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Lexical Sesquipedaliophobia Across Academic and Sociodemographic Contexts: Basis for Developing a Targeted Intervention Scheme

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Abstract

Lexical sesquipedaliophobia—the anxiety associated with encountering long and complex words—presents a significant yet underexplored barrier in foreign language learning. This quantitative study employed a non-experimental descriptive-comparative design to examine the level of lexical sesquipedaliophobia among tertiary students in the Davao Region, Philippines, with attention to grouping variables such as degree program, provincial classification, school type, and sex. Data were gathered from a stratified sample of 330 students across five academic programs using the Lexical Sesquipedaliophobia Scale (LSS), a modified instrument adapted from Horwitz et al.'s (1986) FLCAS. Descriptive and inferential statistics revealed consistently high mean ratings on communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Significant differences in anxiety levels were also found across academic areas, geographic locations, institutional types, and sex. These findings provide an empirical foundation for the design of a targeted intervention scheme titled "LEXI-CALM: Lexical Confidence and Anxiety-Lowering Modules for Academic Lengthy and Complex Word Use." The study highlights the importance of addressing affective factors in vocabulary instruction and supports the development of context-sensitive, learner-informed interventions that respond to the academic and sociocultural variables shaping lexical anxiety in foreign language classrooms.

1. INTRODUCTION

Lexical sesquipedaliophobia, or long-word anxiety, is a specific type of language anxiety characterized by fear or discomfort when encountering polysyllabic words in speaking or reading (Aldrich, 2002). In academic settings, such anxiety may hinder engagement and intensify existing challenges, such as speaking apprehension (Jaya et al., 2022), as reflected in Weiwei's (2023) findings, which show that 45.2% of students experience negative effects. Further, in Malaysia, 68% of respondents worry and get upset when they encounter complex words because they do not know how to pronounce them (Ahmad et al., 2013). Similarly, in Indonesia, unfamiliar vocabulary emerged as a key source of reading anxiety (Fitrawati et al., 2023), which is linked to fear of making mistakes and processing polysyllabic words. These suggest that long and unfamiliar words not only hinder comprehension but also heighten emotional distress—aligning with the core features of lexical sesquipedaliophobia.

This study's social value lies in its potential to highlight how subtle language-related anxieties, such as fear of long or complex vocabulary, can reinforce inequities in higher education, particularly in linguistically diverse contexts like the Davao Region. By showing how lexical anxiety affects participation and academic confidence, the findings support SDG 4 (Quality Education) through the promotion of inclusive and student-centered language practices, SDG 5 (Gender Equality) by acknowledging differential anxiety experiences across sexes and the need for responsive instructional approaches, and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by addressing barriers faced by students from marginalized language backgrounds. Further, this quantitative study used an adapted version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz et al., 1986) to measure students' anxiety responses to long and complex words. Specifically, this study sought answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the level of lexical sesquipedaliophobia among tertiary students in private institutions in the Davao Region?

2. Is there a significant difference in lexical sesquipedaliophobia among tertiary students in Davao Region when grouped according to degree program, provincial classification, school type, and sex?

3. What intervention scheme can be crafted based on the study's findings?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Lexical sesquipedaliophobia, or the fear and anxiety toward long and complex words (Aldrich, 2002; Coon, 1980), is adopted in this study as a specific extension of foreign language anxiety (FLA) because it captures a precise yet underexplored linguistic challenge that many tertiary learners face in English-medium contexts. Additionally, Learners with weak vocabulary knowledge tend to experience disproportionately higher reading anxiety, especially when texts contain unfamiliar or technical words. For example, some researchers (Lervåg & Aukrust, 2010; Shiotsu & Weir, 2007; Yildirim et al., 2011) found that among EFL undergraduates, vocabulary knowledge was the strongest predictor of reading comprehension, surpassing reading anxiety and self-efficacy in multiple regression analyses.

Cognitive studies confirm that anxiety disrupts lexical processing. Learners with high reading anxiety showed weaker neural differentiation between first- and foreign-language words, suggesting inefficiency in early word recognition (Koda, 2015). Further, long or complex words increase cognitive load: anxious learners still "get it right" much more slowly (Gennari et al., 2018). If lexical sesquipedaliophobia operates similarly, one would expect that exposure to long or unfamiliar vocabulary would lead to processing delays, hesitation, or avoidance behavior during oral or reading tasks in the classroom. This shows that anxiety slows down lexical processing, even if it does not always reduce accuracy. On the other hand, a recent study by Sun and Yang (2025) about Chinese college students demonstrated that participants with higher anxiety required significantly longer reaction times on word judgment and semantic categorization tasks compared to low-anxiety peers, although accuracy remained comparable.

