Filipino Education Majors' Academic Vocabulary Interpretation Experiences Toward Inclusive Language Learning Support in Leyte Province

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ABSTRACT:

This study explored Filipino education majors' academic vocabulary interpretation experiences toward inclusive language learning support in Leyte Province. Using a descriptive single case study design, ten first-year Filipino Education majors were purposively selected to participate in a focus group discussion during School Year 2025–2026. The gathered data were analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis. Findings revealed three major experience themes: mixed academic vocabulary experience, technical vocabulary encounter, and contextual vocabulary confusion. The challenges encountered by the participants included limited contextual clues, context-based meaning confusion, and multilingual vocabulary adjustment. Meanwhile, their coping mechanisms involved digital and reference-based vocabulary support, contextual and social clarification strategies, and self-directed vocabulary development. The findings showed that academic vocabulary interpretation was influenced by word familiarity, subject-specific language, context, regional language variation, and multilingual exposure. The study emphasized the need for inclusive, contextualized, and multilingual vocabulary support in higher education institutions. Such support may help Filipino education majors strengthen their vocabulary comprehension, improve class participation, and prepare them as inclusive future language teachers.

Keywords: academic vocabulary; vocabulary interpretation; Filipino education majors; inclusive language learning support; multilingual learning context.

Introduction

Academic vocabulary plays an important role in students' understanding of lessons, participation in class discussions, and performance in academic tasks (Wei, 2021). For Filipino Education majors, interpreting academic vocabulary is especially important because they are future language teachers who are expected to understand, explain, and use words accurately in different academic and classroom contexts. However, understanding vocabulary is not always easy, especially when students encounter unfamiliar, technical, or multiple-meaning words. In the context of Leyte Province, Filipino education majors are often exposed to multiple

languages, including Filipino, Waray, English, and other local languages. This multilingual background may help students compare meanings across languages, but it may also create confusion when words differ in meaning depending on context, subject area, pronunciation, or locality. This makes academic vocabulary interpretation an important concern in higher education, especially in preparing future teachers to support diverse learners. This study is aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 and supported by Philippine laws such as Republic Act No. 7722, or the Higher Education Act of 1994, and Republic Act No. 11650, which promote inclusive, accessible, and quality education through responsive learning environments that recognize and address students' diverse needs (Hye, 2022).

This study is anchored on Second Language Acquisition Theory and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. Second Language Acquisition Theory explains how students acquire, process, and understand language through exposure, practice, and meaningful use (Dubiner, 2019). This theory is relevant to the study because Filipino Education majors use Filipino, Waray, English, and other local languages in both daily and academic communication, which influences how they interpret academic vocabulary. On the other hand, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory explains that learning is developed through social interaction, guidance, and support from more knowledgeable individuals such as teachers, classmates, and community members (Amerian et al., 2014). This theory is relevant because the participants cope with difficult vocabulary words by asking others for clarification, using examples, and relying on guided explanations.

Vocabulary knowledge is essential in academic learning because it helps students understand lessons, answer questions, and express ideas. However, academic vocabulary becomes challenging when words are technical, unfamiliar, or used differently across contexts, showing that vocabulary learning involves understanding how words function in real academic situations (Webb & Nation, 2017). Previous studies have discussed vocabulary learning, context clues, and multilingual language development. However, limited attention has been given to the academic vocabulary interpretation experiences of Filipino Education majors in Leyte Province. There is also a need to understand how their multilingual background, especially the use of Filipino, Waray, and English, shapes their understanding of academic vocabulary. Moreover, many studies focus on vocabulary learning in English language classrooms, but fewer studies explore how Filipino Education majors interpret academic vocabulary across Filipino, English, Waray, and regional language contexts (Macale et al., 2021). This gap is important because Filipino Education majors are future teachers who will eventually support learners with different language backgrounds and learning needs.

The findings of this study may help higher education institutions design inclusive language learning support for Filipino Education majors. Such support may include vocabulary-building activities, contextualized academic language instruction, multilingual vocabulary references, peer-assisted learning, and teacher-guided clarification strategies. The study may also help teacher education programs recognize that vocabulary difficulty is not simply a language weakness. Rather, it may be influenced by unfamiliar academic terms, limited contextual clues, regional language differences, technical vocabulary, and students' confidence in class participation. By understanding these experiences, educators can create more inclusive academic environments where students are supported in interpreting and using academic vocabulary effectively.

