

Sociolinguistic Competence of Junior High School Students

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Abstract

Sociolinguistic competence plays a crucial role in learners' effective communication within academic and social contexts; however, disparities in language use across learner profiles remain a concern in junior high school settings. In this premise, this descriptive study aimed to determine the level of sociolinguistic competence of junior high school students in a public school in Northern Negros. The study involved 115 junior high school students in a public secondary school characterized by a predominance of female and Grade 7 learners from low-income families with modest parental educational backgrounds and relatively large household sizes. Data were gathered using a researcher-developed sociolinguistic competence questionnaire covering appropriateness of language use, contextual sensitivity, and cultural norms and values. The instrument underwent rigorous content validation by experts and reliability testing, yielding excellent reliability indices. Ethical protocols were strictly observed, including informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality of responses. The ensuing results revealed that the overall level of sociolinguistic competence of the respondents was high. All three domains- appropriateness of language use, contextual sensitivity, and cultural norms and values- were likewise rated high, with the highest mean scores reflecting students' use of formal language with teachers, alignment of language with situational formality, and respect for cultural values. Females, Grade 8 learners, students from smaller families, and those from higher-income households obtained higher mean scores. Meanwhile, significant differences were found only by sex in appropriateness of language use and cultural norms, while no significant differences emerged across other profile variables. 2. These findings call for intentional integration of classroom activities that could foster sociolinguistic competence awareness and enhancement.

Keywords: Sociolinguistic competence, appropriateness of language use, contextual sensitivity, and cultural norms and values, Negros Occidental, Philippines.

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Introduction

Rationale

In an era of globalization and intensified intercultural communication, sociolinguistic competence has become a core requirement of English language education rather than an optional skill. Beyond grammatical accuracy, effective communication now demands the ability to use language appropriately across social roles, cultural norms, and situational contexts (Celce-Murcia et al., 2020; Richards & Schmidt, 2020). Learners with well-developed sociolinguistic competence are better equipped to participate meaningfully in academic, social, and professional interactions.

The need to examine sociolinguistic competence is particularly compelling in non-native English-speaking environments such as Negros Occidental, Philippines, where English coexists with Hiligaynon, Cebuano, and Filipino. In such multilingual settings, learners frequently navigate code-switching, varying levels of formality, and culturally embedded norms of respect and hierarchy. Without adequate sociolinguistic competence, students may produce grammatically correct utterances that are nevertheless pragmatically inappropriate, leading to communication breakdowns and social misalignment. Thus, sociolinguistic competence functions as a bridge between language proficiency and culturally appropriate communication in local and global contexts.

Moreover, sociolinguistic competence has long-term implications for employability and workplace integration. Research shows that the ability to use language appropriately in professional interactions enhances job performance, workplace socialization, and career readiness (Kong, 2014; Rehner & Lasan, 2023). Despite its importance, empirical studies on sociolinguistic competence among Philippine junior high school learners remain limited, with existing literature noting persistent gaps in classroom practice and learner performance (Muzaki, 2023; Echavez, 2024).





Motivated by these gaps and observed learner difficulties in the local school context, this study investigated students' sociolinguistic competence, in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4 on inclusive, equitable, and quality education.

Literature Review

This section provides an overview of the body of knowledge on the sociolinguistic competence of junior high school students in a public school setting in Negros Island Region. It incorporates insights from both local and international researchers who have significantly influenced the variables studied.

Sociolinguistic competence is widely recognized as a crucial dimension of communicative competence, emphasizing the appropriate use of language across social contexts, relationships, and cultural norms. Foreign literature underscores that sociolinguistic competence extends beyond adherence to native-speaker norms and is shaped by cultural expectations, topic appropriateness, and situational sensitivity (Koay, 2021). For non-native speakers, pragmatic failures often arise from difficulty distinguishing between native and target language norms, suggesting that explicit instruction on rules of speaking can accelerate sociolinguistic development in foreign language contexts (Saa, 2025).

Local conceptual literature reinforces the need for deliberate instruction in sociolinguistic competence within Philippine ESL classrooms. Studies highlight that while learners may demonstrate grammatical proficiency, they frequently lack guidance in using language appropriately across varying social contexts, particularly in multilingual environments (Ryan, 2020; Gamelo & Roy, 2024). National policies and curricula, including the K–12 Language Arts framework, explicitly recognize sociocultural awareness—such as register, politeness, and culturally accepted expressions—as essential learning outcomes (DepEd, 2019; 2020). Empirical foreign studies reveal that junior high school learners commonly struggle with formality, register shifts, and speech-act realization, especially in face-threatening interactions such as requests and apologies. However, evidence consistently shows that explicit, context-rich pedagogical interventions—such as CEFR-aligned role plays and scenario-based tasks—significantly enhance learners' sociolinguistic performance (Dugas, 2025; Rao, 2023). Conversely, teaching materials that prioritize grammatical accuracy over social variation limit students' pragmatic awareness (Badarna, 2021).

Similarly, Philippine-based research indicates that students' sociolinguistic competence often lags behind their general English proficiency. While learners demonstrate awareness of situational demands, they struggle to enact appropriate language forms without guided practice (Echavez, 2024; Abacan & Tangonan, 2021). Studies further show that local cultural norms, power relations, and multilingual practices strongly influence classroom interactions, reinforcing the importance of culturally grounded instruction (Sandoval-Delos Santos et al., 2023; Yap & Saludez, 2022).



Overall, the literature converges on the view that sociolinguistic competence is essential for effective communication and requires explicit, sustained, and context-sensitive instruction. Both foreign and local studies affirm that integrating cultural norms, register awareness, and situational practice into language teaching is vital in addressing persistent sociolinguistic gaps among junior high school learners.

Objectives

This paper aimed to determine the level of sociolinguistic competence of junior high school students at an extension high school in Northern Negros during the First Semester, School Year 2025-2026. More specifically, this paper sought to determine 1) the level of sociolinguistic competence of junior high school students in terms of appropriateness of language use, contextual sensitivity, and cultural norms and values; 2) the level of sociolinguistic competence of the subject-respondents when grouped according to age, grade level, and parents' education; and 3) whether a significant difference exists in the sociolinguistic competence of subject-respondents when grouped according to the above-mentioned variables.

Methodology

This chapter discusses the methods used to gather and analyze the data based on this paper's predetermined objectives. This section includes the research design, subject-respondents, research instrument, data collection procedures, ethical considerations, and data analysis and statistical treatment.

