

# Language Barriers in Reading Comprehension of Students

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## Abstract

This study examined the language barriers affecting reading comprehension among Grade 11 students and developed contextualized reading materials for literature instruction. Employing a descriptive-correlational research design, the study involved 166 Grade 11 students from three secondary schools in Pili West District, Philippines, during School Year 2025-2026. Results revealed that students demonstrated an "Approaching Proficiency" level in language barriers (M=15.14, 50.46%), with grammar skills showing the greatest difficulty (M=4.98, 49.76% - Developing level). Reading comprehension performance was also at the "Approaching Proficiency" level (M=16.25, 54.16%), with literal comprehension highest (M=6.39, 63.92%), inferential comprehension lowest (M=4.55, 45.48% - Developing level), and evaluative/critical comprehension in between (M=5.31, 53.07%). Correlation analysis revealed no significant relationships between vocabulary, sentence structure, or grammar skills and any level of reading comprehension ( $p > .05$ ), leading to acceptance of the null hypothesis. These findings indicate that language barriers alone are insufficient predictors of reading comprehension performance. Using the ADDIE model, the researcher developed BASALIT (Build, Analyze, Synthesize, Appreciate Literature) reading materials featuring culturally relevant Bicolano literary texts with scaffolding activities addressing both linguistic and cognitive dimensions of reading. The study concludes that effective reading materials must integrate vocabulary and grammar support with higher-order thinking tasks while connecting to students' cultural experiences.

**Keywords:** *language barriers, reading comprehension, senior high school, literature instruction, contextualized reading materials, vocabulary knowledge, grammar skills, inferential comprehension, BASALIT, Bicolano literature*



## I. INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is widely recognized as one of the most fundamental academic skills necessary for learners to succeed in school and in life. The ability to understand, interpret, and critically analyze written texts allows students to construct meaning, expand knowledge, and participate actively in academic and social discourse. In the senior high school level, where students encounter more sophisticated academic and literary materials, effective reading comprehension becomes even more essential. Learners are expected not only to recognize information explicitly presented in texts but also to interpret implicit meanings, evaluate arguments, and connect ideas across different contexts.

Despite its importance, many learners encounter persistent challenges when engaging with written texts, particularly when language-related difficulties interfere with comprehension. Students who have limited vocabulary knowledge, weak grammatical awareness, and difficulty processing complex sentence structures often struggle to construct meaning from reading materials. These linguistic constraints can slow down reading processes, reduce comprehension accuracy, and hinder the development of higher-order thinking skills. When learners are unable to decode the linguistic features of texts, their capacity to analyze themes, understand author intent, and engage critically with literature becomes restricted.

In multilingual learning environments such as the Philippines, these challenges become even more pronounced. Students often navigate among several languages including their mother tongue, Filipino, and English. While multilingualism offers cognitive and cultural advantages, it may also create additional demands on learners when they encounter academic texts written in a second or third language. As a result, students may experience difficulties interpreting



vocabulary, understanding complex syntactic patterns, and identifying the relationships among ideas presented in literary and academic materials.

These challenges highlight the need to examine the role of language barriers in reading comprehension and to develop instructional materials that can assist learners in overcoming these difficulties. Understanding how language-related challenges affect comprehension can provide teachers with important insights for designing reading materials that are more responsive to students' linguistic needs and reading abilities.

From a global perspective, mastery of language plays a crucial role in students' achievement in reading and understanding texts, as strong communicative competence strengthens the development of fundamental reading and writing skills. Language—whether spoken or written—serves as the primary medium through which ideas are communicated and interpreted in academic and literary contexts. However, learners around the world encounter various forms of language barriers that hinder effective comprehension and communication.

Language barriers are defined as limitations that distort the origin, transmission, or reception of messages, often resulting in misunderstanding or misinterpretation (Buarqoub, 2019; Gratis, 2022). Goodman (2021) emphasized that dialectal differences, while culturally meaningful, may hinder comprehension when linguistic patterns are unfamiliar, while Devine (2014) noted that specialized jargon complicates understanding for readers with limited technical knowledge. Semantic barriers may also arise when words carry multiple meanings and are interpreted differently by readers (Buarqoub, 2019). Elsworth (2017) emphasized that although these barriers present challenges, they may be mitigated through instructional support such as explicit vocabulary instruction and the use of contextualized reading materials.



International research consistently identifies vocabulary knowledge as one of the strongest predictors of reading comprehension. Studies conducted in Canada, China, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Ghana, South Korea, and Sweden reveal that vocabulary size directly influences learners' ability to recall literal meanings, make inferences, and evaluate arguments in academic texts (Veenman, 2019; Fang & Wu, 2020; Nyandoro, 2018; Silva, 2017; White & Gardner, 2021). Similarly, research from South Korea, India, Saudi Arabia, Japan, and Germany demonstrates that limited syntactic awareness restricts reading fluency and comprehension, particularly when learners encounter complex sentence structures, connectors, and multi-clause constructions (Park & Lee, 2019; Mukherjee, 2018; Musa & Ragab, 2020; Werner, 2017). Grammar proficiency also plays a crucial role in reading comprehension, as studies from Mexico, Iran, China, Japan, and Australia indicate that grammatical competence supports accurate interpretation of meaning, author stance, and argumentation within texts (Hernández, 2017; Hosseinpur, 2019; Zhu & Hu, 2020; Morris, 2018).

Apart from linguistic competence, the availability of appropriate instructional materials also influences reading comprehension development. Research in literacy education emphasizes that contextualized reading materials can improve comprehension by aligning text difficulty with learners' linguistic and cognitive levels. Carefully designed literary materials can scaffold vocabulary learning, highlight grammatical structures, and provide opportunities for students to engage in higher-order interpretation of texts. Studies in literacy instruction highlight that reading materials which incorporate guided questions, contextual explanations, and structured comprehension activities can significantly enhance students' interpretive and analytical reading skills.



Although numerous studies have examined language barriers and reading comprehension separately, relatively few investigations focus on how these linguistic constraints inform the development of contextualized reading materials in literature for senior high school learners. Existing studies primarily emphasize the measurement of comprehension performance but provide limited attention to the instructional design of reading materials that directly address learners' language barriers. This gap suggests the need for research that not only examines the relationship between language barriers and comprehension but also translates these findings into practical instructional materials that support learners' reading development.

At the national level, improving reading literacy remains a major educational priority in the Philippines. Reports from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development through the Program for International Student Assessment revealed that Filipino learners performed below the global average in reading literacy in the 2018 assessment. These findings highlight the need for sustained literacy interventions that strengthen students' comprehension abilities and language competencies.

Efforts to improve reading literacy are also aligned with the global educational agenda under the Sustainable Development Goal 4, which focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

*Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and  
promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.*

*(United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4)*

In support of literacy development, the Department of Education (Philippines) issued DepEd Order No. 14, Series of 2018, which institutionalized the Revised Philippine Informal Reading



Inventory (Phil-IRI) as a nationwide assessment tool for measuring learners' reading proficiency and identifying appropriate reading interventions.