Research Questions

This study explored the academic vocabulary interpretation experiences of Filipino Education majors toward inclusive language learning support in Leyte Province during School

Year 2025–2026. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. How did Filipino Education majors describe their experiences in understanding vocabulary words used in their academic subjects?
2. What challenges did Filipino Education majors encounter in interpreting unfamiliar vocabulary words?
3. How did Filipino Education majors cope with the challenges they encountered in interpreting difficult vocabulary words?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive single case study design (Hunziker & Blankenagel, 2024) to explore the academic vocabulary interpretation experiences of Filipino Education majors. This design was considered appropriate because the study focused on one bounded case involving a specific group of students in a higher education institution. It allowed the researcher to describe the participants' experiences, difficulties, and coping mechanisms in interpreting academic vocabulary.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in a state university in Leyte Province. The university was selected because it offered a teacher education program with students majoring in Filipino. The locale provided a suitable setting because the participants were exposed to Filipino, Waray, English, and other local languages in their daily and academic communication. The participants came from different areas within Leyte and nearby communities, which made their vocabulary experiences varied and meaningful. This setting reflected a multilingual higher education environment where academic vocabulary interpretation became relevant to inclusive language learning support.

Research Participants

The participants of the study were ten (10) first-year Bachelor of Secondary Education students major in Filipino who were officially enrolled during School Year 2025–2026. They were purposively selected because they had direct experiences in understanding and interpreting academic vocabulary in their subjects. All participants voluntarily agreed to join the study and were willing to share their experiences in a focus group discussion.

Research Instrument

The study used a semi-structured interview guide as the main research instrument. The guide contained open-ended questions based on the statement of the problem, which focused on experiences, difficulties, and coping mechanisms in interpreting academic vocabulary. The instrument was content-validated by three experts to ensure that the questions were clear, relevant, and aligned with the purpose of the study. The focus group discussion lasted for approximately 40 to 60 minutes and was conducted without unnecessary interruption.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher first sought permission from the university to conduct the study. After approval was granted, the researcher informed the participants about the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. The participants were also assured that their identities would remain anonymous and that their responses would be treated with confidentiality. After the focus group discussion, the researcher transcribed the recorded responses and conducted member checking to confirm the accuracy of the participants' statements. The findings were interpreted based on the participants' responses and were prepared for dissemination through a research forum and possible publication while maintaining participant anonymity.

Data Analysis

The study used reflexive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2023) to analyze the participants' responses. The researcher first familiarized themselves with the data by reading

and rereading the transcripts. Then generated initial codes from meaningful statements related to vocabulary experiences, difficulties, and coping mechanisms. After coding, the researcher developed possible themes, reviewed them carefully, and refined them based on the patterns found in the data. The final themes were named and discussed according to their connection with the research questions and the participants' significant responses.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher secured permission from the university and obtained informed consent from the participants before conducting the study. Participation was voluntary, and the participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time without any negative consequence. To protect their privacy, their identities were kept anonymous, and all responses were treated with confidentiality.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the study was established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was supported through member checking, where participants confirmed whether the transcribed responses reflected their intended meanings. Transferability was addressed by providing detailed descriptions of the participants, locale, and research context. Dependability was ensured by following a clear and organized research process from data gathering to data analysis. Confirmability was maintained by grounding the findings in the participants' actual responses rather than the researchers' personal assumptions.

Reflexivity

The researcher practiced reflexivity throughout the conduct of the study and recognized that own background, assumptions, and academic experiences could influence how the data being interpreted given by the participants' responses. To reduce bias, researcher focused on the actual statements shared by the participants during the focus group discussion. The themes and interpretations were based on the students' narratives rather than the researcher's personal opinions. Through reflexivity, the researcher ensured that the findings remained faithful to the academic vocabulary experiences of the Filipino Education majors.

Result and Discussion

Description of Students' Experiences in Understanding Vocabulary Words

Theme 1: Mixed Academic Vocabulary Experience

Filipino Education majors could understand familiar academic words but struggled with unfamiliar, technical, or rarely used terms. Their experiences were both manageable and challenging, depending on word familiarity, context, and subject use. This supports González-Fernández et al. (2021) who emphasized that academic vocabulary understanding is influenced by exposure, context clues, and the type of vocabulary encountered. Below were the narratives of the participants:

Significant response 1: "My experience in understanding vocabulary words in my academic subjects is generally okay, but there are times when I struggle, especially when I encounter unfamiliar or technical terms." [P_4, L22-23]

