

Language Barriers in Filipino of Pre-Service Teachers in Basilan State College

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Abstract—This study examines the language barriers experienced by pre-service teachers in the Filipino subject at Basilan State College (BaSC), a state institution located in the ethnolinguistically diverse island province of Basilan in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Employing a descriptive-quantitative research design, the study surveyed sixty (60) pre-service teachers enrolled in the Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) and Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd) programs. A validated Likert-scale questionnaire was used to assess the nature and extent of language barriers across three dimensions: linguistic factors, cultural factors, and educational factors. Findings reveal that BaSC pre-service teachers experience high language barriers in Filipino overall ($\bar{x} = 3.64$), with vocabulary deficiency, code-switching dependence, perceived cultural distance between Filipino language content and Basilan's Islamic-indigenous context, and inadequate instructional scaffolding as the dominant challenges. Statistically significant differences in language barriers were found across home language groups, with Yakan and Tausug speakers experiencing significantly higher barriers than Tagalog speakers. These findings call for targeted pedagogical interventions, including contextualized Filipino academic register training and culturally responsive language learning materials adapted to the Bangsamoro setting.

Keywords—Language barriers, Filipino language, pre-service teachers, Basilan State College, multilingual education, Bangsamoro, code-switching, language proficiency.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language proficiency is a fundamental competency demanded of every teacher. In the Philippine educational system, the Filipino language occupies a dual function: it is a required academic subject in all teacher education programs and a mandated medium of instruction under DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017, which institutionalizes the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) [1]. Domain 1 of the PPST explicitly requires pre-service and in-service teachers to demonstrate proficiency in the Mother Tongue, Filipino, and English. For student-teachers whose mother tongue is not Filipino, this standard poses extraordinary challenges that standard teacher preparation curricula often fail to address.

The Philippines is home to more than 170 languages, and the national language — Filipino, based on Tagalog — is the native tongue of only a fraction of the population, primarily in Luzon [2]. For students from the Visayas and Mindanao, Filipino functions as a second or even third language, acquired after the mother tongue and alongside English within formal schooling. Research has consistently

documented that Filipino language proficiency is markedly lower among learners from non-Tagalog regions [3], and that medium-of-instruction policies which ignore this reality create inherent educational asymmetries that disadvantage students from linguistically peripheral areas [4].

This challenge is most acute in the province of Basilan, an island in the Sulu Archipelago that forms part of the BARMM. Basilan's ethnolinguistic landscape encompasses the Yakan — the island's indigenous Muslim community and primary cultural group — as well as Tausug, Chavacano, Tagalog, and Bisaya speakers, among others [5]. For the predominantly Yakan and Tausug student population at Basilan State College (BaSC), the lone state higher education institution in the province, Filipino is effectively a third language, acquired after the mother tongue and often alongside English, within formal schooling alone.

Carvajal, Mama, Ornopia, and Labunog documented that pre-service teachers who must deliver instruction through Filipino during internship suffer from proficiency gaps in academic register, heightened anxiety, and classroom management strain — collectively constraining their instructional effectiveness [6]. Bakun, Kamlian, and Rajik identified vocabulary barriers, cultural bias, identity crisis, and social isolation as the primary challenges for Sama students adapting to a dominant language in a Muslim Mindanao academic institution — challenges directly analogous to those faced by Yakan and Tausug students encountering Filipino as a dominant language at BaSC [7]. Punongbayan, Andino, Atienza, and Baral found that limited vocabulary, difficulty organizing ideas, and fear of judgment were the foremost communication challenges for pre-service teachers, and recommended the development of a targeted enhancement module to address these gaps [8].

Despite a growing body of research on language barriers in Philippine teacher education, no published study has specifically examined the language barriers in Filipino experienced by pre-service teachers in Basilan — a province whose multilingual, Islamic, and historically marginalized character makes it a uniquely important yet understudied site for language-in-education inquiry. This study addresses that gap by investigating the nature and extent of language barriers in Filipino among BaSC pre-service teachers, testing for significant differences across sociolinguistic subgroups, and generating evidence-based recommendations for contextually responsive teacher education.

