

# Barriers to Foreign Language Acquisition: Insights from Cavite State University Students

Dr. Jimboy B. Pagalilauan<sup>1</sup>, & Prof. Chona D. Ramos<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>English Professor at Cavite State University under the College of Arts and Sciences- Department of Humanities

<sup>2</sup>Foreign Language at the College of Arts and Sciences under the Department of Humanities in Cavite State University, Philippines

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the different barriers that students at Cavite State University encounter when learning a foreign language, paying close attention to cognitive, affective, instructional, and environmental factors. Using a descriptive-comparative quantitative design, the researchers surveyed 276 students from various programs offering foreign language courses, selected through a combination of stratified random sampling and convenience sampling. Data were collected through a researcher-made questionnaire that was reviewed by language experts and tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha.

The results revealed that most students had only limited prior exposure to foreign languages, which may have contributed to the difficulties they experienced. Among the four categories, cognitive ( $M = 2.70$ ) and affective barriers ( $M = 2.51$ ) were the most pronounced. Many students reported struggling with vocabulary retention, understanding grammar structures, and managing anxiety or embarrassment when speaking in a foreign language. Instructional ( $M = 2.06$ ) and environmental barriers ( $M = 2.38$ ) were rated lower, although students consistently noted that the lack of opportunities to practice outside the classroom slowed down their progress.

The study also found significant variations in barriers when grouped by sex and academic program, while differences based on age, year level, and prior exposure were minimal. Students shared that these challenges have a moderate impact on their overall learning, often slowing their progress and affecting the development of their proficiency. Open-ended responses further emphasized concerns related to confidence, consistency in studying, and limited real-world practice. Students also suggested improvements such as more interactive activities, better technological tools, and structured opportunities for practice.

Based on the findings, the study presents an action plan focused on strengthening cognitive skills, reducing anxiety, providing differentiated and engaging instruction, and enhancing institutional support systems. Moreover, the results highlight the importance of learner-centered and supportive interventions to help foreign language learners at Cavite State University overcome the challenges that hinder their language development.

**Keywords:** foreign language acquisition, learning barriers, cognitive factors, affective factors, instructional factors, environmental factors, descriptive-comparative research, language learning difficulties, university students, Cavite State University

## INTRODUCTION

In today's increasingly interconnected world, learning a foreign language is no longer merely an academic requirement; it serves as a gateway to new cultures, broader career opportunities, and meaningful participation in global society. For university students, foreign language proficiency is more than a skill it is an advantage that supports both professional growth and personal development. In the Philippines, languages such as Spanish, Korean, Japanese, and Mandarin have become integral parts of higher education curricula, reflecting the

recognition that multilingual competence is essential for students to thrive in a competitive, globalized environment.

Despite the growing emphasis on foreign language education, many students continue to struggle with language acquisition. Research in the Philippine context highlights persistent challenges, particularly in vocabulary retention, grammar mastery, and the application of effective learning strategies (Aguilar & Rebolla, 2023). These difficulties are widely considered cognitive barriers, referring to internal limitations that affect a learner's ability to process and retain new knowledge. Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis emphasizes the importance of conscious awareness in transforming linguistic exposure into intake; without intentional noticing, much learning remains superficial. Empirical evidence shows that learners with weak memory skills or limited strategy use struggle with vocabulary recall and grammar comprehension. Recent studies further support the value of spaced-repetition and retrieval-based learning, which have been shown to significantly improve long-term vocabulary retention (Saksittanupab, 2024; Aghdam et al., 2025). These findings highlight the importance of integrating structured review systems, digital tools, and cognitive scaffolds into language instruction.

Affective barriers such as anxiety, low confidence, and fear of making mistakes are equally influential. Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis posits that learners with high anxiety or low motivation acquire less language, even when given the same instructional input. Philippine studies consistently reveal that speaking anxiety remains one of the most significant obstacles for foreign language learners. Labicane (2021) reported heightened anxiety during remote learning, particularly in oral communication tasks, while Castro (2017) found that high anxiety negatively correlates with classroom performance. More recent international research suggests that classroom interventions such as small-group speaking tasks, low-pressure communicative activities, and supportive feedback models substantially reduce foreign language anxiety and increase willingness to communicate (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2021). These findings underscore the critical need to implement affective support strategies within instructional practice.

