

# Assessing Grammatical Competence of First-Year College Students in a Philippine University: Basis for Instructional Intervention

Ma. Asuncion G. Desales\*

Department of Teacher Education

\*Corresponding author

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## ABSTRACT

A strong foundation in grammar is essential for developing and enhancing English communication, writing and comprehension skills, particularly for individuals engaged in government, business, or academic institutions. This study aimed to assess the grammatical competence of first-year college students at the University of Eastern Philippines, Laoang Campus. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed utilizing a teacher-made test, adapted with modifications from the works of Baraceros and De Guzman, and were validated by experts. Statistical tools such as Slovin's formula, Anova, mean, frequency counts and percentages were used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that, applying the test of difference, students from BTVTED, BSED, BPED, and ENGINEERING Courses demonstrated a high level of grammatical competence while CRIMINOLOGY, BSIT, and BEED disclosed an average level of competence. However, individual weaknesses were identified, particularly in the use of adverbs as modifiers, prepositions, and subject-verb agreement. These results suggest a need for greater exposure to English grammar rules. It is recommended that first-year college students should engage in activities that will further strengthen their grammar skills. Additionally, English teachers are encouraged to develop instructional materials such as books, workbooks, modules, and enhanced syllabi, along with employing innovative teaching strategies, to improve the teaching and learning of English grammar in the classroom.

**Keywords:** Grammatical competence, Philippine University, descriptive- quantitative, First-year college students, Instructional Intervention

## INTRODUCTION

Understanding English grammar is beneficial to people from all walks of life, and it is especially important to those who work in government, business, or academic institutions since they frequently communicate using the English language. Being at home with speaking English makes it easier for the speaker to express himself or herself clearly and with confidence. Additionally, proficient grammar fosters the development of a person's critical abilities such as speaking, writing, reading, and comprehension.

Speaking is a necessary ability for human interaction. Good communication has numerous advantages and is acknowledged and valued by everybody. In a forum, a speaker with a solid command of the English language can hold the attention of his or her audience and is able to facilitate a complete discussion. The spoken information a speaker conveys can elicit a variety of reactions from the audience since they could comprehend and analyze effectively the contents of the topic discussed.

As regards to writing, the use of good grammar is also essential, just as it is when speaking. Writing per se requires specific knowledge about grammar, this is the reason why several professionals view writing as a lonely and terrifying task (Saqueton 2016). Nonetheless, one must be aware of the conventions and requirements of writing to communicate effectively. Writing and speaking are the two skills that categorically necessitate the knowledge of correct grammar use.

According to Sabarniati and Said (2020), to facilitate an adequate speaking ability, there are several aspects to consider and one of which is grammatical competence. In school, a student will not be able to construct a sentence if he does not understand the grammar of English. In the study of Salman and Hazen (2022), they reveal that Iraqi students have problems in mastering some grammatical components in English, wherein the most recurrent are the miss-formation errors characterized using wrong form of the morpheme or structure and omission errors.

In the Philippines, problems related to grammatical competence among students, are likewise observed. Saqueton (2016) expresses that English teachers often find themselves in a frustrating situation since no matter how hard they try to teach the rules of English to their students, they still commit errors in word order, word choice, subject-verb agreement, tenses, prepositions, modifiers and the like. She further articulates that such situation is alarming because the rules applied in the sentences that they give are simple rules that the students should have learned in grade school. Yet, they are now in college, but still committing those same errors (Saqueton 2016).

In the study of Merza (2022), he expresses that students of DMMMSU show their strength in the indicators that include correct usage of conjunctions, prepositions, the correct possessive form of nouns. Nonetheless, the students' weaknesses in English grammar lie along with the pronoun-antecedent relationship, pluralization of nouns, subject-verb agreement, order of adjectives, order of adverbs and degree of comparison for adjectives. This displays similarity with this present study since it reveals that students also demonstrate strength in the use of conjunctions, interjections, and adjectives but are weak on adverbs used as modifiers, prepositions, and subject-verb agreement.

