Metalinguistic Awareness, Language Attitude, and Pragmatic Competence of Education Students: Input to Building Language Competence Module

Emely D. Armonidad

Filamer Christian University, Inc.

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ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods sequential explanatory research study aimed to determine the levels of metalinguistic awareness, language attitude, and pragmatic competence of education students from various State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in the Province of Iloilo during the academic year 2025–2026. A standardized and validated instrument for metalinguistic awareness, language attitude, and pragmatic competence was administered to collect data from the 277 respondents. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency, mean, standard deviation, ANOVA, and Pearson r, while qualitative insights were gathered through Focus Group Discussions (FGD) involving ten students and ten teachers to triangulate and enrich the findings. Results revealed that the education students' levels of metalinguistic awareness, language attitude, and pragmatic competence were all "high." However, one-way ANOVA indicated no significant differences in pragmatic competence among the levels of metalinguistic awareness and language attitude. Furthermore, Pearson r correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship between metalinguistic awareness and language attitude; conversely, no significant relationship was found between metalinguistic awareness and pragmatic competence, nor between language attitude and pragmatic competence.

Keywords: Mixed-Method Sequential Explanatory, State Universities and Colleges (SUCs), Metalinguistic Awareness, Language Attitude, Pragmatic Competence

INTRODUCTION

Language is the cornerstone of education, functioning both as the primary medium of instruction and as a fundamental tool for knowledge construction. For education students, linguistic proficiency extends beyond the mechanical mastery of grammar; it requires the capacity to analyze language critically, respond to it affectively, and use it appropriately across diverse social contexts. In this regard, three interrelated constructs, such as metalinguistic awareness, language attitude, and pragmatic competence, are central to developing the communicative readiness expected of future educators.

Metalinguistic awareness refers to an individual's ability to consciously reflect on and analyze the forms and functions of language. As described by Hofer and Jessner (2022), it is a "composite of differentiated faculties" that enables learners to engage with multiple linguistic systems reflectively and analytically. This cognitive dimension is particularly important in teacher education, where future educators are expected not only to use language effectively but also to explain and evaluate it. However, a discrepancy persists between theoretical knowledge and actual performance. While many students demonstrate competence in completing formal grammar tasks, they often struggle to articulate underlying linguistic principles or critically evaluate language use in authentic contexts (Neokleous & Karpava, 2023).

Complementing this cognitive domain is the affective dimension of language learning, represented by language attitude. Language attitude encompasses learners' evaluative dispositions toward a language, its varieties, and its speakers, significantly influencing motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes (Garrett, 2017). Despite its importance, many students exhibit a passive orientation toward language learning, perceiving it primarily as an academic requirement rather than as a dynamic tool for professional communication and social interaction

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(Lasagabaster, 2017). Such perceptions may limit learners' willingness to actively engage with language in meaningful and context-rich situations.

Pragmatic competence further extends communicative ability by focusing on the appropriate use of language in social interaction. It involves understanding how meaning is shaped by context, including speaker intentions, cultural norms, and interpersonal relationships (Mao, 2021; Taguchi, 2019). This competence requires learners to move beyond grammatical accuracy and develop sensitivity to when and how to use language appropriately in varying communicative situations. Nevertheless, pragmatic competence remains underdeveloped among many learners, who often struggle to adapt their language to specific audiences or to interpret implied meanings in complex social exchanges (Budeng & Merza, 2023).

Researchers frequently study metalinguistic awareness, language attitude, and pragmatic competence in isolation, despite substantial research examining these constructs. Existing literature typically situates metalinguistic awareness within early language development (Roehr-Brackin, 2018), language attitude within sociolinguistic identity (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017), and pragmatic competence within second language acquisition (Taguchi, 2019). This fragmentation highlights a critical gap in the literature: the lack of integrative studies that examine the interaction of these three variables within the context of teacher education. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates metalinguistic awareness, language attitude, and pragmatic competence as a unified framework to better understand and enhance the communicative competence of future educators.

Statement of the Problem/Objectives

This study sought to determine the level of metalinguistic awareness, language attitude, and pragmatic competence of education students enrolled in State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in the Province of Iloilo for the academic year 2025–2026.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following question.

1. What is the level of metalinguistic awareness of education students?

2. What is the level of language attitude of education students?

3. What is the level of pragmatic competence of education students?

4. Is there a significant difference in pragmatic competence among the levels of metalinguistic awareness of education students?

5. Is there a significant difference in pragmatic competence among the levels of language attitude of education students?

