

LANGUAGE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN FILIPINO-BASED SUBJECTS AMONG ENGLISH-DOMINANT PUPILS IN THE PHILIPPINES

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Abstract

Despite the growing body of research on bilingual education in the Philippines, limited attention has been given to the “reverse” bilingual context, specifically, English-dominant learners navigating Filipino as a subject in the early grades. Much of the existing literature focuses on Filipino-dominant pupils acquiring English, leaving a gap in understanding the challenges experienced by young learners whose primary language exposure is English but who are required to develop academic proficiency in Filipino. This study explored the language learning difficulties faced by English-dominant pupils in Grades 1 to 3 enrolled in Filipino-based subjects. Employing a survey research design and validated questionnaires, the research involved a stratified random sample of pupils and a complete enumeration of their Filipino subject teachers in an English-dominant school setting in the Philippines. Findings revealed that students experienced varying degrees of difficulty across listening, speaking, reading, and writing, with speaking being the most problematic. These difficulties, particularly in productive language skills, were shown to hinder active participation and decrease motivation, even within supportive classroom environments. The study emphasizes the importance of instructional designs that not only bridge comprehension gaps but also foster confidence and engagement through expressive language development. It supports the broader call for inclusive language policies and classroom practices that empower young learners in linguistically diverse contexts.

Keywords: language learning difficulties, Filipino-based subjects, bilingual learners, multilingual learners, early grade education

1. Introduction

Language is a fundamental tool for learning, communication, and cultural transmission in any educational setting (Bonvillain, 2019). In the Philippine context, the Department of Education (DepEd), promotes bilingualism through the use of both Filipino and English as mediums of instruction (DepEd, 2016). English is generally used for science, mathematics, and technology, while Filipino serves as the medium for subjects such as araling panlipunan (social studies), panitikan (literature) and Filipino language. Particularly in the early grades, Filipino is taught both as a subject and as a language of instruction. Although this bilingual framework aims to cultivate national identity alongside global competence, it presents challenges for learners whose dominant language is English.

In this study, *English-dominant pupils* refer to learners whose primary language of communication at home and in everyday interaction is English, who have greater expressive and receptive proficiency in English than in Filipino, and whose exposure to Filipino is limited largely to formal schooling contexts. Such learners are commonly found in private or urban schools where English is widely used in family discourse and media consumption (Coetzee & Van Rooy, 2021; Salomone & Salomone, 2022). Consequently, they often demonstrate comparatively lower proficiency in Filipino.

This imbalance creates difficulties when pupils are required to engage in Filipino-based subjects delivered primarily in Filipino. These subjects demand academic vocabulary, syntactic control, reading comprehension, and oral fluency that many English-dominant learners have not fully developed. Limited exposure reduces opportunities for naturalistic acquisition, leading to challenges in vocabulary retention (Parba, 2021), sentence construction, reading comprehension, and oral expression (Catanes, 2025). The cognitive and affective demands of functioning in a less dominant language may further hinder participation and motivation (Buhisan et al., 2024).

This issue is further complicated by instructional practices and curriculum designs that assume a baseline proficiency in Filipino. Teachers may lack the training or resources to differentiate instruction for English-dominant learners, leading to gaps in understanding and engagement (Garcia, 2015). Consequently, these pupils

may develop negative attitudes toward the Filipino language, experience lower performance in Filipino subjects, and miss out on the cultural and identity-building functions that Filipino education is meant to serve.

While numerous studies in the Philippines have explored bilingualism and multilingual education (e.g., Dangan & Cruz 2021; Martin 2015; Tupas, 2015), few have focused specifically on the challenges faced by English-dominant pupils in Filipino-based subjects. Existing literature tends to focus on mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) and its implementation in the country (Apolonio, 2022; Cabansag, 2016; Dagalea et al., 2022; Metila et al., 2016) or on learners transitioning from Filipino or regional languages to English (Perfecto, 2022; Tweedie et al., 2018). The reverse case students transitioning from English to Filipino in a formal academic setting has not been adequately examined. As such, there is limited research on how educational practices can be improved to support English-dominant learners in developing Filipino language competence especially among young learners.

This study seeks to address that gap by examining the specific language learning difficulties experienced by English-dominant pupils in Filipino-based subjects. The study sought answer to the question: What specific language learning difficulties do English-dominant pupils face in Filipino-based subjects? Specifically, the study (i) identified common difficulties experienced by English-dominant pupils in Filipino-based subjects in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing; and (ii) determined common difficulties experienced by English-dominant pupils in Filipino-based subjects as observed by the teachers.

By doing so, this study contributes not only to the improvement of Filipino language instruction but also to broader educational goals, including Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), which emphasize inclusive and equitable education for all learners, regardless of linguistic background.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in sociocultural and bilingual language acquisition theories that explain how English-dominant pupils develop proficiency in Filipino in early-grade classrooms. Grounded in Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), language learning is viewed as a socially mediated process in which cognitive development occurs through interaction with more knowledgeable others. Central to this framework is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learners acquire new skills through guided support and scaffolding. Empirical classroom research shows that structured peer collaboration and teacher scaffolding significantly enhance second language development among young learners (Cruz & Ausa, 2025; Mendoza & Cruz, 2024). The speaking difficulties identified in this study may therefore reflect limited opportunities for scaffolded expressive use of Filipino.

