

LINGUISTIC DIFFICULTIES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: AN ANALYSIS OF GRAMMAR, PRONUNCIATION, VOCABULARY, AND READING COMPREHENSION BARRIERS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the linguistic difficulties encountered by Senior High School students in Kitaotao National High School, specifically focusing on grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. It assessed the level of linguistic challenges experienced by learners in terms of syntactic accuracy, phonological competence, lexical development, and comprehension skills. In parallel, the study compared the linguistic performance of HUMSS and STEM students to determine whether significant differences existed between the two academic strands. A descriptive-comparative research design was employed to evaluate the extent of linguistic difficulties and identify strand-specific variations. The study involved 80 Senior High School students selected through purposive sampling from the HUMSS and STEM strands. Data were collected using validated survey questionnaires that measured the four linguistic domains. The gathered data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation, and inferential statistics, particularly the independent samples t-test, to examine differences between groups.

The findings revealed that students demonstrated moderate levels of difficulty across all linguistic domains, with vocabulary and reading comprehension emerging as the most challenging areas. Grammar and pronunciation also registered moderate difficulty levels, indicating persistent gaps in syntactic and phonological competence. Furthermore, the results showed a significant difference in grammar difficulties between HUMSS and STEM students, while no significant differences were found in pronunciation, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.

Based on these findings, it was concluded that linguistic difficulties remain a notable concern among Senior High School learners, and that strand-specific instructional approaches may be necessary to address grammatical challenges. The study concludes that strengthening vocabulary instruction, enhancing grammar competence, and improving reading comprehension strategies can contribute to better language learning outcomes.

It is recommended that teachers implement targeted interventions, integrate multimodal instructional strategies, and provide strand-responsive support to improve students' linguistic proficiency in English.

Keyword: *Linguistic Difficulties, Grammar, Pronunciation, Vocabulary, Reading Comprehension, HUMSS, STEM*

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of English language proficiency has become increasingly important in strengthening teaching and learning processes, particularly in Senior High School education. With the continuous expansion of academic demands, students are expected to demonstrate competence in grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and

reading comprehension to improve scholastic performance, communication skills, and cognitive engagement. English enables learners to access specialized content, interpret complex ideas, and participate in academic discourse, thereby enhancing their overall understanding and retention (Bolton, 2020). In the context of rural Bukidnon, the level of English proficiency varies depending on students' linguistic backgrounds,

exposure to authentic English input, and institutional support.

Despite its recognized importance, many Senior High School students still face challenges in effectively acquiring and using the English language. These challenges include grammatical inaccuracies, phonological interference, limited vocabulary, and difficulties in comprehending academic texts. As a result, some learners continue to rely on translation-based strategies and rote memorization, which may not fully address the diverse linguistic needs of students. Leaño et al. (2019) emphasized that linguistic barriers are often linked to both external and internal factors, including instructional quality, cognitive load, and language anxiety. In the Philippine context, similar challenges have been observed, where students' readiness and exposure to English significantly influence their classroom performance (Gonzalez, 1998). This situation raises concerns regarding academic achievement and whether current instructional approaches adequately support learners' linguistic development.

The importance of this study lies in its potential to examine how linguistic difficulties influence students' learning experiences and academic performance in English. The findings will provide valuable insights for teachers in improving their instructional strategies and designing interventions that target specific linguistic barriers. Additionally, school administrators may utilize the results to develop relevant language support programs and improve the allocation of instructional resources. Enhancing linguistic proficiency through targeted interventions can lead to better student learning experiences and improved academic outcomes in English (Manalastas, 2022).

Several studies support the significant impact of linguistic proficiency on academic performance. Research indicates that students who develop strong grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension skills demonstrate higher engagement and improved mastery of subject matter (Kilag et al., 2024). According to Joven et al. (2025), learners who meaningfully strengthen their linguistic foundations exhibit more effective communication and improved academic writing, as linguistic competence supports clearer, more organized, and more analytical learning. In the Philippine setting, linguistic development has

been found to enhance students' engagement and achievement in various subjects (Bonifacio, 2022). Similarly, vocabulary growth and comprehension strategies support student motivation and learning, although their effectiveness depends on proper implementation (Torres et al., 2023). These findings highlight the importance of equipping students with the necessary linguistic skills and resources to improve their academic performance.

The study aimed to examine the linguistic difficulties encountered by Senior High School students in Kitaotao National High School. Specifically, it aimed to describe the level of students' linguistic difficulties in terms of grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. It also evaluated whether significant differences existed between HUMSS and STEM students. The study was conducted within one academic term, beginning with the preparation of research instruments and securing necessary approvals, followed by data collection, analysis, and interpretation, and culminating in the completion and presentation of the research findings.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

This study was conducted to determine the level of linguistic difficulties and their relationship to students' academic strands in Kitaotao National High School.