*The Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) shall serve as the primary assessment tool to measure learners' reading proficiency and guide teachers in providing appropriate reading interventions. (DepEd Order No. 14, s. 2018)*

Despite these initiatives, studies in the Philippines continue to report difficulties among senior high school learners in vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure, which limit their ability to interpret academic texts and literary works.

At the local level, studies conducted in Bicol and Camarines Sur provide contextual evidence of these challenges. Vocabulary limitations remain one of the most persistent barriers to reading comprehension, particularly in public schools where exposure to English-language materials is limited. Research also indicates that students often struggle with lengthy paragraphs and complex sentence structures, resulting in breakdowns in comprehension and weak inferential interpretation. Furthermore, grammatical difficulties frequently lead to superficial reading and fragmented understanding of texts, preventing learners from performing well in higher-level comprehension tasks such as evaluating arguments and identifying author bias.

The findings of this study are expected to benefit several stakeholders in the field of education. Teachers may utilize the results to design more responsive reading instruction and develop reading materials that address learners' linguistic difficulties. Students may benefit from improved instructional strategies and contextualized reading materials that support vocabulary



development, grammatical awareness, and higher-order comprehension skills. School administrators may use the findings to strengthen reading intervention programs and literacy initiatives within their institutions. Curriculum developers and educational agencies, particularly the Department of Education (Philippines), may also use the results as a reference in designing instructional resources that support national literacy development efforts.

In view of the persistent reading challenges experienced by senior high school learners and the limited research that integrates language barrier analysis with the development of instructional reading materials, this study aims to examine the language barriers affecting students' reading comprehension and to develop contextually appropriate reading materials in literature. By identifying the linguistic difficulties that influence comprehension and translating these findings into instructional resources, the study seeks to provide practical solutions that support learners' reading development, enhance academic performance, and contribute to the broader goal of improving literacy outcomes in Philippine education.

### **Research Objectives**

This study aims to identify the language barriers affecting reading comprehension and use this as a basis in crafting reading material in literature for Grade 11 students to enhance their reading comprehension skills, Pili West District. Specifically, it aimed to achieve the following objectives:

1. To determine the level of students' language barriers as measured in vocabulary, sentence structure, and grammar skills.



2. To assess the level in reading comprehension of Grade 11 students in terms of literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, and evaluative/critical comprehension.
3. To ascertain the significant relationship between students' language barrier and their comprehension competencies.
4. To develop reading materials in literature to enhance reading comprehension skills of Grade 11 students.

### **Scope and Delimitation**

This study employed a descriptive–correlational research design to determine the language barriers that influence the reading comprehension competencies of Grade 11 respondents of the study coded as SHS-X1 Rodriguez National High School, SHS-X2 Gov Mariano E Villafuerte High School, and SHS-X3 San Jose Pili National High School during the School Year 2025–2026 and to examine the relationship between these barriers and their comprehension performance. The findings of the descriptive and correlational analyses served as the basis for developing contextualized reading materials intended to support students' comprehension in literature classes.

The respondents of the study were Grade 11 learners enrolled in the subject 21st Century Literature from the Philippines and the World during the first semester of the School Year 2025–2026. The respondents were identified using a modified ADDIE sampling technique, which guided the analysis and identification of learners who demonstrated language-related challenges that may affect reading comprehension. These language barriers may include difficulties in vocabulary knowledge, sentence structure, grammar skills, and other aspects of English language



proficiency such as word recognition and contextual understanding of texts. The respondents of the study were grouped according to coded sections, which are presented in Table 1 (Respondents of the Study) to maintain anonymity and confidentiality.

This study focused on determining the relationship between language barriers and selected reading comprehension competencies of Grade 11 respondents of the study. The investigation was limited to analyzing the respondents' reading comprehension performance in relation to the language barriers identified through the research instruments administered during the data collection period.

The study was delimited to selected aspects of English language proficiency that directly influence reading comprehension, particularly vocabulary knowledge, sentence structure, and grammar skills in understanding of texts. Other components of English language proficiency such as listening skills, speaking fluency, pronunciation, discourse competence, and sociolinguistic competence were not included in the scope of this investigation.

In terms of reading comprehension, the study assessed the respondents' performance in selected comprehension processes that are commonly used in classroom reading activities. However, the investigation did not include other advanced reading skills, such as metacognitive reading strategies, speed reading, extensive reading practices, digital literacy reading skills, and other higher-level comprehension frameworks beyond those measured in the research instruments.

The results of the study were used solely as a basis for developing contextualized reading materials for literature instruction and were not intended to serve as a comprehensive evaluation of all language competencies or reading abilities of Grade 11 respondents of the study.

### **Assumptions**

In this study, the following statements were assumed to be true:

1. The language barriers experienced by Grade 11 respondents of the study can be measured through selected indicators of English language proficiency, and these barriers may influence their performance in reading comprehension activities in the literature subject;
2. The reading comprehension competency of the respondents of the study can be determined through their performance in selected comprehension tasks, and this competency may vary depending on the language barriers they encounter while interpreting literary texts;
3. The use of specially crafted reading materials in literature can enhance the reading comprehension skills of Grade 11 students.

### **Hypothesis**

Objective: To ascertain the significant relationship between students' language barrier experiences and their reading comprehension competencies.

Ho: There is no significant relationship between students' language barrier and competency level in reading comprehension;

Ha: There is a significant relationship between students' language barrier and competency level in reading comprehension.

### **Theoretical Framework**



This study was anchored in four foundational theories: Schema Theory, Bottom-Up Theory, Top-Down Theory, and Interactive Theory. These theories collectively explain how reading comprehension occurs, how language barriers interfere with the process, and how instructional materials may be designed to address these barriers. Taken together, the theories provide a comprehensive framework for examining the relationship between language-related factors such as vocabulary and grammar—and the reading comprehension performance of Grade 11 students, which is central to the research questions of this study.

Schema Theory. Originally proposed by Anderson (1984), Schema Theory posits that comprehension occurs when readers activate and integrate their prior knowledge (schema) with the information they encounter in the text. This theory highlights that reading is not merely decoding symbols but a process of meaning construction driven by the learner's pre-existing knowledge structures.