Specifically, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the sociolinguistic profile of pre-service teachers at BaSC in terms of mother tongue, home language, exposure to Filipino, and self-rated proficiency?
2. What is the level of language barriers experienced by BaSC pre-service teachers along linguistic, cultural, and educational dimensions?
3. Is there a significant difference in the language barriers experienced by respondents when grouped according to their sociolinguistic profile?
4. What pedagogical interventions can be recommended to address the identified language barriers?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Language Barriers in Multilingual Academic Contexts

Language barriers arise when learners must function academically in a language that does not match their dominant linguistic repertoire, generating a mismatch between the learner's communicative competence and the academic demands of the educational environment [7]. In multilingual educational institutions, such barriers are not limited to the linguistic dimension but encompass cognitive, affective, and sociocultural facets that collectively impede learning, professional development, and identity formation [9].

Research globally has demonstrated that the imposition of a prestige language as the sole medium of instruction systematically disadvantages learners from linguistic minority backgrounds [4]. In the Philippine context, Metila, D'Agostino, and Iwasaki traced how the political erosion of mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) left many learners stranded between their indigenous languages and Filipino, without adequate institutional support for developing academic proficiency in either [4]. The consequence, as documented by Bakun et al. [7], is a population of students who navigate their higher education careers in a language that remains, to varying degrees, foreign to their lived linguistic experience.

B. Language Barriers in Muslim Mindanao

The Muslim communities of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago face distinctive language challenges. The Yakan of Basilan speak a language belonging to the Sama-Bajau subgroup of Malayo-Polynesian languages — morphologically ergative and structurally distant from Filipino [10]. The Tausug speak a Bisayan-affiliated language also significantly different from Tagalog-based Filipino [11]. For students from these linguistic backgrounds, acquiring Filipino academic register constitutes a particularly steep learning gradient, as there is minimal structural transfer between their home languages and Filipino.

Bakun et al.'s qualitative study of Sama students at Mindanao State University–Tawi-Tawi — a setting directly analogous to BaSC — identified six primary challenges: vocabulary barriers, cultural bias, identity crisis, social isolation, linguistic inequality, and identity formation difficulties [7]. Students described how unfamiliarity with dominant-language vocabulary undermined confidence and

participation, while cultural bias embedded in the dominant language's norms created persistent alienation. These findings provide a foundational empirical framework for understanding the language barrier experiences of BaSC's Yakan and Tausug pre-service teachers.

Pacio's ethnographic study of Yakan oral tradition in Basilan underscores that the Yakan community's primary mode of knowledge transmission is oral — through songs, stories, and community interaction — rather than through Filipino-medium literacy [12]. This oral tradition orientation, while culturally rich, does not equip Yakan pre-service teachers with the academic Filipino register demanded by their teacher education programs. The cultural distance between BaSC's predominantly Islamic-indigenous student body and the implicitly Filipino-lowland-Christian cultural frame embedded in many Filipino language textbooks constitutes a further layer of barrier beyond purely linguistic dimensions [5].

C. Filipino Language Proficiency and Pre-Service Teachers

Pre-service teachers in the Philippines are required to demonstrate Filipino language competence as part of the PPST under DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017 [1]. This expectation, applied uniformly regardless of regional linguistic background, creates differential demands for teacher education students from non-Filipino-speaking areas.

Carvajal et al. documented five dominant themes in the challenges of pre-service teachers using Filipino as a medium of instruction during internship: (1) linguistic limitations and proficiency gaps, (2) code-switching and pedagogical discontinuity, (3) affective challenges including anxiety and reduced self-efficacy, (4) language barriers in classroom management, and (5) strategic coping through preparation and mentoring [6]. Critically, these themes were identified in Iligan City — a setting whose linguistic diversity is considerably less extreme than Basilan, suggesting that the challenges faced by BaSC pre-service teachers are likely more severe and more deeply embedded in home-language interference.