Studies on second language (L2) learning anxiety show that difficulties with complex vocabulary and grammar can heighten anxiety levels in university environments, potentially impacting overall communication and comprehension performance (Karalık & Merç, 2025). Additionally, a large body of work has documented that vocabulary acquisition is often perceived by students as a formidable task, contributing to sustained worry or avoidance behaviors when faced with challenging or lengthy words (Hulstijn, 2001). Moreover, academic-support environments have been empirically linked to reductions in anxiety and enhanced confidence, which support persistence and improved academic outcomes among students facing lexical challenge (Voisin et al., 2023). These claims collectively affirm that vocabulary anxiety is not a trivial affective state but a substantive influence shaping academic trajectory.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Research Design

This study used the quantitative research method employing a non-experimental design that utilized both descriptive and comparative approaches to determine the level of lexical sesquipedaliophobia and examine whether significant differences exist when grouped by degree program, provincial classification (rural and urban), school type (college and university), and sex (female and male), aligning with Creswell and Creswell (2018). Descriptive statistics provided an overview of trends and distributions, while inferential comparisons allowed for group-level analysis of variance. This dual focus enabled the researcher to measure both the prevalence and the variation of the anxiety construct across subgroups. This structure aligns with the recommendations of Saunders et al. (2019), who affirm the utility of descriptive-comparative research in educational inquiry.

3.2.Research Participants

A total of 330 tertiary students from 11 private HEIs participated, proportionally distributed across the grouping variables justified based on recommended sample sizes for multivariate analyses in language anxiety research, where a minimum of 200–300 cases is considered adequate to ensure statistical power, stable parameter estimates, and reliable subgroup comparisons across multiple moderator variables (Siddiqui, 2013). A stratified random sampling technique was employed, in which students were first grouped by sex and then randomly selected within each stratum to ensure balanced representation (Makwana et al., 2023; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). Consequently, participant representation by degree program included Business Administration (93), Criminology (47), English/Communication (98), Nursing (60), and Psychology (32). In terms of provincial classification, 152 respondents were from rural areas and 178 from urban areas. The sample also comprised 180 students from colleges and 150 from universities, with an equal number of female (165) and male (165) participants. Although slight variations occurred across categories, these distributions were deemed acceptable as they were based on the actual availability of students provided through the assistance of designated gatekeepers in each institution. This approach ensured ethical access, feasibility, and adequate representation while maintaining the integrity of the sampling procedure. The inclusion criteria required participants to have been enrolled in one of the targeted programs, completed at least one semester of English-medium instruction, and provided informed consent.

3.3. Research Instruments

The primary instrument was a structured survey adapted from Horwitz et al.'s (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), modified to assess anxiety toward long and complex English words which is now referred to as Lexical Sesquipedaliophobia Scale (LSS) to reflect its specific focus on anxiety toward long and complex words. This renaming was not meant to detach from the theoretical foundation of the FLCAS but to indicate conceptual refinement and contextual adaptation. Since the modification involves rewording and restructuring items to capture a distinct linguistic phenomenon, Yeung (2024) explicated that using a differentiated title clarifies the instrument's scope and contributes to construct specificity and scholarly transparency. Still, the 33-item modified questionnaire is divided into three subscales: Communication Apprehension (11 items); Test Anxiety (15 items); and Fear of Negative Evaluation (7 items). Together, these dimensions provided a comprehensive measurement framework for capturing the multifaceted experience of lexical sesquipedaliophobia among tertiary students.

To ensure contextual relevance and reliability, the LSS has undergone expert validation by expert validators with backgrounds in linguistics and language education. Although the original instrument of FLCAS by Horwitz et al. (1986) has reported a Cronbach's alpha value of approximately .93, a pilot test was still conducted with students from a private higher education institution in Davao City. Following the recommendations of Bonett and Wright (2015) and Tavakol and Dennick (2011), the pilot testing yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .84 to .93, indicating strong internal consistency reliability. Specifically, the communication apprehension subscale obtained a Cronbach's alpha of 0.915, test anxiety recorded 0.927, and fear of negative evaluation yielded 0.840. The pilot testing also enabled the researcher to identify and revise ambiguous or culturally irrelevant items prior to the formal administration of the instrument *(see below)*.

3.4.Data Collection

After thorough evaluation, the study protocol was granted ethical clearance by the Research Ethics Committee. Prior to data collection, formal approval was requested from the Presidents or Directors of the participating HEIs. Once approved, the researcher personally administered the survey using printed questionnaires to the target participants during the arranged sessions. Before answering, each student was also oriented about the study's purpose, ethical safeguards, and procedures, and was provided with an Informed Consent Form (ICF) to sign. Participation in the study was strictly voluntary. Participants were informed that they could refuse participation, decline to answer specific questions, or withdraw at any point without penalty or consequences of any kind. The survey was expected to take approximately 30 minutes to complete, after which the researcher immediately collected the accomplished forms to ensure confidentiality and data integrity.

3.5. Quantitative Data Analysis

Data obtained from the face-to-face surveys were analyzed using both descriptive statistics—including mean and standard deviation—and inferential statistics to determine significant differences in lexical sesquipedaliophobia across key variables such as degree program, provincial classification (rural and urban), school type (college and university), and sex (female and male). A one-way ANOVA and independent samples t-test were employed where appropriate to examine group differences. All statistical analyses were performed using statistical tools with the significance level set at p-value < 0.05 to ensure analytical rigor and reliability (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008; Roberts & Priest, 2006). Drawing from the

quantitative findings—particularly the levels of lexical sesquipedaliophobia among student groups—a research-informed intervention scheme was developed. This plan, presented in tabular form, was based on the highest-rated items in each of the indicators.