In Quinones (2022) study on the in-depth knowledge of grammar among English majors, she recounts that most students' grammatical errors are related to verb tense, modifiers including adjectives and adverbs. This finding aligns with this study which also identifies students' weaknesses in verbs and modifiers.

The circumstances that Saqueton (2016) had stated are real and are occurring because in the study of Barraquio ((2015), she discloses that college students of the Colegio de San Juan de Letran Calamba are feeble in the areas of sentence structure, subject-verb agreement and sentence construction. In like manner, such problematic situations related to student's grammatical competence also happen in our own university, the University of Eastern Philippines Laoang Campus. In a dialogue with teachers handling English subjects, they have replied candidly, disclosing that lack of knowledge about grammatical rules causes students to find it difficult to express themselves in English even if they are already at higher levels.

This study was conducted to determine the grammatical proficiency of first-year college students from different departments of the University of Eastern Philippines Laoang Campus. In like manner it tried to determine the areas of student's strengths and weaknesses. Findings of this study would encourage English teachers to devise strategies, create study materials, such as books or workbooks, modules and enhance their syllabi that will help improve the grammatical competence of students in their speaking, writing, comprehension, and other skills.

This study tried to determine the competence of first-year college students at the University of Eastern Philippines Laoang Campus, as a basis for intervention. This also aimed to devise study materials such as books, workbooks, work texts, modules and new strategies in teaching English Grammar. Specifically, the study sought to find out the grammatical competence of first-year college students, identify which part of speech do the respondents perform best and to finally distinguish if there is a significant difference among the grammatical competence of the first-year college learners in the University of Eastern Philippines.

## METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted at the University of Eastern Philippines Laoang Campus, Laoang, Northern Samar, employing both descriptive and quantitative research designs to assess the grammar proficiency of first-year college students from the various departments of the University of Eastern Philippines Laoang Campus, Laoang, Northern Samar. The descriptive approach allowed for the systematic presentation of students'

grammar performance, while the quantitative method facilitated the statistical analysis and interpretation of the results. This research was conducted at the University of Eastern Philippines, Laoang Campus, located in the municipality of Laoang, Northern Samar. The respondents of this study were first-year college students enrolled in different academic departments during the academic year 2023-2024. The sample size was determined using Slovin's Formula, ensuring that a statistically appropriate number of students were included. Only students who were present during the scheduled test administration participated in the study. To ensure equal representation, thirty (30) test papers were randomly selected from each department, regardless of total department size. This sampling method allowed for balanced comparative analysis.

The primary instrument used in this study was a teacher-made grammar proficiency test. The test was constructed based on grammar materials and concepts found in the works of Sebastian and Asuncion, Baraceros, and De Guzman. The instrument contained items designed to evaluate various aspects of grammar, including subject-verb agreement, sentence structure, verb tense, pronoun usage, and punctuation. To ensure the validity of the instrument, it was reviewed by a panel of academic experts composed of university faculty members holding master's and doctoral degrees in Language and Literature. The panel provided feedback over a period of two weeks, which led to several revisions and improvements in the test's content, structure, and clarity.

After finalizing the test instrument, the researcher coordinated with the de-partment heads and instructors to schedule the management of the test. Students were informed of the purpose of the test and as respondents, they were assured that their identities would remain confidential, and that the data collected would be used solely for research and academic improvement purposes. Moreover, ethical protocols were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study. Informed consent was obtained from the student respondents, and participation was voluntary.

During the testing sessions, standard procedures were followed to maintain uniformity and minimize external influence. Once the test was completed, the papers were manually checked, and each student's performance was analyzed to determine strengths and weaknesses in grammar proficiency.

To interpret the data, both inferential and descriptive statistical tools were used. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to determine if there were statistically significant differences in grammar proficiency among departments. In addition, the mean, frequency counts, and percentages were used to describe performance trends and identify commonly occurring errors.

Finally, with the approval of the university administration, the results of this study were disseminated to English instructors and the university's testing center to be used as basis for designing targeted instructional interventions and support programs aimed at improving the grammar proficiency of students across departments.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Grammatical Competence of the First Year College Students

**Table 1** presents the grammatical competence of first-year college students in the University of Eastern Philippines, Laoang Campus.