The study also draws on Jim Cummins' distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 2017). This framework differentiates conversational fluency from the more cognitively demanding academic language required for formal schooling. Research indicates that academic proficiency in a second language develops more slowly and requires sustained exposure, explicit instruction, and meaningful practice (Cruz, 2016; Torres & Ortega-Dela Cruz, 2024). Thus, English-dominant pupils may understand conversational Filipino yet encounter challenges in academic and productive domains. These theoretical and empirical foundations support the study's emphasis on scaffolded expressive practice and confidence-building pedagogy in linguistically diverse classrooms.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a survey research design, a quantitative method used to collect standardized data from a sample to describe trends, attitudes, or behaviors within a population (Creswell & Creswell, 2017 in Ortega-Dela Cruz, 2020). It is effective for examining language learning difficulties among Grades 1–3 pupils in Filipino-based subjects, especially in predominantly English-speaking schools, such as those in San Pedro, Laguna, Philippines. This design allows researchers to efficiently gather insights from students, and teachers, about common challenges, helping to identify patterns and inform interventions in early language education.

2.2 Research Participants

The primary respondents were Grade 1–3 pupils identified as English-dominant and enrolled in Filipino-based subjects. For this study, pupils were classified as English-dominant if they met the following criteria: (1) enrollment in an English-medium curriculum, (2) parent report indicating that English was used in more than 60% of daily home interactions, and (3) teacher confirmation that English was the pupil's strongest expressive language.

Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure proportional representation across six classes. Using Yamane's (1967, as cited in Israel, 2009) formula with a 5% margin of error and a population of 158, a sample size

of 114 pupils was determined, with 19 randomly selected from each class. Pupils completed a survey on their language learning difficulties in Filipino-based subjects. In addition, all six Filipino subject teachers participated through total enumeration. Their responses provided complementary perspectives that helped contextualize and corroborate the pupils' self-reported experiences, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges encountered in learning Filipino.

2.3 Instrumentation

To identify language learning difficulties, this study employed an adapted version of the *Language Skills and Learning Difficulties* survey by Khasawneh (2021), designed for both pupils and teachers. The instrument assessed four key language domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, using a three-point Likert scale. Two versions were developed: the pupil version measured self-reported challenges in learning Filipino, while the teacher version evaluated overall class performance through classroom observations. The pupil version included items assessing understanding of spoken Filipino, ability to follow instructions, sentence formation, expression of ideas, reading comprehension, and written expression. Responses were recorded using a three-point scale with clearly defined cut-points: 3 (2.34–3.00=Proficient/Easy)-the task is performed independently and consistently with little to no difficulty; 2 (1.67–2.33=Developing/Sometimes Difficult)-the task is performed with occasional difficulty, requiring some assistance or repetition; and 1 (1.00–1.66=Very Difficult)-the task is performed with frequent difficulty, requiring substantial assistance or often not completed successfully. The teacher version employed a parallel three-point scale to evaluate overall class performance in listening, verbal participation, reading fluency, and writing skills. The cut-points were defined as follows: 3 (2.34–3.00=Most students); 2 (1.67–2.33=Some students)-approximately 30–69% of the class demonstrate the skill; and 1 (1.00–1.66=Few or none)-fewer than 30% of the class demonstrate the skill.

Items were adapted for age-appropriateness through minor lexical simplifications and inclusion of contextualized examples relevant to Filipino classroom experiences. The adapted instrument was reviewed by three experts in bilingual education and early literacy, who evaluated content relevance, clarity, and suitability for Grades 1–3 pupils.

Pilot testing was conducted with 52 pupils and five Filipino subject teachers from a sister school. The pupil questionnaire was interviewer-administered, with items read aloud in small groups to ensure comprehension. While this method enhanced understanding, it may have introduced bias, as pupils could respond according to perceived expectations.

Reliability analysis using SPSS yielded Cronbach's alpha values for the pupil version: Listening (0.865), Speaking (0.823), Reading (0.745), and Writing (0.742); and for the teacher version: Listening (0.784), Speaking (0.822), Reading (0.748), and Writing (0.802), all within acceptable ranges (Taber, 2018).

2.4 Data Analysis

To determine the most prevalent language learning difficulties experienced by pupils, descriptive statistics were applied to the pupil and teacher questionnaire data. Mean scores and standard deviations were computed to summarize pupils' reported difficulties in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in Filipino-based subjects. Teachers' responses were analyzed alongside pupil data to validate the reported difficulties and provide additional insights into the extent and nature of these language difficulties.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Appropriate ethical safeguards were applied to protect participants' rights, privacy, and well-being throughout the research process. Before data collection began, the research proposal was formally submitted to and reviewed by the researcher's Guidance Committee, the institutional body responsible for overseeing ethical compliance in graduate research. In line with established institutional procedures, ethical approval is granted through formal verbal endorsement during an official committee meeting, rather than through the issuance of a separate written ethics approval document.