4. RESULTS

This section provides a comprehensive discussion of the findings obtained from the survey conducted on lexical sesquipedaliophobia among higher education students in Davao Region. It addresses the statistical aspects of the study, detailing the data collected through survey questionnaires and the analysis alongside its interpretation.

4.1.Level of Lexical Sesquipedaliophobia Among Tertiary Students in Davao Region

The summary of the level of lexical sesquipedaliophobia among tertiary students in Davao Region is presented in Table 1. The level of lexical sesquipedaliophobia with its corresponding indicators is enumerated as follows: *communication apprehension* got a mean of 3.71, rated as high; *test anxiety* had a mean of 3.72, rated as high; and *fear of negative evaluation* had a mean of 4.00, rated as high.

Table 1. Level of Lexical Sesquipedaliophobia Among Tertiary Students in Davao Region

Variable/Indicator	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**	**Descriptive Level**
Communication Apprehension (CA)	3.71	0.876	High
Test Anxiety (TA)	3.72	0.882	High
Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE)	4.00	0.923	High
Lexical Sesquipedaliophobia	**3.81**	**0.807**	**High**

4.2. Significance of the Difference in the Level of Lexical Sesquipedaliophobia Among Tertiary Students When Grouped According to Degree Program

In Table 2, the overall F-value is 5.18 (p<0.001), which implies that the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a statistically significant difference in the level of lexical sesquipedaliophobia among tertiary students in Davao Region when grouped according to degree program (Business Administration, Criminology, English/Communication, Nursing, and Psychology).

Table 2. Significance of the Difference When Grouped According to Degree Program

Indicators	**Degree Program**					F	*p*-value*	**Remarks**
	BA	Crim	Eng/Com	NSG	Psych			
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean			
Communication Apprehension	3.80	3.90	3.80	3.51	3.29	3.24	0.015	Significant
Test Anxiety	3.85	3.95	3.84	3.42	3.21	5.38	<.001	Significant
Fear of Negative Evaluation	4.18	4.20	4.01	3.81	3.47	4.14	0.004	Significant
Overall	**3.91**	**3.99**	**3.86**	**3.53**	**3.29**	**5.18**	**<.001**	**Significant**

**value must be p<0.05 to be significant*

Legend: BA = Business Administration
NSG = Nursing
Crim = Criminology
Psych = Psychology
Eng/Com = English/Communication

Moreover, all indicators showed significant differences in higher education students' lexical sesquipedaliophobia when analyzed according to degree programs. Thus, it can be viewed that higher education students' communication apprehension (p<0.05), test anxiety (p<0.05), and fear of negative evaluation (p<0.05), significantly differ based on their degree programs, as all p-values are within the threshold of 0.05 level of significance set in the study.

In sorting out the details, Table 2.1 presents the Tukey post-hoc test as essential in this analysis because it identifies where the significant differences lie among the degree programs after establishing an overall group effect. While ANOVA confirms that at least one group differs, the Tukey test pinpoints the specific program pairs with statistically meaningful differences while controlling for Type I error. This allows for a more precise interpretation of program-based variations in lexical sesquipedaliophobia.

Table 2.1. Tukey Post-Hoc Test When Grouped According to Degree Program

		BA	*Crim*	*Eng/Com*	*NSG*	*Psych*
BA	Mean diff.	-	*-0.0813*	*0.0453*	*0.371**	*0.615***
	p-value	-	*0.978*	*0.995*	*0.038*	*0.002*
Crim	Mean diff.		-	*0.1265*	*0.453**	*0.697***
	p-value		-	*0.895*	*0.028*	*0.001*
Eng/Com	Mean diff.			-	*0.326*	*0.570***
	p-value			-	*0.088*	*0.004*
NSG	Mean diff.				-	*0.244*
	p-value				-	*0.619*
Psych	Mean diff.					-
	p-value					-

The Tukey post-hoc results indicate that significant differences in overall lexical sesquipedaliophobia exist across specific degree programs, rather than uniformly across all groups. To be specific, Business Administration students differ significantly from Nursing (p=0.038) and Psychology students (p=0.002), with higher mean scores observed in Nursing and Psychology. Further, Criminology students likewise show significant differences when compared with Nursing (p=0.028) and Psychology students (p=0.001), again indicating higher anxiety levels in the latter degree programs. Lastly, English/Communication students differ significantly only from Psychology students (p=0.004), while differences with other programs are not statistically significant.

Although no significant differences were found among Business Administration, Criminology, and English/Communication, nor between Nursing and Psychology, the table for the post-hoc analysis suggests that the strongest program-based contrasts involve Psychology and Nursing versus the other academic disciplines.

4.3. Significance of the Difference in the Level of Lexical Sesquipedaliophobia Among Tertiary Students When Grouped According to Provincial Classification

As shown in the Table 3, the overall t-value is 4.93[a], with a computed p-value of <0.001. Under the conventional decision, if the p-value is lower than the 0.05 level of significance set in the study, the null hypothesis should be rejected. Based on the finding, the computed p-value for this grouping analysis is <0.001; thus, the rejection of the null hypothesis which means that a statistically significant difference is observed among tertiary students when grouped by provincial classification (rural and urban).