6. Are there significant relationships among metalinguistic awareness, language attitude, and pragmatic competence of education students?

Hypotheses

There is no significant difference in pragmatic competence among the levels of metalinguistic awareness and the language attitude of Education students. There are no significant relationships among metalinguistic awareness, language attitude, and pragmatic competence of Education students.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on three complementary theoretical perspectives that collectively explain the cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of language competence: Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge through progressive stages of cognitive development. In the context of language learning, this theory underpins the development of metalinguistic awareness, or the ability to consciously reflect on and analyze linguistic forms and functions. As learners reach higher levels of cognitive

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maturity, they become capable of examining language beyond its surface structure, enabling them to explain grammatical rules, evaluate language use, and engage in reflective teaching practices (Roehr-Brackin, 2018). This cognitive dimension is essential for pre-service teachers, who must not only demonstrate language proficiency but also possess the analytical skills necessary for effective instruction.

Complementing this cognitive perspective is Gardner's Socio-Educational Model, which highlights the role of affective factors in language learning. This model posits that language attitudes significantly influence learners' motivation, engagement, and persistence. Positive attitudes toward language and its users encourage active participation and sustained effort, while negative or passive attitudes may limit meaningful learning experiences (Gardner, 2010). For future educators, language attitude is particularly significant, as it shapes not only their learning but also the ways in which they model and transmit language values to their students.

Larsen-Freeman's Complexity Theory extends these perspectives by conceptualizing language competence as a dynamic and interconnected system. Within this framework, metalinguistic awareness and language attitude function as interdependent subsystems that continuously interact and evolve. Their interaction contributes to the emergence of pragmatic competence, which reflects the ability to use language appropriately in varied social contexts. This perspective underscores that communicative competence is not developed linearly but emerges from the ongoing interaction of cognitive understanding and affective disposition within real-life communication (Larsen-Freeman, 2017).

Taken together, these theories suggest that effective language competence is the result of an integrated interplay among cognition, emotion, and social interaction. Anchored in the integrated framework, the present study examines the relationships among these three variables and uses the findings as a basis for developing a language competence module aimed at enhancing the communicative preparedness of education students.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Research Paradigm

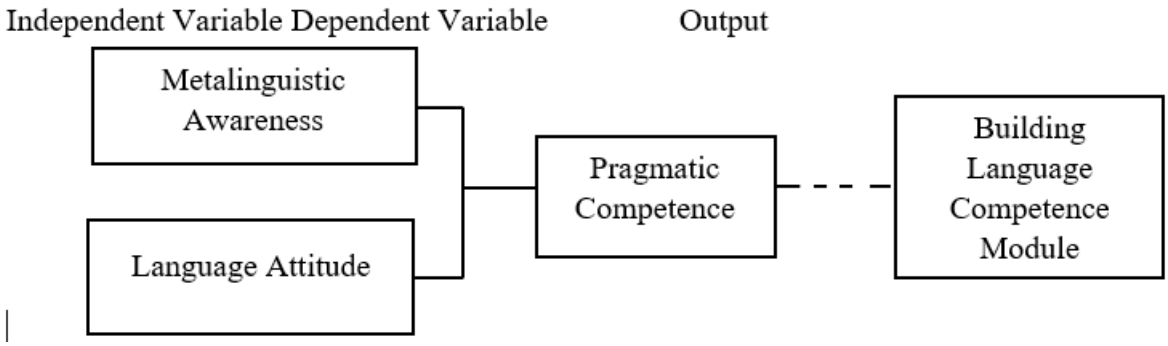

Figure 1. Metalinguistic Awareness, Language Attitude, Pragmatic Competence, and Language Competence Module of BSED Majors in English

Significance of the Study

The results of the study were beneficial to the following:

Education Students. The study's findings help increase understanding of their metalinguistic awareness, language attitudes, and pragmatic competence.

Teachers. The findings help teacher educators design instruction that integrates metalinguistic reflection, fosters positive language attitudes, and enhances pragmatic skills.

Higher Education Institution. The result of this study serves as the basis for schools and universities that offer teacher education programs in utilizing the study's output to strengthen curriculum design and improve teacher preparation.

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School Administrators. The result of this study furnishes significant information to the institution to support professional development initiatives and ensure that education students receive the necessary training in language competence.

Future Researchers. The result of this study serves as a reference for other researchers conducting similar studies and in advancing the understanding of how to improve metalinguistic awareness, language attitude, and pragmatic competence of the education students.

