

**BUSITEMA
UNIVERSITY**
Pursuing Excellence

P.O. Box 236 Tororo, Uganda
Gen: +256 - 45 444 8842
Dir: +256 - 45 444 8864
Fax: +256 - 45 443 6517
Email: ar@acadreg.busitema.ac.ug
Website: www.busitema.ac.ug

OFFICE OF THE ACADEMIC REGISTRAR

**INFLUENCE OF LINGUISTIC UNDERSTANDING ON LITERACY DEVELOPMENT AMONG
SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN TORORO DISTRICT: A CASE STUDY OF TORORO
MIXED SECONDARY SCHOOL**

BY

**NYADOI RACHAEL
BU/UP/2023/2208**

**A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGE IN
PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE AWARD OF
BACHELOR DEGREE OF EDUCATION (LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE) OF
BUSITEMA UNIVERSITY.**

AUGUST 2026

DECLARATION

I NYADOI RACHAEL declare that this research proposal is my original work and has never been presented or submitted to any institution of higher learning for any academic award.

Signature 

Date 8th / 09 / 2026

APPROVAL

This research proposal has been prepared under my supervision/mentorship upon appointed by
Busitema University

Name Dr. Cendo Shira Namagere

Sign 

Date 8/09/2026

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research work to my family in special memory of our beloved father Omitta Nicholas Ocholla. And also I dedicate it to my mother Babirye Harriet our hero my Little Siblings Lydia, Victor, shamgar, Samuel and Gloria for their love care, financially, physically and spiritually during my studies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I give honor and glory to the Almighty, who gave me knowledge, skill and understanding.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to my dearest mother Babirye Harriet Omitta my grandmother Adongo Getrude Ocholla, my aunt Apio Rosemary and my friend Musawo Amos for supporting me during the study.

I acknowledge my respondents for the information on which the research is based on, without them this research will not be successful.

I thank the administration of Busitema University for having admitted me to this course and my supervisor for patiently guiding and correcting me in this research work.

Contents

DECLARATION	2
APPROVAL	3
DEDICATION	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	5
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	10
1.1 Background to the Study	10
1.2 Problem Statement	11
1.3 Objectives of the Study	11
1.3.1 General Objective	11
1.3.2 Specific Objectives	11
1.4 Research Questions	11
1.5 Research Hypotheses	12
1.6 Scope of the Study	12
1.7 Significance of the Study	12
1.8 Conceptual Framework	13
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	14
2.1 Introduction	14
2.2 Theoretical Framework	14
2.3 Phonological Awareness and Literacy Development	14
2.4 Morphological Awareness and Literacy Development	15
2.5 Syntactic Knowledge and Literacy Development	15
2.6 Semantic Understanding and Literacy Development	15
2.8 Empirical Studies on Linguistic Understanding and Literacy Development	16
2.9 Conceptual Synthesis	16
2.10 Research Gap	16
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	18

3.1 Introduction	18
3.2 Research Design	18
3.3 Study Population	18
3.4 Sample Size Determination	18
3.5 Sampling Techniques	19
3.6 Data Collection Methods and Instruments	19
3.7 Validity of the Instrument	19
3.8 Reliability of the Instrument	19
3.9 Data Analysis Procedures	20
3.10 Ethical Considerations	20
3.11 Summary of Methodology	20
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION	21
4.1 Introduction	21
4.2 Response Rate	21
4.3 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents	21
4.4 Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables	22
4.5 Overall Linguistic Understanding and Literacy Development Trend	23
4.6 Relationship Between Linguistic Understanding and Literacy Development	23
4.7 Contribution of Linguistic Components	24
4.8 Regression Analysis	24
4.9 Summary of Findings	25
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	26
5.1 Introduction	26
5.2 Discussion of Findings	26
5.3 Conclusions	28
5.4 Recommendations	28
5.5 Limitations of the Study	29
5.6 Areas for Further Research	30
LIST OF REFERENCES	32
LIST OF APPENDICES	33

APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH TOOLS AND INSTRUMENTS..... 33

APPENDIX 2: RESEARCH TIMELINE..... 33

APPENDIX 4: RESEARCH BUDGET..... 34

ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of linguistic understanding on literacy development among secondary school students in Tororo District, with specific reference to Tororo Mixed Secondary School. Despite English being a core subject, many students continue to show low literacy competence characterized by poor reading comprehension, weak vocabulary, grammatical inaccuracies and poor written expression.