Specifically, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of Senior High School students in terms of strand?
2. What are the levels of linguistic difficulties encountered by HUMSS and STEM students in terms of: a. Grammar b. Pronunciation c. Vocabulary d. Reading comprehension
3. Is there a significant difference in the linguistic difficulties experienced by HUMSS and STEM students?

1.2 Hypothesis of the Study

The hypothesis was drawn based on the stated objectives and tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

Ha₁: There is a significant difference in the linguistic difficulties encountered by HUMSS and STEM students

2.METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methods and procedures employed in the study. It includes the research design, locale of the study, respondents, sampling procedure, research instrument, scoring procedure, administration of the research instrument and data gathering process, ethical considerations, and statistical treatment.

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-comparative quantitative research design to evaluate the linguistic difficulties encountered by Senior High School students at Kitaotao National High School. This design was appropriate because it allowed the researchers to describe existing linguistic conditions and compare the levels of grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and reading comprehension difficulties between HUMSS and STEM students without manipulating variables.

The descriptive-comparative approach enabled the researchers to identify patterns of linguistic challenges and determine whether significant differences existed across academic strands. This design was suitable for real-world classroom settings where experimental control is not feasible and where natural variations in learner performance are observed.

2.2 Locale of the Study

This study was conducted at **Kitaotao National High School**, a public secondary institution located in the municipality of Kitaotao in the province of Bukidnon. The research was carried out during the school year in which the investigation took place under the supervision of the school administration and the Department of Education.

Kitaotao is a rural municipality in Southern Bukidnon where Cebuano, Binukid, and Higaonon can be commonly spoken. These linguistic backgrounds influence students' acquisition of English and make the school an appropriate setting for examining grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and reading comprehension difficulties.

Kitaotao National High School offers the **HUMSS** and **STEM** strands for Senior High School learners. The respondents of this study consisted of students from these two strands.

Kitaotao National High School offers the HUMSS and STEM strands for Senior High School students. These learners constituted the respondents of the study, providing an appropriate context for analyzing grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and reading comprehension difficulties within a rural academic setting.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents consisted of 80 Senior High School students from the **HUMSS** and **STEM** strands. These students were enrolled in Grades 11 and 12 at Kitaotao National High School.

Their participation provided a balanced representation of the two academic strands offered by the institution, allowing for meaningful comparative analysis of linguistic difficulties.

2.4 Sampling Procedure

This study employed a purposive sampling method to select the respondents. The target population consisted of Senior High School students enrolled in the HUMSS and STEM strands at Kitaotao National High School. In this method, only students belonging to these two academic strands were included, as they represented the available Senior High School tracks offered by the institution during the conduct of the study.

Purposive sampling was appropriate because the investigation sought to compare linguistic difficulties between HUMSS and STEM students. Selecting respondents based on their strand ensured that the data accurately reflected the linguistic challenges experienced within each academic group. This approach also allowed the researchers to gather reliable information on grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and reading comprehension difficulties among students in a rural educational setting.

The inclusion of HUMSS and STEM students provided a relevant context for examining strand-specific linguistic barriers and determining whether significant differences existed between the two groups.

2.5 Research Instrument

The study utilized a validated survey questionnaire as the primary instrument for data collection. The instrument was specifically designed to measure the linguistic difficulties encountered by Senior High School students at Kitaotao National High School. It was reviewed by experts in English language teaching to ensure clarity, accuracy, and appropriateness for assessing the four linguistic domains examined in the study.

The questionnaire consisted of two main parts corresponding to the variables of the investigation. **Part I** gathered demographic information, including the students' academic strand. **Part II** focused on the linguistic difficulties experienced by HUMSS and STEM students, covering four core areas: grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Each domain contained statements that allowed respondents to indicate the extent of their linguistic challenges using a five-point Likert scale.

The structure of the instrument enabled the researchers to obtain comprehensive data on students' linguistic performance and to compare the levels of difficulty across strands. Its standardized format ensured consistency in responses and facilitated accurate statistical analysis of the linguistic barriers encountered by the respondents.

2.6 Scoring Procedure

The scoring of the researcher-made questionnaire followed a standardized process. Each item will be rated using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 corresponds to Strongly Disagree and 5 corresponds to Strongly Agree. Since all statements are positively worded, higher scores indicate greater linguistic difficulty, while lower scores reflect lesser difficulty.

For each respondent, the scores of the five items under each linguistic component, grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, will be summed and divided by five to obtain the mean score per component. These mean scores will represent the respondent's level of difficulty in each specific linguistic area.

To determine the overall linguistic difficulty, the mean scores of the four components were

averaged, with the resulting overall mean describing the general level of English language difficulty experienced by the respondents.

The computed means served as the basis for descriptive analysis, while inferential statistics, specifically one-way ANOVA, was applied to test for significant differences in linguistic difficulties between HUMSS and STEM students.

