

Performance of DLSZ Students in the National Achievement Test in Araling Panlipunan: Does Language Matter?

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Abstract: This study sought to determine how language impacts the performance of De La Salle Santiago Zobel (DLSZ) fourth year students in the National Achievement Test (NAT) in Araling Panlipunan (AP). In the past two academic years, 2011-2012 and 2012-2013, DLSZ has been performing unsatisfactorily compared to other schools in the Muntinlupa division. Can the use of the Filipino language in the NAT, as opposed to the teaching of the subject in English, be a stumbling block in our students' performance in the NAT AP? Primary research data were obtained by identifying the Filipino words the students found difficult to understand. The weekly review sessions held in Social Studies class provided the venue to acquire the said data. Students were then tasked to answer the items and jot down the difficult Filipino words beside their answers. The difficult words were then tallied and analyzed thru rank order. Data analysis was conducted thereafter. Our findings show that the top ten (10) most difficult words used in the NAT AP reviewer either had no direct translation in Filipino or were not appropriately examined in context. These support our claim that language has an influence on testing and understanding. It is thus essential to recognize the value of delivering quality instruction by making sure that students understand and wisely use language in the learning process. Likewise, it is critical to recognize that teachers should be adept in the use of the required medium of instruction to guarantee that authentic learning is taking place.

Key Words: language; National Achievement Test (NAT); medium of instruction

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

One of the main goals of a Lasallian education is to foster academic excellence. As Lasallian educators, it is important to train students to be competent. An effective way to make this possible is by increasing their language proficiency.

The National Achievement Test (NAT) gauges learning outcomes across target levels in identified periods of basic education¹. In particular, the NAT for fourth year high school serves as an assessment after a ten-year basic education of senior students. The NAT is a standardized test, which aims to create assessment tools that permit someone to make a valid inference about the knowledge and/or

skills that students possess in a specific content area. That inference is to be norm-referenced so that a student's relative knowledge and/or skills can be compared with those possessed by a national sample of students of the same age or grade level. (e.g. De La Salle Santiago Zobel vs. Muntinlupa schools)

The chart below illustrates DLSZ's performance profile in the NAT for Academic Year 2012-2013 for the six (6) content areas, namely: Filipino, Math, English, Science, AP, and Critical Writing.



¹ Retrieved from <http://www.deped.gov.ph>



Thinking.

Fig. 1. DLSZ's Institutional Performance Profile in the NAT for AY 2012-2013

In DLSZ, High School Social Studies is taught in English across levels while the NAT AP, focusing on Economics, is tested in Filipino. This is where a mismatch was observed. Based on AY 2012-2013 NAT results, we assumed that our fourth year high school students obtained an average mean percentage score (MPS) in AP because of the use of a different language. Because the students were not exposed to learning Economics in Filipino, they did not do very well in the exam compared to other Muntinlupa schools. Since exposure is vital to language learning, mastery of the language was not attained by our students.

Through this study, we sought to find out how language impacts the performance of the fourth year students in the NAT AP and hoped to improve their performance through an academic intervention. Thus, we posited that language is a barrier in the performance of our students in the NAT AP.

1.2 Review of Related Literature

There have been a number of studies that looked into the correlation of medium of instruction to the academic performance of learners in various countries. Some of these literatures were selected for this study's purpose.

In a research made by Chung (1996), an attempt to look into the effects of varying medium of instruction (MOI) to the academic performance of students in the Secondary One Level was made. After taking six (6) achievement tests using different media of instruction, he inferred that the schools that focused on the use of specific MOI produce better student performance. Schools that adopt Chinese MOI help students of all ability levels achieve optimal performance in all subjects except English. Students, who are considered to be able to learn through English, perform well in English MOI on Chinese, English and Mathematics but poorly on Geography, History and Science.

Mchazime (2001) suggested that the ability to improve academic performance may

also depend on the readiness or the preparedness of the students in learning using a specific medium of instruction. After conducting series of interviews and surveys with the primary pupils and parents situated in Chichewa, Malawi, he found out that both are not linguistically prepared for instruction using English as medium of instruction.

