

Factors Affecting the Macro Skills Competence of Pre-Service English Teachers

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Abstract. Given that previous research has primarily focused on individual factors such as motivation and aptitude in relation to language competence, overlooking other factors suggests that more research is needed, particularly on the development of the macro skills among pre-service teachers. This study explored the competence of the 121 pre-service English teachers in macro skills and unveiled the underlying factors. A convergent-mixed method was employed, utilizing a survey questionnaire with embedded open-ended questions. The findings revealed that the respondents' levels of competence in the macro skills are: writing, good (3.36); reading, good (3.38); speaking, fair (2.54); and listening, very good (4.11). For writing, the factors include a lack of writing programs, a lack of interest in writing, and low language proficiency. For reading, the factors are noise interference and a lack of interest in reading. Low proficiency in language, anxiety, and communication gaps are key factors affecting speaking. Environmental distractions were identified as a factor affecting the level of competence in listening. As it is expected that pre-service English teachers are proficient in the various macro skills, student-centered activities may be integrated during their academic preparation to prepare them for their teaching internship and in the workplace.

Keywords: Factors affecting macro skills; Listening; Reading; Speaking; Writing.

1.0 Introduction

Language is the foundation of all human relationships as it is the primary means of communication, and human society would never have been possible without it. Considering that existing studies have primarily focused on individual factors such as motivation and aptitude in relation to language competence, overlooking other potential influences emphasizes the need to study the development of macro skills and the factors that affect them, especially among pre-service English teachers.

English macro skills consist of seven: listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, presenting, and grammar. The first four—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—were the earliest macro skills to be identified. These four skills were given more focus in this study because students need to be proficient in them before acquiring the last three: viewing, presenting, and grammar. The macro skills are divided into oral and written modes and further classified as receptive or productive. Listening is an oral-receptive skill, speaking is an oral-productive skill, reading is a written-receptive skill, and writing is a written-productive skill. Although each skill has its role, they support one another in maintaining a language learner's ability (Aydoğan & Akbarov, 2014). This study, though, emphasizes the idea of the macro skills supporting one another, but does not clarify the external or internal factors that may influence the competence level and the balance among these skills.

Understanding various teaching methods can help make language learning successful. Language learners, whether speaking a foreign language or a dialect, need the four macro skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening to communicate effectively (Labicane, 2021). Additionally, Sevy (2018) believed that the integration of macro skills into language training has become more popular as a pedagogical strategy as the paradigm shift in language education continues to push for an evaluation scheme. Further, Sadiku (2015) asserted that mastering listening, speaking, reading, and writing is crucial for effective communication and academic success. These studies (Labicane, 2021; Sevy, 2018; Sadiku, 2015) emphasize the need for macro skills, but they did not examine the competence levels of learners, particularly among pre-service English teachers. The claims establish pedagogical directions; however, they did not unveil factors that influence these skills, which this study addressed.

In addition, the requirement of including macro skills in the training process is highlighted by the roughly equal distribution of language strands as a pedagogical concept in language teaching. Multiple researchers, such as Barrot (2018), strongly support the integration of these macro abilities at the center of language instruction. The study, though highlighting integration, lacks empirical evidence on learners' perceptions of their competence and how factors differ across skills. With the above contentions, this study was conceptualized and conducted. Despite the likelihood of limitations, this study may aid educators and students in creating greater awareness of the significance of addressing various factors that affect competence in macro skills, which is essential for carrying out an effective language teaching-learning process.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to evaluate the level of competence in macro skills and identify the factors influencing their competence. The collection of quantitative and qualitative data, followed by comparison and analysis of the results, is appropriate for this study. The gathered qualitative data support the interpretation of the competence level of the respondents. This ensures a more comprehensive discussion because it captures not only the extent of capability but also the contextual reasons behind it. This method was utilized in the study to collect both forms of data at roughly the same time and then integrate the information in the interpretation of the overall results. Any contradictions or incongruent findings regarding competence levels and the factors affecting them in macro skills were explained and further probed.