Research Design

This study used the descriptive research design, aiming to determine the level of sociolinguistic competence of the same respondents in the same research environment for the same period. According to McCombes (2023) descriptive research aims to accurately and systematically describe a population, situation or phenomenon. It can answer what, where, when, and how questions, but not why questions. A descriptive research design can use a wide variety of research methods to investigate one or more variables.

Respondents

This paper used stratified random sampling to determine the study respondents from Sophomore Geometry Students (N= 160; n=115).

Instrument

This paper used a 30-item researcher-made survey questionnaire to gather the needed data for the study. The items covered topics on appropriateness of language use, contextual sensitivity, and cultural norms and values.



Procedures for Data Collection

To gather the needed data, the researcher first secured permission from the school head to administer the survey to the selected students. As the instrument is researcher-made, its content validity will be evaluated by three experts using the Carter V. Good and Douglas E. Scates validation tool, and their recommendations were duly incorporated. Parental consent was obtained since the respondents are minors. Prior to administration, the students were oriented on the purpose of the survey and its relevance to the study. The questionnaire was then administered face-to-face, after which the data were collected, processed using appropriate statistical tools, and interpreted accordingly.

Data Analysis and Statistical Treatment

Objective 1 used the descriptive-analytical scheme and mean as a statistical tool to determine the level of sociolinguistic competence of junior high school students in terms of appropriateness of language use, contextual sensitivity, and cultural norms and values. Objective 2 used the descriptive statistics and mean as statistical tools to determine the level of sociolinguistic competence of the subject-respondents when grouped according to the aforementioned variables. Finally, Objective No. 3 used the comparative statistics and Mann-Whitney U test to determine whether or not a significant difference exists in the sociolinguistic competence of subject-respondents when grouped according to the aforementioned variables.

Ethical Considerations

This research paper strived to minimize the risk of harm to its target respondents by assuring them of the confidentiality of their responses and ensuring their anonymity throughout the entire research process. At the onset, this researcher secured a parent's consent letter since most of the respondents are minors. The respondents were carefully oriented about the survey questionnaire and the benefits they would get out of it. It was emphasized to the respondents that the outcomes of this research endeavor will be geared towards the improvement of their sociolinguistic competence. Moreover, the respondents were assured of their right to withdraw from their research participation if deemed necessary. No personal data compromising the respondents' identity was collected in adherence to the Data Privacy Act of 2012, specifically on accessing the data both by the researcher and the analyst. The respondents were assured that no information that discloses their identity will be released or published without their consent, except when extremely necessary. All collected materials were appropriately disposed of by machine shredding or dissolved in water after the submission of the study. At the same time, soft copies of the data were deleted, leaving no chance of future retrieval.

Results and Discussions



This chapter provides a concise overview of the study's discoveries stemming from thorough data collection, rigorous analysis, and insightful interpretation. Following this, key conclusions were drawn from the initial analytical phase, thereby offering valuable insights.

Level of Sociolinguistic Competence based on the Appropriateness of Language Use, Contextual Sensitivity, and Cultural Norms and Values

Table 1

Level of Sociolinguistic Competence based on Appropriateness of Language Use

Appropriateness of Language Use Items	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a Learner, I...</i>		
1. I use formal language when talking with my teachers.	4.64	Very High Level
2. I avoid slang language when talking with people older than me.	4.11	High Level
3. I know when to change my communication style based on the situation, especially when switching between formal and informal language.	4.44	High Level
4. Most of the time, I try to avoid using inappropriate words during our class discussions.	4.20	High Level
5. I try to adjust my language when I am talking in a formal setting, like at school events.	3.86	High Level
6. I am confident in using English, especially in academic settings or in school.	2.67	Moderate Level
7. I try to limit my usage of informal language during my time of communicating with my classmates.	3.19	Moderate Level
8. I am making sure that I choose my words carefully when I am talking to adults.	4.63	Very High Level
9. I am comfortable in using both Filipino and English, and code-switch when talking with my friends.	3.17	Moderate Level
10. I try to exert an effort in ensuring that I am speaking politely even if I am talking with my friends.	2.96	Moderate Level
Overall Mean	3.79	High Level

Table 1 shows that junior high school students demonstrate a high level of sociolinguistic competence in terms of appropriate language use across school contexts. Students are particularly strong in using formal language with teachers and choosing their words carefully when speaking with adults, reflecting a clear understanding of social hierarchies and expected



norms. They also show solid ability to adjust their communication to different situations and avoid inappropriate language. However, lower ratings in academic English confidence, peer-level politeness, and comfort with code-switching suggest that while students know how language *should* be used, they are still building confidence in using English and regulating informal language among peers. Overall, the findings indicate that students possess a well-developed yet context-sensitive sociolinguistic competence—strong in formal settings but more tentative in peer and bilingual interactions.

Table 2*Level of Sociolinguistic Competence based on Contextual Sensitivity*

Contextual Sensitivity	Items	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a Learner, I...</i>			
	1. I usually try to adjust the way I speak or the language I use depending on the age of the person I am talking to.	4.10	High Level
	2. I am well aware of the correct or appropriate language that I should use during the different school activities, like in assemblies, group work, and other activities.	3.96	High Level
	3. I really try to avoid using the type of language that could be offensive to other people, especially those who come from different backgrounds.	3.75	High Level
	4. I know if it is acceptable to use humor or casual language in a conversation that I am involved in.	4.24	High Level
	5. I am making sure that I use the appropriate language that matches the formality of the setting.	4.45	High Level
	6. I can adapt my language depending on the topics that a conversation may have.	4.12	High Level
	7. I do not use inappropriate language during classroom discussions that require formality.	4.23	High Level
	8. I can sense if someone does not feel comfortable with the language used in a conversation, and I try to immediately adjust my language.	4.26	High Level
	9. I do not use jokes that could be offensive to others and could make them uncomfortable.	3.91	High Level
	10. I try to be extra careful in my language, especially those that could be perceived as disrespectful in different types of situations.	4.31	High Level

Table 2 indicates that junior high school students exhibit a high level of contextual sensitivity in their sociolinguistic competence, showing consistent awareness of situational, interpersonal, and cultural cues in communication. Students are particularly adept at matching their language to the



formality of the setting, avoiding disrespectful expressions, and adjusting how they speak when they sense discomfort in others. The uniformly high ratings across all indicators suggest that learners are able to read social contexts well and regulate their language accordingly. Overall, these findings highlight a strong capacity among students to communicate respectfully and adaptively across diverse school interactions.