The study commenced with formal approval from the school administrator following the submission of a request letter outlining the research objectives, methodology, and ethical safeguards. The proposal complied with institutional and national research standards for studies involving minors, including requirements for parental consent, child assent, voluntary participation, and protection from harm.

After approval was granted, informed consent forms were distributed via Google Forms to the parents and guardians of selected Grades 1–3 pupils. The forms clearly described the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, data privacy measures, and the voluntary nature of participation. Only pupils whose parents or guardians provided signed digital consent were included in the study. In addition, pupil assent was obtained through an age-appropriate introductory section in the questionnaire explaining the study in simple terms and asking pupils to indicate their willingness to participate by selecting "Agree" before proceeding. The researcher

explained the assent process and study procedures to the pupils beforehand to ensure understanding and voluntary participation.

To protect confidentiality and privacy, no personally identifiable student information (e.g., names, student numbers, or contact details) was collected in the survey instrument. Each participant was assigned a coded identification number for data recording and analysis purposes. The code list, used solely for monitoring responses, was stored separately and securely, accessible only to the researcher. All data were reported in aggregate form to prevent identification of individual pupils or teachers. Similarly, participating teachers provided informed consent through Google Forms after being fully informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and confidentiality measures.

3. Findings and Discussions

Language Learning Difficulties in the Listening Domain When Learning Filipino-Based Subjects

Table 1 presents the mean scores and standard deviations of learners' experiences in the listening domain within Filipino and Makabansa/Araling Panlipunan subjects. All eight items received a mean score between 1.98 and 2.31, interpreted as "Sometimes Difficult/Developing", indicating that learners generally encounter moderate challenges in understanding spoken Filipino during lessons. The item with the highest mean (M=2.31) was: "When teacher asks you to do a seatwork during Filipino and AP/ Makabansa, is it always easy for you to do it?" This suggests that although seatwork may sometimes be understood, learners still do not feel fully confident. Conversely, the lowest mean score (M=1.98) was observed in the item: "Is it easy for you to understand Filipino words when the teacher doesn't translate them into English?" This reflects a prominent difficulty learners find it significantly harder to understand Filipino when English translations are not provided, highlighting an over-reliance on English as a bridge to comprehension.

Table 1

Pupils' Language Learning Difficulties in Listening Domain (n=114)

Listening Domain	Mean	SD	Mean Interpretation
When teacher asks you to do a seatwork during Filipino and AP/ Makabansa, is it always easy for you to do it?	2.31	0.58	Sometimes Difficult/Developing
When you hear lessons in Filipino and AP/ Makabansa, is it easy for you to think of examples?	2.25	0.64	Sometimes Difficult/Developing
Do you understand how words go together when you listen in Filipino and AP/ Makabansa?	2.29	0.70	Sometimes Difficult/Developing
Is it easy for you to know which words sound the same in Filipino and AP/ Makabansa?	2.27	0.61	Sometimes Difficult/Developing
Is it easy for you to understand spoken Filipino and AP/ Makabansa during listening practice?	2.29	0.72	Sometimes Difficult/Developing
Do you understand the things you hear during Filipino and AP/ Makabansa?	2.21	0.66	Sometimes Difficult/Developing
Is it easy for you to understand Filipino words when the teacher doesn't translate them into English?	1.98	0.69	Sometimes Difficult/Developing
Is it easy to understand Filipino words without extra explanations from teacher?	2.07	0.65	Sometimes Difficult/Developing

Range: 2.34–3.00=Proficient/Easy; 1.67–2.33=Developing/Sometimes Difficult; 1.00–1.66=Very Difficult

These findings align with Jim Cummins' distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Although learners may demonstrate competence in everyday conversational listening, academic listening in Filipino particularly in content-heavy subjects such as Makabansa requires more advanced cognitive and linguistic processing. This distinction situates listening development along a continuum from socially embedded communication to context-reduced academic understanding.

Empirical studies describe complementary instructional conditions along this continuum. Deniega and Neri (2024) and Magno et al. (2024) document how code-switching and translation function as linguistic scaffolds in multilingual and English-dominant classrooms, supporting learners' access to Filipino academic input. In contrast, Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016), Yow (2014), and Andrä et al. (2020) emphasize the role of immersive, multimodal input such as gestures, visuals, and songs in strengthening second-language listening comprehension without

direct translation. Huang (2023) similarly characterizes translation-heavy approaches as shaping how learners process meaning in the target language.

These perspectives converge on a unified view of listening development as a progression supported by varying degrees of linguistic mediation and contextual support. Bilingual scaffolding and immersive multimodal exposure represent interconnected instructional dimensions within the broader development of academic listening proficiency in Filipino.