Mlay (2010) in her work pondered on the idea that while English can be used as a medium of instruction to better academic performance of the students, recommendations on bridging the language barriers through enhancing teaching and learning styles in the classroom should also be pointed out to improve reading and oral skills. Furthermore, language and pedagogy skills of faculty members using English as medium of instruction should also be enhanced.

Kinyaduka (2013) explored the effects of English being used as a medium of instruction in the academic performance of students in Tanzania secondary schools. After the adoption of a cross-sectional research design, the study recommended the use of both English and Swahili in teaching and evaluation, may improve the academic performance of the students. The study concluded that using English language as a medium of instruction may contribute to poor academic performance among students, thus resulting in poor quality education.

Ramasama (2001) examined in his paper the impact of bilingual education on two types of cognitive abilities, namely, nonverbal intelligence and verbal creativity, which is also called divergent thinking. He found out that the either beneficial effect or no detrimental effect on the cognition of the child if he is educated through a medium other than his own mother tongue.

All these papers agree that the MOI has significant effects on the academic performance of any learner from different parts of the world. It can improve cognition and confidence or level of preparedness. However, a poor command of the medium of instruction may also affect the learner's level of confidence and academic performance. Therefore, in order to attain the best results, a good command of the medium of instruction on both the learners and the teachers should be evident.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research data was generated through purposive sampling of the participants in the study. We selected one fourth year high school class, Section Z, as the sample. The class is composed of 39 students.

In each weekly review session in Social Studies, the class was tasked to answer on a ¼ sheet of paper 10 items from the NAT AP reviewer of AY 2012-2013. While answering each item, the class jotted down the difficult Filipino words beside their answers. After answering, the drill was checked and the difficult Filipino words were explained and discussed in class. After all 50 items were assessed, the difficult Filipino words were tallied to identify the 10 most difficult words thru rank order.

Data analysis was conducted thereafter. We analyzed the 10 most difficult vocabulary and how these were contextualized in each item.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Our findings show that 59 Filipino words used in the NAT AP reviewer were not fully understood by the students, with five words appearing more than once in the table. These words are *salik* (items 11, 21, 24 and 47), *talahanayan* (items 30, 37 and 40), *kakapusan* (items 3, 49), *matugunan* (items 1, 30) and *pinagkukunang-yaman* (items 49, 1).

Ten (10) words were deemed to be most difficult based on the number of students who claimed they did not understand it. A table summarizing the 10 most difficult Filipino words thru rank order is presented below.

Item No. in the NAT AP Reviewer	Ten Most Difficult Filipino Words in the NAT AP Reviewer	No. of Students Who Did Not Understand the Word	Percentage	Type of Word (Part of Speech)
30, 37, 40	1. <i>talahanayan</i>	13	33%	noun
11, 21, 24, 47	2. <i>salik</i>	11	28%	noun
4	3. <i>pagsasapribado</i>	10	26%	verb
41	4. <i>sumasaklaw</i>	10	26%	verb
4	5. <i>paglinang</i>	9	23%	verb
3	6. <i>kalabisan</i>	9	23%	noun
48	7. <i>kahihinatnan</i>	8	21%	noun
1, 30	8. <i>matugunan</i>	8	21%	verb
3, 49	9. <i>kakapusan</i>	7	18%	noun
9	10. <i>pakikipagkalakalan</i>	6	15%	verb

Table 1. Ten Most Difficult Terms in the NAT AP Reviewer

The most difficult word encountered by Section Z is *talahanayan*. Thirty-three percent of the class found this term difficult. The second most difficult term is *salik* with 28% of the group finding it difficult. The third and fourth most difficult words are *pagsasapribado* and *sumasaklaw*, respectively. Ten (10) students or 26% of the class found these terms difficult. The fifth and sixth most difficult words are *paglinang* and *kalabisan* respectively, with 23% of the class claiming these terms were difficult. The seventh and eighth most difficult words are *kahihinatnan* and *matugunan*, with 21% of Section Z claiming it were difficult. The ninth most difficult word is *kakapusan* with 18% of the class finding it a tough word to understand. *Pakikipagkalakalan* ranked tenth with 15% finding it difficult. Also ranking tenth is the word *pinagkukunang-yaman* with six (6) students finding it difficult.