Based on the findings, 19 or 55.88 percent of the **Engineering students** obtained the score of 90-119, interpreted as "high". Also, 14 or 41.18 percent of them got the score ranging from 60-89, interpreted as "average". And 1 or 2.94 percent received a score ranging from 30-59, interpreted as "low". Lastly, none of them obtained a score ranging from 120-150 and 0-59. This means that the majority of the first-year engineering students have high grammatical competence (Mean=93.12, SD=1.67).

SCORES	FREQUENCY	ENGINEERING	INTERPRETATION
PERCENTAGE			
120-150	0	0	Very High
90- 119	19	55.88	High
60-89	14	41,18	Average
30-59	1	2.94	Low
0-29	0	0	Very Low

Mean: 93.12

Std. Dev.: 1.67

In terms of the grammatical competence of the **BEED first year students**, the findings revealed that, 12 or 35.29 percent of the BEED students obtained the score of 30-59 , interpreted as “low ”. Also, 10 or 29.41 percent of them got the score ranging from 90-119, interpreted as “high”. Similarly, 10 or 29.41 percent received a score ranging from 60-89, interpreted as “average,” And 2 or 5.88 percent of them got a score ranging from 0-59, interpreted as “very low. Lastly, none of them obtained a score ranging from 120-150

SCORES	FREQUENCY	BEED PERCENTAGE	INTERPRETATION
120-150	0	0	Very High
90- 119	10	29.41	High
60-89	10	29.41	Average
30-59	12	35.29	Low
0-29	2	5.88	Very Low

Mean: 71.50

Std. Dev.: 2.75

In terms of the grammatical competence of the **BTVTED first year students**, the findings revealed that, 25 or 73.53 percent of them obtained the score of 90-119, interpreted as “high”. Also, 6 or 17.65 percent of them got the score ranging from 60-89, interpreted as “average”. And 3 or 8.82 percent of them got a score ranging from 120-150, interpreted as “very high”. Lastly, none of them obtained the e score ranging from 30-59 and 0=29. This means that the majority of the first year BTVTED students have high grammatical competence (Mean= 104.97. SD 1-1.24).

SCORES	FREQUENCY	BTVTED PERCENTAGE	INTERPRETATION
120- 150	3	8.82	Very High
90-119	25	73.53	High
60-89	6	17.65	Average
30-59	0	0	Low

0-29                      0                                      0                                      Very Low

Mean: 104.97

Std. Dev.: 1.24

In terms of the grammatical competence of the **BPED first year students**, the findings revealed that, 25 or 73.53 percent of them obtained the score of 90-119, interpreted as “high”. Also, 7 or 20.59 percent of them got the score ranging from 60-89, interpreted as “average”. And 1 or 2.94 percent of them got a score ranging from 120-150, interpreted as “very high”. Similarly, 1 or 2.94 percent of them obtained the score ranging from 30-59, interpreted as “low”. Lastly, none of them obtained the score ranging from 0-29. This means that the majority of the first year BPED students have high grammatical competence (Mean=98.76, SD=1.32).

SCORES	FREQUENCY	BPED PERCENTAGE	INTERPRETATION
120-150	1	2.94	Very High
90-119	25	73.53	High
60-89	7	20.59	Average
30-59	1	2.94	Low
0-29	0	0	Very Low

Mean: 98.76

Std. Dev: 1.3

In terms of the grammatical competence of the **BSED first year students**, the findings revealed that, 26 or 76.47 percent of them obtained the score of 90-119, interpreted as “high”. Also, 3 or 8.82 percent of them got the score ranging from 120-150, interpreted as “very high”. Similarly, 3 or 8.82 percent of them got a score ranging from 60-89, interpreted as “average”. Further, 1 or 2.94 percent of them obtained a score ranging from 30-59, interpreted as “low” and a score ranging from 0-29, interpreted as “very low”. This means that the majority of the first-year BSED students have high grammatical competence (Mean=102.88, SD=2.24).