Punongbayan et al. found that pre-service teachers at Batangas State University identified vocabulary deficiency, difficulty maintaining consistent tone and style, and fear of judgment as primary communication barriers [8]. Wang, Jia, and Mao's bibliometric review of language teacher self-efficacy research identified emotional factors — particularly anxiety — as the dominant strand in the literature, confirming that language barriers in teacher education operate as much through psychological as through purely linguistic pathways [13].

D. Code-Switching as a Response to Language Barriers

Code-switching — the alternation between two or more languages in a single communicative event — is a pervasive response to language barriers in multilingual educational settings [14]. In the Philippine classroom, code-switching between Filipino, English, and regional languages is nearly universal, serving both compensatory and pedagogical functions [15]. However, Carvajal et al. distinguish between strategic code-switching — a deliberate pedagogical tool —

and compensatory code-switching, which functions as an emergency repair mechanism when learners lack the academic register required for sustained Filipino-medium instruction [6]. For BaSC pre-service teachers whose linguistic repertoire does not include Filipino academic register, compensatory code-switching is likely the dominant pattern, creating cycles of dependency that impede the development of Filipino proficiency.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-quantitative research design to systematically describe and quantify the language barriers experienced by BaSC pre-service teachers in Filipino. Descriptive research enables the identification of patterns and characteristics of a phenomenon without manipulating variables [8], providing a rigorous empirical picture of the language barrier landscape at BaSC. The quantitative approach enables statistical comparison across sociolinguistic subgroups, thereby addressing the third research question regarding significant differences in language barrier levels.

B. Participants

The respondents were sixty (60) pre-service teachers enrolled in the College of Education of Basilan State College during Academic Year 2024–2025. Stratified random sampling was applied to ensure proportional representation across programs (BSEd and BEEd) and year levels. The sample size was determined through Slovin's formula applied to the total population of education students at BaSC.

TABLE I: Distribution Of Respondents

Program	Year Level	Male	Female	Total
BSEd	1st Year	4	8	12
BSEd	2nd Year	3	6	9
BSEd	3rd Year	3	5	8
BSEd	4th Year	2	4	6
BEEd	1st Year	3	7	10
BEEd	2nd Year	2	6	8
BEEd	3rd Year	1	4	5
BEEd	4th Year	1	1	2
Total		19	41	60

C. Research Instrument

Data were collected using a validated, adapted questionnaire structured in two sections. Section 1 collected the respondents' sociolinguistic profile, including mother tongue, home language, years of Filipino study, self-rated Filipino proficiency, and frequency of Filipino use outside school. Section 2 contained 46 Likert-scale items (1 = Never; 5 = Always) measuring language barriers along three dimensions: (a) linguistic factors (21 items) covering vocabulary limitations, grammatical difficulty, pronunciation challenges, and code-switching behavior; (b) cultural factors (12 items) covering cultural distance between Filipino language content and respondents' indigenous-Islamic cultural world; and (c) educational factors (13 items) covering instructional quality, academic material exposure, and

academic register development in Filipino subjects. The instrument was adapted from Misiran et al. [18] and content-validated by three language education experts. Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was 0.89, indicating high internal consistency.

D. Data Analysis

The following statistical tools were applied:

- Frequency and Percentage — for sociolinguistic profiling
- Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation — for quantifying language barrier levels
- Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) — for testing significant differences across home language groups, year levels, gender, and programs
- Post-hoc Tukey HSD Test — for identifying specific group differences following significant ANOVA results

The following scale was used to interpret mean scores:

TABLE II: Scale Of Interpretation

Range	Descriptive Level
4.20 – 5.00	Very High Barrier
3.40 – 4.19	High Barrier
2.60 – 3.39	Moderate Barrier
1.80 – 2.59	Low Barrier
1.00 – 1.79	Very Low Barrier

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Sociolinguistic Profile of Respondents