The following scale was used to interpret the students' responses:

Rating	Response Category	Scale	Verbal Interpretation
5	Strongly Agree	4.21 – 5.00	Very High Difficulty
	Agree	3.41 – 4.20	High Difficulty
3	Neutral	2.61 – 3.40	Moderate Difficulty
	Disagree	1.81 – 2.60	Low Difficulty
1	Strongly Disagree	1.00 – 1.80	Very Low Difficulty

This scoring procedure provided a standardized method for assessing the extent of linguistic challenges encountered by HUMSS and STEM students. It also ensured consistency in interpreting the levels of difficulty across all four domains included in the study.

2.7. Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in strict adherence to established ethical standards. Prior to the administration of the research instrument, permission was secured from the school principal of Kitaotao National High School. The researchers also coordinated with the appropriate school authorities to ensure that the conduct of the study aligned with institutional guidelines.

Informed consent was obtained from all participating HUMSS and STEM students after the researchers clearly explained the nature, objectives, and procedures of the investigation on linguistic difficulties. The respondents were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation. They were informed that their identities would not be disclosed and that all information gathered would be used solely for academic purposes.

Furthermore, participants were assured that they had the right to refuse to answer any item they found uncomfortable and could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. These measures ensured that the rights, welfare, and privacy of all respondents were fully protected throughout the duration of the research.

2.8.Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection for this study was carried out through scheduled visits to Kitaotao National High School. Prior to administering the survey, the researchers coordinated with the school principal and the Senior High School department to ensure that the process aligned with institutional protocols and that the respondents were available during designated class periods. This coordination helped establish an orderly and supportive environment for the conduct of the study.

During the scheduled visits, the researchers distributed the validated survey questionnaires to HUMSS and STEM students inside their respective classrooms. The purpose of the study was briefly explained, and respondents were given clear instructions on how to accomplish the instrument measuring their linguistic difficulties in grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.

Students were allotted sufficient time to complete the questionnaire to ensure thoughtful and accurate responses. Completed questionnaires were collected immediately after the allotted period to maintain the integrity of the data. Throughout the process, the cooperation of teachers and students contributed to the smooth administration of the instrument. Minor adjustments in scheduling were made to accommodate class routines and ensure that all identified respondents were reached.

Despite these minor adjustments, the data gathering procedure was completed within the planned timeframe. The support of school personnel and the responsiveness of the students ensured that the collection of data proceeded efficiently and without significant disruptions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents, analyzes, and interprets the data gathered on the linguistic difficulties experienced by Senior High School students of Kitaotao National High School. The results are

organized according to the sequence of the specific problems outlined in the Statement of the Problem, beginning with the demographic profile of the respondents, followed by the levels of linguistic difficulties across grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, and concluding with the test of significant differences between HUMSS and STEM students.

3.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic distribution of the respondents according to academic strand.

Table 1. *Demographic Profile of Respondents According to Strand*

Strand	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
HUMSS	40	50.0	50.0	50.0
STEM	40	50.0	50.0	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

The table shows that 40 students (50%) belong to the HUMSS strand and 40 students (50%) belong to the STEM strand. This equal distribution ensures balanced representation of both groups and provides a reliable basis for comparing linguistic difficulties across strands.

3.2 Levels of Linguistic Difficulties of the Respondents

The linguistic difficulties of the respondents were examined across four domains: vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and reading comprehension. All computed means fall within the **Moderate Difficulty** range, indicating that students experience noticeable but not severe challenges in English language proficiency. This pattern suggests a broad, systemic linguistic concern rather than isolated weaknesses.

High School students across grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. The mean scores for each indicator reveal that students generally experience moderate levels of difficulty in all four domains.

3.2.1 Vocabulary Difficulties

Table 2 shows that vocabulary difficulties obtained the highest overall mean (3.29), which falls within the moderate difficulty range.

Table 2. *Vocabulary Difficulties*

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
I often do not understand spoken English better than written academic English.	3.36	Moderate Difficulty
I find many English words in textbooks difficult to understand (e.g., hypotenuse, osmosis, paradox, alliteration, epiphany, syllogism).	3.33	Moderate Difficulty
I have difficulty expressing my ideas in English because of limited vocabulary.	3.32	Moderate Difficulty
I struggle with subject-specific English terms (e.g., enjambment in Literature, hegemony in Social Studies, phenomenology in Philosophy).	3.28	Moderate Difficulty
I need to translate English words into my first language to understand lessons.	3.16	Moderate Difficulty
OVERALL MEAN	3.29	Moderate Difficulty

Legend:

Rating	Response Category	Scale	Verbal Interpretation
5	Strongly Agree	4.21 – 5.00	Very High Difficulty
4	Agree	3.41 – 4.20	High Difficulty
3	Neutral	2.61 – 3.40	Moderate Difficulty

2	Disagree	1.81 – 2.60	Low Difficulty
1	Strongly Disagree	1.00 – 1.80	Very Low Difficulty

As shown in the table, the result may indicate that students experience noticeable but not extreme difficulty in understanding, remembering, and using English words in academic contexts. The highest item mean, which refers to difficulty understanding spoken English compared with written academic English, suggests that vocabulary problems may become more evident when students process words in real time. This may be because spoken input requires learners to recognize pronunciation, meaning, and context simultaneously, whereas written texts allow more time for rereading and checking meaning.