Table 3. Significance of the Difference When Grouped According to Provincial Classification

Indicators	**Provincial Classification**		t	*p*-value*	**Remarks**
	Rural	Urban			

	Mean	Mean			
Communication Apprehension	3.91	3.54	3.90[a]	<.001	Significant
Test Anxiety	3.93	3.54	4.03[a]	<.001	Significant
Fear of Negative Evaluation	4.33	3.71	6.35[a]	<.001	Significant
Overall	**4.01**	**3.58**	**4.93[a]**	**<.001**	**Significant**

**value must be p<0.05 to be significant*

In addition, the data reveals that tertiary students' communication apprehension (p<0.05), test anxiety (p<0.05), and fear of negative evaluation (p<0.05), significantly differ based on their provincial classification, as all *p-values* are lower than the 0.05 level of significance. Furthermore, since students from the rural areas got the total mean rating of 4.01 while the ones from the urban areas got the total mean rating of 3.58, this means that tertiary students from far-flung, remote, or mountainous areas exhibit higher levels of lexical sesquipedaliophobia than those who are from the downtowns or cities.

4.4.Significance of the Difference in the Level of Lexical Sesquipedaliophobia Among Tertiary Students When Grouped According to School Type

As reflected in Table 4, the overall t-value is 3.54[a] (p<0.001), which implies that the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a statistically significant difference in the level of lexical sesquipedaliophobia among tertiary students in Davao Region when grouped according to school type (college and university).

Indicators	**School Type**		t	*p*-value*	Remarks
	College	University			
	Mean	Mean			
Communication Apprehension	3.83	3.57	2.66[a]	0.008	Significant
Test Anxiety	3.87	3.55	3.32	<.001	Significant

Fear of Negative Evaluation	4.17	3.78	3.88[a]	<.001	Significant
Overall	**3.92**	**3.61**	**3.54[a]**	**<.001**	**Significant**

Table 4. Significance of the Difference When Grouped According to School Type

**value must be p<0.05 to be significant*

Moreover, the data reveals that tertiary students' communication apprehension (p=0.008), test anxiety (p>0.05), and fear of negative evaluation (p>0.05), significantly differ based on their school type, as all *p-values* are lower than the 0.05 level of significance set in the study. So, since students from the colleges got the total mean rating of 3.92 while the ones enrolled in universities got the total mean rating of 3.61, this implies that college students demonstrate higher levels of lexical sesquipedaliophobia compared to university students.

4.5.Significance of the Difference in the Level of Lexical Sesquipedaliophobia Among Tertiary Students When Grouped According to Sex

As presented in Table 5, the overall t-value is 2.83 (p=0.005), which implies that the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, a significant difference exists in the students' lexical sesquipedaliophobia when analyzed according to sex (female and male).

Table 5. Significance of the Difference When Grouped According to Sex

Indicators	**Sex**		t	*p*-value*	Remarks
	Female Mean	Male Mean			
Communication Apprehension	3.83	3.59	2.54	0.012	Significant
Test Anxiety	3.78	3.66	1.31	0.192	Not Significant
Fear of Negative Evaluation	4.26	3.73	5.40	<.001	Significant
Overall	**3.90**	**3.65**	**2.83**	**0.005**	**Significant**

**value must be p<0.05 to be significant*

Examining further, the data reveals that there is a significant difference in the level of tertiary students' communication apprehension (p=0.012) and fear of negative evaluation

(p<0.05), when grouped based on sex as their p values are lesser than the 0.05 level of significance set in the study. On the other hand, there is no significant difference found in the test anxiety (p=0.192) of tertiary students based on their sex, as its p-value is greater than the 0.05 level of significance threshold. Although there is no significant difference in their test anxiety when grouped according to sex, the overall level of lexical sesquipedaliophobia of female students is still higher than male students.

4.6. Intervention Scheme

Based on the results of the study, several items obtained the highest mean ratings within each indicator of lexical sesquipedaliophobia. With this, an intervention program is proposed to directly address learners' anxiety triggers during oral and evaluative academic tasks—particularly those involving lengthy, unfamiliar, or technical lexical items.

I. Title: LEXI-CALM: Lexical Confidence and Anxiety-Lowering Modules for Academic Lengthy and Complex Word Use

II. Rationale: The **LEXI-CALM** intervention program is designed to reduce lexical sesquipedaliophobia in higher education students by targeting three empirically supported dimensions: **communication apprehension**, **test anxiety**, and **fear of negative evaluation**. The program focuses on strengthening students' ability to process, pronounce, and explain complex lexical items under classroom and assessment conditions. Anchored on the highest-rated items from each indicator, LEXI-CALM emphasizes structured exposure, pronunciation scaffolding, retrieval practice under test-like conditions, and psychologically safe classroom discourse routines. Collectively, the intervention aims to reduce avoidance behaviors associated with high-stakes or evaluative speaking situations.

