

# Literacy and Philippine Policies in Native Language Learning Among High School Students

**Abstract:** In the Philippines, the official languages recognized are Filipino and English, used to teach in educational institutions nationwide. However, the English language is more often used as a medium in teaching the curriculum, which poses a challenge for learners to develop their literacy skills which include the ability to read, write, and speak in the Filipino language in formal learning, especially in high school (grades 7–12). Thus, this study was conducted to assess the level of practice of the Filipino-only policy and the level of literacy in the Filipino language among high school students. This quantitative study utilized descriptive, comparative, and correlational research approaches. The data were gathered from 324 high school students at a catholic university in Western Visayas, who were chosen using a stratified random sampling. Using the mean and the standard deviation, the result showed that the level of students' practice of the Filipino-only policy in academic-related activities and the level of literacy in the Filipino language is high. Further, by utilizing analysis of variance for comparative analysis, the results showed no significant differences in the level of practice of Filipino-only practice and the level of literacy in the Filipino language when grouped according to grade level. Finally, using the mean for correlational analysis, the result showed a correlation between the practice of the Filipino-only policy and literacy in the Filipino language. Based on the findings of the study, supplementary instructional materials on proposal research writing using the Filipino medium were then proposed for possible implementation.

**Keywords:** Practice of Filipino-only policy, Literacy in Filipino, Filipino Language, Basic Education, Quantitative Research

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language policies are a set of guiding principles, norms, laws, rules, and practices designed to effect the desired change in the language of a society, group, or system (Gleason & Ratner, 2020). Pratama et al. (2020) contend that to ensure that minority populations have access to distinguished nationally recognized languages and literacies, it is vital to establish language policies that support the intergenerational preservation of our culture and tradition. According to Domingo et al. (2021), the language of instruction practices in the area indicates that using the child's native language significantly elevates academic results and literacy compared to using a language the child does not speak.

Literacy is the ability to read, write, and talk to comprehend and create meaning (Edge & Olan, 2020). Students' ability to read written texts, write phrases or stories, and comprehend as they speak in conversations indicates their literacy. Various curricula and publishing firms aim to immerse our youth in studying our native language, but engagement in Filipino literature is still **limited. The Philippines** has a long history with Filipino, its national language, rooted in history. The Filipino language has a stronger cultural tie with the country and its people—a sign of national pride that has endured through years of various occupations. To be proficient in a language, especially one distinct from one's mother tongue, one needs knowledge and skills using the linguistic components. The student's training in formal and academic features of language use, his knowledge of rhetorical patterns, and variations in genre and style affect the acquisition of a second language (Tana, 2021).

**Under the mandate** of Article XIV Section 7 of the 1987 constitution, mandating Filipino as one of the official languages of the Philippines, Deped Order 52, S. 1987 – "THE 1987 POLICY ON BILINGUAL EDUCATION," states that institutions must aim to produce competent students in both languages of English and Filipino, the propagation of Filipino as a literacy language, the cultivation and elaboration of Filipino as a language of scholarly discourse, that is, its ongoing intellectualization, must all be ensured in learning levels. Thus, some **subjects at the** high school level are still using Filipino as the medium of instruction.

Linguists view the CHED's decision to exclude **Filipinos from** core college curricula as a step toward the language's eventual deterioration (Bataller, 2019). Even so, learning the Filipino language has continuously been a challenge for high school students, especially those who have grown to familiarize themselves with their mother tongue and English. High School students still struggle to understand and express themselves in Filipino due to their close familiarity with English based on their language exposure. Moreover, the practice of Filipino-only policy is very limited for them due to the presence of Filipino-based subjects.

Several studies were conducted in the Philippines on the factors influencing students' language proficiency (Tana, 2021) **and students'** proficiency in the Filipino language (Nisperos, 2018; Bataller, 2019). However, no literature links the practice of the Filipino-only policy with the literacy of high school students in an academic setting. Thus, this study is conducted to fill the national and local literature gap. To make advancements in the areas of education and linguistics, this research is relevant today.