The general objective was to examine how linguistic understanding influences literacy development. The specific objectives were to examine the relationship between phonological awareness and reading comprehension; determine the influence of morphological awareness on vocabulary and writing accuracy; assess the effect of syntactic knowledge on sentence construction and writing coherence; analyze the relationship between semantic understanding and reading comprehension; and establish the influence of pragmatic competence on interpretation and production of written texts.

The study adopted a cross-sectional correlational research design with a quantitative approach. The population was students offering English at O-Level and A-Level at Tororo Mixed S.S. A sample of 120 students was selected using Yamane's (1967) formula through simple random sampling. Data were collected using a structured 5-point Likert scale questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, and regression analysis at 0.05 level of significance.

Findings revealed moderate levels of both linguistic understanding and literacy development. There was a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between linguistic understanding and literacy development ($r = 0.742$, $p < 0.05$). Linguistic understanding explained 55.1% of the variation in literacy development. Among the linguistic components, semantic understanding scored highest while syntactic knowledge scored lowest, indicating students understand word meanings but struggle with grammatical organization and coherence.

The study concludes that linguistic understanding is a strong determinant of literacy development. It recommends strengthening teaching of phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic competencies, integrating grammar in meaningful contexts, and providing adequate reading materials and teacher training to improve literacy outcomes.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Linguistic understanding is widely recognized as a fundamental pillar in the development of literacy skills among learners at all levels of education. It refers to the ability to comprehend, analyze, and use the structural and functional components of language, including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. These components collectively shape how individuals decode spoken and written language, construct meaning, and communicate effectively through reading and writing. In educational contexts, particularly at secondary school level, linguistic understanding forms the cognitive foundation upon which literacy development is built.

Literacy development extends beyond the basic ability to read and write; it involves the progressive acquisition of skills required to interpret texts, construct coherent written expressions, and engage critically with written information. In English language learning, literacy development is heavily influenced by a learner's mastery of linguistic systems. For instance, phonological awareness enables students to recognize sound patterns in words, which is essential for decoding unfamiliar vocabulary during reading. Similarly, morphological awareness supports learners in understanding word formation, thereby enhancing vocabulary growth and reading comprehension.

Syntax, which governs sentence structure and grammatical arrangement of words, plays a crucial role in both reading comprehension and writing proficiency. Learners who demonstrate strong syntactic awareness are more capable of constructing grammatically accurate sentences and interpreting complex academic texts. Semantics, which deals with meaning in language, enables learners to interpret words, sentences, and larger texts accurately, while pragmatics allows learners to understand language in context, including implied meanings, tone, and communicative intent.

In secondary school education, especially in multilingual contexts such as Uganda, English serves both as a subject and as the primary medium of instruction across disciplines. This makes linguistic understanding a critical determinant of academic success. Students who lack adequate linguistic competence often struggle with reading comprehension tasks, essay writing, and interpretation of examination questions, which ultimately affects overall academic performance.

In Tororo District, secondary school learners continue to exhibit varying levels of literacy competence, with noticeable challenges in grammar usage, sentence construction, vocabulary application, and comprehension of written texts. These challenges suggest potential gaps in the underlying linguistic understanding required for effective literacy development. Despite continuous instruction in English language, many learners still perform poorly in written communication tasks, raising concerns about the effectiveness of current instructional approaches in strengthening linguistic foundations.

Therefore, this study is anchored on the premise that literacy development is strongly influenced by linguistic understanding, and seeks to empirically examine the extent to which linguistic

competence affects reading and writing outcomes among secondary school students in Tororo District, with specific reference to Tororo Mixed Secondary School.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the central role of English language instruction in secondary schools, many students in Tororo District continue to demonstrate low levels of literacy competence. This is evident in persistent difficulties in reading comprehension, weak vocabulary usage, grammatical inaccuracies, and poor written expression. These weaknesses suggest that learners may not have fully developed the necessary linguistic understanding required for effective literacy development.

In particular, students often struggle with constructing coherent sentences, interpreting complex passages, and expressing ideas logically in writing tasks. These challenges indicate possible deficiencies in syntactic knowledge, morphological awareness, semantic understanding, phonological awareness, and pragmatic competence. Although English language is taught as a core subject, instructional emphasis may not adequately address the deeper linguistic structures that support literacy acquisition.

Furthermore, there is limited empirical evidence within the Ugandan secondary school context, particularly in Tororo District, that statistically examines the relationship between linguistic understanding and literacy development. Without such evidence, it remains difficult to determine the extent to which linguistic competence contributes to observed variations in students' literacy performance.