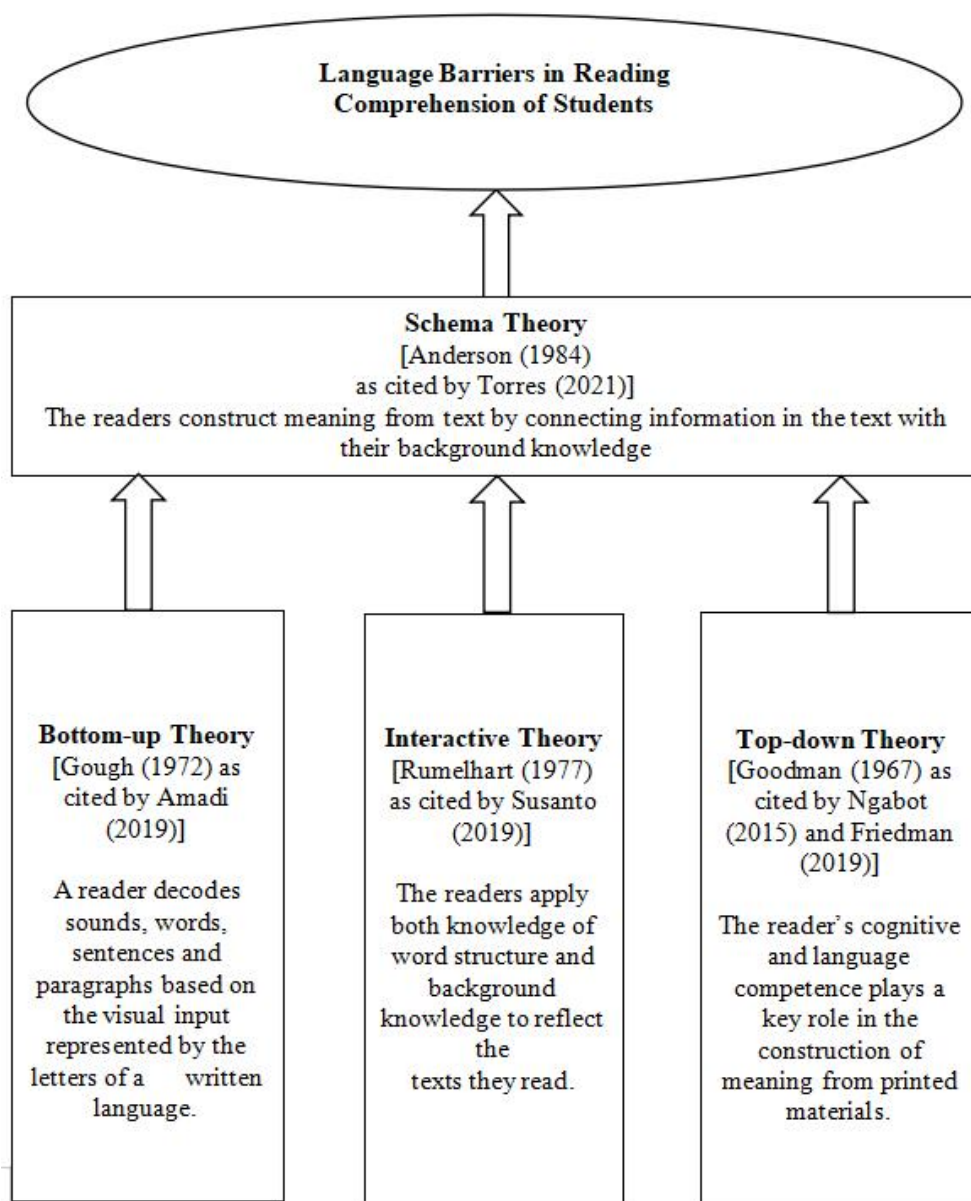
Building on Anderson's foundational work, Anderson (2018) and Torres (2021) further emphasized that learners comprehend texts more effectively when their schema—knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structures—matches the linguistic and conceptual demands of the reading material. These contemporary interpretations reinforce the idea that comprehension becomes difficult when students have limited vocabulary or weak grammar skills, preventing them from connecting new textual information to their existing schema.

Building on this idea, Schema Theory suggests that when students lack sufficient vocabulary and grammatical competence, they struggle to activate relevant schemas needed to make sense of literary texts, particularly those that reflect diverse cultural and historical contexts found in the Philippine and world literature. Without well-developed linguistic schemas, students may focus

more on decoding words and sentence forms rather than constructing meaning from the text. This cognitive overload limits their ability to interpret implied meanings, analyze themes, and evaluate characters' motivations—skills required for higher-level comprehension.

**Figure 1**

*Theoretical Paradigm*





Moreover, ineffective schema activation can cause students to misinterpret textual details or fail to connect events in the text with their own experiences and background knowledge. As a result, comprehension becomes fragmented, affecting not only literal understanding but also inferential and evaluative responses. Consequently, addressing language barriers is crucial in strengthening schema activation and enhancing overall reading comprehension among Grade 11 students.

Bottom-Up Theory. First advanced by Gough (1972), Bottom-Up Theory views reading as a linear decoding process, beginning from the smallest linguistic units (letters and sounds) and moving toward whole-word and sentence-level understanding. According to the original theory, comprehension is only achieved after accurate decoding occurs. Recent authors such as Amadi (2019) extend this theory by stressing that linguistic decoding—especially vocabulary recognition and grammatical accuracy—is foundational to comprehension. Amadi's interpretation modernizes the theory by applying it to second-language learners who often struggle with basic decoding due to limited proficiency.

For Grade 11 learners, bottom-up processing is directly linked to the study's independent variables: vocabulary proficiency and grammar skills. Students with low decoding competence struggle with identifying word meanings, constructing sentence relationships, and understanding literal details in literary texts. When decoding fails, higher-level comprehension processes cannot occur, resulting in low comprehension scores. This theoretical perspective supports the study's effort to quantitatively describe how specific language barriers affect students' literal comprehension and overall reading performance, as examined in the research questions.



Top-Down Theory. Originated from Goodman (1967), the Top-Down Model proposes that readers actively construct meaning by relying on their background knowledge, predictions, and expectations rather than on detailed linguistic decoding. According to this model, reading is a meaning-driven, concept-oriented process. Contemporary scholars such as Ngabot (2015) and Friedman (2019) extend Goodman's theory by emphasizing the role of cognitive processes and reader engagement. Ngabot highlights that readers use syntactic, semantic, and contextual cues to construct meaning with minimal reliance on surface-level decoding. Friedman, meanwhile, argues that top-down processing encourages the development of active readers—learners who not only recognize words but engage with texts through interest, choice, and contextual analysis.

Top-down theory posits that reading comprehension is an active, meaning-making process in which learners utilize their prior knowledge, background experiences, and understanding of literary conventions to construct meaning from texts. In the context of literature, students rely on familiarity with genres, themes, symbols, and cultural references to anticipate ideas, make predictions, and interpret authorial intent. However, the effectiveness of top-down processing is significantly constrained when language barriers are present. Limited vocabulary and weak grammatical competence prevent learners from accurately decoding key words, phrases, and sentence relationships, thereby disrupting their ability to activate relevant schemas. When students cannot understand crucial linguistic cues, they struggle to confirm predictions, recognize implicit meanings, and connect ideas across the text, resulting in weakened inferential and evaluative comprehension.

Moreover, deficiencies in vocabulary and grammar force learners to rely excessively on surface-level decoding rather than higher-order meaning construction. Instead of integrating

prior knowledge with textual information, students become preoccupied with identifying word meanings and parsing sentence structures, which interrupts the natural flow of comprehension. This explanation strengthens the logical connection between language barriers and higher-order comprehension skills addressed in the study's research questions.

Interactive Theory. Proposed by Rumelhart (1977), the Interactive Model combines both bottom-up (decoding) and top-down (meaning-driven) processes, suggesting that comprehension results from the continuous interaction between these two systems. The reader simultaneously uses visual input and background knowledge to construct meaning. Susanto (2019) expands Rumelhart's theory by illustrating how learners use multiple cueing systems—graphophonic (letter-sound), syntactic (structure), and semantic (meaning)—depending on their strengths. According to Susanto, individual readers employ different combinations of cues, and both surface and deep processing are essential for successful comprehension.