SCORES	FREQUENCY	BSED PERCENTAGE	INTERPRETATION
120-150	3	8.82	Very High
90-119	26	76.47	High
60-89	3	8.82	Average
30-59	1	2.94	Low
0-29	1	0	Very Low

Mean: 102.88

Std. Dev: 2.24

In terms of the grammatical competence of the **first-year criminology students**, the findings revealed that 16 or 47.06 percent of them obtained a score of 90-119, interpreted as “high”. Also, 13 or 38.24 percent of them got the score ranging from 60-89, interpreted as “average”. Further, 4 or 11.76 percent of them obtained a score ranging from 30-59, interpreted as “low”. And 1 or 2.94 percent got the score ranging from 0-29,

interpreted as “very low”. This means that more of the first-year criminology students have an average grammatical competence (Mean=82.29, SD=2.26).

#### SCORES FREQUENCY CRIM PERCENTAGE INTERPRETATION

120-150	0	0	Very High
90-119	16	47.06	High
60-89	13	38.24	Average
30-59	4	11.76	Low
0-29	1	2.94	Very Low

Mean: 82.29

Std. Dev: 2.26

In terms of the grammatical competence of the first-year **BSIT students**, the findings revealed that 14 or 41.18 percent of them obtained a score of 90-119, interpreted as “high”. Also, 8 or 23.53 percent of them got the score ranging from 60-89, interpreted as “average”. Further, 6 or 17.65 percent of them obtained a score ranging from 30-59, interpreted as “low”. And 3 or 8.82 percent got the score ranging from 120-150, interpreted as “very high”, and 0-29, interpreted as “very low”. This means that more of the first-year BSIT students have an average level of grammatical competence (Mean=76.71, SD=2.96).

#### SCORES FREQUENCY BPED PERCENTAGE INTERPRETATION

120-150	3	8.82	Very High
90-119	14	41.18	High
60-89	8	23.53	Average
30-59	6	17.65	Low
0-29	3	8.82	Very Low

Mean: 76.71

Std. Dev: 2.96

#### Summary Table for the grammatical competence of all the courses

Course	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
<b>BTVTED</b>	104.97	1.24	High
<b>BSED</b>	102.88	2.24	High
<b>BPED</b>	98.76	1.32	High
<b>ENGINEERING</b>	93.12	1.67	High
<b>CRIMINOLOGY</b>	82.29	2.26	Average
<b>BSIT</b>	76.71	2.96	Average
<b>BEED</b>	71.50	2.75	Average



### Parts of Speech the Respondents perform best.

The table below shows the strengths and weaknesses in Grammar among the First-Year College Students at the University of Eastern Philippines. The students demonstrate their strengths in Conjunctions, Interjections, and Adjectives.

On the contrary, their weaknesses fall on Adverbs used as Modifiers, on Prepositions, and on Subject-Verb Agreement.

This shows that, the first-year college students coming from the Department of Engineering, BTVTED, BPED, BSED have high grammatical competence. Meanwhile, the students from the BEED, BSCrim, and BSIT have average grammatical competence. This means that each student needs more exposure to English grammar rules particularly on adverbs used as modifiers, the use of prepositions and subject-verb agreement. The result relates with the study of Merza that Filipino college freshmen have not mastered the rules on subject-verb agreement. Nevertheless, this also differs with Merza's paper, since the first-year students of UEP Laoang were not good in identifying and correcting sentences with dangling, squinting and misplaced modifiers while in Merza's study, he stressed that Filipino college freshmen had not mastered in pluralization of nouns and rules on pronoun and antecedent relationship.