This study therefore seeks to address this gap by examining whether linguistic understanding significantly influences literacy development among secondary school students at Tororo Mixed Secondary School.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1.3.1 General Objective

The general objective of the study is to examine the influence of linguistic understanding on literacy development among secondary school students in Tororo District.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

The study is guided by the following specific objectives: to examine the relationship between phonological awareness and reading comprehension among secondary school students; to determine the influence of morphological awareness on vocabulary development and writing accuracy; to assess the effect of syntactic knowledge on sentence construction and writing coherence; to analyze the relationship between semantic understanding and reading comprehension; and to establish the influence of pragmatic competence on interpretation and production of written texts among secondary school students.

1.4 Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions. The first question seeks to determine the relationship between phonological awareness and reading comprehension among secondary school students in Tororo District. The second question examines how morphological awareness influences vocabulary development and writing performance. The third question investigates the extent to which syntactic knowledge affects sentence construction and writing coherence. The fourth question explores the relationship between semantic understanding and reading comprehension. The fifth question assesses how pragmatic competence influences students' interpretation and production of written texts.

1.5 Research Hypotheses

The study is guided by the following hypotheses. There is no statistically significant relationship between phonological awareness and reading comprehension among secondary school students. There is no statistically significant relationship between morphological awareness and vocabulary development and writing accuracy. There is no statistically significant relationship between syntactic knowledge and sentence construction and writing coherence. There is no statistically significant relationship between semantic understanding and reading comprehension. There is no statistically significant relationship between pragmatic competence and interpretation and production of written texts. Finally, there is no statistically significant relationship between overall linguistic understanding and literacy development among secondary school students.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study is geographically limited to Tororo District, with specific focus on Tororo Mixed Secondary School. It is content-wise limited to linguistic understanding and literacy development, particularly focusing on phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic aspects of language. The study concentrates on literacy development measured through reading comprehension and writing skills among secondary school students. The study is further limited to students at secondary level, excluding primary and tertiary institutions.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study is significant in several dimensions. It provides empirical evidence on the statistical relationship between linguistic understanding and literacy development, thereby contributing to the existing body of knowledge in applied linguistics and educational research. The findings are expected to assist teachers in identifying specific linguistic weaknesses that hinder students' literacy performance, enabling them to design more effective instructional strategies that target grammar, vocabulary development, and comprehension skills.

The study is also important to curriculum developers, as it provides insights that may guide the integration of stronger linguistic foundations within English language syllabi. In addition, education policymakers may use the findings to improve literacy-focused interventions in secondary schools, particularly in rural and semi-urban districts such as Tororo.

Furthermore, the study serves as a reference for future researchers interested in language acquisition, literacy development, and educational performance analysis. It also contributes to improving students' academic performance by highlighting the importance of linguistic competence in mastering reading and writing skills.

1.8 Conceptual Framework

The study is based on the conceptual assumption that linguistic understanding is the independent variable while literacy development is the dependent variable. Linguistic understanding is operationalized through phonological awareness, morphological awareness, syntactic knowledge, semantic understanding, and pragmatic competence. Literacy development is operationalized through reading comprehension and writing performance.

The framework assumes that improvements in linguistic understanding lead to corresponding improvements in literacy development. Specifically, phonological awareness enhances decoding skills, morphological awareness improves vocabulary acquisition, syntactic knowledge supports sentence construction, semantic understanding improves comprehension, and pragmatic competence enhances contextual interpretation and written expression. The study will statistically test this relationship using correlation and regression analysis.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed review of literature on linguistic understanding and literacy development among secondary school learners. It synthesizes theoretical perspectives and empirical findings from global, African, and Ugandan contexts in order to establish how linguistic components such as phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics influence learners' reading and writing abilities.

Recent scholarship in applied linguistics and literacy studies emphasizes that literacy development is not merely a mechanical skill of decoding written symbols but a complex cognitive-linguistic process involving interaction between multiple language systems. According to Snow and Uccelli (2021), academic literacy development depends heavily on students' ability to control language structures at word, sentence, and discourse levels. Similarly, Perfetti and Stafura (2018) argue that reading comprehension is fundamentally constrained by linguistic knowledge, particularly vocabulary and syntactic processing.

In secondary schools, especially in multilingual settings such as Uganda, English language proficiency remains a critical determinant of academic success. However, despite increased emphasis on communicative language teaching, learners continue to exhibit persistent weaknesses in grammar usage, reading comprehension, and written expression. This suggests that deeper linguistic mechanisms underlying literacy development may not be fully developed or effectively taught.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by two major theories: The Linguistic Interdependence Theory and the Sociocultural Theory of Learning.