2.2 Participants of the Study

The respondents who participated in this research study were the 121 students: (1) enrolled in the College of Teacher Education, second semester, S.Y. 2024-2025, (2) majoring in English, and (3) willing to participate. The purpose of the respondent selection criteria is to guarantee a representative and varied sample that reflects the population being studied. In adherence to ethical principles, the study prioritized voluntary involvement and informed consent from all respondents. Prior to data collection, the respondents were given detailed information about the research objectives, procedures, and their rights as respondents. Additionally, confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

2.3 Instrumentation

The research instrument in this study has two portions. The first portion is a five-point Likert scale survey questionnaire, while the second portion is the open-ended questionnaire. The English language competence questionnaire of Eslit (2022), designed to determine competence in the macro skills, was used. The macro skills were evaluated based on the component skills of each macro skill. The second portion included open-ended questions. This aims to identify the skills that respondents struggle with and the factors that influence them. Experts' comments and suggestions validated that the instrument was incorporated. The researcher also conducted pilot testing. Aforementioned, the pilot test yielded the following data: listening, 0.896; speaking, 0.907; reading, 0.919; and writing, 0.893, with a Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient of 0.961, indicating a high level of reliability.

2.4 Data-Gathering Procedure

The researcher first developed and adapted the research instrument. This was subjected to expert validation and pilot testing. After the instrument was established, a permit to conduct was secured from the University and

Ethical Review Board. The objectives and nature of the study were discussed with the respondents. Informed consent was also secured. Simultaneous gathering of both quantitative and qualitative data was done in the administration of the instrument. To establish the trustworthiness of findings, the data were submitted to the statistician and data analyst. A series of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) was also conducted to make sure the interpretations are correct and valid.

2.5 Data Analysis

The weighted mean was used to determine the respondents' levels of competence on the macro skills. To guide the researcher in analyzing the answers gathered through the open-ended questions, Braun and Clarke's (2022) framework of reflexive thematic analysis was used. The researcher conducted peer member checking and included a data analyst to evaluate the coding and theming procedure.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Level of competence of the respondents in terms of writing, reading, speaking, and listening

Table 1 shows the respondents' levels of competence in the macro skills. The respondents demonstrate greater competence in listening, as evidenced by the result of 4.11, which is qualitatively described as very good. Meanwhile, writing and reading were both described as good, with mean scores of 3.36 and 3.39, respectively. The respondents are least competent in speaking, as indicated by a mean score of 2.54, which is considered fair.

Table 1. *Respondents' Levels of Competence on the Macro Skills*

Skill	Mean	Level of Competence
Writing	3.36	Good
Reading	3.38	Good
Speaking	2.54	Fair
Listening	4.11	Very Good

Writing

All the indicator-statements under writing were labeled as good as a qualitative description. The results mean that they are equipped with the necessary skills and display mastery in writing. However, the findings also further suggest the need for consistent practice to enhance the writing skills of the respondents. Performance activities may be emphasized in writing subjects, such as Technical Writing and Campus Journalism. The skills may also be enhanced by addressing the factors affecting the level of their competence. This result is similar to the findings of Hikmah et al. (2019). In their study, the learners had a fair competency level in writing essays. Specifically, the students performed well in mechanics, but they lacked organization and content. This study, however, unveiled the general factors affecting the respondents' level of writing competence, and not specifically the rudiments of writing.

Reading

All eighteen indicator-statements under reading gathered a label of good as a qualitative description. The results manifest mastery in their reading skills. The findings also suggest the need to sustain activities, particularly in their literature subjects, to improve in decoding, comprehending, and conveying information. The respondents may also practice intensive reading to supplement their knowledge. Reyes et al. (2022) claimed that higher-level reading equips readers with the capacity to test different interpretational possibilities, finding patterns and unusual language in the text, detecting and differentiating different meanings, subtexts, contradictions, bias, and hidden ideologies, detecting analogies and patterns, and drawing inferences or connecting the text with other texts or cultural backgrounds. In this way, their level of competence may increase and develop.