Instructional factors including teaching methods, classroom interaction patterns, learning materials, and curriculum design also shape students' language acquisition outcomes. Philippine studies reveal that some students perceive materials as outdated or teaching methods as overly lecture-based, limiting opportunities for communicative practice (Aguilar & Rebolla, 2023). International scholarship supports the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which provides authentic, real-world speaking opportunities and enhances learner engagement (Mudinillah et al., 2024). Similarly, interaction-focused approaches grounded in Long's (1983) Interaction Hypothesis emphasize the essential role of negotiation of meaning, corrective feedback, and active participation in promoting language development. These contemporary findings highlight the need to strengthen instructional design, diversify learning activities, and ensure updated, multimodal teaching resources.

Environmental factors including access to linguistic exposure, peer interaction, technological tools, and authentic practice spaces significantly influence language learning outcomes. Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis emphasizes the necessity of abundant comprehensible input for effective acquisition. During the COVID-19 pandemic, environmental constraints such as poor internet connectivity, limited interaction, and reduced opportunities for real-time practice further hindered students' engagement (Labicane, 2021). Recent evidence shows that online language exchanges, virtual conversation clubs, and digital tandem programs increase authentic language use and improve students' speaking skills and willingness to communicate (Zhou, 2023; Ambas et al., 2024). Likewise, immersion-based activities even short-term or campus-based enhance fluency, motivation, and confidence (Bygate et al., 2022). These findings suggest that enhancing environmental exposure, both physical and virtual, is essential for supporting language development.

When cognitive, affective, instructional, and environmental barriers interact, the effects on students' academic performance and progress can be substantial. Learners who experience combined challenges often demonstrate lower participation, slower acquisition of speaking and writing skills, and, in some cases, avoidance of language tasks or reduced self-efficacy. Studies in the Philippines confirm this pattern, showing that high anxiety and limited exposure correlate with slower learning progression and lower self-reported proficiency (Castro, 2017; Quintos, 2022). International frameworks explain these outcomes by linking insufficient noticing, inadequate interaction, and elevated affective filters to reduced intake and limited gains.

Taken together, existing literature demonstrates that foreign language learning is shaped by a complex interaction of cognitive, affective, instructional, and environmental factors. While Philippine studies mirror global findings, previous research is often limited to specific institutions, language courses, or learner groups. More importantly, recent studies emphasize evidence-based strategies, such as spaced repetition, TBLT, retrieval practice, digital interaction tools, and structured immersion, which could be more fully integrated into language programs. Thus, there remains a need for research that not only identifies the barriers learners encounter but also examines context-sensitive, practical strategies that address these obstacles.

This study responds to that need by investigating barriers to foreign language acquisition among students at Cavite State University. Using a descriptive-comparative research design, it explores cognitive, affective, instructional, and environmental challenges, examines their connection to student profiles, and evaluates their impact on academic performance and progress. Through a more comprehensive and updated literature base, this study aimed to inform instructional practices, guide policy development, and propose strategic interventions that would make foreign language acquisition more accessible, engaging, and effective for learners.

### Statement of the Problem

This study sought to investigate the barriers to foreign language acquisition among students at Cavite State University. Despite the recognized importance of multilingual competence in academic, professional, and intercultural contexts, many students continue to face challenges that hinder their effective acquisition of foreign languages. Gaining insights into these barriers, along with the students' profiles, is essential for improving instructional strategies, learning resources, and student support systems.

Specifically, the study answered the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of:
  - 1.1. Age;
  - 1.2. Sex;
  - 1.3. Year Level;
  - 1.4. Program Enrolled; and
  - 1.5. Prior Exposure to Foreign Languages?
2. What barriers do Cavite State University students encounter in foreign language acquisition in terms of:
  - 2.1. Cognitive factors
  - 2.2. Affective factors
  - 2.3. Instructional factors
  - 2.4. Environmental factors?
3. To what extent do these barriers influence the performance and progress of students in foreign language learning?
4. Are there significant differences in the barriers encountered when respondents are grouped according to their profile variables?
5. What strategies can be proposed to help students overcome these barriers and enhance foreign language acquisition at Cavite State University?