Several studies support this interpretation. Kilag et al. (2024) reported that Filipino Senior High School learners experience linguistic challenges across vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and comprehension, and that these challenges are shaped by instructional support, motivation, and learning environment. Similarly, Urlanda et al. (2025) found that students were greatly challenged by vocabulary acquisition in learning English as a second language. Nation (2013) also emphasized that vocabulary learning requires repeated exposure, meaningful use, and opportunities to encounter words across varied contexts. These findings suggest that the vocabulary difficulty observed in the present study may be linked to limited opportunities for meaningful and repeated word use rather than to students' ability alone.

This indicates that the respondents have not yet achieved the expected level of linguistic proficiency across the four domains assessed. All computed means fall within the Moderate Difficulty range, suggesting that students continue to experience noticeable challenges in grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. This pattern reflects broader trends in second language acquisition research, where learners often show uneven and incomplete development across linguistic domains when exposed to limited meaningful input (Nation, 2013; Schmitt, 2010).

However, the result should be interpreted cautiously. Although vocabulary registered the highest mean in this study, it does not prove that

vocabulary difficulty causes weakness in the other domains. Grabe and Stoller (2013) explain that reading comprehension is shaped by multiple interacting factors, including vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge, fluency, motivation, and strategic reading processes. This does not invalidate the present finding; rather, it implies that vocabulary should be viewed as one important factor operating together with background knowledge, text familiarity, motivation, grammar, and reading strategies.

The practical significance of this finding is that vocabulary instruction should not be limited to memorizing word lists or translating terms into the first language. Students may benefit more from repeated exposure to words through reading passages, oral discussions, strand-related examples, and contextualized activities. For STEM students, this may include explicit teaching of technical terms used in science and mathematics texts, while HUMSS students may need stronger support in abstract, literary, and social science vocabulary. In this way, vocabulary development becomes strand-responsive and directly connected to the academic language demands students encounter in their subjects.

The vocabulary results also reveal an inter-domain relationship. Limited vocabulary may make reading passages harder to understand, may reduce confidence in speaking, and may slow the application of grammar because students must first search for appropriate words before organizing ideas. Therefore, vocabulary difficulty should be interpreted as a central but interconnected challenge. Addressing it through contextual, repeated, and strand-based exposure may help improve students' access to other language skills without assuming a direct causal effect.

This difficulty becomes more pronounced when considering that vocabulary acquisition is cumulative and incremental. Learners must encounter words multiple times, across varied contexts, before they can internalize their meanings and use them productively. Without consistent exposure to authentic language—whether through reading, listening, or interaction—students are unable to build the depth and breadth of vocabulary needed for fluent comprehension and expression. Nation (2013) further explains that vocabulary knowledge involves both form and meaning, and mastery

requires repeated encounters that reinforce phonological, orthographic, and semantic aspects of each word. When students lack these repeated encounters, their lexical representations remain weak, making retrieval slow and usage inaccurate.

Moreover, Schmitt (2010) highlights that vocabulary learning is heavily dependent on meaningful engagement with language. If students primarily encounter English in decontextualized or mechanical exercises, their opportunities for natural vocabulary growth diminish. This aligns with Krashen's assertion that language acquisition thrives in environments where learners are immersed in comprehensible input that is both interesting and relevant. When such input is limited, students may rely on rote memorization rather than genuine acquisition, leading to superficial understanding and difficulty applying vocabulary in real communicative situations.

The high difficulty in vocabulary also has implications for the other linguistic domains. Vocabulary serves as the foundation for reading comprehension, grammatical understanding, and even pronunciation. Anderson's Cognitive Processing Theory suggests that limited vocabulary increases cognitive load during reading and listening tasks, as learners must allocate more mental resources to decoding unfamiliar words (Anderson, 2010). Thus, the vocabulary challenges observed in the study may contribute to the moderate difficulty levels recorded in the other domains

3.2.2 Grammar Difficulties

Table 3 shows that grammar difficulties which obtained an overall mean of 3.13, interpreted as moderate difficulty.