III. Proposed Intervention Scheme: In this study, the proposed intervention is anchored on the highest-rated items from each indicator. The focal items are: *feeling unsure when needing to pronounce long/complex words during class discussions* for communication apprehension (3.85), *feeling anxious in tests even when prepared, especially with unfamiliar long words* for test anxiety (3.94), and *feeling nervous when teachers unexpectedly ask for word explanations without preparation* for fear of negative evaluation (4.20).

Presented in Table 6 is the proposed intervention scheme, including the targeted concern, objectives, strategies/activities, expected outputs, responsible persons/offices, and implementation timeline.

Table 6. LEXI-CALM: Lexical Confidence and Anxiety-Lowering Modules for Academic Lengthy and Complex Word Use

Areas of Concern	**Objectives**	**Strategies/ Activities**	**Output**	**Person/Office Responsible**	**Timeline**
Communication Apprehension:	• Reduce uncertainty and hesitation during oral classroom	• **Pronunciation Scaffolding Routines**: Syllable chunking, stress marking, and	• Student pronunciation logs (target list + notes on stress/segment	• Program Head / Department Chair • English /	Weekly (10–15 minutes embedded per

feeling unsure when needing to pronounce long/complex words (e.g., subtlety, multidisciplinary) during class discussions	tasks involving complex words. • Improve pronunciation accuracy and fluency for multisyllabic academic vocabulary. • Strengthen confidence in real-time classroom discussion.	phoneme focus (teacher-modeled → guided → independent). • **Low-stakes "Say-It-Again" practice**: Students repeat target words in phrases/sentences (no grading; supportive correction). • **Micro-discussion drills**: 2–3 minute pair-share using target words in context (structured prompts). • **Word Clinic Corner**: A short weekly segment where students submit "hard words" encountered in readings/discussions for guided practice.	s). • Short audio submissions (before/after samples) documenting improvement. • Increased participation in oral discussions using target vocabulary.	Subject Teachers • Students	class) for one term
Test Anxiety: *feeling anxious in tests even when prepared, especially with unfamiliar long words (e.g., innocuous, gobbledygook)*	• Decrease test-related physiological and cognitive anxiety linked to unfamiliar and polysyllabic vocabulary. • Improve lexical retrieval under time pressure. • Build tolerance to unfamiliar/low-frequency words through repeated exposure.	• **Test-Conditioned Practice**: Short timed vocabulary tasks with gradual difficulty (start low-stakes → simulate test format). • **Retrieval Practice Sets**: Flashcards/quiz apps using definition–use–pronounce cycles (word → meaning → sentence → oral). • **Anxiety Regulation Mini-Protocols**: Brief breathing/grounding routine before timed tasks; normalize stress responses. • **Error-Responsive Review**: Students categorize mistakes (meaning/pronunciat	• Weekly timed quizzes (formative only) with reflection sheets. • Vocabulary "error map" (common confusion patterns). • Improved quiz performance and reduced self-reported anxiety across sessions.	• Testing Coordinator / Course Teachers • Guidance Office (optional support module) • Students	Once or twice a week (15–20 minutes), for 6–8 weeks

		ion/context) and apply targeted remediation.			
Fear of Negative Evaluation: *feeling nervous when teachers unexpectedly ask for word explanations (e.g., pseudonymity, nomenclature, mnemonic) without preparation*	• Reduce fear response to spontaneous questioning. • Increase students' ability to explain complex and lengthy terms using partial knowledge strategies (without shame). • Establish psychologicall y safe response norms and supportive feedback culture.	• **"Safe Call" Recitation Protocol**: Students may request (a) 10-second thinking time, (b) "use it in a sentence," or (c) "define by parts" (morpheme-based explanation). • **Think–Pair–Share Buffer** before cold calls (quick peer rehearsal). • **Acceptable Partial Answer Training**: Modeling how to respond when unsure (e.g., "I'm not fully sure, but I think it relates to…"). • **Feedback Reframing**: Teacher uses correction scripts that separate "person" from "performance," reinforcing effort and strategy use.	• Classroom protocol poster (student-facing). • Student strategy checklist for spontaneous responses. • Increased willingness to attempt definitions/exp lanations during recitation.	• Subject Teachers • Program Head • Students	Impleme nted each class meeting; review every 2–3 weeks

5. DISCUSSION

This section examines the findings of the study, focusing on the levels of lexical sesquipedaliophobia among higher education students and the significance of differences across grouping variables like degree program, provincial classification, school type, and sex.

5.1.Level of Lexical Sesquipedaliophobia Among Tertiary Students in Davao Region

The result is aligned with the Alqurashi (2025), which demonstrated that vocabulary knowledge was a strong predictor of reading comprehension among learners in Saudi Arabia, while heightened reading anxiety emerged when students encountered complex lexical items. This anxiety negatively affected comprehension outcomes, reflecting learners' difficulty in processing lengthy or unfamiliar words. Similarly, Zhou et al. (2025) reported that 98.72% of Malaysian students exhibited poor language proficiency when faced with increasingly complex English vocabulary as they advanced in grade level. Collectively, these findings support the

presence of lexical sesquipedaliophobia, wherein anxiety toward long and complicated words impedes learners' linguistic performance and comprehension across contexts.

