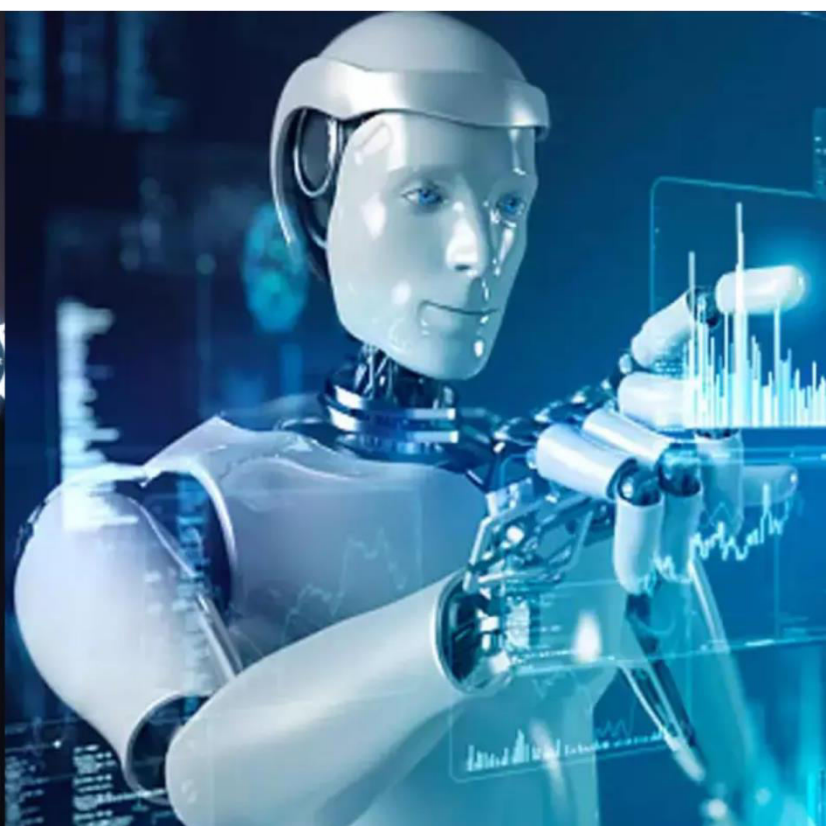




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Levels of Grammatical Awareness and Language Proficiency of Secondary School Students

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ABSTRACT: This study was conducted to determine the levels of grammatical awareness and language proficiency of secondary students for the academic year 2025–2026. The respondents of the study consisted of 98 high school students selected through stratified random sampling from the total population of 128 students. The data for the study were gathered using a researcher-made questionnaire composed of a grammatical awareness questionnaire and a language proficiency questionnaire. The independent variable in this study was grammatical awareness, while the dependent variable was language proficiency in Filipino. The statistical tools used were mean, standard deviation, Analysis of Variance, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, with all inferential tests set at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that the students demonstrated a good level of grammatical awareness. Students demonstrated a high level of language proficiency. There is a significant difference in language proficiency based on the levels of grammatical awareness. There is a strong, positive, and significant relationship between grammatical awareness and language proficiency.

KEYWORDS: Grammatical Awareness, Language Proficiency, Filipino Subject, Secondary Students

I. INTRODUCTION

Language proficiency plays a vital role in students' academic success and their ability to communicate effectively. According to Savignon (2016), language is not merely a system of sounds and rules but an essential tool for meaningful social interaction. Consequently, effective language use depends not only on vocabulary knowledge but also on an understanding of grammatical structures and their appropriate application in actual communication. One of the fundamental components of language proficiency is grammatical awareness, which refers to the ability to recognize, analyze, and understand the grammatical rules of a language. Graham, Kihara & MacKay (2016) emphasized that grammatical awareness is essential for students to construct accurate and coherent sentences, particularly in formal communication such as academic writing and speaking. It also enhances their ability to use language appropriately across different communicative contexts. At the secondary level, students are expected to demonstrate a higher level of language proficiency due to the increasing complexity of academic tasks across various subjects. However, many students continue to experience difficulties in understanding and applying grammatical rules. Recent studies conducted from 2015 onward indicate that inadequate grammatical competence remains one of the major barriers to effective writing among secondary school students. Hinkel (2015) further noted that weaknesses in grammatical knowledge directly affect the quality of students' academic writing. This issue is particularly significant in the Philippine educational context, where both Filipino and English serve as primary languages of instruction.