Language Learning Difficulties in the Speaking Domain When Learning Filipino-Based Subjects

The results from Table 2 reveal that while pupils appear to have ample opportunities to practice speaking Filipino during lessons (M=2.43, SD=0.63), which falls under the "Easy / Proficient" category, they still experience challenges with the actual application of the language in meaningful and spontaneous contexts. The rest of the indicators, such as expressing thoughts in Tagalog (M=2.10), forming complete and grammatically correct sentences (M=2.19), understanding and using new Filipino vocabulary (M=2.18), responding to teachers (M=2.11), and conversing with peers (M=2.05), all fall under the "Sometimes Difficult/Developing" interpretation.

Table 2

Pupils' Language Learning Difficulties in Speaking Domain (n=114)

Speaking Domain	Mean	SD	Mean Interpretation
Do you get to practice speaking Filipino during lessons?	2.43	0.63	Easy / Proficient
Is it easy for you to say your thoughts in Tagalog?	2.10	0.67	Sometimes Difficult/Developing
Can you make complete and correct sentences when speaking?	2.19	0.75	Sometimes Difficult/Developing
Can you easily understand and use new words in Filipino?	2.18	0.66	Sometimes Difficult/Developing
Is it easy for you to answer in Filipino when your teacher speaks in Filipino?	2.11	0.69	Sometimes Difficult/Developing
Is it easy for you to speak Tagalog when talking to your classmates during Filipino and AP/ Makabansa class?	2.05	0.77	Sometimes Difficult/Developing

Range: 2.34–3.00=Proficient/Easy; 1.67–2.33=Developing/Sometimes Difficult; 1.00–1.66=Very Difficult

The findings indicate that while classroom activities provide structured opportunities for oral practice, they do not necessarily translate into fluency in spontaneous speaking. This pattern aligns with Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), which conceptualizes language development as emerging through social interaction and guided participation with more knowledgeable others. When speaking opportunities are largely teacher-led and scripted, with limited peer interaction, opportunities for spontaneous language construction remain constrained.

Empirical literature presents a coherent explanation of this pattern. Muñoz and Cadierno (2021) and Rouse-Malpat et al. (2021) describe oral proficiency as developing more robustly through meaningful, interactive exposure than through repetitive drills. Similarly, Aporbo (2024) and Cruz (2016) identify low confidence and limited vocabulary as central factors shaping learners' hesitation to initiate or sustain second-language conversations. These linguistic and affective dimensions intersect with Bell et al. (2024) and Cruz and Lopez (2022), who frame fluency as shaped not only by practice frequency but also by emotional engagement, cognitive accessibility, and self-efficacy. Jun-Jie and Ying-Liang (2022), along with Maawa and Cruz (2019), further situate speaking performance within the social-affective climate of the classroom, noting how peer presence and fear of error influence participation in bilingual settings.

Complementing this perspective, Stagnitti et al. (2015) document how language-rich environments incorporating songs, chants, and storytelling support oral fluency and willingness to speak among early-grade learners in Mandarin-English bilingual classrooms. Ekeh et al. (2022) and Hamdi et al. (2025) likewise describe play-based and interactive speaking tasks as contexts in which spontaneous production becomes more frequent. Across these studies, structured exposure, peer interaction, emotional safety, and meaningful engagement emerge as interconnected dimensions shaping early learners' spoken language development. The speaking results can be understood within a unified sociocultural and interactionist framework in which fluency develops through socially mediated, emotionally supportive, and communicatively purposeful classroom experiences rather than through scripted practice alone.

Language Learning Difficulties in the Reading Domain When Learning Filipino-Based Subjects

The findings from Table 3 indicate that pupils generally experience moderate difficulties in developing Filipino reading skills, with most indicators falling within the “*Sometimes Difficult/Developing*” range. The highest-rated item, “*Is it easy for you to know how to say Filipino words?*” (M=2.35, SD=0.59), was interpreted as “*Easy/Proficient*,” suggesting that pronunciation and basic decoding are relative strengths. However, this skill does not consistently translate into reading fluency or comprehension.

Lower scores for items such as “*Do you understand what you read in Filipino?*” (M=2.19) highlight persistent challenges in comprehension, consistent with Delos Reyes et al. (2023), who found that learners from English-speaking households often struggle with Filipino texts due to limited exposure and unfamiliar vocabulary and grammar. Morphological and syntactic awareness also pose difficulties, as reflected in “*Is it easy to understand how Filipino words are made?*” (M=2.17) and “*Is it easy for you to read Filipino sentences?*” (M=2.14). Tomas et al. (2021) note that English-dominant learners must navigate linguistic structures that differ from their primary language, while Sandicho and Padilla (2023) emphasize that decoding alone is insufficient for constructing meaning without scaffolded instruction.

These findings suggest that early-grade Filipino reading development involves relative strength in decoding but ongoing challenges in morphosyntactic awareness and comprehension, particularly for English-dominant learners with limited exposure to the target language.