5.2. Significance of the Difference in the Level of Lexical Sesquipedaliophobia Among Tertiary Students When Grouped According to Degree Program

The significant difference observed across degree programs is consistent with the findings of Juan et al. (2018), who claimed that observable physiological signs of anxiety during tests, such as sweaty palms and shaky hands, have been documented among criminology learners experiencing heightened lexical anxiety. In contrast, psychology students reported progressive improvement in their communication skills over time, particularly in face-to-face instructional settings. This is aligned with the findings of Reich et al. (2022), who stated that learners with prior skills training were also able to sustain these gains, indicating greater confidence and reduced anxiety in communicative tasks that involve complex and lengthy vocabulary.

5.3.Significance of the Difference in the Level of Lexical Sesquipedaliophobia Among Tertiary Students When Grouped According to Provincial Classification

The findings in this analysis are parallel to the assertions of Tiongson (2025) and Tupas and Salonga (2016), who emphasized that English proficiency is closely linked to social mobility and academic opportunity, and that unaddressed lexical anxiety may disproportionately disadvantage students from marginalized or non-dominant language backgrounds. On the other hand, students from urban learning environments have been shown to demonstrate higher motivation and confidence in classroom participation when provided with positive instructional feedback, with Das (2020) reporting that 71.4% of learners felt encouraged to engage in class activities and perceived improvement in their English communicative competence.

5.4. Significance of the Difference in the Level of Lexical Sesquipedaliophobia Among Tertiary Students When Grouped According to School Type

The significant difference in the level of lexical sesquipedaliophobia when analyzed by school type aligns with the assertion that students from smaller or non-specialized colleges institutions tend to experience higher levels of language-related apprehension. As noted by Giray et al. (2022), limited exposure to English-medium instruction and fewer opportunities for communicative competence development can heighten students' anxiety toward language use. However, university students exposed to enriched learning environments have been found to exhibit greater confidence in using lengthy and complex English vocabulary, with Quvanch and Si Na (2022) reporting significantly reduced anxiety among learners who regularly engaged in academic English.

5.5. Significance of the Difference in the Level of Lexical Sesquipedaliophobia Among Tertiary Students When Grouped According to Sex

The statistical findings with respect to sex are in line with earlier research indicating that female learners tend to experience higher levels of anxiety when confronted with complex lexical items. Almotiary (2022) observed that female students reported greater anxiety when encountering difficult or technical English terms during academic reading, which was attributed to heightened self-imposed performance expectations. On the contrary, the present findings indicate that male students tend to experience lower levels of reported lexical sesquipedaliophobia. This pattern aligns with Chaffee et al. (2020), who noted that male language learners were less likely to seek assistance or employ overt coping strategies when encountering lexical difficulty, often masking their anxiety through silence or disengagement due to lower interest in language learning that involves complex vocabulary.

5.6. Intervention Scheme

Anchored on the highest mean ratings across communication apprehension (3.85), test anxiety (3.94), and fear of negative evaluation (4.20), LEXI-CALM is a data-driven intervention designed to reduce lexical sesquipedaliophobia in oral and evaluative academic contexts. It integrates structured exposure, pronunciation scaffolding, retrieval practice, anxiety-regulation techniques, and psychologically safe discourse routines to address cognitive and affective triggers associated with lengthy and unfamiliar lexical items. Through clearly defined objectives, activities, and implementation structures, the program translates empirical findings into a sustained classroom-based strategy for strengthening lexical confidence and minimizing avoidance behaviors.

The activities incorporated in the LEXI-CALM intervention scheme are grounded in complementary theoretical perspectives that address both the affective and communicative dimensions of lexical sesquipedaliophobia. First, Stephen Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis provides a foundational rationale for designing activities that lower learners' anxiety, fear, and self-consciousness when using complex vocabulary. According to this hypothesis, heightened anxiety acts as a psychological barrier that prevents learners from effectively processing language input. In response, the intervention emphasizes low-pressure, non-evaluative activities—such as guided pronunciation practice and peer-supported discussions—to reduce affective barriers and allow learners to engage more comfortably with lengthy and unfamiliar lexical items.

Second, the intervention draws on Joseph Wolpe's (1961) Systematic Desensitization Theory, which explains how anxiety can be reduced through gradual and repeated exposure to feared stimuli in controlled settings. This principle directly informed the sequencing of activities in LEXI-CALM, wherein students are progressively exposed to long and complex words through structured practice, simulated test items, and scaffolded impromptu responses. By encountering anxiety-provoking lexical items incrementally rather than abruptly, learners are given opportunities to manage physiological and emotional reactions, thereby reducing avoidance behaviors associated with lexical sesquipedaliophobia in academic settings.