The interactive model aligns closely with the variables of this study. When students possess sufficient vocabulary knowledge, grammar skills, and background knowledge, bottom-up and top-down processes support each other, leading to effective comprehension. However, language barriers disrupt this interaction. A student who cannot decode unfamiliar words experiences bottom-up failure, while a student who lacks background knowledge encounters top-down failure. As a result, comprehension breaks down. Strong reading comprehension occurs only when both processes function together. This model provides a comprehensive explanation of how language barriers influence reading comprehension and supports the study's aim of developing reading materials that address both decoding and meaning-making processes.



### Conceptual Framework

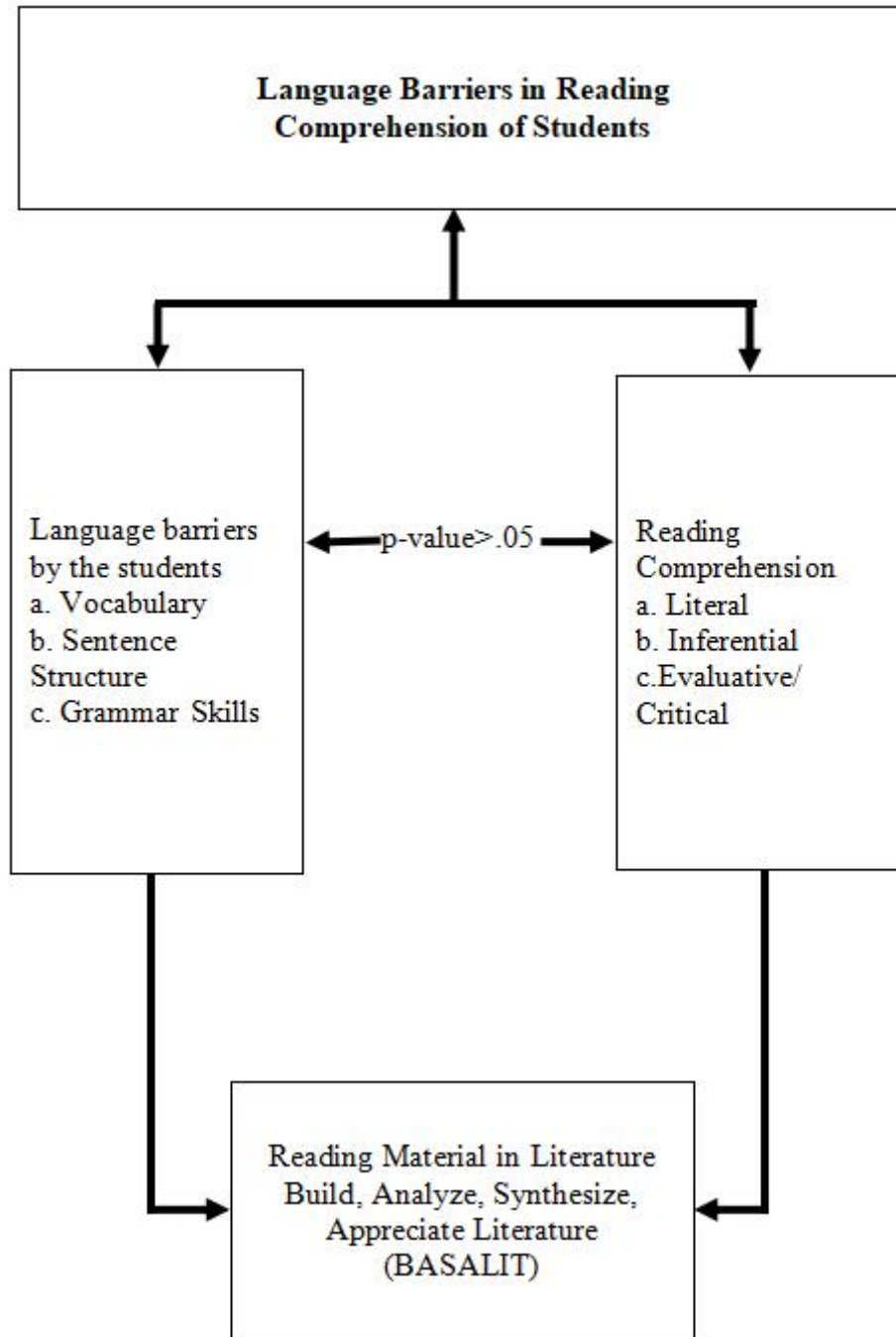
This study assumed that language barriers (independent variable), measured through various aspects of English language proficiency including vocabulary, sentence structure, and grammar skills influence the reading comprehension competencies (dependent variable) of Grade 11 respondents of the study. Reading comprehension competencies were measured at the literal, inferential, and evaluative/critical levels, focusing on students' ability to interpret, analyze, and evaluate literary texts. The study further considered the role of contextualized reading materials, specifically BASALIT, as a mediating tool to support learners in overcoming language barriers and enhancing their comprehension skills in literature.

Guided by Schema Theory, this study asserts that reading comprehension is facilitated when students meaningfully connect new textual information with their existing knowledge, experiences, and cultural background. Comprehension is an active and constructive process rather than mere word recognition. However, language barriers such as limited vocabulary, weak grammatical competence, and difficulty understanding complex literary language obstruct this process by preventing effective decoding and interpretation of texts.

From the perspective of Bottom-up theory, deficiencies in basic language skills impede comprehension because students struggle to recognize words and structures accurately, leaving fewer cognitive resources for understanding meaning.

**Figure 2**

*Conceptual Paradigm*





In contrast, Top-down theory underscores the role of prior knowledge, expectations, and affective factors; students with inadequate background knowledge or reading anxiety may struggle with inferential and evaluative comprehension. Interactive theory integrates these viewpoints by emphasizing that successful reading comprehension results from the interaction between bottom-up decoding skills and top-down cognitive processes, wherein readers actively construct meaning by combining accurate word recognition and grammatical understanding with prior knowledge, contextual cues, and interpretive strategies.

The study was conducted among Grade 11 students of Pili West District during School Year 2025–2026. Findings from this investigation served how language barriers affect the reading comprehension competencies of Grade 11 respondents of the study and how contextualized reading materials such as BASALIT can support comprehension processes.

### **Definition of Terms**

For purpose of clarity, the following terms were defined conceptually and operationally:

**Competency Level.** This refers to the degree of ability or proficiency an individual demonstrates in performing a specific skill or task within an academic context (Okoyere, 2021). In this study, it pertains to the extent of the respondents' ability to read and comprehend literary texts as evidenced by their scores on reading comprehension assessments, including literal, inferential, and evaluative/critical reading items.

*Evaluative / Critical Comprehension.* This refers to a deep level of reading comprehension in which the reader assesses, analyzes, and critiques ideas presented in a text and forms reasoned judgments based on evidence (Fidalgo et al., 2019). In this

study, it refers to respondents' performance on reading comprehension items that require evaluation of author intent, credibility, logic, and textual validity.