Speaking

Most of the indicator-statements on speaking gathered a fair qualitative description. The findings suggest the need for consistency in reinforcing and practicing speaking to enhance the encoding process and improve one's effectiveness as a speaker. The results also suggest the essence of effective teaching strategies and methods, and how a conducive learning environment helps in developing speaking skills. The results contradict the findings of Reyes et al. (2023). It was revealed in their study that students' English-speaking competence is sufficient. It was because students of the English education study program practiced English regularly in their speaking classes. Although contradictory, their findings suggest that practicing English regularly in speaking classes may help enhance the respondents' speaking skills.

Listening.

Most of the indicator-statements on listening gathered a label of very good as a qualitative description. The findings suggest that respondents must consistently improve and maintain their listening skills competence, as this leads to enhanced communication and interaction performance, ultimately facilitating easier information retention. The result was also similar in the findings of Santos (2022), wherein the students have a high advanced proficiency in all specific macro skills at the literal level of listening skill. This shows that students can retain information listened to and understand stated facts. They added that the exposure of the learners to movies, advertisements, and other audiovisual materials at home, in school, and even online must have scaffolded their familiarity with American English.

3.2 Factors affecting the respondents' level of competence in the macro skills

Writing Skill

Lack of Programs in Writing. This theme implies that when individuals are confined or restricted, they are unable to express their capabilities fully and are hindered from further developing them. Consequently, this limitation hinders their ability to recognize areas for improvement, particularly in their writing. According to Grabe and Kaplan (2014), the multifaceted nature of writing positions it not merely as a talent but as a demanding task. Their assertion highlights the depth of cognitive engagement demanded by the act of writing. This suggests that mastering the craft of writing involves a cognitive journey characterized by sustained effort and deliberate practice.

Lack of Interest in Writing. This theme highlights the crucial role of motivation in the development of writing skills. When students are motivated, they become more interested and engaged in writing activities. This enthusiasm drives them to actively participate in class discussions and strive to improve their writing abilities. However, despite the importance of motivation, some authors have discussed the challenges and negative emotions associated with writing, such as "agony" and "anguish" (Al-Khasawneh, 2010). Negative thoughts or perceived difficulties in writing can impact how writers express their ideas. Hence, this underscores the importance of fostering motivation and self-efficacy in writing education.

Reading Skill

Noise Interference. The first factor affecting reading skills is noise. This theme explores how auditory distractions affect reading comprehension cognitively, highlighting how frequently present auditory stimuli are during the reading process, and implying how essential it is to identify and proactively address these issues. The results presented in this study are comparable to the findings of Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011), who identified that when learners are in safe environments, their reading comprehension ability will be better. Readers may encounter more difficulties understanding a text in an unorganized environment than those who read in a calm and controlled place. If learners are in an unsafe place, they find it difficult to focus on their reading. When they are in safe environments, their reading comprehension ability will improve. Learners need a healthy environment that is free from distractions, allowing them to focus entirely on the learning process.

Lack of Interest in Reading. This theme highlights that personal factors like motivation and interest greatly influence an individual's reading abilities. Individuals who read for intrinsic motivations such as curiosity, personal interest, or the drive to improve themselves show more passion, perseverance, and commitment to the reading process. On the other hand, those who lack desire can approach reading with reluctance, which would make it more difficult for them to connect with the text and acquire essential reading skills. The findings align with those of Shah et al. (2022). According to them, one factor is pertinent to anxiety during reading comprehension. Examinations, class work, or homework situations can put more pressure on readers' reading than reading for enjoyment. This can lead to a lowering of reading comprehension among readers.

Speaking Skill

Low Language Proficiency. This theme targets both spoken and written discourse. The challenges faced by respondents in speaking and writing encompass a spectrum of linguistic hurdles, including a lack of vocabulary, grammatical obstacles, and deficiencies in knowledge. Without a robust vocabulary, one's ability to articulate thoughts and comprehend written material is severely hindered. Vacalares et al. (2023) noted that students, despite their motivation, often grapple with vocabulary-related difficulties. The remarks from the respondents echo these sentiments, highlighting issues such as a lack of ideas, vocabulary, and information, as well as struggles with grammar. These challenges underscore the complex interplay between language acquisition and cognitive

processes. Overall, these emphasize the importance of a well-rounded language education that focuses on grammar and vocabulary, while also encouraging critical thinking and idea development.