This study aimed to determine the literacy level of High School students in the Filipino language and its influence to the practice of the **Filipino-only policy** in an academic setting. Moreover, the results served as a guide for addressing the student's literacy in the Filipino language.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

**Research design.** This paper utilized the quantitative research design using the descriptive, comparative, and correlational research approaches to determine the level of practice of Filipino-only policy and the level of literacy in the Filipino Language. The researchers examined the level of each variable, its differences, and the relationship between the variables in the study.

**Respondents and sampling technique.** The study utilized 324 sampled High School students in a Catholic School for the School year 2022-2023 from the total population of 2,014 officially enrolled students. The sample size was determined using an online sample calculator with a 5% margin of error. The respondents of the study were determined using stratified random sampling.

**Research instrument.** This study utilized a research-made questionnaire **about cross-recorded questionnaires to assess the level of practice of the Filipino-only policy in a classroom setting.** The questionnaire included 20 items that allowed the researchers to evaluate the extent to which the student practices the Filipino-only policy. For the level of literacy in the Filipino language, a researcher-made test including 20 items is utilized to grasp the student's literacy in the Filipino language.

The researcher-made **instruments underwent content** validity with **3panels of** experts and used content validity ratio (CVR) to calculate each item by employing Lawshe's (1975) method. All items are valid or significant with the  $CVR = 4.88$  or interpreted as excellent. To ensure the reliability of the study's findings, it was administered to 30 STEM G12 students at a Catholic university. Additionally, it was tested using Cronbach's Alpha for measurement with the result of 0.954010967 and interpreted as excellent.

**Data collection procedure.** Upon the approval of the gatekeepers, the researchers identified the participants of the study. Orientation was conducted to inform the participants about the study before securing informed consent and parents' ascent for voluntary participation. The data were collected online with the virtual presence of the researchers. The participants were given enough time to answer through an online survey platform. After the data were gathered, a series of tabulations and analyses were done employing the statistical tools appropriate for the research questions.

**Data analysis procedure.** Descriptive, comparative, and correlational analysis were the methods for the variables in this study to analyze the data gathered. The researchers used Mean and standard deviation for descriptive analysis, ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) for comparative analysis, and Mean for correlational analysis.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1**

*Level of Practice of The Filipino Only Policy (FOP)*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
GRADE				
GRADE 7	40	3.46	0.81	High
GRADE 8	34	3.49	0.76	High
GRADE 9	33	3.74	0.50	High
GRADE 10	41	3.49	0.71	High
GRADE 11	99	3.48	0.67	High
GRADE 12	77	3.54	0.61	High
<b><i>As a whole</i></b>	<b>324</b>	<b>3.52</b>	<b>0.67</b>	<b><i>High</i></b>

Table 1 presents the level of practice of the Filipino-Only Policy (FOP) when taken as a whole and when grouped according to their grade level. As a whole, the level of practice of FOP (M=3.52, SD= 0.67) is high, with Grade 9 (M= 3.74, SD =0.50) as the highest and Grade 7 (M= 3.46, SD= 0.81) as the lowest in terms of the mean rating. Results have shown that Grade 9 students practice more the Filipino Only Policy than the other grade levels. Grade 9 students use Filipino as their language medium in the classroom, mainly, in their listening and speaking skills when interacting in academic settings, wherein Grade 9 students had a higher rating compared to other grade levels and in other literacy skills.

The overall high level of practice of the Filipino-Only Policy indicates that high school students **are practising Filipino-Only Policy (FOP)** in a classroom setup. This high rating of the practice of FOP could be attributed to the use of the Filipino language in terms of class recitations, activities, and assessments in an academic setting. The proficiency of students in their native language is increasing because of the language policy that encourages the use of the native language as a subject and for instruction (Mulovhedzi et al., 2015). Filipino-only Policy (FOP) is a language **policy practised in a** classroom setting by a few institutions in the Philippines, contrary to the standardized English-only policy (Paes, 2018). According to Tana (2021), Filipino teachers incorporate proper instructional methods and policies whenever necessary into the teaching-learning process. Language policies and practices improve the quality of education (UNICEF Publications, 2017).