*Inferential Comprehension.* This refers to the reader's ability to draw meaning from a text by combining explicit textual information with prior knowledge to infer ideas and relationships not explicitly stated (McElvany et al., 2017). In this study, it involves respondents' performance on reading comprehension items that require them to make predictions, draw conclusions, identify implicit meanings, and interpret unstated relationships in literary texts.

*Literal Comprehension.* This refers to the foundational level of reading comprehension in which the reader identifies and understands information that is explicitly stated in the text, such as facts, details, and events (Fidalgo et al., 2019). In this study, it is measured by respondents' performance on reading comprehension items requiring recall of surface-level information.

**Language Barriers.** This refers to the linguistic limitations that hinder comprehension and communication, including issues with vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, and contextual understanding (Genc & Bada, 2019). In this study defines language barriers as measured linguistic gaps that interfere with respondents' ability to interpret and comprehend literary texts, as evidenced by performance on reading assessments.

*Grammar Skills.* This refers to the knowledge and application of rules that govern syntax, morphology, punctuation, and word form usage (Richards & Schmidt, 2017). In this study, grammar skills are measured through assessment items that evaluate

respondents' accuracy in applying grammatical rules within reading comprehension tasks.

*Sentence Structure.* This refers to the arrangement of words and phrases to form grammatically correct and meaningful sentences (Radford, 2016). In this study, it is measured through tasks involving sentence completion, error recognition, and sentence combining; correct syntax supports comprehension by signalling relationships among ideas.

*Vocabulary.* This refers to the body of words that a reader recognizes, understands, and can use appropriately in context (Nation, 2017). In this study, it is measured through test items assessing word recognition, meaning, and contextual usage in reading texts.

**Literature.** This refers to the artistic and meaningful written works expressing human experiences, ideas, and emotions (Eagleton, 2016). In this study, it refers to the selected literary texts used as instructional reading materials in the English or Literature subject.

**Reading Comprehension.** This refers to the the ability to extract and construct meaning from a text through active interaction between reader and text (Snow, 2016). In this study, it refers to respondents' competency level in understanding literary texts as demonstrated by performance on reading assessment items at literal, inferential, and evaluative/critical levels.

**Reading Material.** This refers to the written texts and resources used for instructional purposes to facilitate reading and comprehension (Tomlinson, 2017). In this study, it refers to developed literary texts and exercises such as BASALIT (Build, Analyze, Synthesize, Appreciate



Literature) designed to address language barriers and enhance respondents' reading comprehension skills.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The realization of the study's objectives was achieved through the careful application of appropriate research methods and systematic procedures. This chapter provides a detailed discussion of the data-gathering techniques employed, as well as the statistical tools and analyses used to ensure the accuracy, reliability, and validity of the findings.

### Research Design

The study employed a descriptive–correlational research design, which was appropriate for examining existing conditions while determining the degree and direction of relationships among variables. This design aligned with the theoretical framework of the study, which posits that language barriers—specifically vocabulary knowledge, sentence structure proficiency, and grammar skills—are related to and may influence students' reading comprehension competencies at the literal, inferential, and evaluative/critical levels, and that understanding these relationships can inform the development of effective instructional interventions. Descriptive–correlational research is particularly suitable when variables are not manipulated but are studied in their natural context to determine patterns of association (Waters et al., 2019). Recent studies underscore the value of this design in literacy research: for instance, Domingo & Aquino (2021) investigated the relationship between English language proficiency and reading comprehension performance among senior high school learners, while Balta & Duran (2018) examined how vocabulary knowledge and reading fluency correlate with comprehension levels in adolescent



readers. These studies support the use of descriptive–correlational design in examining language and comprehension variables without experimental manipulation.

The descriptive design was utilized to systematically determine the levels of language barriers and reading comprehension competencies of Grade 11 students. Specifically, it addressed the research questions concerning students’ vocabulary knowledge, proficiency in sentence structure, and grammar skills, as well as their performance on reading comprehension assessments across literal, inferential, and evaluative/critical levels. Descriptive research allows for the accurate profiling of participants’ skills and provides baseline data that highlight strengths and weaknesses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Supporting this approach, Lopez & Guerrero (2020) used descriptive statistics to profile Filipino learners’ reading comprehension performance, and Kim & Cho (2017) reported distinct patterns of grammar and vocabulary difficulties among high school readers based on descriptive analysis. By quantifying students’ linguistic and comprehension abilities, the study established a clear baseline that directly informed the identification of learning needs prior to the development of the contextualized reading enhancement material.

The correlational design was employed to examine the relationships between students’ language barrier experiences and their reading comprehension competencies, as well as to assess the effectiveness of the developed instructional material through pre-test and post-test comparisons. Correlational research was deemed essential in determining the extent to which two or more variables are related and identifying meaningful patterns that have instructional implications (McMillan & Schumacher, 2018). Consistent with this, Hammad & Khasawneh (2018) found significant correlations between English vocabulary knowledge and reading



comprehension achievement among secondary students, and Nguyen & Boers (2021) demonstrated that grammar proficiency and syntactic awareness contribute to higher levels of comprehension performance in learners of English as a second language. In this study, correlation analyses addressed research questions and hypotheses regarding whether language barriers significantly relate to reading comprehension performance and whether the implementation of contextualized reading material results in measurable improvement. This logical progression—from describing learner characteristics, to examining relationships, and finally to evaluating instructional effectiveness—ensures internal coherence within the framework and aligns with contemporary practices in educational research design.

### **Respondents of the Study**

The subject of this study were Grade 11 students of the three Secondary Schools in Pili West District coded as SHS-X1, SHS-Y2, SHS-Z3 for School Year 2025 - 2026. Hence, purposive sample was employed to determine the number of respondents. A total of 166 students participated in the study representing selected strands under Senior High School curriculum. The student respondents were purposively selected from identified schools and consisted of Grade 11 students from different academic strands who were officially enrolled in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literature from the Philippines and the World. Selection was guided by the following criteria: (1) officially enrolled as a Grade 11 student in one of the selected schools; (2) currently taking literature subject during the data collection period; and (3) with available documented evidence of reading comprehension performance, such as results from reading comprehension assessments. This sampling approach ensured that participants possessed relevant academic exposure and

experiences necessary for the objectives of the study, particularly in relation to literature and reading comprehension.

**Table 1**

*School Respondents of the Study*

School	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
SHS-X1	50	30
SHS-Y2	60	36
SHS-Z3	56	34
Total	166	100

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents from three sections included in the study. Out of a total of 166 respondents, 50 students (30%) are from Section SHS-X1, 60 students (36%) from Section SHS-Y2, and 56 students (34%) from Section SHS-Z3. The distribution reflects a relatively balanced representation of the Grade 11 population across the sections, ensuring that data collected on language barriers and reading comprehension competencies adequately represents the participants of the study. This proportional representation helps in achieving reliable and generalizable findings for senior high school respondents in the Pili West district.