Table 3

Pupils’ Language Learning Difficulties in Reading Domain (n=114)

Reading Domain	Mean	SD	Mean Interpretation
Can you understand stories or lessons in Filipino when the teacher reads them?	2.32	0.64	Sometimes Difficult/Developing
Is it easy for you to pronounce Filipino words?	2.24	0.63	Sometimes Difficult/Developing
Do you understand what you read in Filipino?	2.19	0.59	Sometimes Difficult/Developing
Is it easy to understand how Filipino words are made?	2.17	0.71	Sometimes Difficult/Developing
Is it easy for you to read Filipino sentences?	2.14	0.66	Sometimes Difficult/Developing
Is it easy for you to know how to say Filipino words?	2.35	0.59	Easy / Proficient

Range: 2.34–3.00=Proficient/Easy;1.67–2.33=Developing/Sometimes Difficult;1.00–1.66=Very Difficult

Mendoza and Cruz (2024), as well as Quimsing and Cruz (2024), emphasize the role of culturally and contextually relevant reading materials in supporting second-language learners. When learners encounter unfamiliar Filipino texts without sufficient background knowledge or personal connection to the content, comprehension demands increase, particularly at the level of meaning construction rather than word recognition.

Within second-language reading research, this pattern reflects the distinction between surface-level decoding and deeper comprehension. Learners may demonstrate accurate pronunciation and basic word recognition yet struggle to integrate vocabulary, sentence structure, and contextual cues into coherent understanding. In this view, reading development involves the interaction of decoding skills, lexical knowledge, syntactic processing, and schema activation. Culturally familiar texts function as cognitive and affective anchors, supporting vocabulary access and facilitating connections between prior knowledge and new information.

These perspectives frame second-language reading comprehension as a multilayered process in which linguistic proficiency and contextual familiarity operate simultaneously. Difficulties in comprehension are therefore not limited to phonological decoding but are closely tied to vocabulary depth, syntactic awareness, background knowledge, and reader–text connection.

Language Learning Difficulties in the Writing Domain When Learning Filipino-Based Subjects

The findings from Table 4 indicate that pupils in Grades 1 to 3 experience moderate difficulties in Filipino writing, with all indicators falling within the “*Sometimes Difficult/Developing*” range. While students are developing writing proficiency, consistent challenges remain, particularly with structured or cognitively demanding tasks.

The highest mean score, for “*Is it easy for you to finish writing assignments in Filipino?*” (M=2.31), reflects that completing writing tasks poses moderate difficulty. This aligns with Sarmiento and Ortega-Dela Cruz (2021), who

emphasize that second-language writing requires not only technical skills but also cognitive processes such as organization and idea development, which are more challenging in a non-primary language.

Conversely, the indicator “*Is it easy for you to tell Filipino letters and syllables apart?*” (M=2.25) received one of the lowest mean scores, suggesting that students struggle with orthographic recognition. This corresponds with findings by Dangan and Cruz (2021) and Zhang and Wang (2023), who highlight the challenges bilingual learners face when navigating languages with different orthographic systems, especially with limited exposure.

Moderate difficulty is also reflected in “*Is it easy for you to write examples in Filipino?*” (M=2.29) and “*Can you write a sentence in Filipino?*” (M=2.27), indicating struggles with expressing ideas in writing. Sarmiento and Ortega-Dela Cruz note that limited vocabulary and unfamiliarity with grammatical rules contribute to such challenges.

The lowest mean score, “*Is it easy for you to complete the writing tasks given by your teacher?*” (M=2.21), underscores the substantial cognitive and linguistic demands of producing coherent, structured texts in a second language, as described by Juayong-Caldoza and Ortega-Dela Cruz (2023). These results portray early-grade Filipino writing development as characterized by moderate, consistent challenges across decoding, sentence formation, and task completion.

Table 4

Pupils’ Language Learning Difficulties in Writing Domain (n=114)

Writing Domain	Mean	SD	Mean Interpretation
Is it easy for you to finish writing assignments in Filipino?	2.31	0.58	Sometimes Difficult/Developing
Is it easy for you to tell Filipino letters and syllables apart?	2.25	0.64	Sometimes Difficult/Developing
Is it easy for you to write examples in Filipino?	2.29	0.70	Sometimes Difficult/Developing
Can you write a sentence in Filipino?	2.27	0.61	Sometimes Difficult/Developing
Do you understand the Filipino words/ phrases/ sentences you write during class?	2.29	0.72	Sometimes Difficult/Developing
Is it easy for you to complete the writing tasks given by your teacher?	2.21	0.66	Sometimes Difficult/Developing

Range: 2.34–3.00=Proficient/Easy;1.67–2.33=Developing/Sometimes Difficult;1.00–1.66=Very Difficult

On the other hand, Bhowmik and Kim (2021) and Tsiritakis et al. (2020) report that writing difficulties in early second-language learners can be minimized through structured interventions, including explicit instruction, graphic organizers, and consistent writing routines. Similarly, De Smedt et al. (2019) found that peer-assisted support during guided writing activities enhanced both accuracy and complexity in upper-elementary EFL pupils, while Puranik et al. (2018) observed comparable gains among kindergarten learners. Across these studies, iterative feedback, scaffolded instruction, and gradual release of responsibility emerge as central mechanisms supporting writing development from early to upper primary levels.