**Table 2.** Part of Speech in which the First-Year students perform best.

Part of Speech	Mean	Grand Mean	Rank
Conjunctions Test VII	7.43	7.43	1
Interjections Test VIII	7.31	7.31	2
Interjections Test IIIA	5.62		
Adjectives Test IIIB	7.59	6.60	3
Adjectives Test IIA	6.69		
Pronouns Test IIB	4.45		
Pronouns Test IIC	7.33	6.16	4
Pronouns Test IA	6.79		
Nouns Test IB	4.01	5.84	5
Nouns Test IC	6.71		
Verbs Test VA	5.33	5.73	6
Verbs Test VB	6.12		
Prepositions Test VI	5.12	5.12	7
Adverbs Test IVA	6.32	4.92	8
Modifiers Test IVB	3.52	4.92	8

### Test of Difference Between the Grammatical Competence of First-Year College Students of UEP Laoang Campus

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the significant difference among grammatical competence among the first- year college students at the University of Eastern Philippines, Laoang Campus.

Based on the findings, there is sufficient statistical evidence that the grammatical competence of all first-year college students has significant difference ( $F = 12.83$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Hence, the null hypothesis, there is no significant difference between the grammatical competence of the first-year students was rejected. This means that among the courses, the BTVTED got the highest mean of 104.97 interpreted as “high” while BEED got the lowest mean of 71.50 interpreted as “average”. It implies that the BEED students are not yet that grammatically competent as compared to the BTVTED and other courses from the different departments.

**Table 3 Test of Difference Between the Grammatical Competence of First Year College Students.**

F-value	P-value	Level of significance	Decision	Interpretation
12.83	0.000	0.05	Reject Ho	Significant

### Parts of Speech the Respondents perform best and least.

The students demonstrate their strengths in Test VII Conjunctions, Test VIII Interjections, and Test IIIA & B Adjectives. On the contrary, their weaknesses fall on Test IV A on Adverbs and Test IV B on Modifiers, Test VI Prepositions, and Test V A& B on Subject-Verb Agreement.

This shows that although, as a whole the first-year college students coming from the Department of Engineering, BPED, BSIT, BSED, Criminology has high grammatical competence, except BTVTED with very high and BEED with average, still each student needs more exposure to English grammar rules particularly on adverbs used as modifiers, the use of prepositions and subject-verb agreement. This result relates with the study of Merza that Filipino college freshmen have not mastered the rules on subject-verb agreement. Nevertheless, this shows also a difference, since the first-year students of UEP Laoang were not good in identifying and correcting sentences with dangling, squinting and misplaced modifiers while in Merza’s study, Filipino college freshmen have not mastered in pluralization of nouns and rules on pronoun and antecedent relationship.

### Test of Difference Between the Grammatical Competence of First Year College Students

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the significant difference in the grammatical competence of the first-year college students in the University of Eastern Philippines, Laoang Campus.

Based on the findings, there is sufficient statistical evidence that the grammatical competence of first college students has significant difference ( $F = 12.83$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Hence, the null hypothesis, there is no significant difference between the grammatical competence of the first-year students was rejected. This means that among the courses, the BTVTED got the highest mean of 104.97 interpreted as “high” while BEED got the lowest mean of 71.50 interpreted as “average”. It implies that the BEED students are not yet that grammatically competent as compared to the BTVTED and other courses from the different departments.

## CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study indicate that first-year college students of the University of Eastern Philippines Laoang Campus exhibit a high level of grammatical competence for the BTVTED, BSED, BPED and ENGINEERING courses. Meanwhile Criminology, BSIT and BEED courses got an average level of competence. However, individual weaknesses persist, particularly in areas such as the use of adverbs as modifiers, prepositions and subject-verb agreement.

Generally, the grammatical competence of the first-year college students was high; however, each student had his /her weak points, which means that every student needs more exposure to English grammar rules, particularly on adverbs used as modifiers, on the use of prepositions and on subject-verb agreement.

To address the gaps regarding grammatical competence, it is therefore recommended that first-year college students should immerse themselves in structured learning activities that will help them enhance their



command and competence of English grammar. Moreover, teachers should devise instructional materials such as books, workbooks, work texts, modules, enhanced syllabi and new strategies in teaching English grammar, tailored to the learner's needs that can promote learning outcomes.

In like manner, teachers handling English subjects need to strengthen the grammatical competence at the collegiate level because doing so will not only improve student's academic performance but also equip them with essential communication skills necessary for success in professional and social contexts.

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## Conflict of Interest

The researcher declares no conflict of interest.

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