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-comparative research design using a quantitative approach. A descriptive design was chosen because it allows the researchers to systematically identify and document the barriers that students at Cavite State University encounter in learning foreign languages. Additionally, the study examined how these challenges influence students' learning progress. The comparative aspect of the design enabled the researchers to explore whether these barriers vary based on specific student characteristics, including age, sex, year level, and academic program. Thus, by combining description and comparison, the study aimed to provide a detailed understanding of the factors affecting foreign language acquisition in the university setting.

### Participants

The participants of this study were selected students enrolled in various programs at Cavite State University that offer foreign language courses during the Academic Year 2025-2026. These programs include the Bachelor of Arts in English Language Studies, Bachelor of Science in Tourism Management, Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management, Bachelor of Science in International Studies, and Bachelor of Science in Industrial Technology–Automotive. Participants were chosen using a combination of stratified random sampling and convenience sampling to ensure balanced representation across different programs. The sample size was determined using the Raosoft Calculator, with a confidence level of 90% and a margin of error of 5%, ensuring that the results are statistically meaningful while reflecting the diversity of the student population.

### Instrumentation

The data were collected through a self-constructed questionnaire, which was carefully designed and validated by experts in language and education to ensure content accuracy, clarity, and reliability. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections: (1) the profile of the respondents, (2) barriers to foreign language acquisition, and (3) the extent to which these barriers affect students' performance and progress. An additional open-ended question allowed respondents to share personal experiences, providing richer qualitative insights.

To ensure the internal consistency and reliability of the instrument, the researchers conducted a Cronbach's alpha test. The results indicated a high level of reliability, confirming that the items consistently measured the intended constructs. Hence, by combining expert validation and statistical reliability testing, the questionnaire provided a trustworthy tool to capture both the challenges faced by students and the effects of these challenges on their foreign language learning outcomes.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1. Profile of the respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	20	100	36.23%
	19	67	24.28%
	21	64	23.19%
	22	24	8.70%
	23	7	2.54%
	24	5	1.81%

	25	4	1.45%
	26	2	0.72%
	18	2	0.72%
	30	1	0.36%
<b>Total</b>	-	<b>276</b>	<b>100%</b>
Sex	Female	195	70.65%
	Male	81	29.35%
<b>Total</b>	-	<b>276</b>	<b>100%</b>
Year Level	3rd Year	158	57.25%
	2nd Year	118	42.75%
<b>Total</b>	-	<b>276</b>	<b>100%</b>
Program Enrolled	BSHM	113	40.94%
	BSTM	113	40.94%
	BSINDT	23	8.33%
	BAELS	16	5.80%
	BSIS	11	3.99%
<b>Total</b>	-	<b>176</b>	<b>100%</b>
Prior Exposure to Foreign Languages	Basic ( <i>short course, basic phrases</i> )	200	81.97%
	Intermediate ( <i>some conversational ability</i> )	23	9.43%
	Advanced (studied in school or abroad)	21	8.61%
<b>Total</b>	-	<b>176</b>	<b>100%</b>

The table presents the demographic profile of the respondents, showing that most of the students fall within the ages of 19 to 21, which is typical of the college population. A large majority are female, and more than half are already in their third year, suggesting that many of them have had enough academic exposure to form clearer insights about their language-learning experiences. The respondents also come from a range of programs, with the largest groups coming from Hospitality Management and Tourism Management, fields where learning a foreign language is often encouraged. Smaller groups from Industrial Technology, English Language Studies, and International Studies add diversity to the perspectives represented in the study.

The table further reveals that most students entered foreign language learning with only basic exposure, usually limited to short courses or simple phrases. Only a few reported having intermediate or advanced experience. This limited background suggests that many of them are still in the early stages of foreign language acquisition, which may contribute to the challenges they face in mastering pronunciation, vocabulary, or overall fluency.