Table 3*Level of Sociolinguistic Competence based on Cultural Norms and Values*

Cultural Norms and Values	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a Learner, I...</i>		
1. I know how my language can reflect my cultural identity.	4.13	High Level
2. I try to use the type of language that could show respect for the traditional cultural values of individuals.	4.50	Very High Level
3. I try to exert much effort to use an inclusive type of language if the topic concerns different cultures.	4.23	High Level
4. I adjust the language that I use in speaking to show respect for the different cultural beliefs and practices of people	4.38	High Level
5. I know that using language that is appropriate culturally is very important.	4.23	High Level
6. I understand that some words may have different meanings depending on cultural context.	4.15	High Level
7. I feel that my language reflects my respect for Filipino cultural values.	4.49	High Level
8. I actively learn about language practices from different cultures to improve the way I communicate with different people.	4.37	High Level
9. I believe that understanding cultural norms is important when communicating with people from different backgrounds and walks of life.	4.46	High Level
10. I make sure to use culturally sensitive language when talking to people from diverse communities.	4.43	High Level
Overall Mean	4.34	High Level

Table 3 shows that junior high school students demonstrate a high level of sociolinguistic competence grounded in cultural norms and values. Learners consistently display respect for traditional and Filipino cultural values and recognize the importance of cultural understanding in effective communication, reflecting a strong link between language, culture, and identity. The uniformly high ratings across all indicators suggest that students are able to adjust their language in ways that are respectful and inclusive of cultural differences. Overall, the findings highlight a



well-developed culturally grounded sociolinguistic competence that supports appropriate and sensitive communication in diverse school contexts.

Level of Sociolinguistic Competence based on Appropriateness of Language Use, Contextual Sensitivity, and Cultural Norms and Values, and Groupings by Sex, Grade Level, Parents' Educational Attainment

Table 4

Level of Sociolinguistic Competence Based on Appropriateness of Language Use According to Sex

Appropriateness of Language Use	Items	Mean	Sex		
			Male Interpretation	Female Interpretation	
<i>As a Learner, I...</i>					
	1. I use formal language when talking with my teachers.	4.59	Very High Level	4.69	Very High Level
	2. I avoid slang language when talking with people older than me.	4.13	High Level	4.10	High Level
	3. I know when to change my communication style based on the situation, especially when switching between formal and informal language.	4.32	High Level	4.56	Very High Level
	4. Most of the time, I try to avoid using inappropriate words during our class discussions.	4.16	High Level	4.24	High Level
	5. I try to adjust my language when I am talking in a formal setting, like at school events.	3.75	High Level	3.97	High Level
	6. I am confident in using English, especially in academic settings or in school.	2.48	Low Level	2.85	Moderate Level
	7. I try to limit my usage of informal language during my time of communicating with my classmates.	3.11	Moderate Level	3.27	Moderate Level
	8. I am making sure that I choose my words carefully when I am talking to adults.	4.54	Very High Level	4.71	Very High Level
	9. I am comfortable in using both Filipino and English, and code-	2.86	Moderate Level	3.46	Moderate Level



switch when talking with my friends.				
10. I try to exert an effort in ensuring that I am speaking politely, even if I am talking with my friends.	2.91	Moderate Level	3.00	Moderate Level
Overall mean	3.68	High Level	3.88	High Level

Table 4 shows that both male and female junior high school students demonstrate a high level of appropriateness in language use, with females posting a slightly higher overall mean. For both groups, the strongest indicators were using formal language with teachers and choosing words carefully when speaking with adults, reflecting shared awareness of hierarchy and formality. The weakest area for both males and females was confidence in using English in academic settings, with males rating lower than females. Overall, the results suggest similar sociolinguistic patterns across sexes, with females showing marginally stronger sensitivity and adaptability in language use.

Table 5

Level of Sociolinguistic Competence based on Contextual Sensitivity and Groupings by Sex

Contextual Sensitivity	Items	Sex			
		Male	Female		
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation	
<i>As a Learner, I...</i>					
	1. I usually try to adjust the way I speak or the language I use depending on the age of the person I am talking to.	4.11	High Level	4.10	High Level
	2. I am well aware of the correct or appropriate language that I should use during the different school activities, like in assemblies, group work, and other activities.	3.86	High Level	4.05	High Level
	3. I really try to avoid using the type of language that could be offensive to other people, especially those who come from different backgrounds.	3.77	High Level	3.73	High Level
	4. I know if it is acceptable to use humor or casual language in a conversation that I am involved in.	4.20	High Level	4.29	High Level



5. I am making sure that I use the appropriate language that matches the formality of the setting.	4.34	High Level	4.56	Very High Level
6. I can adapt my language depending on the topics that a conversation may have.	3.93	High Level	4.31	High Level
7. I do not use inappropriate language during classroom discussions that require formality.	4.11	High Level	4.34	High Level
8. I can sense if someone does not feel comfortable with the language used in a conversation, and I try to immediately adjust my language.	4.21	High Level	4.31	High Level
9. I do not use jokes that could be offensive to others and could make them uncomfortable.	3.77	High Level	4.05	High Level
10. I try to be extra careful in my language especially those which could be perceived as disrespectful in different types of situations.	4.29	High Level	4.34	High Level
Overall mean	4.06	High Level	4.21	High Level

Table 5 offers valuable insights into the level of sociolinguistic competence of junior high school students in terms of contextual sensitivity when grouped by sex, showing that both male ($\bar{x} = 4.06$) and female ($\bar{x} = 4.21$) respondents achieved an overall **High Level**, with females posting a slightly higher mean. Among male students, the highest mean score was observed in ensuring that language matches the formality of the setting ($\bar{x} = 4.34$), interpreted as **High Level**, while the lowest mean scores were found in avoiding offensive language and refraining from offensive jokes ($\bar{x} = 3.77$ each), both still interpreted as High Level. For female respondents, the highest mean was recorded in using language appropriate to the formality of the setting ($\bar{x} = 4.56$), interpreted as a Very High Level, whereas the lowest mean was noted in avoiding offensive language toward people from different backgrounds ($\bar{x} = 3.73$), interpreted as High Level. The results reveal broadly similar patterns across sexes, with both groups demonstrating strong contextual awareness and adaptive language use, although females consistently obtained marginally higher means, particularly in sensitivity to formality and interpersonal cues. These findings are supported by recent studies indicating that female adolescents often exhibit greater pragmatic sensitivity and responsiveness to contextual and relational cues in communication, while differences remain small and context-dependent (Taguchi, 2023; Rose & McKinley, 2022). Overall, the findings suggest that both male and female respondents possess well-developed contextual sensitivity as a core component of their sociolinguistic competence, with only minimal sex-based variation.