### **Research Instrument**

The tool used was teacher-made test for Grade 11 students as the respondents to gather quantitative data on students' language barriers and their reading comprehension competencies. The researcher constructed a table of specification for teacher-made test in reading comprehension. The instrument consisted of two main parts: Part I focused on determining the



level of language barrier of students in terms of vocabulary, sentence structure, and grammar skills (Each component contained ten (10) items designed to measure the respondents' difficulties and proficiency in understanding and using the English language); Part II measured the reading comprehension competencies of the students, specifically in the areas of literal, inferential, and evaluative or critical comprehension, with ten (10) items per category. The researcher used one reading passage only for the consistency of information. The test was conducted during Second Quarter of the school year 2025-2026.

To determine reliability of the test, Kuder-Richardson Formula 21 (KR-21) was applied, which is suitable for instruments with dichotomous items (right/wrong responses). The test was administered to 34 Grade 11 students, and item analysis revealed varying levels of mastery per item. Mastery level per item ranged from 11.76% (unmastered) to 100% (mastered), while mastery level per learning competency ranged from 55.15% (nearly mastered) to 88.24% (mastered). Most items were interpreted as "Nearly Mastered" or "Mastered," indicating that the test appropriately differentiated students' performance levels.

Using KR-21 formula, reliability coefficient of the instrument was calculated as 0.84, indicating that the test is highly reliable for measuring students' language skills and reading comprehension competencies. This reliability level demonstrates that instrument consistently measures the constructs it is intended to assess, providing confidence that results accurately reflect the respondents' abilities.

To ensure content validity of the research instrument, questionnaire underwent expert review by a panel composed of one Master Teacher in English, one literacy/reading coordinator, and one English language and a research adviser. The experts evaluated the instrument in terms of



content relevance, clarity of language, appropriateness of items, and alignment with study's objectives. Their comments and recommendations were carefully considered and incorporated to improve wording, organization, and overall quality of the questionnaire.

Following content validation, the instrument was subjected to pilot testing involving a group of Grade 11 students who were not included in actual respondents of the study. The pilot test was conducted to identify ambiguous, unclear, or problematic items and to assess the instrument's overall usability. An item analysis was performed to refine the questionnaire by revising or removing items that were found to be unclear or misinterpreted by students. Based on results of the expert validation and item analysis, questionnaire was finalized and used as the primary data-gathering instrument to obtain accurate and credible responses from participants.

### **Procedure of Investigation**

In collecting data required for this study, the following steps were followed:

Validation. Survey questionnaires and teacher-made test assessed by the English reading coordinator or master teachers in English or Doctorate Degree graduate but English Teachers. The researcher prepared test questions used for pre- assessment which cover competencies contained in the curriculum guides of Grade 11- 21st Century Literature from the Philippines and the World. The questionnaire and test were personally administered to respondents with 1 hour allotted time in answering the test on reading comprehension skills and on survey. Retrieval of questionnaires and answer sheets were done immediately after the test. Data were subjected to statistical computation, analysis and interpreted.



Dry run. Survey questionnaire and teacher-made test measured through pilot testing. Scores are subject to item analysis where the index of reliability and validity is identified. Results serve as the basis for some revisions on the test questions and stem choices.

Administration of Test. After validation, suggestions, and revisions of the teacher-made test, the researcher administered test to participants of the study. The Teacher-Made Test was measured through pilot testing. Scores are subject to item analysis where the index of reliability and validity is identified. Results serve as the basis for some revisions on test questions and stem choices.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study strictly adhered to established research ethics and school policies to ensure the credibility of findings and protection of all participants. Prior to the conduct of study, formal approval was obtained from the school heads of participating schools. In addition, written parental consent and student assent were secured before the administration of the research instrument. Consent forms clearly stated the purpose of the study, procedures involved, voluntary nature of participation, and participants' right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Copies of signed consent and assent forms were collected and are included in the appendices of this study.

To ensure informed participation, the researcher personally explained objectives, procedures, and expected duration of the study to students prior to data collection. Participants were assured that their responses would be treated with strict confidentiality and would be used solely for



academic and research purposes. No identifying information was collected, and all data were anonymized during analysis and reporting.

The study also observed ethical fairness and non-discrimination, particularly in relation to students' language proficiency and linguistic background. Care was taken to avoid any form of bias, labeling, or stigmatization during data collection and interpretation. All results were reported honestly and accurately, reflecting the actual data gathered without manipulation or misrepresentation.

During data collection, the researcher personally administered validated questionnaire in the respondents' respective classrooms to ensure proper guidance and clarification of instructions while avoiding undue influence on students' responses. This approach ensured ethical standards of respect, transparency, and responsibility were consistently upheld throughout the research process.

In adherence to ethical research standards, the researcher discloses the use of ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2025) as a supplementary tool for language refinement, structural organization, summarizing parts of the interpretation and inferences. The tool did not influence study's data, results, or conclusions.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

Data collected from the respondents were analyzed using specific statistical procedures appropriate to the objectives of the study.

**Mean.** Computed to determine the average level of students' performance in each component of language barriers—vocabulary, sentence structure, and grammar skills—as well as



in reading comprehension at the literal, inferential, and evaluative/critical levels. It served as primary measure in identifying the overall proficiency level of students in each variable based on the established proficiency scale.

**Standard Deviation.** Calculated to measure degree of variability or dispersion of students' scores from the mean. This statistic was used to determine the consistency of students' responses and to identify whether scores were closely clustered around the average or widely dispersed across the different proficiency levels.

**Proficiency Level.** Used to classify the students' performance in reading comprehension into four categories: Proficient, Approaching Proficiency, Developing, and Beginning. These categories served as the basis for interpreting the competency level of the students in reading comprehension and identifying the extent of language barriers experienced by the respondents. The classification enabled the researcher to clearly determine level of mastery demonstrated by the students and provided a descriptive interpretation of their performance.

**Pearson's Product–Moment Correlation Coefficient (r).** Employed to determine the strength and direction of linear relationship between students' language barriers and their reading comprehension competencies. This statistical test assessed whether increases or decreases in language barrier levels were associated with corresponding changes in reading comprehension performance.

All statistical computations and graphical presentations were generated using Jamovi statistical software, which served as a computational tool for calculating descriptive statistics and



Pearson's Product–Moment Correlation Coefficient, ensuring accuracy, reliability, and transparency in data analysis.

**Modified ADDIE Model.** This model was used to provide a systematic framework for identifying students' language barriers and assessing their proficiency across literal, inferential and evaluative/critical level. In this study, the Analysis phase focused on determining students' specific difficulties in vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure.; Design and Development involved constructing and validating the instruments; and Implementation covered the administration of the tools. No Evaluation phase was done in the study.

### III. RESULT ADISCUSSIONS

This section presents and interprets findings on the language barriers of students and their competency level in reading comprehension. Results are organized based on the study's objectives, showing descriptive data, and correlations between language barriers and reading comprehension levels. Each table is discussed with a supporting interpretation.

#### Language Barriers of Students

Language barriers can significantly affect students' ability to comprehend and process written texts. These barriers often manifest in vocabulary limitations, difficulties in sentence construction, and grammar weaknesses, which may hinder reading comprehension and academic performance. This section presents the students' performance in different language components to identify areas that require improvement.