Anxiety. This theme was unveiled relative to respondents' confidence, fear of criticism, and class environment. Personal behaviors reveal the foundational role and impact of various personal interferences, such as personally rooted behaviors that hinder one's ability to speak and communicate. Dincer and Yesilyurt (2013) suggest that appropriate speaking activities can reduce anxiety, emphasizing the importance of topic choice in boosting confidence. They also highlight the teachers' negative opinions on speaking instruction, despite recognizing its significance.

Communication Gap. This theme highlights the lack of communication effectiveness and inadequacies in the transmission between individuals. Communication gaps can foster a breeding ground for misinterpretation, thereby detrimentally affecting the overall effectiveness and cohesion of the communication. An example of this factor is pronunciation. According to Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011), pronunciation is one of the most challenging aspects of a language for learners to master and one of the least favorite topics for teachers to address. However, all learners can learn the pronunciation of a language effectively if the teacher and learner participate together in the total learning process.

Listening Skill

Environmental Distractions. Despite being rated as very good in terms of listening competence, this factor significantly hinders the comprehension of information. These distractions entail a failure to listen carefully and attentively, which alters the listener's ability to receive information. These environmental distractions reduce attention, focus, and concentration, decrease retention, and create communication breakdowns, which may result in ineffective listening skills. This result was also indicated in the study by Ardila (2013), which found that the noise distracted to the point of losing interest in the exercise. Discriminating between noise and background sounds in some listening exercises prevented them from identifying key information needed to answer specific questions.

3.3 Merging of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Table 2 presents the merging results of quantitative and qualitative data, jointly displaying the level of competence and the factors affecting each macro skill.

Table 2. *Joint Display of Quantitative and Qualitative Data*

Skill	Level	Factors
Writing	Good	Lack of Programs in Writing Lack of Interest in Writing
Reading	Good	Noise Interference Lack of Interest in Reading
Speaking	Fair	Low Language Proficiency Anxiety Communication Gap
Listening	Very Good	Environmental Distractions

Although the writing and reading skills are rated as good, they require further development, as these skills are essential for pre-service English teachers. Enrichment activities may be done to address the factors affecting these skills. For speaking, the factors need to be adequately addressed to improve the respondents' competence and confidence in speaking. Scaffolding is necessary considering their level of competence, which is described as fair. Approaches such as Community Language Learning and Communicative Language Teaching may be employed. Teachers and school administrations may also develop and spearhead programs and activities targeting the development of positive perception towards language, knowledge on World Englishes, and the development of communicative competence among the respondents. Lastly, listening skills, despite being rated as very good, still have a factor affecting them. Strategic competence may be developed among learners to enhance their capability to participate in the communication process.

4.0 Conclusion

The respondents' levels of competence on the macro skills are suitable for writing and reading, fair for speaking, and very good for listening. Enrichment activities and task-based strategies may still be employed to improve their competence level, especially in speaking. There are various factors affecting the levels of competence in the macro skills. These include a lack of writing programs, a lack of interest in writing, noise interference, a lack of interest in reading, low language proficiency, anxiety, communication gaps, and environmental distractions. Teachers may adapt their teaching strategies and techniques to the needs and interests of their students. Also, teachers may help students develop their macro skills and pinpoint areas in which they need more assistance, and create focused interventions in those areas. Seminars and training on macro skills development may be conducted. Teachers may also spearhead and participate in Learning Action Cell sessions targeting approaches and strategies in enhancing the macro skills.

Future researchers may conduct action research using strategies or materials that address the factors unveiled in this study.

5.0 Contribution of Authors

The author conducted and crafted the study after the approval of the authorities.

6.0 Funding

The researcher funded the study.

7.0 Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

8.0 Acknowledgment

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