Altogether, the respondents' demographic details provide important context for understanding the barriers they encounter in learning a foreign language at Cavite State University.

Table 2. Barriers to Foreign Language Acquisition

Factor Category	Statement	Mean	Interpretation
<b>Cognitive</b>	I find it difficult to memorize foreign language vocabulary.	2.83	Agree
	I struggle to understand foreign language grammar rules.	2.83	Agree
	I have limited strategies for learning a foreign language effectively.	2.7	Agree
	My language aptitude is low.	2.47	Disagree
	I forget easily what I previously learned in foreign languages.	2.66	Agree
<b>Affective</b>	I feel anxious when speaking in a foreign language.	2.79	Agree
	I lack motivation to learn foreign languages.	2.31	Disagree
	I feel embarrassed or shy when making mistakes in class.	2.72	Agree
	I have low confidence in my ability to learn a foreign language.	2.43	Disagree
	I easily lose interest when lessons become difficult.	2.3	Disagree
<b>Instructional</b>	The teaching methods used do not fit my learning style.	2.07	Disagree
	The instructional materials provided are insufficient or outdated.	1.97	Disagree
	The curriculum does not provide enough time to learn a foreign language.	2.28	Disagree
	The assessment methods increase my difficulty in learning.	2.15	Disagree
	Teachers do not provide enough interactive/practical activities.	1.84	Disagree
<b>Environmental</b>	I lack opportunities to practice the foreign language outside class.	2.69	Agree
	My learning environment hinders language learning.	2.41	Disagree
	I have limited access to technology for language learning.	2.16	Disagree
	I do not have peers to practice with in a foreign language.	2.35	Disagree
	The university does not provide enough support programs.	2.28	Disagree
<b>Overall Means by Factor</b>			
Factor Category	Categorical Mean	No. of items	

Cognitive	2.70	5	Agree
Affective	2.51	5	Agree
Instructional	2.06	5	Disagree
Environmental	2.38	5	Disagree
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>2.41</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>Disagree</b>

The table presents the barriers encountered by students in learning a foreign language, grouped into cognitive, affective, instructional, and environmental factors. Among these, cognitive and affective aspects received the highest mean ratings, both interpreted as “Agree,” indicating that most challenges stem from internal processing and emotional responses to language learning. Students reported particular difficulty with memorizing vocabulary ( $M = 2.83$ ), understanding grammar rules ( $M = 2.83$ ), and retaining previously learned material ( $M = 2.66$ ). These difficulties echo the findings of Nation (2013), who noted that vocabulary load and grammatical complexity remain persistent cognitive hurdles for language learners, especially those with limited exposure. Similarly, the students’ agreement that they have limited learning strategies ( $M = 2.70$ ) aligns with Oxford’s (2017) work, which emphasizes that learners lacking strategic approaches such as note-taking, self-testing, or contextual learning often struggle to progress efficiently. Although learners disagreed with the statement that their language aptitude is low ( $M = 2.47$ ), the overall cognitive mean (2.70) still suggests that most barriers originate from how students process and remember linguistic information.

Affective barriers also emerged as significant concerns, particularly anxiety in speaking the language ( $M = 2.79$ ) and feelings of embarrassment when making mistakes ( $M = 2.72$ ). These findings are consistent with Horwitz, and Cope’s (1986) theory of Foreign Language Anxiety, which identifies communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation as common emotional obstacles. Learners who feel anxious or self-conscious often hesitate to participate, limiting their opportunities to practice and build fluency. However, students disagreed with statements related to low motivation ( $M = 2.31$ ), low confidence ( $M = 2.43$ ), and loss of interest during difficult lessons ( $M = 2.30$ ), suggesting that while emotional discomfort exists, it does not necessarily translate to lack of drive or persistence. This distinction can be seen in Dörnyei’s (2005) motivation framework, noting that anxiety can coexist with strong effort and engagement.