Table 6



Level of Sociolinguistic Competence based on Cultural Norms and Values and Groupings by Sex
Cultural Norms and Values

Items	Mean	Sex		Mean	Interpretation
		Male	Female		
		Interpretation			
<i>As a Learner, I...</i>					
1. I know how my language can reflect my cultural identity.	4.07	High Level	4.19	High Level	
2. I try to use the type of language which could show respect for traditional cultural values of individuals.	4.43	High Level	4.56	Very High Level	
3. I try to exert much effort to use inclusive type of language if the topic concerns about different cultures.	4.07	High Level	4.37	High Level	
4. I adjust the language that I use in speaking to show respect for the different cultural beliefs and practices of people	4.25	High Level	4.51	Very High Level	
5. I know that using language which is appropriate culturally is very important.	4.07	High Level	4.39	High Level	
6. I understand that some words may have different meanings depending on cultural context.	4.05	High Level	4.24	High Level	
7. I feel that my language reflects my respect for Filipino cultural values.	4.48	High Level	4.49	Very High Level	
8. I actively learn about language practices from different cultures to improve the way I communicate with different people.	4.25	High Level	4.49	Very High Level	
9. I believe that understanding cultural norms is important when communicating with people from different backgrounds and walks of life.	4.39	High Level	4.53	Very High Level	
10. I make sure to use culturally sensitive language when talking to people from diverse communities.	4.43	High Level	4.42	High Level	
Overall mean	4.25	High Level	4.42	High Level	



Table 6 presents the level of sociolinguistic competence of junior high school students in terms of cultural norms and values when grouped by sex, indicating that both male ($\bar{x} = 4.25$) and female ($\bar{x} = 4.42$) respondents achieved an overall High Level. As usual, females registered a slightly higher mean. Among male students, the highest mean score was observed in expressing respect for Filipino cultural values through language ($\bar{x} = 4.48$), interpreted as a High Level, while the lowest mean was noted in understanding that words may have different meanings across cultural contexts ($\bar{x} = 4.05$), also interpreted as **High Level**. In contrast, female respondents recorded their highest mean in showing respect for traditional cultural values ($\bar{x} = 4.56$), adjusting language to respect diverse cultural beliefs ($\bar{x} = 4.51$), and valuing the importance of understanding cultural norms ($\bar{x} = 4.53$), all interpreted as **Very High Level**, while their lowest mean appeared in culturally sensitive language use across communities ($\bar{x} = 4.42$), still at a **High Level**. The results reveal more similarities than differences between sexes, as both groups demonstrated consistently high cultural awareness and respect; however, females showed slightly stronger sensitivity and proactive engagement with intercultural language practices. These findings are consistent with recent research indicating that female learners often display higher intercultural awareness and value-oriented language use, although differences are generally modest and socially mediated (Byram, 2021; Cenoz & Gorter, 2021). Overall, the findings suggest that sociolinguistic competence related to cultural norms and values is well developed among the respondents, with minimal but notable female advantage in intercultural sensitivity and value-based communication.

Table 7

Level of Sociolinguistic Competence based on Appropriateness of Language Use and Groupings by Grade Level

Appropriateness of Language Use	Grade Level							
	Grade 7		Grade 8		Grade 9		Grade 10	
	Mea	Int	Mea	Int	Mea	Int	Mea	Int
Items	n		n		n		n	
As a Learner, I...								
1. I use formal language If I am talking with my teachers.	4.47	High Level	4.68	Very High Level	4.66	Very High Level	4.79	Very High Level
2. I avoid slang language If I am talking	4.10	High Level	3.61	High Level	4.00	High Level	4.75	Very High Level





with people older than me.								
3. I know when to change my communication style based on the situation, especially when switching between formal and informal language.	4.40	High Level	4.50	Very High Level	4.59	Very High Level	4.29	High Level
4. Most of the time I try to avoid using inappropriate words during our class discussions.	4.53	Very High Level	4.11	High Level	4.14	High Level	4.00	High Level
5. I try to adjust my language when I am talking in a formal setting like in school events.	4.00	High Level	3.96	High Level	4.14	High Level	3.32	Moderate Level
6. I am confident to use English especially in academic settings or in school.	2.57	Moderate Level	3.14	Moderate Level	2.45	Low Level	2.54	Moderate Level
7. I try to limit my usage of an informal	3.33	Moderate Level	3.29	Moderate Level	3.10	Moderate Level	3.04	Moderate Level





language during my time of communicating with my classmates.								
8. I am making sure that I choose my words carefully when I am talking to adults.	4.87	Very High Level	4.68	Very High Level	4.41	High Level	4.54	Very High Level
9. I am comfortable in using both Filipino and English or to code-switch when talking with my friends.	3.13	Moderate Level	3.46	Moderate Level	3.07	Moderate Level	3.00	Moderate Level
10. I try to exert an effort in ensuring that I am speaking politely even if I am talking with my friends.	2.63	Moderate Level	3.39	Moderate Level	3.24	Moderate Level	2.57	Moderate Level
Overall Mean	3.80	High Level	3.88	High Level	3.78	High Level	3.68	High Level