Table 3. *Grammar Difficulties*

Indicator	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
I feel less confident using English grammar in casual conversation than in school tasks.	3.28	Moderate Difficulty
I find it difficult to use correct verb tenses when writing in English.	3.20	Moderate Difficulty

I am confused about the subject-verb agreement in academic writing.	3.11	Moderate Difficulty
I find it difficult to use correct grammar when speaking English.	3.08	Moderate Difficulty
I struggle to apply grammar rules even after they are explained in class (e.g., subject-verb agreement, verb tenses, pronoun use, prepositions, modifiers).	2.98	Moderate Difficulty
OVERALL MEAN	3.13	Moderate difficulty

Legend:

Rating	Response Category	Scale	Verbal Interpretation
5	Strongly Agree	4.21 – 5.00	Very High Difficulty
4	Agree	3.41 – 4.20	High Difficulty
3	Neutral	2.61 – 3.40	Moderate Difficulty
2	Disagree	1.81 – 2.60	Low Difficulty
1	Strongly Disagree	1.00 – 1.80	Very Low Difficulty

The result suggests that students experience noticeable challenges in applying grammatical rules, particularly in verb tense, subject-verb agreement, and grammar use in speaking and writing. The item with the highest mean indicates that students feel less confident using English grammar in casual conversation than in school tasks. This pattern implies that students can recognize grammar rules during structured activities but may find it harder to apply them spontaneously when communicating.

Grammar difficulty also interacts with other domains. Limited vocabulary may restrict the ideas students can express, while pronunciation concerns may reduce their willingness to practice grammar orally. Reading comprehension may also

be affected when students encounter long sentences or unfamiliar structures. Therefore, grammar should be addressed as part of an integrated language program rather than as a separate set of rules. This integrated approach may improve coherence across vocabulary, reading, speaking, and writing activities while maintaining caution in interpreting the findings as descriptive rather than causal.

The moderate mean does not necessarily mean that students lack grammar knowledge completely, nor does it establish that grammar difficulty causes poor academic performance. Larsen-Freeman (2015) explains that grammar learning becomes more effective when rules are connected to meaningful language use rather than treated only as isolated forms. This view suggests that grammar difficulty may affect students' confidence and clarity, but its influence may depend on the type of task, teacher feedback, and opportunities for applied practice.

This finding is consistent with studies showing that Filipino learners often experience difficulty in grammar and sentence construction. Kilag et al. (2024) identified grammar as one of the major linguistic hurdles among Senior High School students in the Philippines, while Joven et al. (2025) reported grammar gaps in academic writing among senior high school learners. Urlanda et al. (2025) likewise noted that grammar and sentence structure were among the challenges encountered by learners of English as a second language. These studies support the view that grammar difficulty is not an isolated issue but part of a broader pattern of English language learning challenges.

The practical significance of the grammar result is that instruction should move beyond rule explanation toward guided application. Students may need short grammar lessons connected to actual writing, speaking, and reading tasks. For HUMSS learners, grammar support may focus on constructing arguments, interpreting literary texts, and writing reflective or analytical responses. For STEM learners, grammar support may emphasize clear reporting of procedures, explanations of processes, and accurate use of tense in technical descriptions. Such strand-based grammar instruction can make rules more meaningful because students apply them in the types of academic communication required in their strand.

This developing grammatical competence also affects students' broader communicative performance. Hymes (1972) argues that communicative competence involves more than grammatical accuracy, including sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. When students struggle with verb tenses, agreement, or syntactic organization, they may experience reduced confidence in speaking and writing tasks, leading to limited engagement in classroom interactions. Furthermore, insufficient mastery of grammatical structures may increase cognitive load during language processing, as learners must devote more mental effort to formulating accurate sentences.

3.2.3 Pronunciation Difficulties

Indicator	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
I feel nervous speaking English because I might mispronounce words.	3.48	Moderate Difficulty

Table 4. *Pronunciation Difficulties*

I struggle with pronunciation, which affects how well others understand me when I speak English.	3.22	Moderate Difficulty
I avoid speaking English in class because of pronunciation concerns	3	Moderate Difficulty
I find English sounds that do not exist in Filipino or Bisaya hard to pronounce (e.g. /f/ in fan, /v/ in victory, /th/ in think, /z/ in zebra, long vowels like /ee/ in seat).	2.98	Moderate Difficulty

I am unsure how to pronounce unfamiliar English words correctly (e.g., Colonel, dept, psychology, choir, receipt, island).	2.92	Moderate Difficulty
OVERALL MEAN	3.12	Moderate Difficulty

Legend:

Rating	Response Category	Scale	Verbal Interpretation
5	Strongly Agree	4.21 – 5.00	Very High Difficulty
4	Agree	3.41 – 4.20	High Difficulty
3	Neutral	2.61 – 3.40	Moderate Difficulty
2	Disagree	1.81 – 2.60	Low Difficulty
1	Strongly Disagree	1.00 – 1.80	Very Low Difficulty

From this, it is evident that pronunciation difficulties obtained an overall mean of 3.12, interpreted as moderate difficulty. The highest mean is found in the item indicating nervousness when speaking English because of possible mispronunciation. This suggests that pronunciation difficulty is not only a matter of producing individual sounds but also involves confidence, anxiety, and willingness to participate in oral communication. Students may understand English words in written form but still hesitate to use them orally when they are unsure of stress, intonation, or sound production.