Instructional and environmental factors received lower mean scores, both interpreted as “Disagree,” indicating that students do not generally perceive these areas as major barriers. They disagreed that teaching methods are unsuitable ( $M = 2.07$ ), materials are outdated ( $M = 1.97$ ), or that assessments hinder learning ( $M = 2.15$ ). This implies that instructional quality is largely satisfactory and does not significantly impede their progress. Similarly, respondents did not see the environment as strongly limiting, with most disagreeing about lack of technology ( $M = 2.16$ ), absence of peers to practice with ( $M = 2.35$ ), or insufficient university support ( $M = 2.28$ ). Although they agreed that practice opportunities outside class are limited ( $M = 2.69$ ), other environmental conditions appear manageable. These results align with studies such as Kara and Aksel (2020), which argue that internal factors often outweigh classroom or institutional conditions in influencing language learning outcomes.

Furthermore, implications of these findings suggest that foreign language programs may benefit from strengthening cognitive and affective support for learners. Since vocabulary retention, grammar understanding, and anxiety emerged as notable barriers, instructors could integrate more memory-enhancing techniques, scaffolded grammar instruction, and low-stress speaking activities. Workshops on learning strategies may also help students take more control of their learning process. Meanwhile, the relatively lower influence of instructional and environmental barriers indicates that the existing classroom setup is generally effective, but additional opportunities for authentic communication outside class such as language clubs, conversation tables, or digital exchange programs could further support learners. Moreover, the data highlight the need to focus on learner-centered approaches that build confidence, reduce anxiety, and enhance cognitive processing to improve foreign language acquisition.

Table 3. Extent of the Effect of Barriers on Performance and Progress

Statement	Mean	Interpretation
The barriers I face negatively affect my grades in foreign language subjects.	2.45	Agree
The challenges I encounter slow down my ability to learn and retain new lessons.	2.52	Agree
My difficulties prevent me from reaching the expected level of proficiency.	2.54	Agree
The barriers I experience lower my participation and engagement in class.	2.33	Disagree
These barriers reduce my ability to apply foreign language skills in real-life situations.	2.48	Disagree
The difficulties I face affect my overall confidence in continuing foreign language studies.	2.33	Disagree
Because of these barriers, I sometimes consider avoiding or dropping foreign language classes.	1.96	Disagree
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>2.37</b>	<b>Disagree</b>

The results in Table 3 suggest that the barriers students experience have a moderate impact on their overall learning performance, particularly in terms of grades, learning speed, and proficiency development. Students agreed that these difficulties affect their grades in foreign language subjects ( $M = 2.45$ ), slow down their ability to learn and retain lessons ( $M = 2.52$ ), and prevent them from reaching the expected level of proficiency ( $M = 2.54$ ). These findings align with research showing that cognitive load especially memory-related challenges directly influences a learner's ability to retain vocabulary and grammatical structures. For example, Karpicke and Roediger (2008) emphasized that without effective retrieval and repeated exposure, learners struggle to store and use linguistic information, which results in slower academic progress.

Although the students recognized the academic influence of these barriers, they disagreed that such challenges significantly lower their class participation ( $M = 2.33$ ), confidence ( $M = 2.33$ ), or ability to apply the language in real-life situations ( $M = 2.48$ ). This suggests that while barriers hinder the quality of learning outcomes, they do not entirely diminish students' willingness to participate. Horwitz et al. (1986) similarly argued that anxiety often interferes with performance accuracy but does not always discourage students from engaging in learning activities. Likewise, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) found that anxiety disrupts cognitive processing, which may limit proficiency development without necessarily leading to withdrawal from the learning environment.

The data also show that the barriers do not generally push students to avoid or drop foreign language classes ( $M = 1.96$ ). This is consistent with local findings where Filipino learners report anxiety and difficulty but continue attending classes because of academic requirements or intrinsic interest (Labicane, 2021). The modest disagreement in real-world application also reflects Swain's (2005) perspective that insufficient opportunities for meaningful "output" or actual use of the target language limit learners' ability to internalize forms and apply them outside the classroom. In contexts like the Philippines, where exposure to foreign languages is often limited, this output gap becomes more pronounced.

Taken together, the results show that the main consequence of these barriers is slowed progress and limited proficiency, rather than disengagement. This indicates that students are willing but constrained learners motivated enough to continue their studies, yet restrained by obstacles in memory, anxiety, practice, and real-life application. This mirrors earlier Philippine research in which students with higher anxiety and fewer exposure opportunities reported slower progress and lower performance (Castro, 2017; Labicane, 2021).