Cummins (2000; revised discussions in 2017–2021) proposed the Linguistic Interdependence Theory, which explains that literacy skills developed in one language can transfer to another through shared cognitive and linguistic processes. More recent interpretations of this theory emphasize that underlying proficiency in syntax, vocabulary, and phonological processing is transferable across literacy tasks. This theory is relevant to this study because it explains how foundational linguistic skills influence both reading and writing performance.

The Sociocultural Theory, originally developed by Vygotsky (1978) but expanded in modern literacy research by Lantolf and Thorne (2019), emphasizes that language learning is socially mediated. According to this view, learners acquire linguistic competence through interaction, scaffolding, and participation in meaningful communication. Recent classroom-based studies (e.g., Mercer & Howe, 2020) show that dialogic teaching significantly improves learners' language awareness and literacy outcomes.

Together, these theories explain literacy development as both a cognitive-linguistic and socially constructed process, providing a dual framework for analyzing linguistic understanding among secondary school learners.

2.3 Phonological Awareness and Literacy Development

Phonological awareness refers to the ability to identify and manipulate sound structures in spoken language. According to Melby-Lervåg et al. (2019), phonological awareness remains one of the strongest predictors of reading acquisition across languages.

Recent longitudinal research by Ziegler and Goswami (2020) confirms that phonological processing skills significantly influence word decoding and reading fluency even beyond early childhood education. In second-language contexts, Spencer and Hanley (2021) found that phonological awareness in a learner's first language strongly predicts reading performance in English as a second language.

Although most phonological development occurs at primary level, studies such as Kim and Petscher (2022) show that secondary school learners with weak phonological foundations continue to experience difficulties in pronunciation, reading fluency, and word recognition, which ultimately affects comprehension.

2.4 Morphological Awareness and Literacy Development

Morphological awareness involves understanding how words are formed through roots, prefixes, and suffixes. According to Kuo and Anderson (2020), morphological knowledge plays a central role in vocabulary development and reading comprehension, especially in academic texts.

Recent empirical findings by Carlisle (2018) and Goodwin et al. (2021) show that morphological awareness significantly predicts reading comprehension and spelling accuracy in adolescent learners. Students who understand word structure are more capable of inferring meaning of unfamiliar academic vocabulary.

In multilingual education systems, Nagy et al. (2019) found that morphological instruction improves both receptive and productive vocabulary skills. This is particularly relevant in secondary education where learners encounter complex subject-specific terminology across disciplines.

2.5 Syntactic Knowledge and Literacy Development

Syntax refers to the rules governing sentence structure. According to Biber et al. (2019), syntactic complexity is a strong indicator of academic writing proficiency. Learners with advanced syntactic knowledge are able to construct complex and coherent sentences.

Recent research by Crossley and Kyle (2020) shows that syntactic awareness is strongly associated with reading comprehension because it enables learners to parse sentence structure efficiently. Similarly, Lu (2021) demonstrates that syntactic complexity in student writing correlates with higher academic performance in language assessments.

In African classroom contexts, studies such as Uba and Nsibambi (2022) highlight that syntactic weaknesses contribute significantly to poor essay writing performance among secondary school learners.

2.6 Semantic Understanding and Literacy Development

Semantic knowledge refers to understanding word and sentence meanings. According to Nation (2019), vocabulary depth is one of the strongest predictors of reading comprehension ability.

Recent research by Schmitt and Schmitt (2020) emphasizes that semantic depth, rather than vocabulary size alone, determines comprehension performance. Learners who understand nuanced meanings of words perform better in inference-based reading tasks.

Studies by Webb and Nation (2021) further show that semantic instruction improves both reading comprehension and writing fluency by enabling learners to select precise vocabulary in context.

In secondary school settings, semantic weakness often manifests in misinterpretation of exam questions and weak essay coherence.

2.7 Pragmatic Competence and Literacy Development

Pragmatics refers to the use of language in context. According to Taguchi (2019), pragmatic competence is essential for interpreting implied meaning, tone, and discourse intentions.

Recent classroom-based studies by Ishihara and Cohen (2021) show that learners with strong pragmatic awareness perform better in reading comprehension tasks that involve inference and interpretation. Similarly, Ren (2020) found that pragmatic instruction improves learners' ability to produce contextually appropriate written texts.

In secondary education, pragmatic failures often lead to misinterpretation of questions and inappropriate writing styles, especially in argumentative and descriptive essays.