Table 2 presented the level of language barriers of students as measured in terms of vocabulary, sentence structure, and grammar skills. The data revealed that students obtained a mean score of 5.02 (SD = 2.03) in vocabulary, 5.14 (SD = 2.13) in sentence structure, and 4.98

(SD = 2.43) in grammar skills. Computed overall mean of 15.14 with a percentage level of 50.46% indicated that students fall under the category of Approaching Proficiency (AP) in their language performance.

**Table 2**

*Level of Language Barriers of Students*

Language Barriers	Items	Mean	SD	PL	Interpretation
Vocabulary	10	5.02	2.03	50.24	Approaching Proficiency
Sentences	10	5.14	2.13	51.39	Approaching Proficiency
Grammar Skills	10	4.98	2.43	49.76	Developing
Overall	30	15.14	5.38	50.46	Approaching Proficiency

*Notes:* The interpretation applied follows the proficiency described as Proficient (P) (75.0 to 100), Approaching Proficiency (AP) (50.0 to 74.9), Developing (D) (25.0 to 49.9), and Beginning (B) (0 to 24.9)

Among three components, sentence structure obtained the highest mean suggesting that students can generally construct sentences with moderate correctness, though occasional structural errors may still occur. Vocabulary followed closely showing that learners possess a fair range of words but may have limited lexical variety and precision. Conversely, grammar skills recorded the lowest mean which falls under Developing (D) level. This result indicated that students encounter more difficulties in applying grammatical rules correctly and consistently in both oral and written communication.

These results suggested that students have a basic command of English but still face significant challenges in grammar, which can impede sentence coherence and comprehension. Weak grammar skills may affect their reading comprehension as it influences their ability to process complex texts (Harmer, 2015; Thornbury, 2019; Ellis, 2017; Celce-Murcia, 2014; Brown, 2018).

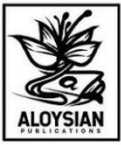


The findings were consistent with Cummins (2017) and Nation (2013), who argued that vocabulary, syntax, and grammar are interconnected components of language proficiency. Zhang (2018) and Richards & Schmidt (2017), on the other hand, emphasized that deficits in these areas can hinder reading comprehension. According to Schema Theory, students activate prior knowledge to compensate for language limitations (Anderson, 2016). Hence, while students show progress toward mastery, targeted interventions focusing on grammar and vocabulary are recommended.

### **Competency Level in Reading Comprehension**

Reading comprehension is a multifaceted process that involves literal, inferential, and evaluative/critical understanding of texts. Competency in these domains reflects the students' ability to extract explicit information, infer implied meanings, and critically analyze content (Bernardo, 2019; Day & Park, 2005; Grabe, 2016; Afflerbach, 2016; Snow, 2010). This section presents the students' performance in each domain.

Table 3 displayed the competency level of students in reading comprehension as measured in terms of literal, inferential, and evaluative/critical skills. Results showed that students obtained a mean score of 6.39 (SD = 2.20) in literal comprehension, 4.55 (SD = 2.22) in inferential comprehension, and 5.31 (SD = 2.27) in evaluative/critical comprehension. Overall mean score of 16.25 with a percentage level of 54.16% indicated that students were Approaching Proficiency (AP) in their overall reading comprehension performance. This suggested that while students demonstrated a basic understanding of the texts, their comprehension skills were not yet fully developed and remain inconsistent across different levels of comprehension. It further implied



that students may require additional instructional support and targeted interventions to strengthen their literal, inferential, and evaluative reading abilities.

**Table 3**
*Competency Level in Reading Comprehension*

Reading Comprehension Competencies	Items	Mean	SD	PL	Interpretation
Literal	10	6.39	2.20	63.92	Approaching Proficiency
Inferential	10	4.55	2.22	45.48	Developing
Evaluative/ Critical	10	5.31	2.27	53.07	Approaching Proficiency
Overall	30	16.25	5.07	54.16	Approaching Proficiency

*Note:* The interpretation applied follows the proficiency described as Proficient (P) (75.0 to 100), Approaching Proficiency (AP) (50.0 to 74.9), Developing (D) 925.0 to 49.9), and Beginning (B) (0 to 24.9)

Among three domains, literal comprehension recorded the highest Mean suggesting that students could identify facts, recall details, and understand explicitly stated information from texts. This implied that they could process straightforward information efficiently. Meanwhile, evaluative/critical comprehension showed that students were beginning to exercise judgment and reasoning in assessing ideas and opinions found in reading materials. However, inferential comprehension posted the lowest Mean which fell under the Developing (D) level. This result indicated that students struggle to interpret implied meanings, infer causes and effects, or predict outcomes based on textual clues.

These results implied that students' reading comprehension is still developing beyond surface-level understanding. Limited inferential skills may stem from insufficient exposure to higher-order reading tasks (Bernardo, 2019; Day & Park, 2005; Grabe, 2016; Afflerbach, 2016;



Snow, 2010). Students require additional guided instruction in inferential and evaluative strategies.

The findings aligned with Schema Theory, which posits that comprehension involved activating prior knowledge and experiences (Anderson, 2016). Studies by Bernardo (2019), Day & Park (2005), Grabe (2016), Afflerbach (2016), and Snow (2010) supported that Filipino students excel in literal comprehension but struggle with higher-order skills. Instruction focusing on inference, critical evaluation, and text-to-life connections is crucial to enhance overall reading competency.

### **Relationship between Language Barrier and Reading Comprehension Competencies**

Understanding the relationship between language barriers and reading comprehension helps determine whether weaknesses in vocabulary, sentence structure, or grammar affect literal, inferential, and evaluative/critical comprehension (Cummins, 2017; Nation, 2013; Zhang, 2018; Ellis, 2017; Harmer, 2015).

Table 4 presented the relationship between language barrier in terms of vocabulary, sentence structure, and grammar skills and reading comprehension competencies of Grade 11 students at the literal, inferential, and evaluative/critical levels. Results indicated that vocabulary exhibited a low negative correlation with literal comprehension ( $r = -0.354$ ,  $p = 0.316$ ), a very low positive correlation with inferential comprehension ( $r = 0.160$ ,  $p = 0.660$ ), and a very low negative correlation with evaluative/critical comprehension ( $r = -0.113$ ,  $p = 0.529$ ). Sentence structure showed very low correlations with literal ( $r = 0.297$ ,  $p = 0.405$ ), inferential ( $r = 0.230$ ,  $p = 0.523$ ), and evaluative/critical comprehension ( $r = 0.181$ ,  $p = 0.618$ ). Similarly, grammar skills



demonstrated very low to low negative correlations with literal ( $r = -0.146$ ,  $p = 0.686$ ) and inferential comprehension ( $r = -0.323$ ,  $p = 0.363$ ), while a moderate negative correlation was observed with evaluative/critical comprehension ( $r = -0.549$ ,  $p = 0.100$ ). However, all computed p-values exceeded the 0.05 level of significance, indicating that none of the observed relationships were statistically significant.