TABLE III: Sociolinguistic Profile Of Bsc Pre-Service Teachers

Variable	Category	f	%
Mother Tongue	Yakan	22	36.7
	Tausug/Sinug	18	30.0
	Chavacano	10	16.7
	Tagalog	5	8.3
	Others	5	8.3
Home Language	Yakan	20	33.3
	Tausug/Sinug	17	28.3
	Chavacano	11	18.3
	Tagalog/Filipino	8	13.3
	Mixed/Multiple	4	6.7
Self-Rated Filipino Proficiency	Very Proficient	2	3.3
	Proficient	12	20.0
	Moderately Proficient	28	46.7
	Less Proficient	14	23.3
	Not Proficient	4	6.7
Filipino Use Outside School	Daily	10	16.7
	Often	17	28.3
	Sometimes	22	36.7
	Rarely	11	18.3

The data in Table III reveal that 66.7% of respondents are native speakers of Yakan (36.7%) or Tausug (30.0%), with Chavacano accounting for a further 16.7%. Only 8.3% use Tagalog/Filipino as their home language. This confirms that for 91.7% of BSC pre-service teachers, Filipino is a second or

third language with limited natural acquisition opportunities outside formal schooling — a finding consistent with the documented linguistic ecology of Basilan [5].

Self-rated Filipino proficiency data are striking: only 23.3% of respondents rate themselves as proficient or very proficient, while 76.7% rate themselves as moderately proficient at best. Furthermore, 55% of respondents report using Filipino only "sometimes" or "rarely" outside school, severely restricting natural language acquisition opportunities. Cummins' CALP framework predicts that academic register — the variety of Filipino demanded in teacher education — will be especially underdeveloped when learners lack sustained out-of-school exposure to the target language [16].

B. Level of Language Barriers in Filipino

TABLE IV: Summary Of Language Barrier Levels

Dimension	Mean (\bar{x})	SD	Descriptive Level
Linguistic Factors	3.82	0.58	High Barrier
Cultural Factors	3.61	0.64	High Barrier
Educational Factors	3.49	0.71	High Barrier
Overall Mean	3.64	0.57	High Barrier

The overall mean of 3.64 indicates that BSC pre-service teachers experience *High* language barriers in Filipino. All three dimensions fall within the High Barrier range, suggesting a pervasive and multi-dimensional barrier pattern that transcends purely linguistic difficulties.

1) Linguistic Factors

TABLE V: Language Barriers Along Linguistic Factors

Indicator	\bar{x}	SD	Level
Code-switching when Filipino vocabulary is unavailable	4.31	0.52	Very High
Difficulty understanding Filipino academic vocabulary	4.12	0.67	High
Struggling to express ideas in Filipino with precision	4.08	0.71	High
Limited knowledge of Filipino grammar rules	3.95	0.74	High
Confusion between Filipino and home language structures	3.89	0.68	High
Difficulty reading Filipino academic texts	3.87	0.72	High
Mispronunciation affecting confidence during recitation	3.76	0.80	High
Composite Mean	3.82	0.58	High

Code-switching when Filipino vocabulary is unavailable ranked as the sole Very High Barrier ($\bar{x} = 4.31$), confirming that compensatory code-switching is the dominant linguistic coping mechanism at BSC. Carvajal et al. describe this pattern as a shift from intentional pedagogical scaffolding to "emergency repair," noting that it can create cycles of linguistic avoidance that impede register development [6]. Vocabulary deficiency ($\bar{x} = 4.12$) and difficulty expressing ideas with precision ($\bar{x} = 4.08$) round out the top three, reflecting what Carvajal et al. describe as a "dissonance between conversational fluency and the academic register required for pedagogy" [6]. For Yakan speakers, structural interference from an ergative mother tongue that has minimal

lexical overlap with Filipino constitutes a particularly acute form of this barrier [10].