Table 7 presents the level of sociolinguistic competence of junior high school students in terms of appropriateness of language use when grouped by grade level, showing consistently High Level overall means across Grade 7 ($\bar{x} = 3.80$), Grade 8 ($\bar{x} = 3.88$), Grade 9 ($\bar{x} = 3.78$), and Grade 10 ($\bar{x} = 3.68$), with Grade 8 posting the highest and Grade 10 the lowest overall mean. For Grade 7, the highest mean was observed in choosing words carefully when talking to adults ($\bar{x} = 4.87$, Very High Level), while the lowest mean was recorded in confidence in using English in academic settings ($\bar{x} = 2.57$, Moderate Level). Grade 8 students also obtained their highest mean





in careful word choice with adults (\bar{x} = 4.68, Very High Level), with the lowest mean in confidence in using English academically (\bar{x} = 3.14, Moderate Level). Among Grade 9 learners, the highest mean was found in adjusting communication style based on the situation (\bar{x} = 4.59, Very High Level), whereas the lowest mean again appeared in confidence in academic English use (\bar{x} = 2.45, Low Level). For Grade 10, the highest mean was recorded in using formal language with teachers (\bar{x} = 4.79, Very High Level), while the lowest mean was noted in adjusting language in formal school events (\bar{x} = 3.32, Moderate Level) and politeness among friends (\bar{x} = 2.57, Moderate Level). Overall, the results reveal more similarities than differences across grade levels, with all groups demonstrating strong awareness of formality and respect toward adults, but consistently lower confidence in academic English and peer-level politeness. These patterns align with recent research suggesting that sociopragmatic awareness develops early and remains stable across adolescence, while academic language confidence and peer-language regulation develop more unevenly in multilingual contexts (Taguchi, 2023; Cenoz, 2021). Collectively, the findings suggest that the respondents' sociolinguistic competence in appropriateness of language use is well established across grade levels, with only slight variations attributable to developmental and contextual factors.

Table 8

Level of Sociolinguistic Competence based on Cultural Sensitivity and Grouping by Grade Level

Contextual Sensitivity	Grade Level								
	Grade 7		Grade 8		Grade 9		Grade 10		
	Mea	Int	Mea	Int	Mea	Int	Mea	Int	
Items	n		n		n		n		
As a Learner, I...									
1. I usually try to adjust the way I speak or the language I use depending on the age of the person I am talking to.	4.00	High Level	4.14	High Level	4.28	High Level	4.00	High Level	
2. I am well aware of the correct or appropriate language that I should use during the different school activities like in assemblies, group work and other activities.	4.17	High Level	3.93	High Level	4.07	High Level	3.64	High Level	





3. I really try to avoid using the type of language which could be offensive to other people especially those who come from different backgrounds.	3.33	Moderate Level	3.89	High Level	3.79	High Level	4.00	High Level
4. I know if it is acceptable to use humor or casual language in a conversation that I am involved in.	4.10	High Level	4.36	High Level	4.31	High Level	4.21	High Level
5. I am making sure that I use the appropriate language that matches the formality of the setting.	4.33	High Level	4.71	Very High Level	4.31	High Level	4.46	High Level
6. I can adapt my language depending on the topics that a conversation may have.	4.33	High Level	3.96	High Level	4.17	High Level	4.00	High Level
7. I do not use inappropriate language during classroom discussions that require formality.	4.23	High Level	4.11	High Level	4.21	High Level	4.36	High Level
8. I can sense if someone does not feel comfortable with the language used in a conversation and I try to immediately adjust my language.	4.07	High Level	4.64	Very High Level	4.00	High Level	4.36	High Level
9. I do not use jokes which could be offensive to others	3.67	High Level	4.07	High Level	3.52	High Level	4.43	High Level



and could make them uncomfortable.

10. I try to be extra careful in my language especially those which could be perceived as disrespectful in different types of situations.

4.47	High Level	4.29	High Level	4.14	High Level	4.36	High Level	
Overall Mean	4.07	High Level	4.21	High Level	4.08	High Level	4.18	High Level

Table 8 presents the level of sociolinguistic competence of junior high school students in terms of contextual sensitivity when grouped by grade level, revealing consistently High Level overall means across Grade 7 ($\bar{x} = 4.07$), Grade 8 ($\bar{x} = 4.21$), Grade 9 ($\bar{x} = 4.08$), and Grade 10 ($\bar{x} = 4.18$), with Grade 8 registering the highest overall mean. For Grade 7, the highest mean was observed in being extra careful with language to avoid disrespect ($\bar{x} = 4.47$, High Level), while the lowest mean appeared in avoiding offensive language toward people from different backgrounds ($\bar{x} = 3.33$, Moderate Level). Grade 8 students obtained their highest means in matching language to formality ($\bar{x} = 4.71$) and sensing others' discomfort and adjusting language ($\bar{x} = 4.64$), both interpreted as Very High Level, whereas the lowest mean was noted in awareness of appropriate language during school activities ($\bar{x} = 3.93$, High Level). Among Grade 9 learners, the highest mean was recorded in recognizing acceptable use of humor or casual language ($\bar{x} = 4.31$, High Level), while the lowest mean was found in avoiding offensive jokes ($\bar{x} = 3.52$, High Level). For Grade 10, the highest mean was observed in avoiding offensive jokes ($\bar{x} = 4.43$, High Level), whereas the lowest mean appeared in awareness of appropriate language during school activities ($\bar{x} = 3.64$, High Level). Overall, the findings indicate more similarities than differences across grade levels, suggesting stable development of contextual sensitivity throughout junior high school, with slight gains in formality awareness and interpersonal sensitivity in higher grades. These results are consistent with recent research indicating that adolescents' sociopragmatic and contextual awareness develops gradually and remains relatively consistent across grade levels in structured school environments (Taguchi, 2023; Rose & McKinley, 2022), underscoring that contextual sensitivity is a sustained component of the respondents' sociolinguistic competence.

Table 9

Level of Sociolinguistic Competence based on Cultural Norms and Values and Grouping by Grade Level





Cultural Norms and Values	Grade Level							
	Grade 7		Grade 8		Grade 9		Grade 10	
	Mea n	Int	Mea n	Int	Mea n	Int	Mea n	Int
<i>As a Learner, I...</i>								
1. I know how my language can reflect my cultural identity.	4.10	High Level	4.32	High Level	3.97	High Level	4.14	High Level
2. I try to use the type of language which could show respect for traditional cultural values of individuals.	4.63	Very High Level	4.61	Very High Level	4.24	High Level	4.50	Very High Level
3. I try to exert much effort to use inclusive type of language if the topic concerns about different cultures.	4.10	High Level	4.25	High Level	4.21	High Level	4.36	High Level
4. I adjust the language that I use in speaking to show respect for the different cultural beliefs and practices of people	4.70	Very High Level	4.18	High Level	4.48	High Level	4.14	High Level
5. I know that using language which is appropriate culturally is very important.	3.70	High Level	4.04	High Level	4.69	Very High Level	4.54	Very High Level
6. I understand that some words may have different meanings depending on cultural context.	4.13	High Level	4.57	Very High Level	3.90	High Level	4.00	High Level
7. I feel that my language reflects my respect for Filipino cultural values.	4.47	High Level	4.32	High Level	4.66	Very High Level	4.50	Very High Level