These findings converge on the view that writing proficiency develops through frequent, guided, and socially mediated practice. Even when foundational support is present, learners continue to encounter challenges with sentence construction, orthographic conventions, and independent task completion. Structured, stepwise approaches including scaffolded frameworks and culturally relevant prompts serve to strengthen both fluency and expressive competence in Filipino writing.

Language Learning Difficulties of Pupils in Listening Domain as Observed by Teachers

The findings from Table 5 indicate that while a moderate number of students are capable of basic listening comprehension in Filipino, significant challenges persist, particularly in understanding Filipino words without translation or clarification. Most indicators in the listening domain were interpreted as “*Some students,*” indicating that the ability to comprehend spoken Filipino is limited to only a portion of the class.

Table 5

Pupils’ Language Learning Difficulties in Listening Domain as Observed by Teachers (n=6)

Listening Domain	Mean	SD	Mean Interpretation
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Pupils can easily follow instructions given in Filipino-based subjects	2.00	0.00	Some students
Pupils can easily connect what they hear to real-life situations	2.00	0.63	Some students
Pupils can easily understand how sentences are connected while listening	2.00	0.00	Some students
Pupils can easily recognize words that sound similar.	2.33	0.82	Some students
Pupils have enough listening practice to understand spoken Filipino.	1.83	0.41	Some students
Pupils can easily understand spoken Filipino content in class discussions.	1.83	0.41	Some students
Pupils can easily understand Filipino words without needing frequent translations into English.	1.33	0.52	Few or none
Pupils can easily understand Filipino words without frequently asking for explanations from the teacher or classmates.	1.50	0.55	Few or none

Range: 2.34–3.00= Most students;1.67–2.33= Some students;1.00–1.66= Few or none

The findings indicate that pupils face significant challenges in developing independent listening comprehension in Filipino. The two lowest-scoring indicators- “Pupils can easily understand Filipino words without needing frequent translations into English” (M=1.33) and “Pupils can easily understand Filipino words without frequently asking for explanations” (M=1.50) highlight that English remains a primary scaffold for understanding, reflecting limited internalization of Filipino vocabulary among English-dominant learners. This aligns with Magno et al. (2024) and Buhisan et al. (2024), who observed that minimal exposure outside the classroom leads to surface-level comprehension, with students relying on translation rather than developing automatic auditory processing in the second language.

Indicators such as “Pupils can easily follow instructions” and “Pupils can understand how sentences are connected while listening” (both M=2.00) suggest functional listening in predictable or routine classroom situations. This pattern mirrors Butler (2020), who notes that children perform better when they can leverage nonverbal cues, repetition, and familiar structures. However, such performance does not reflect deeper comprehension, particularly in academic contexts with novel vocabulary and complex syntax.

Slightly higher scores in recognizing similar-sounding words (M=2.33) indicate emerging phonological awareness, a foundational skill in listening development. Carruth and Bustos (2019) note that phonemic awareness can progress independently when learners are regularly exposed to spoken language through songs, games, or structured listening activities.

Low scores on having sufficient listening practice (M=1.83) point to gaps in instructional design. Nobles and Cruz (2020) and Krüger (2023) emphasize that effective second-language listening instruction requires repeated exposure, interactive tasks, and gradually increasing linguistic complexity to build comprehension automaticity and confidence.

The teacher-observed data depict listening comprehension as still developing, particularly when translation and explanations are minimized. Pupils demonstrate functional understanding in structured settings but struggle with independent comprehension, indicating the importance of scaffolded, interactive listening tasks, explicit vocabulary teaching, and multimodal oral activities to support both comprehension and confidence in Filipino.

Language Learning Difficulties of Pupils in Speaking Domain as Observed by Teachers

Table 6 shows that pupils’ speaking proficiency in Filipino remains underdeveloped, particularly in spontaneous interaction and structured oral expression. Four of the six indicators were interpreted as “Few or none,” indicating limited active use of Filipino in classroom discourse. The lowest mean score was for “Pupils can form complete and correct sentences when speaking” (M=1.33), highlighting persistent difficulties in grammatical accuracy and sentence construction. As noted by Syakira et al. (2021), insufficient guided practice and modeling often result in fragmented second-language output. In English-dominant environments where Filipino is rarely used outside formal lessons, opportunities for meaningful oral practice are limited.