Several factors may influence students' grammatical awareness and language proficiency, including grade level, sex, and type of school. Graham et al. (2016) reported that language exposure and the quality of instruction significantly affect students' language development. Similarly, Nassaji and Fotos (2017) emphasized that metalinguistic awareness, including grammatical awareness, develops more effectively when students are exposed to systematic instruction and active language use. Although the importance of grammar in language learning has long been recognized, there remains a limited number of local studies in the Philippines examining the relationship between grammatical awareness and language proficiency among secondary school students. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by determining the levels of grammatical awareness and language proficiency and examining the relationship between these two variables. It will also investigate whether significant differences exist based on grade level, sex, and type of school. The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for teachers, curriculum developers, and educational policymakers. According to Richards (2015), appropriate language teaching strategies promote active learning and contribute to the more effective development of students' communicative competence.

This study is anchored on several important linguistic and educational theories that explain how students acquire and use language. The Input Hypothesis Theory proposes that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input that is slightly beyond their current level of competence. According to Gass (2017), students learn language more effectively through continuous exposure to meaningful and contextualized language use rather than through rote memorization of grammatical rules. Likewise, Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (Lantolf & Thorne, 2015) emphasizes that grammatical awareness develops through interaction, collaboration, and scaffolding. Metalinguistic awareness also enables learners to reflect on language structures and apply grammatical rules more accurately, thereby improving language proficiency (García & Wei, 2017; Andrews, 2019). Cummins' (2017) Linguistic Interdependence Theory further explains that knowledge acquired in a learner's first language can facilitate the acquisition of a second language, while Sweller's (2019) Cognitive Load Theory suggests that automatic grammatical knowledge reduces cognitive load and enables learners to focus on comprehension, expression, and higher-order language tasks (Paas & van Merriënboer, 2020; Anderson, 2018). Together, these theories provide the conceptual foundation for examining the relationship between grammatical awareness and language proficiency among secondary school students.

This study aimed to determine and analyze the levels of grammatical awareness and language proficiency of secondary students. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of grammatical awareness of secondary students?
2. What is the level of language proficiency of secondary students?
3. Is there a significant difference in language proficiency based on the levels of grammatical awareness?
4. Is there a significant relationship between grammatical awareness and language proficiency among students?

II. RELATED LITERATURE

Grammatical Awareness

Grammatical awareness is widely recognized as a fundamental component of language competence that enables learners to understand, analyze, and appropriately apply grammatical rules in spoken and written communication. It extends beyond knowledge of grammar to include metalinguistic awareness, allowing learners to reflect on language structures and use them effectively in different communicative contexts (Ellis, 2016; Roehr-Brackin, 2018). Previous studies have consistently shown that grammatical awareness contributes to the development of students' academic writing, reading comprehension, and overall language proficiency by helping learners produce more accurate, coherent, and meaningful texts (Hyland, 2019; Andrews, 2019; Nassaji & Fotos, 2017). The literature further indicates that the development of grammatical awareness is influenced by several factors, including explicit grammar instruction, meaningful language exposure, task-based learning, metalinguistic awareness, learner motivation, and opportunities for authentic communication (Ellis, 2017; Cummins, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Moreover, communicative and form-focused instructional approaches have been found to enhance learners' grammatical competence and improve their ability to use language effectively across different contexts (Nassaji & Fotos, 2017; Ellis, 2017).