This interpretation is supported by recent studies on Filipino learners. Abellana et al. (2025) found that targeted public speaking workshops can enhance Grade 12 learners' speech delivery skills, suggesting that guided oral practice and structured feedback can help address confidence and delivery issues. Kilag et al. (2024) also identified pronunciation as a major hurdle in English education, while Derwing and Munro (2015) emphasized that intelligibility, exposure, and evidence-based feedback are central to second-language pronunciation development. These findings align with the present result and suggest that pronunciation problems may be

shaped by both linguistic background and classroom exposure.

Nevertheless, the results should not be interpreted as proof that pronunciation difficulty directly causes low speaking performance. Urlanda et al. (2025), for instance, found that pronunciation was the least challenging area among their respondents, while vocabulary was the most difficult. This contrasting evidence suggests that pronunciation difficulty may vary across schools, regions, language backgrounds, and instructional practices. In the present study, pronunciation remains moderately difficult, but it appears to be closely tied to confidence and classroom participation rather than sound production alone.

The practical significance of this finding is that pronunciation instruction should be supportive, low-pressure, and communicative. Teachers may provide short pronunciation drills, listening models, peer practice, and corrective feedback that emphasizes intelligibility rather than perfect native-like pronunciation. For HUMSS students, oral activities may include speeches, debates, and literary presentations, while STEM students may practice explaining processes, reporting experiments, and presenting technical concepts. Such strand-based oral tasks can help students practice pronunciation in meaningful academic situations.

Pronunciation is also connected to vocabulary, grammar, and reading. Students who are unsure how to pronounce unfamiliar words may avoid using those words in speech, which can limit vocabulary practice. Anxiety about pronunciation may also reduce opportunities to apply grammar orally. In reading, unfamiliar spelling-sound relationships may slow word recognition. Thus, pronunciation difficulty should be addressed as part of a wider language development process, particularly through activities that combine listening, speaking, vocabulary use, and comprehension.

Hymes' framework further emphasizes that intelligibility is central to communicative competence, and challenges in pronunciation can diminish learners' confidence and willingness to participate in oral tasks (Hymes, 1972). When students are unsure of their ability to articulate words correctly, they may avoid speaking opportunities, reducing the communicative

practice necessary for improvement. Krashen's view on meaningful input reinforces this interpretation: without adequate exposure to comprehensible and engaging spoken language, learners may struggle to acquire pronunciation features naturally (Krashen, 1982). These factors collectively explain the moderate difficulty recorded in this domain and highlight the need for richer auditory input and more frequent oral communication practice

3.2.4 Reading Comprehension Difficulties

Table 5 shows that reading comprehension difficulties obtained an overall mean of 3.11, interpreted as moderate difficulty.

Table 5. *Reading Comprehension Difficulties*

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
I often struggle to identify or pronounce unfamiliar words when reading (e.g., figuring out the meaning of epitome, quay, yacht, colonel, subtle).	3.21	Moderate Difficulty
I have difficulty understanding long English reading passages, especially when they contain complex vocabulary or ideas.	3.12	Moderate Difficulty
I struggle to identify the main idea of academic texts written in English, particularly when the content is unfamiliar.	3.08	Moderate Difficulty
I find it challenging to make inferences or understand implied meanings when reading in English texts.	3.08	Moderate Difficulty
I have difficulty clearly stating the main point or purpose after reading even a short English passage.	3.03	Moderate Difficulty

OVERALL MEAN	3.11	Moderate Difficulty
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Legend:

Rating	Response Category	Scale	Verbal Interpretation
5	Strongly Agree	4.21 – 5.00	Very High Difficulty
4	Agree	3.41 – 4.20	High Difficulty
3	Neutral	2.61 – 3.40	Moderate Difficulty
2	Disagree	1.81 – 2.60	Low Difficulty
1	Strongly Disagree	1.00 – 1.80	Very Low Difficulty

The highest item mean refers to difficulty identifying or pronouncing unfamiliar words while reading, which suggests that comprehension challenges may begin at the word-recognition level before students can fully process the meaning of a passage. This indicates that reading comprehension is not limited to understanding main ideas; it also involves vocabulary knowledge, decoding, fluency, background knowledge, and inferential thinking.

Supporting studies show that reading comprehension remains a persistent concern among Filipino learners. Idulog et al. (2023) noted that Filipino students often struggle with reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and critical thinking skills, and identified resources, teacher training, and culturally relevant materials as possible areas for improvement. Rudas (2026) similarly emphasized gaps among Senior High School students in vocabulary, information retrieval, and inferencing. Kilag et al. (2024) also identified comprehension skills as one of the linguistic challenges encountered by Senior High School learners. These studies support the present result by showing that comprehension difficulty is multifaceted and often connected with broader literacy conditions.