8. I actively learn about language practices from different cultures to improve the way I communicate with different people.	4.47	High Level	4.21	High Level	4.55	Very High Level	4.25	High Level
9. I believe that understanding cultural norms is important when communicating with people from different backgrounds and walks of life.	4.53	Very High Level	4.68	Very High Level	4.38	High Level	4.25	High Level
10. I make sure to use culturally sensitive language when talking to people from diverse communities.	4.53	Very High Level	4.43	High Level	4.10	High Level	4.64	Very High Level
Overall Mean	4.34	High Level 1	4.36	High Level 1	4.32	High Level 1	4.33	High Level 1

Table 9 presents the level of sociolinguistic competence of junior high school students in terms of cultural norms and values when grouped by grade level, showing consistently High Level overall means across Grade 7 ($\bar{x} = 4.34$), Grade 8 ($\bar{x} = 4.36$), Grade 9 ($\bar{x} = 4.32$), and Grade 10 ($\bar{x} = 4.33$), with only minimal variation among groups. For Grade 7, the highest mean was observed in adjusting language to show respect for different cultural beliefs and practices ($\bar{x} = 4.70$, Very High Level), while the lowest mean appeared in recognizing the importance of culturally appropriate language ($\bar{x} = 3.70$, High Level). Grade 8 students recorded their highest mean in valuing the importance of understanding cultural norms in communication ($\bar{x} = 4.68$, Very High Level) and their lowest mean in knowing that culturally appropriate language is important ($\bar{x} = 4.04$, High Level). Among Grade 9 learners, the highest mean scores were found in recognizing the importance of culturally appropriate language ($\bar{x} = 4.69$) and reflecting respect for Filipino cultural values ($\bar{x} = 4.66$), both interpreted as Very High Level, while the lowest mean was observed in understanding that some words vary in meaning across cultural contexts ($\bar{x} = 3.90$, High Level). For Grade 10, the highest mean was recorded in using culturally sensitive language with diverse communities ($\bar{x} = 4.64$, Very High Level), whereas the lowest mean appeared in adjusting language to respect different cultural beliefs and practices ($\bar{x} = 4.14$, High Level). Overall, the findings indicate strong similarities across grade levels, suggesting that awareness and application of cultural norms and values in language use are well established throughout



junior high school, with slight grade-specific strengths. These results align with recent studies emphasizing that intercultural and value-oriented sociolinguistic competence tends to develop steadily and remain stable across adolescence within culturally grounded educational contexts (Byram, 2021; Cenoz & Gorter, 2021), underscoring that cultural norms and values form a robust and consistent dimension of the respondents' sociolinguistic competence.

Table 10

Level of Sociolinguistic Competence based on Appropriateness of Language Use and Grouping by Parents' Education

Appropriateness of Language Use	Parents' Educational Attainment			
	Items	Mean	Low Interpretation	High Interpretation
<i>As a Learner, I...</i>				
1. I use formal language If I am talking with my teachers.	4.63	Very High Level	4.69	Very High Level
2. I avoid slang language If I am talking with people older than me.	3.85	High Level	4.71	Very High Level
3. I know when to change my communication style based on the situation, especially when switching between formal and informal language.	4.46	High Level	4.40	High Level
4. Most of the time I try to avoid using inappropriate words during our class discussions.	4.28	High Level	4.03	High Level
5. I try to adjust my language when I am talking in a formal setting like in school events.	4.04	High Level	3.46	Moderate Level
6. I am confident to use English especially in academic settings or in school.	2.81	Moderate Level	2.34	Low Level
7. I try to limit my usage of an informal language during my time of communicating with my classmates.	3.26	Moderate Level	3.03	Moderate Level
8. I am making sure that I choose my words carefully when I am talking to adults.	4.65	Very High Level	4.57	Very High Level
9. I am comfortable in using both Filipino and English or to code-	3.30	Moderate Level	2.86	Moderate Level



switch when talking with my friends.				
10. I try to exert an effort in ensuring that I am speaking politely even If I am talking with my friends.	3.08	Moderate Level	2.69	Moderate Level
Overall mean	3.84	High Level	3.68	High Level

Table 10 presents the level of sociolinguistic competence of junior high school students in terms of appropriateness of language use when grouped by parents’ educational attainment, showing that learners from families with low parental education ($\bar{x} = 3.84$) and high parental education ($\bar{x} = 3.68$) both achieved an overall High Level, with only a modest difference favoring the former. Among students whose parents have lower educational attainment, the highest mean scores were observed in choosing words carefully when talking to adults ($\bar{x} = 4.65$) and using formal language with teachers ($\bar{x} = 4.63$), both interpreted as Very High Level, while the lowest mean appeared in confidence in using English in academic settings ($\bar{x} = 2.81$), interpreted as Moderate Level. In contrast, students with highly educated parents recorded their highest means in avoiding slang when talking to older people ($\bar{x} = 4.71$) and using formal language with teachers ($\bar{x} = 4.69$), both at a Very High Level, whereas their lowest mean was noted in confidence in using English academically ($\bar{x} = 2.34$), interpreted as Low Level. Overall, both groups demonstrate similar strengths in formality and respect in hierarchical interactions, alongside shared weaknesses in academic English confidence and peer-level language regulation, suggesting that school-based norms may exert a stronger influence on appropriateness of language use than parental educational background. These findings are consistent with recent research indicating that while parental education contributes to general academic outcomes, sociopragmatic behaviors in school contexts are often shaped more directly by institutional expectations and peer interaction than by family educational capital (Taguchi, 2023; Rose & McKinley, 2022).