Language Proficiency

Language proficiency is generally defined as an individual's ability to use language accurately, appropriately, and effectively in listening, speaking, reading, and writing for meaningful communication. It is a multidimensional construct that encompasses grammatical competence, vocabulary knowledge, fluency, accuracy, comprehension, pragmatic competence, and the ability to communicate effectively across various social and academic contexts (Council of Europe, 2020; Bachman & Palmer, 2017). International frameworks such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) describe language proficiency as the practical ability to perform communicative tasks in authentic situations (Educational Testing Service [ETS], 2024; IELTS, 2023). The literature consistently indicates that language proficiency is shaped by cognitive, affective, social, and instructional factors, including metalinguistic awareness, language exposure, learner motivation, self-efficacy, meaningful interaction, and communicative, task-based instruction (Segalowitz, 2016; Gass & Mackey, 2016; González-Lloret & Ortega, 2021; Hughes, 2021). Empirical studies further demonstrate that learners with higher language proficiency exhibit stronger academic performance, more effective communication skills, greater intercultural competence, and improved career opportunities, while technology-enhanced instruction, authentic language use, and collaborative learning significantly contribute to language development (Le Bruyn & Paquot, 2021; Phusit & Suksiripakonchai, 2023; Zhao et al., 2025). In the Philippine context, language proficiency is likewise recognized as a key educational outcome, with the Department

of Education emphasizing the development of communicative competence in Filipino and English through learner-centered and task-based instruction that prepares students for academic, professional, and real-world communication (Department of Education, 2017).

III. METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to determine the levels of grammatical awareness and language proficiency among secondary students for the School Year 2025–2026 using a survey-correlational research design. The participants consisted of ninety-eight (98) randomly selected high school students from a population of one hundred twenty-eight (128), with the sample size determined using the Taro Yamane formula and selected through stratified random sampling. Data were gathered using two researcher-made instruments: a 10-item Grammatical Awareness Questionnaire and a 10-item Language Proficiency Questionnaire, both of which underwent face and content validation, pilot testing, factor analysis, and reliability testing. The grammatical awareness questionnaire obtained a Cronbach's alpha of .923 with factor loadings ranging from .614 to .842, while the language proficiency questionnaire yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .937 with factor loadings ranging from .721 to .865, indicating that both instruments were valid and highly reliable. Before data collection, permission was secured from the school principal, and questionnaires were personally administered by the researcher while ensuring the confidentiality and privacy of the respondents. The collected data were encoded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Statistical tools employed included frequency count and percentage to describe the respondents' profile, mean and standard deviation to determine the levels of grammatical awareness and language proficiency, One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to test significant differences, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (Pearson's r) to determine the relationship between the variables, with all inferential tests conducted at the 0.05 level of significance.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Level of Grammatical Awareness

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation of students' grammatical awareness. The results reveal that students obtained an overall mean score of 4.07, which is interpreted as good. This indicates that the respondents generally demonstrate a strong level of grammatical awareness. Furthermore, the standard deviation of 0.56 suggests that the students' responses are relatively consistent, showing only minimal variation in their level of grammatical awareness.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Grammatical Awareness

Category	Mean	Description	SD
Grammatical Awareness	4.07	Good	0.56

Note Interval. Very Good - 4.21 - 5.00: Good - 3.41 - 4.20: Fair - 2.61 – 3.40:
Poor -1.81 – 2.60: Very Poor - 1.00 – 1.80

The students demonstrated a good level of grammatical awareness, indicating that they possess a high understanding of grammar rules and are generally capable of applying them correctly in both spoken and written communication. This suggests that they have developed sufficient knowledge of grammatical structures, enabling them to perform language-related tasks more effectively. Such a result implies that the grammar instruction and learning experiences provided in school have contributed positively to strengthening students' foundational knowledge of language, which is essential for effective communication, academic writing, reading comprehension, and the accurate expression of ideas.