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design, following a two-phase approach in which quantitative data collection and analysis were conducted first, followed by a qualitative phase to explain and enrich the initial findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative component utilized a survey-correlational method to generate objective numerical data from English major education students, using standardized tests and questionnaires to determine the levels of metalinguistic awareness, language attitude, and pragmatic competence, as well as to examine the relationships among these variables (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2019). Descriptive statistics were used to profile the respondents' status across the three constructs, while correlational analysis identified the strength and direction of their interrelationships. Subsequently, the qualitative phase employed focus group discussions (FGDs) to capture participants' perspectives, experiences, and contextual insights, thereby providing deeper explanations for the quantitative results (Morgan, 2019). The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings enabled a comprehensive understanding of the cognitive, affective, and pragmatic dimensions of language competence, ensuring that both statistical trends and lived experiences informed the study's conclusions and implications.

Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study were education students majoring in English, from first year to fourth year, who are enrolled during the academic year 2026–2027 across three State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in the Province of Iloilo.

Sample Size

The sample size was a total of 277 respondents. Among the participating institutions, Northern Iloilo State University (NISU) contributed a substantial portion of respondents, with its Estancia, Batad, Barotac Viejo, and Ajuy campuses yielding sample sizes of 40, 37, and 36, respectively. Similarly, Iloilo Science and Technology University (ISATU)–Miagao campus accounted for 40 participants. Meanwhile, Iloilo State University of Fisheries Science and Technology (ISUFST) campuses demonstrated varied representation, with Dumangas (34), San Enrique (22), Main Tiwi (20), and Dingle (11) contributing repondents in proportion to their enrollment sizes.

Locale Of the Study

The study was conducted in the Province of Iloilo, Philippines, a region characterized by a diverse educational landscape that includes various State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) offering teacher education programs. Specifically, the research was carried out in Northern Iloilo State University (NISU), which is distributed across various municipalities such as Estancia, Batad, Ajuy, Barotac Viejo, Iloilo. Also, Iloilo State University of Fisheries Science and Technology (ISUFST) in Dumangas, Dingle, San Enrique, Barotac Nuevo–Tiwi, Iloilo, and Iloilo Science and Technology University (ISAT-U) in Miagao, Iloilo.

Sampling Technique

This study employed stratified random sampling, a probability sampling method in which the population is divided into homogeneous subgroups (strata) based on specific characteristics, and respondents are randomly selected from each stratum in proportion to its size (Etikan & Bala, 2017). In this study, the strata were defined according to campus affiliation, ensuring that each subgroup of English major students was adequately represented. Through proportional random selection within each stratum, the technique enhanced the sample's

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representativeness and ensured that the population's diversity across participating institutions was accurately reflected.

Research Instruments

The study utilized a set of standardized and validated instruments consisting of a demographic profile sheet, a Metalinguistic Awareness Test (MAT), a Language Attitude Questionnaire (LAQ), and a Pragmatic Competence Test (PCT), with a total of 88 items. The demographic profile gathered basic information such as course, year level, and institutional affiliation. The Metalinguistic Awareness Test (MAT), composed of 25 items, measured students' ability to analyze and reflect on language across syntactic, morphological, semantic, and phonological domains, drawing from established assessments (Leeser & Schoen, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021; Hulme & Snowling, 2024). It demonstrated high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.824) and established construct validity through factor analysis.

The participants' level of metalinguistic awareness is determined using the following scale of values:

Scale	Description
21-25	Very High Metalinguistic Awareness
16-20	High Metalinguistic Awareness
11-15	Moderate Metalinguistic Awareness
6-10	Low Metalinguistic Awareness
5-Below	Very Low Metalinguistic Awareness

The Language Attitude Questionnaire (LAQ) consisted of 40 Likert-scale items assessing students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral orientations toward the English language in academic and social contexts. Adapted from established language attitude frameworks (Gardner, 1985; Baker, 1992; Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011; Yildiz, 2023), the instrument showed very high internal consistency (Cronbach alpha = 0.894) and satisfactory construct validity based on factor loadings.

Respondnets are asked to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with each statement using a five-point Likert scale, with the following response options:

Score	Responses
5	Strongly Agree
4	Agree
3	Neutral
2	Disagree
1	Strongly Disagree

The overall level of language attitude of the education students is interpreted using the following scale of values:

Scale	Description
4.21-5.00	Very High Language Attitude

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3.41-4.20	High Language Attitude
2.61-3.40	Moderate Language Attitude
1.81-2.60	Low Language Attitude
1.00-1.80	Very Low Negative Language Attitude

Meanwhile, the Pragmatic Competence Test (PCT) included 23 multiple-choice items designed to evaluate students' ability to interpret and produce contextually appropriate language, focusing on speech acts, politeness strategies, deixis and reference, and conversational implicatures, based on the Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Test (Taguchi, 2019). The test yielded a high reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha = 0.841) and met acceptable validity standards.