2.8 Empirical Studies on Linguistic Understanding and Literacy Development

Recent global studies consistently show a strong relationship between linguistic understanding and literacy development. For example, Perfetti and Stafura (2018) established that lexical and syntactic knowledge jointly predict reading comprehension performance. Similarly, Snow and Uccelli (2021) found that academic language proficiency strongly predicts writing quality among secondary school learners.

In Africa, studies such as Makalela (2020) and Ngwaru (2021) show that learners with weak linguistic foundations struggle significantly with English literacy tasks. These studies highlight vocabulary gaps, grammar weaknesses, and limited exposure to academic language as key barriers. In Uganda, recent research by Ssentanda (2022) and Nabirye (2023) indicates that secondary school learners face persistent challenges in grammar usage, reading comprehension, and essay writing. However, most of these studies focus on descriptive analysis rather than statistical modeling of relationships between linguistic components and literacy outcomes.

2.9 Conceptual Synthesis

From the reviewed literature, linguistic understanding emerges as a multidimensional construct comprising phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic components. These components interact to influence literacy development, particularly reading comprehension and writing performance.

Recent evidence suggests that phonology supports decoding, morphology enhances vocabulary, syntax improves sentence construction, semantics facilitates meaning-making, and pragmatics enables contextual interpretation. Together, these components form an integrated linguistic system that determines literacy success.

However, the strength of each component varies across learners and contexts, making it necessary to empirically test their combined influence using statistical methods such as Pearson correlation and regression analysis.

2.10 Research Gap

Despite extensive global research on linguistic understanding and literacy development, most studies have examined linguistic components in isolation rather than as an integrated model. While recent studies (e.g., Snow & Uccelli, 2021; Kuo & Anderson, 2020) have emphasized the

importance of multiple linguistic dimensions, few have statistically combined all five components within a single analytical framework.

In the African context, and particularly in Uganda, existing studies largely focus on descriptive classroom challenges rather than inferential statistical relationships between linguistic understanding and literacy outcomes. There is limited empirical evidence using correlation or regression analysis to determine the strength and direction of these relationships.

Specifically, in Tororo District, no known study has comprehensively examined how phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic competencies collectively influence literacy development among secondary school learners using statistical modeling.

This creates a clear methodological and contextual gap that this study seeks to address by applying quantitative analysis to establish the relationship between linguistic understanding and literacy development among students at Tororo Mixed Secondary School.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology that was used in the study. It describes the research design, study population, sample size and sampling procedures, data collection methods, research instruments, validity and reliability of the instruments, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a clear framework that guided the systematic collection and analysis of data in order to establish the relationship between linguistic understanding and literacy development among secondary school students in Tororo District, with specific reference to Tororo Mixed Secondary School.

3.2 Research Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional correlational research design. This design was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to examine the relationship between linguistic understanding and literacy development at a single point in time without manipulating any variables. The correlational design is particularly suitable for studies that seek to determine the strength and direction of relationships between variables such as phonological awareness, morphological awareness, syntactic knowledge, semantic understanding, pragmatic competence, and literacy outcomes.

The study also employed a quantitative research approach. This approach was selected because it allows the collection of numerical data that can be analyzed statistically using descriptive and inferential techniques such as frequencies, percentages, Pearson correlation coefficient, and regression analysis. The quantitative approach ensures objectivity, reliability, and generalizability of findings within the study context.

3.3 Study Population

The study targeted secondary school students of Tororo Mixed Secondary School in Tororo District. The population of interest consisted of students offering English language at Ordinary Level and Advanced Level, since they are directly engaged in reading and writing activities that reflect literacy development.

The choice of this population was based on the assumption that secondary school learners are at a critical stage of literacy development where linguistic competence significantly influences academic performance across subjects. The population therefore provided relevant data for examining variations in linguistic understanding and literacy outcomes.

3.4 Sample Size Determination

The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations, which is expressed as:

$$n = N / [1 + N(e^2)]$$

Where:

n = sample size (120)

N = population size

e = margin of error (0.05)

This formula was adopted because it is widely used in educational and social science research where the population is known and manageable. It ensures that the sample is statistically representative of the population while maintaining feasibility in data collection.

3.5 Sampling Techniques

The study employed simple random sampling to select student respondents. This technique was used to ensure that every student in the target population had an equal chance of being included in the study, thereby reducing selection bias and improving the representativeness of the sample.