Finally, the communicative orientation of the intervention is anchored in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as articulated by Michael Canale and Merrill Swain

(1980). CLT emphasizes meaningful interaction, fluency, and functional language use over error-free performance, which aligns with the intervention's focus on encouraging students to use complex vocabulary without fear of immediate correction or negative evaluation. Activities such as group discussions, paraphrasing tasks, and approximation-based responses reflect CLT principles by prioritizing intelligibility and confidence, thereby helping learners reframe complex vocabulary use as a communicative resource rather than a source of anxiety.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it is concluded that tertiary students generally experience a high level of anxiety toward long, complex, and unfamiliar vocabulary, particularly in situations involving oral communication, testing, and evaluation. This indicates that lexical sesquipedaliophobia is a prevalent affective concern that influences students' willingness to communicate, performance in assessments, and overall engagement with academic language tasks. The statistical results revealed consistently high levels of anxiety across the three measured constructs—*communication apprehension*, *test anxiety*, and *fear of negative evaluation*—with specific line items involving pronunciation of complex words, unfamiliar vocabulary in tests, and impromptu lexical explanations receiving the highest mean ratings. Significant differences were also found in the level of lexical sesquipedaliophobia when students were grouped according to degree program, provincial classification, school type, and sex. Criminology students, learners from rural areas, students from colleges, and female students exhibited higher levels of lexical sesquipedaliophobia compared to their counterparts. These findings underscore that lexical complexity functions as a significant trigger of anxiety even among students who are otherwise academically prepared, highlighting the affective burden associated with advanced vocabulary use in higher education contexts. In response to the identified areas of concern, this study proposed an intervention program titled "LEXI-CALM: Lexical Confidence and Anxiety-Lowering Modules for Academic Lengthy and Complex Word Use."

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

At the policy level, the results of this study may inform the development of language education guidelines that explicitly account for affective variables alongside linguistic competence. Educational authorities may consider endorsing anxiety-sensitive instructional approaches and encouraging higher education institutions to adopt evidence-based interventions that address lexical sesquipedaliophobia. Policies supporting teacher training in affective language pedagogy and the integration of supportive vocabulary practices into curricula may contribute to more inclusive and effective language learning environments.

The significant differences observed across degree programs, provincial classifications, school types, and sex, suggest that institutional context plays a meaningful role in shaping students' experiences of lexical sesquipedaliophobia. HEIs are therefore encouraged to integrate structured lexical support mechanisms within both general education and discipline-specific courses, particularly in programs with high technical vocabulary demands. Faculty development workshops and student support initiatives may be established to promote awareness of lexical sesquipedaliophobia and to facilitate the implementation of intervention schemes such as LEXI-CALM across departments.

The findings highlight the need for teachers to recognize lexical sesquipedaliophobia as a significant factor influencing students' classroom participation and assessment performance. Thus, it is recommended that teachers adopt instructional strategies that lower evaluative pressure, particularly during oral tasks and impromptu questioning. Practices such as scaffolded vocabulary use, tolerance for approximation, and delayed corrective feedback may help mitigate fear of mispronunciation and negative evaluation. Moreover, teachers are encouraged to pursue professional development opportunities that focus on affect-sensitive pedagogy and anxiety-reducing strategies in vocabulary instruction.

Given that lexical sesquipedaliophobia manifests strongly even among academically prepared individuals, learners are encouraged to develop greater awareness of lexical anxiety as a legitimate challenge in language use rather than a personal deficiency. Students may benefit from engaging in structured support programs, such as the proposed LEXI-CALM intervention, which emphasize gradual exposure to complex vocabulary, anxiety regulation strategies, and confidence-building activities. By actively participating in low-stakes communicative tasks and reflective practices, students may reduce avoidance behaviors and develop more adaptive responses to complex lexical demands in academic settings.

Future studies are recommended to extend the present findings by examining lexical sesquipedaliophobia in relation to other variables such as motivation, self-efficacy, academic discipline, and technology-mediated learning environments. Longitudinal research may also be conducted to assess the sustained impact of interventions like LEXI-CALM on students' lexical confidence and academic performance. Additionally, future research may explore the phenomenon across different educational levels or cultural contexts to further refine theoretical and pedagogical understandings of lexical sesquipedaliophobia.

8. LIMITATIONS

This quantitative study offers important insights into the distribution of lexical sesquipedaliophobia across academic and sociodemographic variables; however, several limitations must be considered. The sample, though stratified, was confined to selected institutions within the Davao Region, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other geographic or institutional contexts. Self-report measures, while efficient for large-scale data collection, are susceptible to biases such as social desirability and subjective interpretation. Additionally, the cross-sectional design captures perceptions at a single time point, preventing the analysis of progression or change in lexical sesquipedaliophobia over time. Although the study explored key moderator variables, it did not examine possible interaction effects or underlying psychological constructs that may influence the results. Lastly, the statistical outcomes, while robust, do not provide explanatory depth regarding the causes or lived dynamics of the anxiety itself. Future research may address these constraints by employing longitudinal, quasi-experimental, or mixed-methods designs to build a more nuanced understanding of lexical anxiety and inform intervention development.

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This paper was collaboratively authored by two researchers, each contributing according to their expertise: Prof. Caloc led the development of the introduction, statistical analysis,

interpretation of results, and discussion of findings; Dr. Baradillo ensured the rigor of the study through validation of the methodology and results. He was also responsible for the comprehensive review and critical refinement of the manuscript.