The level of pragmatic competence of the education students is interpreted using the following scale of values:

Scale	Description
20-23	Very High Pragmatic Competence
16-19	High Pragmatic Competence
12-15	Moderate Pragmatic Competence
8-11	Low Pragmatic Competence
7-Below	Very Low Pragmatic Competence

All instruments underwent expert validation to ensure content accuracy and appropriateness. A pilot test involving 30 students who were not included in the actual study was conducted to establish the reliability of the research instrument, with all instruments exceeding the acceptable Cronbach's alpha threshold of 0.70. Factor analysis further confirmed construct validity, with all items meeting the minimum factor loading requirement of 0.50. These procedures ensured that the instruments were both valid and reliable for measuring metalinguistic awareness, language attitude, and pragmatic competence.

Data Gathering Procedures

Before data collection, ethical clearance and formal permissions were secured from the appropriate institutional authorities to ensure compliance with research standards, including voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity. Upon approval, coordination with campus officials was conducted to identify eligible respondents and arrange the schedule and venue for data collection. Informed consent was obtained from respondents aged 18 and above, while parental consent and assent were secured for minors. The validated and pilot-tested instruments were then administered in person, with clear instructions provided to ensure proper understanding and completion. Responses were collected, reviewed for completeness, and organized for analysis.

Quantitative data were subsequently coded, tabulated, and analyzed using descriptive and correlational statistics to determine the levels of metalinguistic awareness, language attitude, and pragmatic competence, as well as the relationships among these variables. Thereafter, selected participants were invited to participate in focus group discussions to provide deeper insights and explanations of the results. The qualitative data were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and carefully reviewed through repeated reading to capture participants' experiences and perspectives. This was followed by data coding to capture key ideas emerging from the participants' responses. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the variables under study, while strict adherence to ethical standards was maintained throughout the research process.

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Data Analysis Procedure

The data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), with all tests interpreted at the 0.05 level of significance. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to determine the overall levels and variability of metalinguistic awareness, language attitude, and pragmatic competence among the respondents. To examine the relationships among the three variables, the Pearson product–moment correlation coefficient (r) was employed, assessing both the strength and direction of their associations. Furthermore, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether significant differences in pragmatic competence existed when participants were grouped according to their levels of metalinguistic awareness and language attitude.

In addition to the quantitative analysis, qualitative data were gathered through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). First, all FGD recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure that every spoken word, including pauses and significant non-verbal cues, was accurately documented. The transcripts were then subjected to data familiarization, where the researcher repeatedly read the texts to gain a deeper understanding of the content and to note initial impressions and recurring ideas. This was followed by data coding, in which meaningful segments of the transcripts were labeled using open coding to capture key concepts expressed by the participants. The coded data were then organized through categorization to form meaningful clusters of ideas. Finally, the findings were systematically reported by presenting the organized categories and interpretations in narrative form, supported by relevant participant responses to ensure clarity and authenticity of the qualitative results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The level of metalinguistic awareness of education students is high (M= 19.08 and SD=1.58). This high mean score indicates that the students possess a well-developed ability to consciously reflect on and analyze language structures, enabling them to recognize patterns and relationships across linguistic systems. Furthermore, the relatively low standard deviation of 1.58 indicates that the scores are clustered closely around the mean, reflecting a high degree of homogeneity among the respondents.

The level of language attitude of Education students is high (M=4.00 and SD=0.51), the relatively low standard deviation of 0.51 indicates minimal variation in responses, suggesting that the participants exhibit a consistent pattern of positive attitudes. This implies that the respondents generally possess a favorable and positive disposition toward the English language, reflecting strong interest, motivation, and perceived importance of its use in academic and social contexts.

The level of pragmatic competence of Education students is high (M=18.93 and SD=1.31), This indicates that the students possess a generally well-developed capacity for context-appropriate language use, indicating an ability to interpret meaning beyond literal expressions and respond according to social expectations.