2) Cultural Factors

TABLE VI: Language Barriers Along Cultural Factors

Indicator	\bar{x}	SD	Level
Cultural distance between Basilan context and Filipino textbook content	4.02	0.69	High
Limited identification with Filipino cultural references in materials	3.89	0.73	High
Difficulty relating to cultural idioms and expressions in Filipino	3.77	0.74	High
Resistance to adopting Filipino as a primary identity marker	3.61	0.82	High
Feeling marginalized by the dominant Filipino-lowland cultural frame	3.48	0.89	High
Limited motivation to use Filipino due to perceived irrelevance	3.33	0.91	Moderate
Composite Mean	3.61	0.64	High

Cultural distance between the Basilan context and Filipino textbook content was the highest-rated cultural barrier ($\bar{x} = 4.02$). Filipino language learning materials in the Philippines are pervasively anchored in lowland Filipino-Christian cultural references — folk tales, proverbs, and narratives rooted in Luzon-based traditions [4]. For Yakan and Tausug students whose cultural lifeworlds are organized around Islamic practice, indigenous customs, and Bangsamoro historical memory, this creates what Bakun et al. term "cultural bias" — a form of symbolic alienation from the dominant language and its embedded cultural assumptions [7].

The resistance to adopting Filipino as a primary identity marker ($\bar{x} = 3.61$) is theoretically significant. For communities whose cultural identity is deeply embedded in indigenous language — as extensively documented for the Yakan by Pacio [12] and for the Tausug by Amil [11] — the adoption of Filipino as an academic language can be experienced as an identity negotiation rather than a neutral skill acquisition process, elevating Krashen's affective filter and impeding language intake [17].

3) Educational Factors

TABLE VII: Language Barriers Along Educational Factors

Indicator	\bar{x}	SD	Level
Inadequate Filipino instruction responsive to multilingual needs	3.71	0.78	High
Filipino subjects not addressing specific needs of Yakan/Tausug speakers	3.71	0.80	High
Insufficient exposure to Filipino academic reading materials	3.68	0.74	High
Limited opportunities for Filipino oral academic practice	3.62	0.83	High
Absence of materials reflecting Basilan cultural context	3.57	0.87	High
Lack of peer models of academic Filipino in the community	3.49	0.91	High
Insufficient feedback on Filipino language errors	3.45	0.88	High
Composite Mean	3.49	0.71	High

Educational factors yielded the lowest overall mean ($\bar{x} = 3.49$) but remain squarely within the High Barrier range. The highest-rated educational barriers — inadequate multilingual-

responsive instruction ($\bar{x} = 3.71$) and the failure of Filipino subjects to address the specific needs of Yakan and Tausug speakers ($\bar{x} = 3.71$) — point to a systemic pedagogical gap at BSC. Carvajal et al. argue that the sustainability of language-in-education policy depends critically on implementation capacity — specifically, teachers' ability to scaffold instruction for learners who do not share the dominant language's cultural and linguistic assumptions [6]. The absence of Filipino-medium supplementary materials reflecting the Basilan cultural context ($\bar{x} = 3.57$) further intensifies the cultural distance identified in the previous dimension.

C. Significant Differences in Language Barriers by Sociolinguistic Profile

TABLE VIII: Anova Results – Language Barriers By Home Language

Dimension	F	p-value	Interpretation
Linguistic Factors	8.34	0.001	Significant
Cultural Factors	6.78	0.003	Significant
Educational Factors	4.52	0.012	Significant
Overall	7.19	0.002	Significant

ANOVA results reveal statistically significant differences in language barriers across home language groups at the $p < 0.05$ level for all three dimensions and the overall scale. Post-hoc Tukey HSD testing indicates that Yakan and Tausug speakers experience significantly higher language barriers than Tagalog speakers ($p < 0.05$), while no significant difference is found between Yakan and Tausug speakers ($p = 0.48$). Chavacano speakers fall between the indigenous-language group and the Tagalog group, reflecting Chavacano's hybrid character — sharing some Spanish-derived lexical items with Filipino borrowings but remaining grammatically distinct.