Significant response 2: "Minsan nakakaintindi ako ng mga salita at mayroon ring mga ibang salita na mahirap pa rin intindihin para sa akin." ("Sometimes, I understand some words, but there are also other words that are make me struggle to understand.") [P_4, L_{46-47}]

Significant response 3: "Mixed ang experience ko kapag nag-a-analyze ng academic vocabulary—minsan madali, pero minsan may nagstruggle ako din talaga." ("My experience in analyzing academic vocabulary is mixed—sometimes it is easy, but sometimes it is also quite challenging.") [P_8, L_{90-91}]

Significant response 4: "Sometimes it is easy and difficult for me at the same time. I can easily understand common words, but when it comes to new and unfamiliar words it is a bit hard for me to catch up." [P_9, L_{97-99}]

Theme 2: Technical Vocabulary Encounter

This theme show that Filipino Education majors struggled with technical and academic terms because these words were unfamiliar and not commonly used in everyday conversations. Students emphasized that technical words were difficult to understand because they were often limited to specific subjects or academic situations. Academic vocabulary is important in understanding content learning who noted that specialized vocabularies are often known only within specific fields or groups (Allen, 2023). Therefore, the participants' technical vocabulary encounter shows that limited exposure to subject-specific terms affects their ability to understand academic discussions and lessons. Below were the narratives of the participants:

Significant response 1: "Pinakamahirap ko ang technical words. Dahil talagang hindi ko ito naririnig sa mga pang-araw-araw na usapan lamang." {"The most difficult words for me are technical words because I do not usually hear them in everyday conversations."} [P_2, L_{38-39}]

Significant response 2: "I sometimes struggle with unfamiliar academic or technical terms." [P_6, L_{77-78}]

Significant response 3: "Usually I am having a hard time with different academic terms which I am not familiar with." [P_7, L_{89}]

Theme 3: Contextual Vocabulary Confusion

Filipino Education majors became confused when words had multiple meanings depending on context, language, dialect, or locality. Some words could be misunderstood because their meanings changed across places and languages. That knowing a word involves more than knowing its definition because word knowledge is multifaceted and context-dependent. This theme also emphasized that many words are polysemous, meaning they may carry different meanings across different contexts (Haber & Poesio, 2024). Therefore, the participants' contextual vocabulary confusion shows that academic vocabulary interpretation requires attention to context, culture, and language variation. Below were the narratives of the participants:

Significant response 1: "Para sa akin yung multiple meaning of words ang mahirap dahil halimbawa kung unfamiliar ka pa rin sa isang salita at marami itong kahulugan ay tiyak malilito ka talaga." {"For me, multiple-meaning words are difficult because when you are unfamiliar with a word and it has many meanings, you will surely become confused."} [P_4, L_{52-53}]

Significant response 2: "In our barangay in Eastern Samar, "omang" refers to a small snail-like creature. However, based on their presentation, they were not referring to an animal at all. In their dialect, "omang" meant a handsome man." [P_5, L_{67-69}]

Significant response 3: "The word "langgam" means "ant" in Filipino, but in another language, it means "bird". [P6, L_{81-82}]

Participant 9: "Sometimes, multiple-meaning words give me confusion especially when it was only uttered by someone." [P_9, $L_{104-109}$]

Challenges Encountered by Filipino Education Majors in Interpreting Unfamiliar Vocabulary Words

Theme 1: Limited Contextual Clues

Students had difficulty interpreting unfamiliar vocabulary words when there was not enough context to guide their understanding. Participants also shared that unfamiliar words became harder to understand when they had not heard or read them before, or when the surrounding sentence did not provide enough clues. This indicates that limited contextual support affected their ability to identify the exact meaning of words and fully understand the lesson. This finding is emphasized that context clues help students infer the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary and defines context as the surrounding parts of a text that help explain meaning (Mauliza et al., 2019). Therefore, the participants' difficulty shows that unfamiliar vocabulary becomes more challenging when students lack enough contextual clues to interpret meaning accurately. Below were the narratives of the participants:

Significant response 1: "The biggest challenge I experience is understanding the exact meaning of unfamiliar words, especially when there are not enough context clues." [P_1, $L_{116-117}$]

Significant response 2: "I struggle when I do not really know the meaning of the word or when it is my first time hearing it and there is not enough context to guess its meaning." [P_2, $L_{122-123}$]

Significant response 3: "There are times when I come across words that I have never heard or read before, making it difficult for me to understand their meaning immediately." [P_5, $L_{134-136}$]