However, the relationship between vocabulary and comprehension should be treated carefully. Although vocabulary difficulty appears related to reading challenges in this study, Anji et al. (2025) found no significant correlation between lexical ability and reading comprehension among Senior

High School students. This contrasting finding suggests that comprehension may also depend on factors such as prior knowledge, text structure awareness, motivation, metacognitive strategies, and critical thinking. Therefore, the present result should be understood as evidence of association among related skills rather than proof that one domain directly causes another.

The practical significance of the reading comprehension result is that students need explicit support in vocabulary previewing, identifying main ideas, making inferences, and monitoring comprehension while reading. STEM students may need strategies for handling dense technical texts, interpreting procedures, and understanding discipline-specific terminology. HUMSS students may need support in analyzing abstract ideas, implied meanings, figurative language, and argumentative or literary texts. A strand-sensitive reading program can therefore provide different types of scaffolding while still strengthening shared comprehension skills.

The findings also show important inter-domain relationships. Vocabulary affects access to meaning, grammar affects the interpretation of sentence relationships, pronunciation may influence word recognition and oral reading, and comprehension depends on the coordination of all these skills. Thus, reading difficulty should be addressed through integrated literacy instruction rather than isolated comprehension questions. A deeper synthesis of Tables 3 to 6 suggests that students' difficulties are moderate across domains because English learning requires simultaneous development of word knowledge, structural accuracy, oral confidence, and meaning-making strategies.

The consistent pattern of moderate difficulty across all domains suggests a broader linguistic challenge rather than isolated weaknesses. Webb and Nation (2017) emphasize that linguistic skills are interdependent; weaknesses in vocabulary and grammar often cascade into pronunciation and reading comprehension difficulties. Krashen's theory points to insufficient comprehensible input, Hymes' theory highlights gaps in communicative competence, and Anderson's theory explains the lack of automatization in essential cognitive processes. Taken together, these perspectives provide a coherent explanation for the respondents' performance. The present findings align with these established patterns,

underscoring the need for enriched input, communicative practice, scaffolded grammar instruction, and structured reading interventions to support learners' progression toward higher levels of linguistic proficiency.

3.3 Independent Samples t-Test Results on Students' Linguistic Difficulties When Grouped According to Strand

Table 6. Grammar Difficulty Statistics

Linguistic Difficulty	Strand	Mean	Deviation Standard	T-Test	Sig (2-tailed)	Remarks
GRAMMAR DIFFICULTY MEAN	HUMSS STEM	3.34 2.93	.589 .769	2.68	.009	Significant

The analysis revealed that Grammar Difficulties was the only linguistic domain that showed a statistically significant difference between the two academic strands. HUMSS students reported higher grammatical difficulty ($M = 3.3400$) compared with STEM students ($M = 2.9300$). The independent samples t-test yielded a p-value of 0.009, which is below the 0.05 significance threshold, indicating that the difference in mean scores is statistically meaningful.

This shows that HUMSS students tend to experience greater challenges in grammatical structures, sentence construction, and rule application than their STEM counterparts. The higher HUMSS mean may be associated with the nature of HUMSS coursework, which requires more frequent engagement with extended writing tasks, literary analysis, and complex syntactic structures. In contrast, STEM writing is typically more structured and concise, which may reduce opportunities for grammatical errors. This interpretation aligns with Joven et al. (2025), who found that humanities students often encounter more advanced grammatical difficulties due to the linguistic demands of their academic tasks.

Table 7. Pronunciation Difficulty Statistics

Linguistic Difficulty	Strand	Mean	Deviation Standard	T-Test	Sig (2-tailed)	Remarks
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Difficulty	Strand	Mean	Deviation Standard	T-Test	Sig (2-tailed)	Remarks
PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTY MEAN	HUMSS STEM	3.21 3.03	.636 .833	1.116	.268	Not Significant

The analysis showed that pronunciation difficulty did not significantly differ between HUMSS and STEM students. HUMSS students obtained a mean score of 3.21 ($SD = 0.636$), while STEM students obtained a mean score of 3.03 ($SD = 0.833$). The computed t-value of 1.116 and corresponding p-value of 0.268 exceed the 0.05 significance threshold, indicating that the difference in mean scores is not statistically meaningful. As a result, the null hypothesis is accepted.

These findings indicate that students from both strands experience similar levels of pronunciation difficulty, suggesting that academic specialization does not substantially influence learners' challenges with English sounds, stress patterns, or articulation. This pattern aligns with studies such as Kilag et al. (2023), which found that pronunciation challenges among Filipino learners are largely shaped by phonological transfer from local languages rather than by academic track. Likewise, Dita (2022) noted that pronunciation anxiety and limited exposure to authentic spoken English are common across diverse learner groups, supporting the idea that strand differences may not significantly affect pronunciation outcomes.