Results indicated that although some correlations—particularly between grammar skills and evaluative/critical comprehension—appear moderate in magnitude, these relationships are not statistically significant. This suggested that variations in students' vocabulary knowledge, sentence structure understanding, and grammar skills did not reliably predict their performance across the three levels of reading comprehension. Presence of low to very low correlations implied that language barriers may exist but do not independently exert a strong influence on comprehension outcomes. One possible reason is that students may rely on context clues, background knowledge, schema activation, or instructional support, which can compensate for linguistic limitations during reading tasks. Additionally, lack of significance may be attributed to sample size, variability in student strategies, or exposure to reading interventions that mitigate the effects of language barriers.

**Table 4**

*Significant Relationship between Language Barrier and Reading Comprehension Competencies of Students*

Language Barrier	Reading Comprehension Competencies	r-value			
			Int	p-value	Int
Vocabulary		-			
	Literal	0.354	LC	0.316	N/A
	Inferential	0.160	VLC	0.660	N/A
Sentence Structure		-			
	Evaluative/Critical	0.113	VLC	0.529	N/A
	Literal	0.297	VLC	0.405	N/A
Grammar Skills		-			
	Inferential	0.23	VLC	0.523	N/A
	Evaluative/Critical	0.181	VLC	0.618	N/A
		-			
	Literal	0.146	VLC	0.686	N/A
	Inferential	0.323	LC	0.363	N/A
		-			
	Evaluative/Critical	0.549	MC	0.100	N/A

*Note:* Int. refers to interpretation, N/A refers to Not Applicable, The r-value interpretation is based on the following 0.90 to 0.99 as Very High Correlation (VHC); 0.70 to 0.89 as High Correlation (HC); 0.50 to 0.69 as Moderate Correlation (MC); 0.30 to 0.49 as Low Correlation (LC); and 0.01 to 0.29 as Very Low Correlation (VLC).

Based on findings, it can be inferred that language barriers alone are insufficient predictors of Grade 11 students' reading comprehension competencies at the literal, inferential, and evaluative/critical levels. While grammar skills showed a moderate negative relationship with evaluative/critical levels. While grammar skills showed a moderate negative relationship with evaluative/critical comprehension, this relationship was not statistically significant. Related research supports this outcome: Alqurashi (2024) noted that vocabulary knowledge influences



reading proficiency but is also affected by non-linguistic factors like reading anxiety; studies on reading fluency found limited correlations with comprehension when academic text demands are high; translanguaging research reports mixed effects of language practices on comprehension; oral language research emphasizes broader linguistic and cognitive influences beyond isolated language barriers; and Philippine studies on language use in ESL settings highlight how instructional and sociocultural factors contribute to reading outcomes. Collectively, these studies suggested that other factors — such as reading strategies, motivation, background knowledge, instructional approaches, and contextual language practices — may play a more critical and complex role in shaping students' reading comprehension performance than language barriers alone. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there was no significant relationship between language barrier experiences and reading comprehension competencies is accepted.

Based on findings and supported by Schema Theory (Anderson, 2016) as well as studies by Cummins (2017), Nation (2013), Zhang (2018), Ellis (2017), and Harmer (2015), reading materials for Grade 11 students should be designed to address both linguistic and cognitive needs, as comprehension is multifaceted and not solely dependent on language proficiency. Materials should include scaffolding through guided questions, pre-reading activities to activate prior knowledge, vocabulary and grammar support, and tasks that gradually progress from literal to inferential and evaluative comprehension. Texts should be contextually meaningful, connecting to students' experiences and real-life situations, while exercises promote critical thinking, reflection, and reasoning. By integrating language support, strategy use, and contextual understanding, these reading materials can effectively enhance students' comprehension across



literal, inferential, and evaluative domains, helping them overcome language barriers while developing higher-order reading skills.

### **Reading Material in Literature**

**Analysis Phase-** Findings of this study revealed that students demonstrated strengths in literal comprehension but encountered difficulties in inferential and evaluative reading, along with challenges in grammar application. These gaps highlighted the need for an instructional material that not only enhances comprehension but also supports language development in a contextualized manner.

**Design Phase-** The material was structured to promote progressive learning and deeper engagement with texts. Developed material consists of six reading selections written by Bicolano writers, ensuring cultural relevance and familiarity, which supports schema activation and learner engagement. Each lesson was divided into four key components: Build, Analyze, Synthesize, and Reflect.

Build Section- Designed to activate and strengthen students' prior knowledge and vocabulary, preparing them for meaningful text engagement.

Analyze Section- Guided learners in examining literary elements, language use, and text structure, thereby deepening comprehension and promoting analytical thinking.

Synthesize Section- Encouraged learners to connect ideas, draw conclusions, and relate the text to broader concepts or real-life experiences, addressing the identified weakness in inferential comprehension.



Reflect Section- Fostered enjoyment and critical reflection, allowing students to express insights, values, and personal interpretations derived from the reading.

**Development Phase**- Reading selections and accompanying activities were carefully constructed to integrate grammar and vocabulary within authentic literary contexts, ensuring that language skills are reinforced alongside comprehension. Inclusion of culturally relevant texts further enhances students' engagement and facilitates better understanding through familiar experiences.

**Implementation Phase**- Positioned the material as a supplementary instructional resource that teachers can utilize to facilitate interactive, student-centered reading sessions that emphasize strategy use and higher-order thinking.

**Evaluation Phase**- Ensured that the material remains dynamic and effective through continuous assessment of learners' performance and feedback, allowing for refinement and improvement.

Overall, the application of the ADDIE Model resulted in a pedagogically sound and contextually grounded reading material that addresses both linguistic and cognitive dimensions of reading, ultimately supporting the development of students' inferential and critical comprehension skills.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

1. The study concluded that students' language barriers fall at a moderate level, categorized as "Approaching Proficiency," with grammar skills showing the greatest difficulty.



2. The study concluded that students can understand explicitly stated information (literal comprehension) but have difficulty deriving implied meaning (inferential comprehension) and critically evaluating textual content (evaluative/critical comprehension). Overall performance was at the “Approaching Proficiency” level.

3. The study concluded that vocabulary, sentence structure, and grammar skills do not have a significant relationship with students’ reading comprehension competencies. Language barriers alone were insufficient predictors of performance in literal, inferential, and evaluative/critical comprehension.

4. The study concluded that reading materials need to address both linguistic and cognitive needs to support comprehension across literal, inferential, and evaluative domains. Materials should provide scaffolding, vocabulary and grammar support, and meaningful context for students.

## **V. RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Teachers should provide targeted interventions focusing on grammar and vocabulary development, including practice exercises and guided activities to strengthen students’ language proficiency;

2. Reading instructions should include activities that promote inferential and evaluative thinking, such as guided questioning, text analysis, and reasoning tasks to improve higher-order comprehension skills;



3. Teachers should incorporate strategies that develop reading skills beyond linguistic proficiency, including activation of prior knowledge, context-based reading exercises, and explicit instruction on reading strategies;

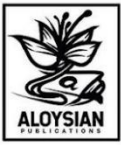
4. Reading materials should include pre-reading activities, guided questions, vocabulary and grammar exercises, and tasks that progress from literal to inferential and evaluative comprehension. Materials should connect to students' experiences and promote critical thinking, reflection, and reasoning.

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