Beyond linguistic concerns, the implications are broader. Language functions not only as a tool for academic communication but also as a carrier of culture and identity. Limited speaking proficiency may reduce pupils’ participation, confidence, and engagement in culturally grounded classroom discussions. Over time, this may affect both academic performance in Filipino-based subjects and learners’ connection to the sociocultural

meanings embedded in the language. These findings highlight the need for structured, scaffolded oral language activities that build accuracy, confidence, and cultural engagement in early-grade classrooms.

Table 6

Pupils' Language Learning Difficulties in Speaking Domain as Observed by Teachers (n=6)

Speaking Domain	Mean	SD	Mean Interpretation
Pupils engage in speaking experiences during lessons.	1.50	0.55	Few or none
Pupils can express thoughts clearly in Filipino.	1.50	0.55	Few or none
Pupils can form complete and correct sentences when speaking.	1.33	0.52	Few or none
Pupils understand and apply new Filipino vocabulary correctly.	1.67	0.52	Some students
Pupils can respond in Filipino when the teacher speaks in Filipino.	1.83	0.75	Some students
Pupils use Filipino when talking to classmates during Filipino and AP/ Makabansa class.	1.50	0.55	Few or none

Range: 2.34–3.00= Most students;1.67–2.33= Some students;1.00–1.66= Few or none

The data indicate that pupils in Grades 1 to 3 exhibit limited oral language use in Filipino, particularly in unstructured or peer-driven contexts. The lowest-scoring indicators- “*Pupils engage in speaking experiences during lessons*” and “*Pupils can express thoughts clearly in Filipino*” (both M=1.50)-reflect minimal participation and difficulty expressing ideas. This aligns with Leaño et al. (2019) and Daar (2020), who identify fear of errors, low vocabulary retention, and limited confidence as key factors inhibiting second-language oral production, especially when peers are more fluent in the dominant language.

Conversely, studies in multilingual classrooms suggest that interactive, emotionally safe environments can support oral production. Omar et al. (2020) observed that elementary ESL learners improved oral fluency in highly interactive settings, highlighting the role of classroom climate and teacher strategies in fostering risk-taking and confidence.

Moderate performance was observed in “*Pupils can respond in Filipino when the teacher speaks in Filipino*” (M=1.83), consistent with Cummins’ (as cited in Darmi, 2018) concept of context-embedded communication, where learners perform better when prompts are supported by nonverbal cues and immediate scaffolding. Similarly, “*Pupils understand and apply new Filipino vocabulary correctly*” (M=1.67) indicates a transitional stage from passive recognition to active use, reflecting the need for repeated reinforcement through speaking tasks and interactive practice, as emphasized by Muñoz and Cadierno (2021) and Rouse-Malpat et al. (2021).

The indicator “*Pupils use Filipino when talking to classmates during Filipino and AP/Makabansa class*” (M=1.50) demonstrates a persistent preference for English in peer interactions, supporting Adams (2018), who notes that bilingual learners often default to their dominant language unless schools implement immersive or code-switching practices.

These findings portray English-dominant pupils as capable of limited, scaffolded oral responses in Filipino but hesitant in spontaneous or socially driven communication. Oral language development in these contexts benefits from structured, interactive, and emotionally supportive activities such as role-plays, group discussions, and peer interviews combined with modeling, sentence frames, and repeated practice to gradually build fluency and confidence.

Language Learning Difficulties of Pupils in Reading Domain as Observed by Teachers

The results in Table 7 indicate that pupils faced moderate challenges in reading Filipino texts, with most indicators interpreted as “*Some students*” and a few as “*Few or none.*” Pupils demonstrated basic decoding skills, as reflected in their moderate ability to understand texts read aloud by the teacher (M=2.00) and pronounce Filipino words correctly (M=2.00), though these skills were not yet consistent across the class.

Comprehension, however, remains a significant challenge. The indicator “*Pupils can easily understand the meaning of Filipino reading materials*” scored low (M=1.50), showing that few students grasp content independently. This is consistent with Dagnaw (2023) and Zeng et al. (2025), who highlight that limited vocabulary and background knowledge impede second-language reading comprehension.

Additional indicators, including fluency (M=1.83) and recognition of word formation and meaning (M=1.67), reveal gaps in morphological awareness, a critical component of reading development in Filipino. Nabor and

Ortega-Dela Cruz (2022) emphasize that fluency and morphological knowledge are strengthened through repeated exposure and guided reading activities that are aligned with learners' linguistic proficiency. These findings portray early-grade learners as developing foundational decoding skills but continuing to experience moderate difficulties in comprehension, fluency, and morphosyntactic awareness in Filipino reading.