## Thematic Analysis on the open-ended questions *(What do you think is the biggest barrier you personally face in learning a foreign language? And What strategies or programs do you suggest helping students like you overcome these barriers?)*

The responses of the respondents indicate that the biggest barriers in learning a foreign language are largely related to cognitive, affective, and environmental factors. Many students reported challenges in memorization, retaining vocabulary, and understanding grammar rules, which align with studies emphasizing the difficulty of vocabulary acquisition and retention in foreign language learning (Hayakawa et al., 2019). Issues of consistency and lack of time were also prominent; several respondents shared that they struggle to maintain a steady study routine due to schoolwork, personal responsibilities, or short class durations. This finding is consistent with Choffin et al., (2019) who highlight the importance of spaced and repeated practice in fostering long-term retention and mastery of language skills.

Affective factors such as low confidence, fear of making mistakes, and motivation were also frequently mentioned. Some students admitted that even when they understood the lesson, they hesitated to speak for fear of mispronunciation or making errors, which mirrors findings from Loewen and Sato (2018), who underscore the critical role of interaction and safe communicative environments in second language acquisition. Similarly, respondents pointed out that fast-paced teaching methods, limited classroom engagement, and inadequate learning materials exacerbate their learning difficulties, which aligns with the interaction hypothesis emphasizing the need for tailored, interactive, and engaging instructional approaches (Huang, Lu, & Ou, 2024).

Environmental and structural barriers, including insufficient materials, lack of appropriate classrooms, limited exposure to native speakers, and inconsistent practice opportunities, were frequently cited. Many students suggested strategies such as using language-learning apps, online resources, conversation partners, and structured practice routines to overcome these challenges. These suggestions reflect evidence from Karpicke and Roediger (2008), who emphasize the role of repeated retrieval practice in improving learning and memory. Additionally, respondents recommended more interactive activities, role-playing, and exposure to real-life contexts, highlighting the importance of immersive and practical learning environments to foster both confidence and fluency.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that while cognitive challenges such as memorization and grammar comprehension are significant, affective and environmental factors confidence, motivation, exposure, and interactive opportunities play a critical role in shaping students' success in learning foreign languages. Addressing these barriers through structured, interactive, and personalized strategies, combined with consistent practice, can significantly enhance students' language learning outcomes (Hayakawa et al., 2019).

Table 5. Test of differences in the barriers encountered when respondents are grouped according to their profile variables

Profile Variable	Dependent Variable	Test	t / F Statistic	p-value	Interpretation
Sex	Cognitive Barriers	Independent t-test	-2.950	0.003	Statistically Significant
	Affective Barriers	Independent t-test	-0.842	0.401	Statistically not significant
	Instructional Barriers	Independent t-test	-2.925	0.004	Statistically Significant
	Environmental Barriers	Independent t-test	-1.984	0.048	Statistically Significant
Year Level	Cognitive Barriers	Independent t-test	-1.089	0.277	Statistically not significant
	Affective Barriers	Independent t-test	-1.156	0.249	Statistically not significant
	Instructional Barriers	Independent t-test	-2.719	0.007	Statistically significant

	Environmental Barriers	Independent t-test	-1.296	0.196	Statistically not significant
Age	Cognitive Barriers	Independent t-test	-1.053	0.293	Statistically not significant
	Affective Barriers	Independent t-test	-0.860	0.391	Statistically not significant
	Instructional Barriers	Independent t-test	-2.202	0.028	Statistically Significant
	Environmental Barriers	Independent t-test	-0.871	0.385	Statistically not significant
Program Enrolled	Cognitive Barriers	One-way ANOVA	5.995	< .001	Statistically Significant
	Affective Barriers	One-way ANOVA	3.244	0.013	Statistically Significant
	Instructional Barriers	One-way ANOVA	8.589	< .001	Statistically Significant
	Environmental Barriers	One-way ANOVA	5.292	< .001	Statistically Significant
Prior Exposure	Cognitive Barriers	One-way ANOVA	0.151	0.86	Statistically not significant
	Affective Barriers	One-way ANOVA	0.230	0.795	Statistically not significant
	Instructional Barriers	One-way ANOVA	0.941	0.392	Statistically not significant
	Environmental Barriers	One-way ANOVA	0.059	0.942	Statistically not significant