There are no significant differences in pragmatic competence in levels of metalinguistic awareness among education students using the One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). (Mean square=0.208), (F-value of 0.796), with a corresponding (P=0.497). This finding suggests that the ability to analyze and reflect on language structure does not necessarily translate into differences in the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts. While metalinguistic awareness is primarily cognitive and analytical, pragmatic competence is situational and performance-based, requiring the application of language in real-time interactions.

The is no significant differences in pragmatic competence across levels of language attitude among education students using the One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The (Mean Square of 0.076). The calculated F-value is 0.289, with a corresponding significance of 0.75. The p-value of 0.749 is substantially higher than the established alpha level of 0.05. This indicates that students' attitude toward the language does not significantly alter their actual ability to perform pragmatically. The results imply that while having a positive attitude is beneficial for overall motivation, it does not act as a primary determinant for the mastery of pragmatic nuances, dependent on direct exposure to social interaction or specific linguistic training that goes beyond general affective factors.

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The significant relationship between metalinguistic awareness and language attitude, and no significant relationship between metalinguistic awareness and pragmatic competence, language attitude and pragmatic competence, among education students using the Pearson r.

The result indicates that the correlation between metalinguistic awareness and language attitude yielded a significance (p-value) of 0.000. Since $p < 0.05$, this indicates a statistically significant but weak positive correlation between variables. Conversely, the relationship between metalinguistic awareness and pragmatic competence, with an r value of -0.015, significance of 0.810, likewise, the language attitude and pragmatic competence**,** r value of 0.022, and significance of 0.720, both yielded p-values significantly higher than the 0.05 alpha level. This implies that

The significant relationship between metalinguistic awareness and language attitude indicates that students who demonstrate higher levels of awareness about language structure and use also tend to exhibit more positive attitudes toward learning the language. This relationship shows that understanding of how language works can enhance learners' confidence and interest.

The no significant relationship between metalinguistic awareness and pragmatic competence indicates that the students' ability to consciously reflect on and analyze language structures does not necessarily translate into their ability to use language effectively in real-life social interactions. Despite exhibiting a high level of metalinguistic awareness, learners may still exhibit inconsistent pragmatic competence. While metalinguistic awareness is largely cognitive and analytical in nature, focusing on understanding grammatical rules, language forms, and structures. In contrast, pragmatic competence is context-dependent and performance-based, requiring the ability to interpret social cues, adjust language according to the situation, and respond spontaneously during interaction. This suggests that knowing about language does not automatically lead to knowing how to use language appropriately in authentic communication.

The no significant relationship between language attitude and pragmatic competence. Implies that even if students possess a positive attitude toward the English language, such as motivation, interest, or perceived importance, this does not necessarily translate into effective communicative performance in real-life situations. While language attitude is primarily affective in nature, reflecting learners' feelings, beliefs, and dispositions toward the language. In contrast, pragmatic competence is behavioral and situational, requiring the ability to apply language appropriately depending on context, interlocutor, and social norms. This indicates a disconnect between what learners feel about the language and how they perform when using it.

CONCLUSIONS

The high levels of metalinguistic awareness, language attitude, and pragmatic competence indicate strong cognitive, affective, and social foundations in language use. While students possess the ability to analyze linguistic structures and maintain positive attitudes toward language learning, these strengths do not necessarily translate into enhanced pragmatic competence. The results show no significant differences in pragmatic competence when grouped according to levels of metalinguistic awareness and language attitude, suggesting that theoretical knowledge and positive disposition toward language function independently from social language use. Furthermore, although a significant relationship exists between metalinguistic awareness and language attitude, neither variable is significantly related to pragmatic competence. These findings highlight a critical gap between linguistic knowledge, attitude, and actual language use, thereby underscoring the need for a structured and integrative intervention. Consequently, the development of a language competence module is proposed to bridge this gap by enhancing the alignment of cognitive, affective, and pragmatic dimensions of language learning among education students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it is recommended that education students should engage in authentic communicative experiences beyond the classroom to strengthen pragmatic competence through real-world language use. Teachers are encouraged to adopt performance-based and context-driven instructional strategies that emphasize the practical application of language, particularly through activities that develop pragmatic skills. Higher

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education institutions should enhance their curricula and provide supportive learning environments, such as communication laboratories, to ensure a balanced integration of linguistic knowledge and communicative performance, with pragmatic competence as a core outcome. School administrators should invest in faculty development and co-curricular programs that promote sociolinguistic and pragmatic awareness. Finally, future researchers are urged to explore additional factors influencing pragmatic competence using in-depth qualitative approaches to further refine instructional interventions, including the proposed language competence module.

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