Table 7

Pupils' Language Learning Difficulties in Reading Domain as Observed by Teachers (n=6)

Reading Domain	Mean	SD	Mean Interpretation
Pupils can easily understand Filipino texts (stories, lessons, etc.) read by the teacher	2.00	0.63	Some students
Pupils pronounce Filipino words correctly	2.00	0.63	Some students
Pupils can easily understand the meaning of Filipino reading materials	1.50	0.55	Few or none
Pupils can easily recognize how Filipino words are formed and their meanings.	1.67	0.82	Some students
Pupils read Filipino sentences fluently	1.83	0.41	Some students
Pupils can easily recognize and apply correct Filipino pronunciation	1.50	0.55	Few or none

Range: 2.34–3.00= Most students;1.67–2.33= Some students;1.00–1.66= Few or none

Only a few students consistently demonstrated correct pronunciation (M=1.50), underscoring the need for targeted phonics instruction and oral reading practice. Hilao-Valencia and Ortega-Dela Cruz (2023) emphasize that accurate pronunciation is foundational to fluent reading, and deficits in this area can hinder both comprehension and engagement with texts.

Although some pupils show emerging decoding skills, most remain in the early stages of Filipino literacy development, particularly in comprehension, fluency, and morphological awareness. Supporting reading growth therefore requires differentiated, scaffolded approaches, including vocabulary instruction, visual aids, guided reading, and phonics practice. Deeper comprehension can be promoted through culturally and contextually meaningful content, paired with language experience activities and oral storytelling that connect learners' personal experiences to written text (Abelarde & Cruz, 2021).

Language Learning Difficulties of Pupils in Writing Domain as Observed by Teachers

Table 8 indicates that pupils experience considerable challenges in developing Filipino writing skills, with most indicators falling within the "Few or none" range, particularly in higher-order writing tasks. The indicator "Pupils demonstrate strong writing skills in Filipino-based assignments" scored very low (M=1.17, SD=0.41), showing that only a few students exhibit confidence and proficiency in writing in Filipino.

Although a moderate number of students could differentiate Filipino letters and syllables (M=2.33), this foundational phonological awareness has not yet translated into effective writing performance. Pupils struggled with constructing full sentences (M=1.50) and expressing ideas about real-life situations in writing (M=1.50), both critical for functional literacy. Sarmiento and Ortega-Dela Cruz (2021) note that early second-language writers often face difficulties in sentence formation and content development due to limited vocabulary and underdeveloped syntactic awareness.

Furthermore, the ability to complete written tasks with confidence and accuracy remains limited (M=1.33), reflecting Dangan and Cruz's (2021) observation that bilingual students may possess ideas but lack sufficient exposure and guided practice to convey them effectively in written Filipino.

Table 8

Pupils' Language Learning Difficulties in Writing Domain as Observed by Teachers (n=6)

Writing Domain	Mean	SD	Mean Interpretation
Pupils demonstrate strong writing skills in Filipino-based assignments.	1.17	0.41	Few or none
Pupils can easily differentiate Filipino letters and syllables correctly	2.33	0.82	Some students

Pupils express ideas in writing about real-life situations	1.50	0.55	Few or none
Pupils can easily write full sentence in Filipino	1.50	0.55	Few or none
Pupils can easily understand written Filipino words/ phrase/ sentences during class	1.67	0.52	Some students
Pupils complete written Filipino tasks with confidence and accuracy.	1.33	0.52	Few or none

Range: 2.34–3.00= Most students;1.67–2.33= Some students;1.00–1.66= Few or none

The moderate score for understanding written Filipino words, phrases, and sentences (M=1.67) reflects emerging decoding and receptive literacy skills but insufficient proficiency to support independent, confident writing. This aligns with Sarmiento and Ortega-Dela Cruz (2021), who highlight the importance of task-based writing, sentence starters, and scaffolded composition to bridge the gap between receptive understanding and expressive competence.

The findings illustrate that while some pupils demonstrate developing phonological awareness, many remain in the early stages of Filipino writing, particularly in sentence construction, idea generation, and grammatical accuracy. The findings also underscore the need for writing instruction that integrates vocabulary enrichment, sentence modeling, visual aids, sentence frames, interactive writing prompts, and opportunities for peer feedback, oral rehearsal, and teacher-guided revisions. Addressing the affective dimension of second-language writing is also crucial, as creating a low-stress, affirming environment encourages pupils to take linguistic risks and express their ideas more freely.

4. Concluding Remarks

This study explored the difficulties encountered by English-dominant pupils in Grades 1–3 when learning Filipino-based subjects. Results showed that learners experienced challenges across listening, speaking, reading, and writing, with speaking emerging as the most difficult skill. These difficulties, particularly in expressive language, appeared to limit pupils' active participation and motivation, even in classrooms designed to be supportive.

The findings suggest that instructional approaches that combine comprehension support with opportunities for scaffolded expressive practice may help enhance engagement and confidence. While these implications are exploratory and context-bound, they point to potential strategies for supporting young learners in multilingual classrooms.

The small teacher sample limits the ability to make broad inferential generalizations. Findings should therefore be interpreted as specific to the context of this single school. Replication across multiple schools including public and private, rural and urban settings is recommended to assess the applicability of these observations more broadly.

Future research could examine how scaffolded speaking interventions affect language development, motivation, and participation among English-dominant pupils in Filipino-based subjects. Studies involving larger and more diverse samples would help determine whether the patterns observed here are consistent across different educational contexts.

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