The students' good level of grammatical awareness may be attributed to consistent grammar instruction, regular exposure to language learning materials, and frequent participation in reading, writing, and classroom communication activities that reinforce grammatical concepts. These experiences provide learners with meaningful opportunities to recognize and apply grammatical rules in authentic contexts. The finding is consistent with the studies of Guo and Ellis (2021), who reported that frequent and meaningful language use enhances learners' morphosyntactic development, Zhou (2022), who found that syntactic awareness is significantly associated with second-language reading comprehension, and Murakami (2022), who emphasized that repeated exposure to grammatical structures improves learners' grammatical accuracy and awareness.

B. Level of Language Proficiency

Table 2 presents the mean and standard deviation of students' language proficiency. The results indicate that the respondents obtained an overall mean score of 3.97, which is interpreted as high based on the given scale. This suggests that the students generally demonstrate a strong level of language proficiency in using language effectively in different communication contexts. The standard deviation of 0.57 indicates that the students' responses are relatively consistent, showing only slight variation in their perceived level of language proficiency.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Language Proficiency

Category	Mean	Description	SD
Language Proficiency	3.97	High	0.57

Note Interval. Very High - 4.21 - 5.00: High - 3.41 - 4.20: Moderate - 2.61 - 3.40:
Low -1.81 - 2.60: Very Low - 1.00 - 1.80

The students demonstrated a high level of language proficiency, indicating that they are generally capable of using the language effectively and communicating ideas with fluency, accuracy, and confidence. This suggests that they possess well-developed language skills necessary for academic and everyday communication, including speaking, writing, reading comprehension, and understanding language structures. The finding further implies that students are able to apply their language knowledge appropriately across different communicative situations, which may positively influence their classroom participation, academic achievement, and overall communicative competence. The students' high level of language proficiency may be attributed to their regular exposure to meaningful language learning experiences both inside and outside the classroom. Consistent practice in speaking, writing, reading, and classroom interactions, together with effective language instruction that emphasizes communication, vocabulary development, and authentic language use, may have contributed to strengthening their proficiency. Access to digital resources, educational materials, and interactive learning activities may have likewise enhanced their language development. This finding is consistent with the studies of DeKeyser (2020), who emphasized that sustained practice and meaningful language use promote the development of communicative competence; Ushioda (2021), who highlighted the importance of learner motivation and authentic communication opportunities in language learning; Zhang and Graham (2022), who found that active language practice improves students' language proficiency and communication confidence; and Sato and McNamara (2021), who reported that learners with greater exposure to meaningful language use and interaction tend to achieve higher levels of language proficiency.

C. Difference in Language Proficiency Based on Levels of Grammatical Awareness

Table 3 presents the results of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) conducted to determine whether there are significant differences in students' language proficiency based on their levels of grammatical awareness. The results show that the computed F-value of 26.477 with a corresponding significance value ($p = .000$) indicates that the result is statistically significant at the 5% level ($p < .05$). This means that there are significant differences in students' language proficiency when grouped according to their levels of grammatical awareness. Based on the results, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in language proficiency based on the levels of grammatical awareness is rejected. This indicates that students with varying levels of grammatical awareness demonstrate significantly different levels of language proficiency. In other words, grammatical awareness appears to be a contributing factor in students' overall language proficiency.

Table 3: ANOVA on the Differences in Language Proficiency Based on the Levels of Grammatical Awareness

Category	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Grammatical Awareness					
Between Groups	14.426	3	4.809	26.477*	.000
Within Groups	17.073	94	.182		
Total	31.499	97			

* $p < .05$ – significant at 5% level

The findings revealed a significant difference in language proficiency based on the levels of grammatical awareness, indicating that students with higher grammatical awareness also demonstrate higher levels of language proficiency. This suggests that students who possess a stronger understanding of grammatical rules are generally more capable of using the language accurately and effectively in various communicative situations. The result further implies that grammatical awareness is an important factor in the development of students' language proficiency, as it enhances their ability to perform language-related tasks such as speaking, writing, reading comprehension, and the appropriate use of language structures.