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Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Appendix A. Modified Survey Questionnaire Adapted from Horwitz et al.'s (1986) FLCAS

Lexical Sesquipedaliophobia Scale (LSS)

Range of Means:	4.20 – 5.00	= Very High
	3.40 – 4.19	= High

2.60 – 3.39 = Moderate

1.80 – 2.59 = Low

1.00 – 1.79 = Very Low

COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION (CA)	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α	Descriptive Equivalent
1. I feel unsure when I need to pronounce long or complex words such as *subtlety* or *multidisciplinary* during class discussions.	3.85	0.931	0.937	High
2. I get frightened when the teacher uses words like *entrepreneurship* or *institutionalization* that I do not understand.	3.54	1.203	0.934	High
3. I become anxious when I am asked to explain or read aloud long words like *phenomenology* or *psychoanalysis* without preparation.	3.69	1.149	0.931	High
4. I feel nervous speaking or reading long English words in front of fluent speakers.	3.80	1.125	0.931	High
5. I do not feel confident when I use or pronounce long English words during class.	3.66	1.167	0.929	High
6. I feel very self-conscious when I have to pronounce or use words like *metacognitive* or *decriminalization* in front of my classmates.	3.60	1.150	0.931	High
7. I get nervous and confused when I need to use complex words such as *recontextualization* or *unfathomable* while speaking.	3.73	1.087	0.931	High
8. I get nervous when I cannot understand the meaning of long words the teacher says.	3.79	1.047	0.934	High
9. I feel overwhelmed by the many complex patterns and pronunciations of long English words.	3.79	1.000	0.932	High
10. I feel uncomfortable around people who easily use long English words.	3.58	1.246	0.930	High
11. I become anxious when I cannot express myself using long or formal English words.	3.79	1.120	0.934	High
OVERALL	**3.71**	**0.876**	**0.938**	**High**

TEST ANXIETY (TA)	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α	Descriptive Equivalent
12. I tremble when I know I'll be called on to read or explain words like *equivocal* or *tattletale*.	3.75	1.123	0.953	High

13. I feel uncomfortable in taking classes that often require using long and difficult English words.	3.71	1.102	0.953	High
14. During lessons with long words, I lose focus and think about unrelated things.	3.69	1.112	0.953	High
15. I feel uneasy during tests that contain long or technical English words.	3.65	1.071	0.952	High
16. I worry about failing tests that include unfamiliar or polysyllabic English words.	3.89	0.999	0.954	High
17. I feel upset when lessons involve long and complicated words.	3.73	1.112	0.952	High
18. When long or complex words like *quintessential* or *perpetuity* appear, I get so nervous that I forget what I already know.	3.73	1.090	0.952	High
19. Even if I am well prepared, I still feel anxious when my test includes words like *innocuous* or *gobbledygook*.	3.94	1.009	0.954	High
20. I am uninterested in going to classes because I fear encountering long and difficult words.	3.48	1.369	0.954	High
21. My heart pounds when I am asked to pronounce or spell words like *neurolinguistics* or *lollapalooza*.	3.73	1.131	0.952	High
22. The more I study long vocabulary like *malfeasance* or *anachronistic*, the more confused and anxious I become.	3.66	1.154	0.952	High
23. I feel pressured whenever I expect long and complex words in class.	3.76	1.083	0.952	High
24. Lessons that include long words move too quickly, and I worry about being left behind.	3.78	1.089	0.952	High
25. I feel more tense and nervous in classes that involve many long words than in my other subjects.	3.68	1.118	0.952	High
26. On my way to classes that involve long English words, I feel nervous and unsure.	3.61	1.238	0.953	High
OVERALL	**3.72**	**0.882**	**0.956**	**High**

FEAR OF NEGATIVE EVALUATION (FNE)	**Mean**	**SD**	**Cronbach's α**	**Descriptive Equivalent**
27. I worry a lot about making mistakes when pronouncing long English words.	4.03	1.098	0.914	High
28. I feel that other students are better at using and pronouncing long and difficult words.	4.00	1.110	0.910	High

29. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers when I must say long words like *constitutionalism* or *legitimization* aloud.	3.89	1.134	0.906	High
30. I am afraid that my teacher will correct me when I mispronounce words like *skedaddle* or *transcendental*.	3.89	1.232	0.909	High
31. I feel that other students pronounce long words like *bureaucratically* or *benignity* better than I can.	3.92	1.093	0.906	High
32. I am afraid my classmates will laugh if I mispronounce long words such as *criminological* or *indictment*.	4.04	1.169	0.903	High
33. I feel nervous when the teacher unexpectedly asks me to explain words like *pseudonymity, nomenclature, or mnemonic* without prior preparation.	4.20	0.991	0.918	Very High
OVERALL	**4.00**	**0.923**	**0.921**	**High**

Indicators	**Mean**	**SD**	**Cronbach's α**	**Descriptive Equivalent**
Communication Apprehension (CA)	3.71	0.876	0.822	High
Test Anxiety (TA)	3.72	0.882	0.788	High
Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE)	4.00	0.923	0.901	High
OVERALL (LS)	**3.81**	**0.807**	**0.886**	**High**