Significant response 4: "I usually have difficulty understanding the lesson when my teacher uses unfamiliar terms or vocabulary words that I have not encountered before." [P_6, $L_{170-171}$]

Theme 2: Context-Based Meaning Confusion

This theme shows Filipino Education majors experienced confusion when a word changed its meaning depending on how it was used in a sentence, subject, or situation. The words with different meanings required careful interpretation because the correct meaning depended on context. Vocabulary learning involves not only knowing word definitions but also understanding how words work in different uses and contexts and word knowledge is complex and develops through repeated exposure to words in varied contexts (Nation, 2022); therefore, the participants' confusion shows that interpreting unfamiliar vocabulary requires attention to context, subject use, and meaning variation. Below were the narratives of the participants:

Significant response 1: "Sometimes, I also get confused when one word has different meanings depending on how it is used in a sentence." [P_1, $L_{117-118}$]

Significant response 2: "The word 'current' can mean present time, but in Science, it can also refer to the flow of electricity." [P_2, $L_{126-128}$]

Significant response 3: "I get confused about the correct and proper use of words in different contexts." [P_4, $L_{133-134}$]

Theme 3: Multilingual Vocabulary Adjustment

Students experienced difficulty in interpreting unfamiliar vocabulary because they used different languages in daily and academic communication. Switching among Filipino, Waray, Cebuano, English, and other local languages affected how students understood certain words. Some participants needed to compare, translate, or shift to their native language before fully expressing or understanding ideas. This finding explains that learning another language involves using existing language knowledge while developing vocabulary, grammar, and meaning in a new language (Cook, 2016). Skills across languages may be connected and participants' multilingual vocabulary adjustment shows that language background can both support and complicate academic vocabulary interpretation. Below were the narratives of the participants.

Significant response 1: "Switching between Filipino, Waray, Cebuano, and English affects how I understand certain vocabulary words." [P_1, $L_{119-120}$]

Significant response 2: "At home, we mostly use Waray, but in school, there are many English and deep Filipino words." [P_2, $L_{130-131}$]

Significant response 3: "I sometimes compare or translate words before fully understanding their meaning." [P_5, $L_{166-169}$]

Significant response 4: "I cannot speak continuously in one language because there are words or terms that I do not know, so I switch to my native language." [P_{10}, $L_{206-208}$]

Coping Mechanisms in Interpreting Difficult Vocabulary Words

Theme 1: Digital and Reference-Based Vocabulary Support

Filipino Education majors coped with difficult vocabulary words by using Google, online searches, dictionary apps, and other digital references to find meanings quickly and independently. Participants shared that they searched online or used dictionary applications whenever they encountered unfamiliar words.

This indicates that digital and reference-based tools served as immediate vocabulary support, especially when students needed quick definitions, translations, or examples. This finding highlighted that mobile dictionary apps helped higher education students develop independent vocabulary learning and reduce dependence on others (Dan et al., 2024). Therefore, the participants' use of digital and reference-based vocabulary support shows that technology and dictionary resources became practical coping mechanisms for understanding difficult academic vocabulary. Below were the narratives of the participants

Significant response 1: "Whenever I encounter difficult vocabulary words, I usually search for their meaning using Google or a dictionary app." [P_1, $L_{214-215}$]

Significant response 2: "Sometimes, if I encounter difficult vocabulary words, I search it online." [P_4, L_{238}]

Significant response 3: "My first instinct is to search for their meaning online, especially if I have access to the internet or a technological device." [P_5, $L_{245-246}$]

Significant response 4: "I have three dictionary apps on my phone: English to Filipino Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, and KWF Dictionary." [P_{10}, $L_{294-295}$]

Theme 2: Contextual and Social Clarification Strategies

Filipino Education majors coped with difficult vocabulary words by rereading sentences, using context clues, checking examples, and asking others for clarification. Some participants emphasized that rereading and examining the sentence context helped them understand unfamiliar words more clearly, while other participant shared that asking friends, teachers, family members, or locals became helpful when the meaning could not be found online. This indicates that students used both independent and social strategies to interpret vocabulary accurately. This finding is emphasized that context clues helped undergraduate students infer vocabulary meanings and learning is strengthened through interaction and guidance from more knowledgeable others (Bouknify & Meryem, 2025). Therefore, contextual and social clarification strategies served as practical coping mechanisms that helped students understand difficult vocabulary through meaning clues, repeated reading, and guided explanation. Below were the narrative responses of the participants:

Significant response 2: "First, I try to read it again and again. Sometimes, I look for context." [P_2, $L_{221-222}$]

Significant response 3: "The strategy that helps me the most is looking at the context of the sentence and checking examples." [P_1, $L_{216-217}$]

Significant response 6: "I also read the sentence again for me to understand the word better." [P_9, $L_{284-285}$]

Significant response 7: "When the word is so difficult that I cannot find it on the internet, I ask some friends, teacher, family members, or locals in our community." [P_{10}, $L_{295-296}$]

Theme 3: Self-Directed Vocabulary Development

The students coped with difficult vocabulary words by improving their vocabulary through reading, practice, self-study, and the use of vocabulary materials. They emphasized that reading stories, searching for definitions independently, reviewing examples, and using vocabulary references helped them understand unfamiliar words better. These strategies show that students did not only rely on immediate assistance but also developed independent habits to expand their vocabulary over time. This finding emphasized that extensive reading provides language-learning benefits, including vocabulary growth and that reading can support vocabulary acquisition through repeated exposure to words (Strong, 2024). Therefore, self-directed vocabulary development served as a meaningful coping mechanism because it helped students build confidence, improve comprehension, and continue learning academic vocabulary independently.

Significant response 1: "By practicing and reading lots of stories, it really helps me comprehend or understand words." [P_3, $L_{235-237}$]

Significant response 2: "When I search for a word on my own, I can take my time reading different definitions, examples, and explanations. These experiences motivate me to continue expanding my vocabulary through reading and self-study." [P_5, $L_{257-259}$]

Significant response 4: "With the help of my vocabulary materials, I can explore and understand new words faster to keep my learning smooth and continuous." [P_8, $L_{281-283}$]

Significant response 6: "When you are not familiar with the words, you are not confident to answer or participate in class. That is why it is important to read always to expand your vocabulary." [P_{10}, $L_{302-303}$]

Conclusion

The study concluded that Filipino Education majors experienced academic vocabulary interpretation as both manageable and challenging, as reflected in the themes *mixed academic vocabulary experience, technical vocabulary encounter, and contextual vocabulary confusion*. The participants were able to understand familiar academic words, but they struggled when they encountered unfamiliar, technical, or multiple-meaning vocabulary. Their experiences showed that academic vocabulary understanding depended on word familiarity, subject use, context, and language variation. In terms of the challenges encountered, the themes *limited contextual clues, context-based meaning confusion, and multilingual vocabulary adjustment* revealed that students had difficulty interpreting unfamiliar words when there was not enough context, when words changed meanings across situations, and when different languages influenced their understanding. These findings supported Second Language Acquisition Theory, which explains that students develop language understanding through exposure, practice, and meaningful use of language. Since the participants used Filipino, Waray, English, Cebuano, and other local languages, their vocabulary interpretation was affected by how they compared, translated, and processed meanings across languages. For coping mechanisms, the themes *digital and reference-based vocabulary support, contextual and social clarification strategies, and self-directed vocabulary development* showed that students used different strategies to understand difficult vocabulary words. They searched online, used dictionary applications, reread sentences, looked for context clues, asked teachers or classmates, and improved their vocabulary through reading and self-study. These findings supported Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes that learning develops through social interaction, guidance, and support from more knowledgeable individuals. The study concluded that academic vocabulary interpretation among Filipino Education majors required inclusive language learning support that considered their multilingual background, vocabulary difficulties, and coping strategies. Higher education institutions may strengthen this support through contextualized vocabulary instruction, multilingual vocabulary references, peer-assisted learning, guided clarification, and self-directed vocabulary development activities. These forms of support may help Filipino Education majors become more confident, competent, and inclusive future language teachers.

Recommendations

It is recommended that higher education institutions provide inclusive vocabulary support for Filipino Education majors through contextualized instruction, multilingual references, digital vocabulary tools, peer assistance, and guided clarification activities. These supports may help students better understand unfamiliar, technical, and context-based vocabulary while improving their confidence, participation, and readiness as future language teachers.

AI Declaration

The researcher declares that artificial intelligence tools, specifically ChatGPT and Grammarly, were used only to enhance the grammar, clarity, organization, and academic presentation of this manuscript. These tools assisted in improving the language and readability of the paper, but the ideas, data, analysis,

interpretations, findings, and overall content remained the original work and responsibility of the researcher. The researcher carefully reviewed, verified, and approved all AI-assisted revisions to ensure accuracy, originality, and alignment with the purpose of the study.

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