The significant difference may be attributed to students' ability to apply grammatical knowledge in authentic communication. Learners with stronger grammatical awareness are more likely to construct accurate sentences, organize ideas coherently, and communicate with greater clarity and confidence. This finding is consistent with Ellis (2020), who emphasized that grammatical knowledge provides the foundation for effective language development, DeKeyser (2021), who explained that repeated and meaningful practice strengthens grammatical accuracy and language acquisition, Larsen-Freeman (2021), who identified grammar as a key component of communicative competence, and Skehan (2022), who reported that learners with stronger grammatical competence tend to perform better in productive language tasks. Collectively, these studies support the view that strengthening students' grammatical awareness contributes significantly to improving their overall language proficiency.

D. Relationship Between Grammatical Awareness and Language Proficiency Among Students

Table 4 presents the results of the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis conducted to determine the relationship between grammatical awareness and language proficiency among students. The findings reveal an r -value of 0.682 with a corresponding significance value of 0.000, which is statistically significant at the 5% level ($p < .05$). The obtained correlation coefficient of 0.682 indicates a strong positive relationship between grammatical awareness and language proficiency. This means that as students' level of grammatical awareness increases, their level of language proficiency also tends to increase. In other words, students who possess a greater understanding and awareness of grammar rules are more likely to demonstrate higher proficiency in using language effectively in various communication tasks. Since the computed significance value ($p = .000$) is lower than the 0.05 level of significance, the relationship between grammatical awareness and language proficiency is considered statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between grammatical awareness and language proficiency among students is rejected.

Table 4: Pearson r Between Grammatical Awareness and Language Proficiency

Variables	r	Sig
Grammatical Awareness and Language Proficiency	.682*	.000

* $p < .05$ – significant at 5% level

The findings revealed a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between grammatical awareness and language proficiency, indicating that students with higher levels of grammatical awareness also tend to demonstrate higher levels of language proficiency. This suggests that as students develop a better understanding of grammatical rules and language structures, their ability to communicate effectively in both spoken and written forms also improves. The result further implies that grammatical awareness serves as a fundamental component of language proficiency, contributing to students' performance in speaking, writing, reading comprehension, and the accurate use of language in various communicative contexts.

The significant relationship may be attributed to students' ability to apply grammatical knowledge effectively in authentic communication. Learners with greater grammatical awareness are more likely to construct meaningful and grammatically accurate sentences, organize ideas coherently, and express themselves with clarity and confidence. This finding is supported by Ellis (2017), who emphasized that grammatical knowledge provides the structural foundation for effective language use and communicative competence; DeKeyser (2020), who explained that language proficiency develops through the repeated and meaningful application of grammatical knowledge; Skehan (2019), who argued that grammatical competence contributes to greater accuracy, fluency, and complexity in communication; and Larsen-Freeman (2021), who maintained that learners with stronger grammatical awareness generally demonstrate higher

levels of overall language proficiency. Collectively, these studies affirm that strengthening grammatical awareness is essential for improving students' language proficiency.

V. CONCLUSION

Grammatical awareness among the students was found to be at a good level, indicating that they possess a sound understanding of grammatical rules and are generally able to apply them correctly in speaking and writing. This suggests that the students have developed a solid grammatical foundation that supports accurate language use. Likewise, language proficiency was found to be at a high level, demonstrating that the students are capable of using the language effectively in both academic and everyday contexts. Their proficiency reflects strong communicative competence, enabling them to express ideas clearly, comprehend language structures, and perform effectively in various language-related tasks.

Language proficiency varied significantly according to the students' level of grammatical awareness, with those demonstrating higher grammatical awareness also exhibiting higher levels of language proficiency. Moreover, a strong positive and statistically significant relationship was established between grammatical awareness and language proficiency, indicating that improvements in grammatical awareness are associated with corresponding improvements in language proficiency. This finding underscores the important role of grammatical awareness as a foundation for developing effective communication and overall language competence.

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