Table 8. Vocabulary Difficulty Statistics

Linguistic Difficulty	Strand	Mean	Deviation Standard	T-Test	Sig (2-tailed)	Remarks
VOCABULARY DIFFICULTY MEAN	HUMSS STEM	3.48 3.21	.496 .818	1.124	.264	Not Significant

The analysis indicated that vocabulary difficulty does not significantly differ between HUMSS and STEM students. HUMSS students obtained a mean score of 3.38 (SD = 0.496), while STEM students obtained a mean score of 3.21 (SD = 0.818). The computed t-value of 1.124 and corresponding p-value of 0.264 exceed the 0.05 significance threshold, demonstrating that the difference in mean scores is not statistically significant. Accordingly, the null hypothesis is accepted.

These suggest that students from both strands experience comparable levels of vocabulary difficulty, indicating that academic specialization does not substantially influence learners' challenges with word meaning, academic terminology, or lexical processing. This pattern aligns with Nation (2021), who emphasized that vocabulary development is strongly shaped by exposure and context rather than by academic track. Similarly, Torres et al. (2023) found that Filipino ESL learners across different learning groups tend to rely on memorization and translation strategies, which may explain why vocabulary challenges appear consistently across strands.

Although HUMSS students reported a slightly higher mean score, the absence of statistical significance implies that this difference may reflect normal variation rather than meaningful strand-based disparity. Both groups likely encounter similar limitations in exposure to authentic English input, access to reading materials, and opportunities for contextual vocabulary learning—factors commonly observed in rural educational settings.

Table 9. *Reading Comprehension Difficulty Statistics*

Linguistic Difficulty	Strand	Mean	Deviation Standard	T-Test	Sig (2-tailed)	Remarks
READING COMPREHENSION	HUMSS	3.16	.633	.649	.518	Not Significant
	STEM	3.06	.740			
DIFFICULTY						

MEAN

The independent samples t-test indicated that reading comprehension difficulty does not significantly differ between HUMSS and STEM students. HUMSS students obtained a mean score of 3.16 (SD = 0.633), while STEM students obtained a mean score of 3.06 (SD = 0.740). The computed t-value of 0.649 and corresponding p-value of 0.518 exceed the 0.05 significance threshold, demonstrating that the difference in mean scores is not statistically significant. Consequently, the null hypothesis is accepted.

This suggest that students from both strands experience similar levels of difficulty in reading comprehension, including challenges in understanding long passages, identifying main ideas, and making inferences. Although HUMSS students reported a slightly higher mean score, the absence of statistical significance indicates that this variation is likely due to normal differences among individuals rather than meaningful strand-based disparity.

Table 10. *Overall Linguistic Difficulty*

Linguistic Difficulty	Strand	Mean	Deviation Standard	T-Test	Sig (2-tailed)	Remarks
OVERALL	HUMSS	2.61	.395	1.59	.117	Not Significant
DIFFICULTY	STEM	2.45	.566			
MEAN						

The analysis of overall linguistic difficulty showed no significant difference between HUMSS and STEM students ($p = .117$). Although HUMSS students recorded a slightly higher overall mean ($M = 2.6190$) than STEM students ($M = 2.4460$), this difference did not reach statistical significance. This indicates that when linguistic challenges are viewed holistically, students from both strands demonstrate comparable levels of difficulty across vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and reading comprehension.

When examining each linguistic domain individually, the results revealed a consistent

pattern: strand membership does not substantially influence students' linguistic difficulties, with one notable exception. Among the four domains, only Grammar Difficulties (GDMEAN) yielded a statistically significant difference between HUMSS and STEM students. HUMSS students reported a higher mean ($M = 3.3400$) than STEM students ($M = 2.9300$), and the corresponding p-value (0.009) fell below the 0.05 significance threshold. This indicates a meaningful difference in grammatical difficulty between the two groups.

While the design does not allow causal conclusions, the higher HUMSS mean suggests that HUMSS students may encounter greater challenges in grammatical structures, sentence construction, and rule application compared to their STEM counterparts. This pattern may be associated with the writing-intensive nature of HUMSS coursework, which requires more frequent engagement with extended essays, literary analyses, and complex syntactic forms. In contrast, STEM writing tends to be more structured and concise, potentially reducing opportunities for grammatical errors.

For the remaining domains—Pronunciation Difficulties (PDMEAN), Vocabulary Difficulties (VDMEAN), and Reading Comprehension Difficulties (RCDMEAN)—the p-values (.268, .264, and .518, respectively) exceeded the 0.05 threshold. Although HUMSS students consistently showed slightly higher mean scores across these areas, the differences were not statistically significant. This suggests that both HUMSS and STEM students experience similar levels of difficulty in pronunciation, vocabulary use, and reading comprehension.

Taken together, the findings indicate that strand membership does not substantially shape students' linguistic challenges, except in the area of grammar. HUMSS students appear to face more difficulty with grammatical competence, but both groups share comparable struggles in vocabulary development, pronunciation accuracy, and reading comprehension.

This pattern highlights the need for strand-responsive grammar instruction for HUMSS students and general linguistic support for learners across both strands

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