**Table 2***Level of Literacy in the Filipino Language*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
GRADE				
GRADE 7	40	3.52	1.03	High
GRADE 8	34	3.51	0.72	High
GRADE 9	33	3.73	0.49	High
GRADE 10	41	3.43	0.78	Moderate
GRADE 11	99	3.61	0.67	High
GRADE 12	77	3.81	0.78	High
<b><i>As a whole</i></b>	<b><i>324</i></b>	<b><i>3.62</i></b>	<b><i>0.76</i></b>	<b><i>High</i></b>

Table 2 presents the level of literacy of high school students in the Filipino language when taken as a whole and when grouped according to grade level. As a whole, the level of literacy (M=3.62, SD= 0.76) is high, with Grade 12 (M= 3.81, SD =0.78) as the highest and Grade 10 (M= 3.43, SD= 0.78) as the lowest in terms of the mean rating. This means that Grade 12 students are the most literate in the Filipino language than the other grade levels. Grade 12 students excel in reading, writing, and speaking abilities in the Filipino language compared to Grade 10 and the other grade levels.

Grade 12 students have already undergone several subjects utilizing Filipino as the medium of instruction than the other grade levels. Thus, they are more exposed to activities planned and implemented by their teachers that would develop their literacy skills. According to **Edge and Olan** (2020), the foundation for children's reading and writing abilities as they begin and advance through school is laid by language development. Developing a child's language skills is strongly linked to their literacy skills. Gaps can be honed through sufficient exposure to organized, age-appropriate instructions in the classroom (Bleses et al., 2018).

**Table 3**

*Difference in the Level of Practice of the Filipino-Only Policy (Fop) when grouped according to Grade Level*

<b>GRADE</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
GRADE 7	3.46 (0.81)	0.854	5 318	0.512
GRADE 8	3.49 (0.76)			
GRADE 9	3.74 (0.50)			
GRADE 10	3.49 (0.71)			
GRADE 11	3.48 (0.67)			
GRADE 12	3.54 (0.61)			

*Note: The difference in the means is significant when  $p \leq 0.05$*

Table 3 presents the significant difference in the level of practice of Filipino-only Policy (FOP) among high school students when grouped according to grade level. Using the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and the p-value shown in the table ( $p = 0.512$ ) shows no significant difference in the level of practice of Filipino-only Policy (FOP) among high school students when grouped according to grade level. Thus, it shows that the students have a similar level of practice of Filipino-only Policy (FOP). This means the students, in an academic setting, practice the Filipino-only Policy (FOP) in recitations, activities, and assessments.

The structure as a whole and the applied English-Only Policy affect the participation of the students. This similar implementation of language policy enables the students to engage in class or even not engage in class because of language difficulty. Both policies encourage the students to engage and even participate in classroom-based activities while utilizing the said language, it is similarly imposed to expose the students to the use of the Filipino language in their academic interactions (Villanueva et al., 2020).

**Table 4***Difference in the Level of Literacy in the Filipino Language*

<b>GRADE</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
GRADE 7	3.52 (1.03)	1.902	5 318	0.094
GRADE 8	3.51 (0.72)			
GRADE 9	3.73 (0.49)			
GRADE 10	3.43 (0.78)			
GRADE 11	3.61 (0.67)			
GRADE 12	3.81 (0.78)			

Note: The difference in the means is significant when  $p \leq 0.05$

Table 4 presents the difference in the level of literacy in the Filipino language among high school students when they are grouped according to grade level. Using the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and with the shown p-value in the table ( $p = 0.094$ ), the result showed no significant difference in the level of literacy among high school students.

In context, grade 10 was measured by having the lowest level of literacy among other grade levels, and grade 12 had the highest level of literacy. The result implies that high school students can utilize the Filipino language, wherein the students, in an academic setting, can proficiently write, read, and speak in the Filipino language.