The table presents the test of differences in the barriers to foreign language acquisition when respondents are grouped according to their sex, year level, age, program enrolled, and prior exposure to foreign languages. The results show that sex plays a significant role in several areas of language learning. Significant differences were found in cognitive, instructional, and environmental barriers, suggesting that male and female students experience certain challenges differently. These findings are consistent with the study of Kaylani (1996), who noted that gender can influence learning strategies, anxiety levels, and language performance. However, affective barriers showed no significant difference, indicating that both male and female learners experience similar emotional reactions such as anxiety, embarrassment, or confidence levels during language learning.

When grouped according to year level, only instructional barriers showed a significant difference. This suggests that second-year and third-year students perceive teaching methods, materials, or assessment demands differently, possibly because of their varying academic exposure. This aligns with Chamot and O'Malley's (1994) framework, which found that learners at different stages of academic development use distinct learning strategies and respond differently to instructional practices. For age, the only significant difference also falls under instructional barriers, implying that maturity levels may shape how students respond to the teaching process, but not necessarily to cognitive or emotional difficulties associated with learning a foreign language.

A more pronounced pattern emerges when examining differences according to program enrolled. All barrier categories cognitive, affective, instructional, and environmental were found to be significantly different across programs. This indicates that students from Hospitality Management, Tourism Management, Industrial Technology, English Studies, and Information Systems experience foreign language challenges in distinct ways. This is supported by findings from Kirkgöz (2010), which highlight how program requirements and disciplinary cultures influence learners' exposure, motivation, and learning contexts. In contrast, prior exposure to foreign languages did not produce any significant difference across all barrier categories. This suggests that whether a student had basic, intermediate, or advanced exposure, their experiences of barriers remain largely comparable. This may reflect the limited nature of exposure for most learners, as Song (2018) notes that superficial or short-term exposure often does not substantially alter one's perception of language learning challenges.

Implications of these findings point to the need for more designed instructional approaches. Since sex and degree program significantly influence the types of barriers encountered, educators may need to design learning activities that are sensitive to the diverse needs of learners. For instance, programs that require more communicative competence, such as tourism or hospitality, might benefit from increased practical activities, while more technical programs may require contextualized language support. Furthermore, the lack of significant differences in affective barriers across sex, age, and year level suggests that emotional challenges are universal among language learners; thus, integrating anxiety-reducing classroom strategies, confidence-building activities, and supportive feedback is essential. Because prior exposure does not significantly lessen barriers, universities may also consider offering more sustained and meaningful foreign language experiences such as immersion programs, conversation clubs, or digital language platforms to help students build stronger foundations. Moreover, the data emphasize the importance of differentiated and learner-centered approaches in addressing foreign language learning barriers.

Table 6. Proposed Strategy/Action Plan to address the challenges encountered by the respondents

Barrier Category	Specific Challenge	Proposed Strategy/Action	Responsible Party	Expected Outcome
<b>Cognitive</b>	Difficulty memorizing vocabulary	Integrate spaced-repetition techniques using learning apps (ex. Anki, Quizlet) for consistent vocabulary review	Students, Instructors	Improved long-term vocabulary retention
	Struggling with grammar rules	Facilitate grammar enhancement sessions and provide mnemonic devices to support rule mastery	Instructors	Better understanding of grammar rules
	Limited learning strategies	Introduce strategy-training sessions on mind mapping, chunking, retrieval practice, and effective study habits	Instructors, Learning Center	Strengthened learning strategies for foreign language acquisition
	Forgetting previously learned content	Implement weekly structured review activities and active recall exercises	Instructors, Students	Reinforced memory and retention of learned content
<b>Affective</b>	Anxiety when speaking	Conduct small-group conversations, speaking circles, and low-pressure communicative activities	Instructors, Peer Groups	Reduced speaking anxiety, increased participation
	Embarrassment or shyness when making mistakes	Apply positive reinforcement strategies and maintain a non-judgmental, supportive classroom atmosphere	Instructors	Increased confidence and willingness to participate
<b>Instructional</b>	Teaching methods not fitting learning styles	Use differentiated instruction with visual, auditory, and kinesthetic approaches	Instructors	Enhanced student engagement and comprehension
	Insufficient instructional materials	Provide updated digital resources, multimedia tools, and interactive modules	School Administration, Instructors	Improved access to and quality of learning materials
	Limited interactive/practical activities	Integrate role-playing, simulations, peer teaching, and field-based tasks into lessons	Instructors	Increased hands-on practice and skill application