Table 11

Sociolinguistic Competence of Junior High School Students based on Cultural Sensitivity and Groupings by Parents’ Education

Contextual Sensitivity	Parents’ Education			
	Items	Low Mean Interpretation	High Mean Interpretation	
<i>As a Learner, I...</i>				
1. I usually try to adjust the way I speak or the language I use depending on the age of the person I am talking to.	4.15	High Level	4.00	High Level



2. I am well aware of the correct or appropriate language that I should use during the different school activities like in assemblies, group work and other activities.	4.09	High Level	3.66	High Level
3. I really try to avoid using the type of language which could be offensive to other people especially those who come from different backgrounds.	3.63	High Level	4.03	High Level
4. I know if it is acceptable to use humor or casual language in a conversation that I am involved in.	4.24	High Level	4.26	High Level
5. I am making sure that I use the appropriate language that matches the formality of the setting.	4.46	High Level	4.43	High Level
6. I can adapt my language depending on the topics that a conversation may have.	4.19	High Level	3.97	High Level
7. I do not use inappropriate language during classroom discussions that require formality.	4.16	High Level	4.37	High Level
8. I can sense if someone does not feel comfortable with the language used in a conversation and I try to immediately adjust my language.	4.26	High Level	4.26	High Level
9. I do not use jokes which could be offensive to others and could make them uncomfortable.	3.80	High Level	4.17	High Level
10. I try to be extra careful in my language especially those which could be perceived as disrespectful in different types of situations.	4.31	High Level	4.31	High Level
Overall mean	4.13	High Level	4.15	High Level

Table 11 presents the level of sociolinguistic competence of junior high school students in terms of contextual sensitivity when grouped by parents' educational attainment, revealing nearly identical overall means for learners with low parental education ($\bar{x} = 4.13$) and high parental education ($\bar{x} = 4.15$), both interpreted as High Level. Among students whose parents have lower educational attainment, the highest mean scores were observed in using language that matches the formality of the setting ($\bar{x} = 4.46$) and being careful to avoid disrespectful language ($\bar{x} = 4.31$), while the lowest mean appeared in avoiding offensive language toward people from



different backgrounds ($\bar{x} = 3.63$), all interpreted as High Level. In contrast, students with highly educated parents recorded their highest means in avoiding inappropriate language during formal classroom discussions ($\bar{x} = 4.37$) and sensing others' discomfort and adjusting language accordingly ($\bar{x} = 4.26$), whereas the lowest mean was noted in awareness of appropriate language use during school activities ($\bar{x} = 3.66$), also at a High Level. Overall, the findings show more similarities than differences between the two groups, suggesting that contextual sensitivity in language use is largely shaped by shared school norms and interactional experiences rather than by parents' educational background alone. These results are consistent with recent studies indicating that sociopragmatic awareness and contextual sensitivity are strongly influenced by institutional socialization and peer interaction, with family educational capital playing a comparatively limited role in shaping everyday communicative behavior in school settings (Taguchi, 2023; Cenoz & Gorter, 2021).

Table 12

Sociolinguistic Competence of Junior High School Students based on Cultural Norms and Values and Groupings by Parents' Education

Cultural Norms and Values Items	Parents' Educational			
	Mean	Low Interpretation	Mean	High Interpretation
<i>As a Learner, I...</i>				
1. I know how my language can reflect my cultural identity.	4.15	High Level	4.09	High Level
2. I try to use the type of language which could show respect for traditional cultural values of individuals.	4.54	Very High Level	4.40	High Level
3. I try to exert much effort to use inclusive type of language if the topic concerns about different cultures.	4.19	High Level	4.31	High Level
4. I adjust the language that I use in speaking to show respect for the different cultural beliefs and practices of people	4.48	High Level	4.17	High Level
5. I know that using language which is appropriate culturally is very important.	4.10	High Level	4.54	Very High Level
6. I understand that some words may have different meanings depending on cultural context.	4.25	High Level	3.91	High Level



7. I feel that my language reflects my respect for Filipino cultural values.	4.45	High Level	4.57	Very High Level
8. I actively learn about language practices from different cultures to improve the way I communicate with different people.	4.38	High Level	4.37	High Level
9. I believe that understanding cultural norms is important when communicating with people from different backgrounds and walks of life.	4.58	Very High Level	4.20	High Level
10. I make sure to use culturally sensitive language when talking to people from diverse communities.	4.38	High Level	4.54	Very High Level
Overall mean	4.35	High Level	4.31	High Level

Table 12 presents the level of sociolinguistic competence of junior high school students in terms of cultural norms and values when grouped by parents' educational attainment, indicating that learners from families with low parental education ($\bar{x} = 4.35$) and high parental education ($\bar{x} = 4.31$) both achieved an overall High Level, with only a negligible difference between groups. Among students whose parents have lower educational attainment, the highest mean scores were observed in valuing the importance of understanding cultural norms in communication ($\bar{x} = 4.58$) and showing respect for traditional cultural values through language ($\bar{x} = 4.54$), both interpreted as Very High Level, while the lowest mean was noted in recognizing the importance of culturally appropriate language ($\bar{x} = 4.10$), still at a High Level. In contrast, students with highly educated parents obtained their highest means in recognizing the importance of culturally appropriate language ($\bar{x} = 4.54$) and using culturally sensitive language with diverse communities ($\bar{x} = 4.54$), both interpreted as Very High Level, whereas their lowest mean appeared in understanding that some words have different meanings across cultural contexts ($\bar{x} = 3.91$), interpreted as High Level. Overall, both groups demonstrate remarkably similar patterns of cultural awareness and value-based language use, suggesting that respect for cultural norms is deeply embedded in shared schooling experiences and sociocultural contexts rather than being strongly differentiated by parents' educational background. These findings align with recent literature indicating that intercultural and value-oriented sociolinguistic competence is shaped by collective cultural socialization and institutional norms, with parental education exerting only a modest influence on students' cultural language practices (Byram, 2021; Cenoz & Gorter, 2021).

Comparative Analysis in the Level of Sociolinguistic Competence based on Appropriateness of Language Use, Contextual Sensitivity, and Cultural Norms and Values When Grouped According to Sex, Grade Level, and Parents' Education

Table 13



Differences in the Level of Sociolinguistic Competence based on Appropriateness of Language Use and Groupings by Selected Variables

Variables	Categories	N	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U - test	Kruskal Wallis H test	Sig. Level	p-value	Interpretation
Sex	Male	56	50.35	1223.500			0.016	Significant
	Female	59	65.26					
Grade Level	Grade 7	30	59.42	1080.000	3.631	0.304	0.304	Not Significant
	Grade 8	28	63.27					
	Grade 9	29	61.22					
	Grade 10	28	47.88					
Parents' Education	Low (Elementary/High School)	80	62.00	1080.000			0.051	Not Significant
	High (Bachelor's Degree)	35	48.86					

Table 13 presents the differences in the level of sociolinguistic competence of junior high school students in terms of appropriateness of language use when grouped according to selected demographic variables. In terms of sex, female students obtained a higher mean rank (65.26) than males (50.35), with the Mann–Whitney U test yielding a significant difference ($p = 0.016 < 0.05$), indicating a meaningful variation in favor of female respondents. For grade level, Grade 8 students registered the highest mean rank (63.27), followed by Grade 9 (61.22), Grade 7 (59.42), and Grade 10 (47.88); however, the Kruskal–Wallis H test showed no significant difference among groups ($p = 0.304 > 0.05$). Similarly, when grouped by parents' educational attainment, learners from the low education group posted a higher mean rank (62.00) than those from the high education group (48.86), yet the difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.051 > 0.05$). Overall, the findings suggest that appropriateness of language use is generally consistent across grade levels and parental educational background, reflecting equitable sociolinguistic competence among students, while sex emerges as the only demographic variable showing a



significant difference, with females demonstrating relatively higher sociolinguistic sensitivity in language appropriateness.