Based on the results of the study, the ten (10) most difficult words encountered by Section Z are both nouns and verbs. Five (5) words are nouns: *talahanayan* (ranked first), *salik* (ranked second), *kalabisan* (ranked sixth), *kahihinatnan* (ranked seventh) and *kakapusan* (ranked ninth). Five (5) words are verbs: *pagsasapribado* (ranked third), *sumasaklaw* (ranked fourth), *paglinang*



(ranked fifth), *matugunan* (ranked eighth) and *pakikipagkalakalan* (ranked tenth).

The most difficult word, *talahanayan*, appeared three times in the NAT AP reviewer in items 30, 37 and 40. Seven (7) students found this word difficult in item 30, while four (4) and two (2) students found it difficult in items 37 and 40 respectively. All three (3) items used the word *talahanayan* in reference to the tables given so that the students can answer the said items correctly. The fact that 11 students did not understand the meaning of the word was already an indicator that they might not have gotten the correct answers in those items unless they were lucky enough to have just guessed it right. It is important to know this word in relation to Economics because many test items require students to analyze pertinent data using charts as per stipulation of the learning competency in the curriculum guide.

Some terms used in Economics class are not necessarily the direct translation in Filipino. We assume that students are unfamiliar with the word *salik* (ranked second most difficult) because its etymology has not been discussed thoroughly in elementary. This word appeared four (4) times in the reviewer in items 11, 21, 24 and 46 pertaining to *mga salik ng produksyon* (factors of production). *Pagsasapribado* (ranked third most difficult), on the other hand, has no direct Filipino translation. It appeared in item 4 as an erroneous option.

Because of the fact that some English words have no direct translation in Filipino, the students' understanding of the words through etymology is greatly affected. An example is *kakapusan*. The direct translation of *kakapusan* in English is shortage, which means *kakulangan*. When used as a term in Economics, it means "*di-kasapatan ng pinagkukunang-yaman upang matugunan ang pangangailangan at kagustuhan ng tao*". (Balitao et. al., 2014) *Kahihinatnan* (ranked seventh most difficult), translated in English as outcome, is an important word that students must learn in Economics. In item 48 where it is used, the value of responsibility is highlighted. When students understand and connect this word with responsibility, their response will be proactive and practical.

The words *sumasaklaw*, *paglinang*, *matugunan* and *pakikipagkalakalan* found in items 41, 4, 1 and 30, and 9 respectively, are verbs pertaining to how resources and services are used in the context of a growing economy. It is imperative that students learn the meaning of these words to understand the dynamics of an economy and appreciate the role and contributions of the different sectors in society to its growth and development.

4. CONCLUSIONS

We believe that there is a need to focus on the use of language in developing concepts in Social Studies, particularly in Economics. Our students were not exposed to learning Economics in Filipino, which resulted in mediocre NAT AP results in the last couple of years as compared to other schools.

The findings of this study support our claim that language has an influence on testing and understanding. We believe that language is indeed a barrier in the performance of our students in the NAT. It is thus essential to recognize the value of delivering quality instruction by making sure that our students understand and wisely use language in the learning process. Likewise, it is critical to recognize that teachers should be adept in the use of the required medium of instruction to guarantee that authentic learning is taking place.

It is recommended that the Economics teachers venture into the introduction and repeated use of economic terms in Filipino so that when students reach fourth year high school and take the NAT, the words can easily be recalled, associated and applied to its meaning and context. Moreover, conducting weekly review sessions on the NAT during Social Studies class may be very helpful since it targets to increase the competence of the students in terms of widening their vocabulary in Economics. It is also possible to do further studies in knowing if DLSZ students understand Social Studies better in their native (Filipino) or foreign language (English, in the case of DLSZ students).

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