Despite no significant difference in the level of literacy, some students still struggle to understand how certain words and punctuation are used in Filipino, and most are unable to comprehend a Filipino paragraph in its entirety. Additionally, students in senior high school are likewise regarded as still being at the intermediate level when it comes to the utilization of the Filipino language (Bautista et al., 2019). This means that despite not being able to use its full complexity, they can speak, understand, and utilize the language proficiently and reasonably well. Students' attitudes toward studying the Filipino language are also significantly related, as is the teachers' approach to teaching Filipino (Ariaso, 2020).

**Table 5**

Correlation *the practice* of Filipino-Only Policy and Literacy in the Filipino Language of the High School Students

Variable		r	df	p
LEVEL OF PRACTICE OF THE FILIPINO ONLY POLICY (FOP)	x LEVEL OF LITERACY IN THE FILIPINO LANGUAGE	0.726	322	0.000

Table 5 presents the correlation between the practice of the Filipino-only policy and literacy in the Filipino language among high school students. The shown p-value in the table ( $p = 0.000$ ), it shows a significant relationship between the practice of the Filipino-only policy and literacy in the Filipino language among high school students. This supports the result of the high level of practice of the Filipino-only Policy (FOP) to the high level of literacy in the Filipino language among high school students in an academic setting.

The practice of Filipino-only Policy (FOP) in an academic setting, in recitations, activities, medium of discussion, and assessments, affects the level of literacy of the students in the Filipino language. This means the low level of practice of the Filipino-only Policy (FOP) results in a low level of literacy in the Filipino language, and the high level of the practice of Filipino-only Policy (FOP) results in a high level of literacy in the Filipino language among high school students in an academic setting. Language policies appear to be the mediators of language and literacy. The university language policies also contribute to the literacy goals of the school and the students as the practice of language policy affects the literacy goals and literacy of the students (Airey, 2017).

Whilst experience shows that effectively integrating appropriate language practices into education and development initiatives is challenging, it is critical if we are to achieve desired learning outcomes (UNICEF, 2017). The practice of the Filipino-only policy enables the students to interact with the language in the various facets of their academic learning which allows them to have an improved learning of the said language.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Students have shown to have a significantly high level of literacy in the Filipino language as influenced by their high level of practice of the Filipino-Only Policy in classroom-related activities. Integrating the Filipino-Only Policy in Filipino subjects as the medium of language in classroom discussions, presentations, collaboration, and other related activities is responsible for the students' excellent reading, writing, and speaking abilities in the said language. In addition, implementing language policies can greatly improve the quality of education by helping students increase their literacy.

However, despite the high level of literacy as influenced by the high level of practice, some still struggle with the medium of instruction. As a result, teachers consider and evaluate the challenges students face upon applying the language in instructional or learning materials to address concerns in their literacy. With that being said, the effective strategy of using language policies to foster student language literacy **could** enhance their learning competency, improve academic performance, and nurture their Filipino language proficiency.

### **Consent**

As per international standard or university standard, respondents' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of this research, it is recommended that:

**Institutions** may develop educational initiatives, campaigns, and/or seminars that could help students further practice the Filipino-only **policy to** increase the students' literacy in the Filipino language. Moreover, it is recommended that they assess the learning level of students to know in which area of reading, writing, and speaking the student has a low level.

**Teachers** may identify the language deficiency of high school students in conducting Filipino-only policy and recognize the factors affecting their Filipino literacy. It is also recommended that they develop student learning plans in academic activities and extracurricular activities that ensure improvements in students' language development, specifically in Filipino.

**Students** may continuously practice their reading, writing, and speaking skills in the Filipino language by utilizing the available outputs and programs provided by each department. They are also recommended to develop better approaches to their communication that may influence their literacy and develop a way of establishing an interactive environment among their peers in junior high school and senior high school.

**Future researchers** may identify other internal and external factors that influence the student's practice of Filipino-only policy. This will serve as a guide for them in developing new studies that focus on the Filipino language.

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