<b>Environmental</b>	Lack of opportunities to practice outside class	Establish language exchange sessions, virtual conversation clubs, and short immersion experiences	Students, Instructors	Increased practice and real-world language application
	Limited access to technology	Offer students access to language-learning apps, online platforms, and digital learning spaces	School Administration	Improved opportunities for independent learning
	Lack of peers to practice with	Promote peer mentoring, language partners, and collaborative group tasks	Students, Instructors	Enhanced collaborative learning and speaking confidence
	Limited university support programs	Develop workshops, short courses, and seminars focused on practical language usage	School Administration	Enhanced institutional support and language-learning opportunities

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it is evident that learners encounter multiple barriers in acquiring foreign languages, which span cognitive, affective, instructional, and environmental factors. Cognitive barriers, such as difficulty in memorizing vocabulary, understanding grammar rules, and forgetting previously learned content, were prominent among respondents, highlighting the need for more effective learning strategies and consistent practice. Affective barriers, including anxiety, shyness, and low confidence, also emerged as significant challenges, indicating that emotional and psychological factors influence language learning. Instructional factors, while generally rated lower, revealed that teaching methods, materials, and assessment approaches sometimes fail to accommodate students' diverse learning styles. Environmental barriers, particularly the lack of opportunities to practice outside the classroom, limited access to technology, and insufficient peer interaction, further impede the learners' ability to apply the language in real-world contexts.

Respondents consistently suggested strategies to overcome these barriers, such as the use of language-learning apps, regular practice sessions, interactive activities, personalized learning approaches, and supportive classroom environments. These responses underscore that successful foreign language acquisition requires a combination of cognitive, affective, and environmental interventions. Moreover, the study demonstrates that while students face challenges in language learning, structured support, engagement, and practical exposure can significantly enhance their competence and confidence.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study results, the following recommendations are proposed to address the challenges encountered by learners of foreign languages:

### 1. Cognitive Support

- Implement consistent review sessions using spaced-repetition techniques to improve vocabulary retention and comprehension.
- Provide workshops on grammar, mnemonic strategies, and effective language-learning methods to strengthen students' cognitive abilities.

### 2. Affective and Motivational Interventions

- Establish small-group discussion sessions, conversation clubs, and low-pressure speaking activities to reduce anxiety and increase confidence.

- Encourage positive reinforcement, reward progress, and normalize mistakes to create a supportive learning environment.

### 3. Instructional Enhancement

- Adopt differentiated instruction strategies that accommodate visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners.
- Update teaching materials with interactive digital resources, multimedia, and practical exercises to increase engagement.
- Incorporate role-playing, projects, and peer-teaching to allow hands-on application of language skills.

### 4. Environmental and Institutional Support

- Increase opportunities for practice outside the classroom through language exchange programs, online platforms, and immersion activities.
- Provide access to technological tools and applications to facilitate independent learning.
- Promote peer mentoring, collaborative projects, and group activities to encourage social and communicative practice.
- Develop university-led workshops, seminars, and short-term programs that emphasize practical use of the language.

### 5. Personal Strategies for Learners

- Encourage learners to dedicate time daily for short but consistent practice sessions.
- Use language apps, online videos, and real-life exposure (ex. movies, music, conversations) to reinforce learning.
- Adopt personalized study plans that align with individual learning styles and pace.

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