TABLE IX: Anova Results – Language Barriers By Year Level

Dimension	F	p-value	Interpretation
Linguistic Factors	3.21	0.031	Significant
Cultural Factors	1.89	0.144	Not Significant
Educational Factors	2.76	0.052	Not Significant
Overall	2.94	0.042	Significant

Year level significantly affects linguistic barriers ($p = 0.031$), with first-year students reporting higher linguistic barriers than third- and fourth-year counterparts. This pattern is consistent with Cummins' CALP framework, which predicts gradual improvement in academic language proficiency with sustained exposure and instruction [16]. However, the absence of significant year-level differences in cultural and educational factors is concerning — it implies that cultural alienation from Filipino language content and dissatisfaction with Filipino instruction persist throughout the four-year program, not diminishing with academic progression. This suggests that the current curricular structure at BSC is not adequately addressing the cultural and educational dimensions of Filipino language barriers.

No significant differences in language barriers were observed between BSEd and BEEd respondents ($p = 0.72$) or

between male and female respondents ($p = 0.61$), suggesting that language barriers at BSC are primarily determined by linguistic background rather than by program enrollment or gender — a finding consistent with Punongbayan et al. [8], who similarly found no sex-based differences in communication challenges among pre-service teachers.

D. Qualitative Insights: Coping Strategies

Open-ended responses identified five dominant coping strategies: (1) compensatory code-switching to the home language or English when Filipino vocabulary fails; (2) advance preparation of Filipino vocabulary and scripts before classes and presentations; (3) peer collaboration with students who have stronger Filipino proficiency; (4) use of digital translation tools (e.g., Google Translate) to bridge vocabulary gaps; and (5) reliance on cooperating teachers during practicum for language modeling and correction. These strategies mirror those documented by Carvajal et al. [6] and Bakun et al. [7], and predominantly reflect compensatory rather than developmental approaches to language barrier management — underscoring the need for structured language support that builds academic Filipino register from within the learners' multilingual contexts.

V. CONCLUSION

This study examined language barriers in Filipino among sixty pre-service teachers at Basilan State College, revealing that BSC pre-service teachers experience consistently high language barriers across linguistic, cultural, and educational dimensions (overall $\bar{x} = 3.64$). The barriers are most severe at the linguistic level, where code-switching dependence and vocabulary deficiency dominate, and most structurally entrenched at the cultural level, where the Islamic-indigenous cultural identity of Basilan's majority student population is systematically misaligned with the cultural assumptions embedded in standard Filipino language curricula.

The identification of statistically significant differences in language barriers by home language, with Yakan and Tausug speakers facing markedly higher barriers than Tagalog speakers, underscores the equity dimension of language-in-education policy in the Philippines: uniform Filipino proficiency standards applied without regard for students' linguistic backgrounds disproportionately disadvantage learners from indigenous and minority language communities — precisely those communities that state universities in BARMM are mandated to serve.

The findings generate four concrete recommendations. First, BSC's College of Education should integrate targeted Filipino academic register training that scaffolds acquisition from the learners' indigenous languages, drawing on translanguaging pedagogies shown to be effective in Muslim Mindanao settings [15]. Second, Filipino language learning materials at BSC should be contextually adapted to incorporate cultural references, narratives, and examples from the Yakan, Tausug, and Bangsamoro worlds, reducing cultural distance and increasing affective engagement [12]. Third, a Filipino language enhancement module specifically designed for multilingual Basilan learners should be

developed and pilot-tested as a supplementary resource in the BSED and BEEd programs, following the module development approach validated by Punongbayan et al. [8]. Fourth, teacher education faculty at BaSC should receive professional development in multilingual-responsive pedagogy, including strategic code-switching, CALP scaffolding, and culturally inclusive Filipino language instruction.

Future research should investigate the effectiveness of contextually adapted Filipino language interventions at BSC, employ qualitative methods to explore the lived language barrier experiences of Yakan-speaking pre-service teachers in greater depth, and examine the longitudinal relationship between Filipino language barrier levels and academic performance outcomes in teacher education.

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