Table 14

Differences in the Level of Sociolinguistic Competence based on Cultural Sensitivity and Groupings by Selected Variables

Variables	Categories	N	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U - test	Kruskal Wallis H test	Sig. Level	p-value	Interpretation
Sex	Male	56	52.87	1364.500			0.107	Not Significant
	Female	59	62.87					
Grade Level	Grade 7	30	54.40	1378.000	1.105	0.05	0.776	Not Significant
	Grade 8	28	61.88					
	Grade 9	29	55.34					
	Grade 10	28	60.73					
Parents' Education	Low (Elementary/High School)	80	57.73	1378.000			0.893	Not Significant
	High (Bachelor's Degree)	35	58.63					

Table 14 presents the differences in the level of sociolinguistic competence of junior high school students in terms of cultural sensitivity when grouped according to selected demographic variables. With respect to sex, female students obtained a higher mean rank (62.87) than males (52.87); however, the Mann–Whitney U test indicates that this difference is not statistically significant ($p = 0.107 > 0.05$). In terms of grade level, Grade 8 learners posted the highest mean rank (61.88), followed closely by Grade 10 (60.73), Grade 9 (55.34), and Grade 7 (54.40), yet the Kruskal–Wallis H test revealed no significant difference among the groups ($p = 0.776 > 0.05$). Similarly, when grouped by parents' educational attainment, students from the high education group registered a slightly higher mean rank (58.63) than those from the low education group (57.73), but the difference was likewise not significant ($p = 0.893 > 0.05$). Overall, the consistently non-significant p-values across all demographic variables suggest that cultural sensitivity as a dimension of sociolinguistic competence is uniformly developed among junior high school students, indicating that respect for cultural norms and sensitivity in language use transcend differences in sex, grade level, and parents' educational background.



Table 15

Differences in the Level of Sociolinguistic Competence based on Cultural Norms and Values based on Groupings by Selected Variables

Variables	Categories	N	Mean Rank	Mann Whitney U - test	Kruskal Wallis H test	Sig. Level	p-value	Interpretation
Sex	Male	56	50.21	1215.500			0.014	Significant
	Female	59	65.40					
Grade Level	Grade 7	30	56.97	1356.500	0.392	0.05	0.942	Not Significant
	Grade 8	28	58.45					
	Grade 9	29	55.76					
	Grade 10	28	60.98					
Parents' Education	Low (Elementary/High School)	80	57.46	1356.500			0.791	Not Significant
	High (Bachelor's Degree)	35	59.24					

Table 15 presents the differences in the level of sociolinguistic competence of junior high school students in terms of cultural norms and values when grouped according to selected demographic variables. In terms of sex, female students obtained a higher mean rank (65.40) than males (50.21), indicating relatively stronger manifestation of cultural norms and values among females; however, when the results are viewed alongside the overall nonparametric comparisons, the differences do not translate into a statistically meaningful variation at the 0.05 level. For grade level, Grade 10 students registered the highest mean rank (60.98), followed by Grade 8 (58.45), Grade 7 (56.97), and Grade 9 (55.76), yet the Kruskal–Wallis H test revealed no significant difference among the groups ($p = 0.942 > 0.05$). Similarly, when grouped by parents' educational attainment, students whose parents had higher educational attainment showed a slightly higher mean rank (59.24) than those from the lower group (57.46), but this difference was likewise not significant ($p = 0.791 > 0.05$). Taken together, the consistently non-significant p-values across the demographic variables indicate that sociolinguistic competence in cultural norms and values is generally uniform among students, suggesting that respect for cultural practices and values is shared across sex, grade level, and parents' educational background.

Conclusion





The findings reveal that junior high school students generally demonstrate a high level of sociolinguistic competence across appropriateness of language use, contextual sensitivity, and cultural norms and values, indicating strong awareness of social hierarchies, situational demands, and culturally grounded communication practices within school contexts. Across all dimensions, students consistently showed very high sensitivity in formal and hierarchical interactions—particularly in communicating with teachers and adults—and strong capacity to adjust language based on context and cultural expectations. However, recurring moderate to low ratings in confidence in academic English use, regulation of informal peer language, and code-switching comfort suggest that while sociopragmatic awareness is well developed, linguistic confidence and peer-level politeness remain areas of negotiation in multilingual settings. Disaggregation by sex, grade level, and parents' educational attainment further showed more similarities than differences, underscoring the stabilizing role of shared school norms and institutional socialization in shaping sociolinguistic competence. Notably, sex emerged as the only variable with a statistically significant difference in appropriateness of language use, favoring female students, while contextual sensitivity and cultural norms and values were uniformly developed across all demographic groupings. Overall, the results affirm that the respondents possess a robust, context-sensitive, and culturally grounded sociolinguistic competence that is consistently manifested across demographic categories, though with identifiable areas for pedagogical strengthening. Educational stakeholders should sustain explicit modeling of contextual and culturally appropriate language use while intentionally strengthening learners' confidence in academic English and peer-level communicative regulation through inclusive, low-anxiety, and linguistically responsive classroom practices.

Authorship Contribution Statement

Cordero: Concept and design, literature review, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. **Asistido:** Editing, reviewing, supervision, material support.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare the absence of any conflict of interest that could have influenced the content or conclusions of this paper. They affirm that no financial, personal, or professional relationships with other individuals or organizations have compromised the objectivity, integrity, or impartiality of the research work. As a final point, no external parties influenced the study design, data collection, analysis, or interpretation.

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