach alpha score obtained for this test was 0.74, which is the highest among the different macro-skill tests. This is a good indication that the test conducted was very consistent and reliable. This further implies that the speaking test conducted appropriately reflects the performance and skills of the tested population and further asserts the validity of the test instrument and the scoring system.

3.5 Significant relationships in the students' performance among the macro-skills in English language

To determine whether significant relationships exist in the students' performance among the macro-skills in English language, the mean percent scores of the students in the four macro-skills of the English language namely: reading, writing, listening and speaking were compared using t-test. The result is shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Comparison of the mean percent scores for each pair of test groups

Test groups whose means are being compared	p-values
Reading vs. Writing	0.000000
Reading vs. Listening	0.734796
Reading vs. Speaking	0.000000
Writing vs. Listening	0.000000
Writing vs. Speaking	0.000002
Listening vs. Speaking	0.000000

As shown in the table, it can be observed that in general, the p-values were below 0.05, indicating that the mean percent scores being compared were significantly different. This indicates that in majority of the macro-skills, no significant relationship exists and are therefore not related to each other. Only in one instance was the p-value seen to be above 0.05, that is, between the means of the macro-skill reading and listening. In this combination of means, the p-value was 0.734796, which means not significantly different. This indicates that the two macro-skills are related to each other and are predictive of each other. This is interesting because it can be seen from here that if the macro-skills in reading are developed, this will also improve the listening skills of the students. In the same way that if the listening skills are developed, the macro-skills in reading are also developed. This further implies that the population of students is using their eyes and ears in the mastery of the English language further suggesting a connectivity between reading and listening.

3.6 Difficulties students have in the macro-skills of the English language

English language was determined based on the mean percent scores they obtained for each test item in the four macro-skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. The mean percent scores of less than 50 percent were considered to be difficult. Furthermore, the mean percent scores were ranked from lowest to highest and those with rank 1 were considered to be most difficult. The result is summarized in Table 7.

It can be observed that out of the seventeen skill items for reading, six have mean percent score of less than 50 percent. These skill items can be considered as difficult items for the students.

These items are: phonetic analysis and root words, finding the main idea, sequence and finding details and outlining. Among these items, two belongs to word recognition skills such as phonetic analysis and correct use of root words and three belongs to comprehension skills namely; finding the main idea, sequence and finding details. Only outlining belongs to the utilization skills.

This indicates that the students have difficulties in reading, and it is mainly in their comprehension skills followed by word recognition skills and lastly their utilization skills.

This finding is in contrast with the idea of Hedge (2000) who emphasized that reading as a receptive skill of morphologic form of the language is basically about making sense of the text. It is an astounding complex process and that in creating the reading experience of the learner that aims to develop his skill for him to become successful, must consider the five aspects or components in the reading process that work together, namely: phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, reading comprehension and fluency.

For writing, it can be noted that there are three items out of ten that had mean percent score of less than 50 percent that can be considered as difficult. These items are using words effectively, sentence, paragraphs and messages, and

grammatical relationship. Two of these items such as using words effectively, sentence, paragraphs and messages,

Table 7. Difficult Items in the Teacher Made Test

Macro-skills	Percent of Correct Answer	Rank	Rating
A. Reading			
Word Recognition Skills.			
(1) Context clues.	96	17	ND
(2) Phonetic analysis	47	6	D
(3) Rootwords	44	5	D
(4) Contractions	69	8	ND
(5) Compound words:	90	15	ND
(6) Syllabication:	89	14	ND
Comprehension Skills			
(7) Finding the main idea	25	4	D
(8) Sequence	4	1	MD
(9) Finding details.	9	2	D
(10) Predicting outcome	67	7	ND
(11) Recognizing cause and effect	84	12	ND
(12) Distinguishing between fact and opinion	91	16	ND
Utilization skills			
(13) Skimming for information	85	13	ND
(14) Using titles in lessons	73	9	ND
(15) Using index	78	10	ND
(16) Classification	78	11	ND
(17) Outlining	22	3	D
B. Writing			
Sharpening writing skills			
(18) Spelling	57	7	ND
(19) Using words effectively	17	2	D
(20) Making smooth transition	73	9	ND

(21) Sentence, paragraphs and messages	30	3	D
(22) Structuring phrases and clauses	86	10	ND
Sentence Correction			
(23) Recognizing errors in mechanics	50	4	ND
(24) Structural relationship	58	8	ND
(25) Grammatical relationship	15	1	MD
(26) Word choice	50	5	ND
(27) Identification of sentence that has no error	56	6	ND
C. Listening			
(28) Comprehension 1	76	3	ND
(29) Homonym	70	2	ND
(30) Comprehension 2	24	1	MD
(31) Correct stress of the word	82	5	ND
(32) Use of words	79	4	ND
D. Speaking			
(33) Pronunciation	54	1	MD
(34) Comprehension	58	2	ND
(35) Grammatical accuracy	62	3	ND
Number of student respondents: 298; D- Difficult, MD- Moderately difficult, ND- Not difficult.			

belong to sharpening writing skills, while one item on grammatical relationship belongs to the sentence correction skill. This indicates that the students have difficulties in their writing skills mainly in the aspect of sharpening their writing skills followed by sentence correction skills.

For listening, one out of five items had a mean percent score of less than 50 percent. This item is on comprehension 2. This item is of similar type to item on comprehension 1. The low score obtained for item 30 could be due to the unfamiliarity of the students about the concept as suggested earlier, hence their failure in giving the correct answer.

For Speaking, no item has a mean percent score of below 50 percent. Instead there is an item that has a rank of 1, and it has the lowest mean percent score among the three items. When compared with the other difficult items in the other macro-skills, it may be considered as moderately difficult. This item is on pronunciation. It indicates that

among the three items in speaking, the most difficult item for the students is that which pertains to pronunciation. It can be noted that there are more difficult items in the macro-skill of reading which comprised of six items out of 17, followed by writing consisting of three items out of 10, and lastly by both listening and speaking which are consists of one item out of five and one item out of three respectively. While this pattern seemingly emerges, if the percentage of the difficult items will be calculated relative to the total items, it can be observed that all ends up to a percentage of approximately 20 or 35.3 percent like reading is 6 out of 17 or 35.3 percent; writing is 3 out of 10 or 30 percent; speaking is 1 out of 3 or 33.3 percent; and listening is 1 out of 5 or 20 percent.

Thus, it becomes clear that around 20 or 35.3 percent of the areas in macro-skills of the English language are actually found to be difficult by the students. Reading had the highest percentage of difficult items, followed by speaking, then by writing and lastly by listening.

4. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

The level of students' performance in the macro-skills in reading, writing listening and speaking the English language were all average level. There were significant differences that existed in the students' performance among the macro-skills and were therefore not related to each other. Student's encountered difficulties in comprehension for macro skills in reading and listening; sharpening writing skill for macro skill in writing; and pronunciation for the macro skill in speaking. The most serious among the difficulties in macro-skills are those that pertain to comprehension skills both in Reading and Listening.

In the light of the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made; English teachers must be encouraged to provide more language exercises for their students to improve their language deficiencies. Intervention measures must be developed based on the deficiencies identified. Similar studies on English language macro skills be conducted on universities to determine their student's language performance and difficulties.

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