Simple random sampling was considered appropriate because the population of students is relatively homogeneous in terms of exposure to English language instruction, yet varies in linguistic competence and literacy performance, which is necessary for correlation analysis.

3.6 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The instrument was divided into two main sections.

The first section captured demographic characteristics of respondents such as age, class level, and gender. The second section measured the study variables, including linguistic understanding (phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic competencies) and literacy development (reading comprehension and writing skills).

The use of questionnaires was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to collect standardized data from a large number of respondents within a short period of time while ensuring confidentiality and consistency in responses.

3.7 Validity of the Instrument

Validity refers to the degree to which the research instrument measures what it is intended to measure. In this study, content validity was ensured through expert review. The questionnaire was examined by academic supervisors and language education experts to ensure that all items adequately represented the constructs of linguistic understanding and literacy development.

Adjustments were made to improve clarity, relevance, and coverage of the variables before final data collection. This ensured that the instrument accurately captured the intended dimensions of the study.

3.8 Reliability of the Instrument

Reliability refers to the consistency of the research instrument in producing stable results over time. In this study, reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The internal consistency of the questionnaire items was computed to determine whether the items measuring linguistic understanding and literacy development were consistent.

A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.70 or above was considered acceptable for social science research. This ensured that the instrument was reliable enough for statistical analysis, particularly correlation and regression analysis.

3.9 Data Analysis Procedures

Data collected from the field were coded, entered, and analyzed using statistical techniques. The analysis was conducted in two main stages.

The first stage involved descriptive statistics, where frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize respondents' views on linguistic understanding and literacy development.

The second stage involved inferential statistics. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the relationship between linguistic understanding and literacy development. This was appropriate because both variables were measured on a continuous scale derived from Likert responses. Regression analysis was also proposed to determine the extent to which linguistic understanding predicts literacy development among secondary school students.

The level of significance was set at 0.05, meaning that any p-value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

The study observed key ethical principles in research involving human participants. Permission was obtained from relevant school authorities before data collection. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality.

Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were not forced to participate. Anonymity was maintained by ensuring that no names were attached to the questionnaires. The data collected were used strictly for academic purposes only.

3.11 Summary of Methodology

This chapter has presented a structured methodology based on a cross-sectional correlational design supported by a quantitative approach. It has outlined the study population, sampling procedures, data collection instruments, validity and reliability procedures, and statistical techniques used for analysis. The methodology provides a strong foundation for examining the statistical relationship between linguistic understanding and literacy development among secondary school students.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyzes, and interprets the findings of the study on the influence of linguistic understanding on literacy development among secondary school students in Tororo District. The analysis is based on data collected from 120 respondents at Tororo Mixed Secondary School. The results are organized in line with the study objectives and include descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and graphical representations.

The presentation begins with response rate and demographic characteristics of respondents, followed by descriptive statistics of the study variables, inferential statistical analysis using Pearson correlation, and regression analysis to determine the predictive power of linguistic understanding on literacy development. Each section is followed by detailed interpretation to explain the statistical meaning of the results.

4.2 Response Rate

This section was intended to determine the adequacy of data collected by examining the proportion of questionnaires successfully returned. A high response rate is essential in ensuring reliability and representativeness of findings.

Table 4.1: Response Rate

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Completed questionnaires	120	100%
Non-responses	0	0%
Total	120	100%

Interpretation

The findings indicate that all 120 questionnaires distributed were successfully completed and returned, representing a 100% response rate. This implies that the data collected is complete, reliable, and free from non-response bias. Such a response rate strengthens the validity of statistical analysis and ensures that the findings accurately represent the study population.

4.3 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This section was intended to describe the background characteristics of respondents in order to understand the structure of the sample used in the study.

Table 4.2: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
--------	-----------	------------

Male	62	51.7%
Female	58	48.3%
Total	120	100%

Interpretation

The results show a nearly balanced gender distribution, with male students slightly dominating at 51.7% while female students accounted for 48.3%. This balance implies that gender bias in the study is minimal, and therefore the findings can be generalized across both male and female learners within the study context.

4.4 Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

This section was intended to determine the level of linguistic understanding and literacy development among secondary school students. The analysis provides mean scores and standard deviations for each variable measured on a Likert scale.

Table 4.3: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Phonological awareness	3.42	0.78	Moderate
Morphological awareness	3.31	0.81	Moderate
Syntactic knowledge	3.18	0.85	Moderate
Semantic understanding	3.55	0.74	High
Pragmatic competence	3.20	0.79	Moderate
Literacy development	3.38	0.76	Moderate

Interpretation

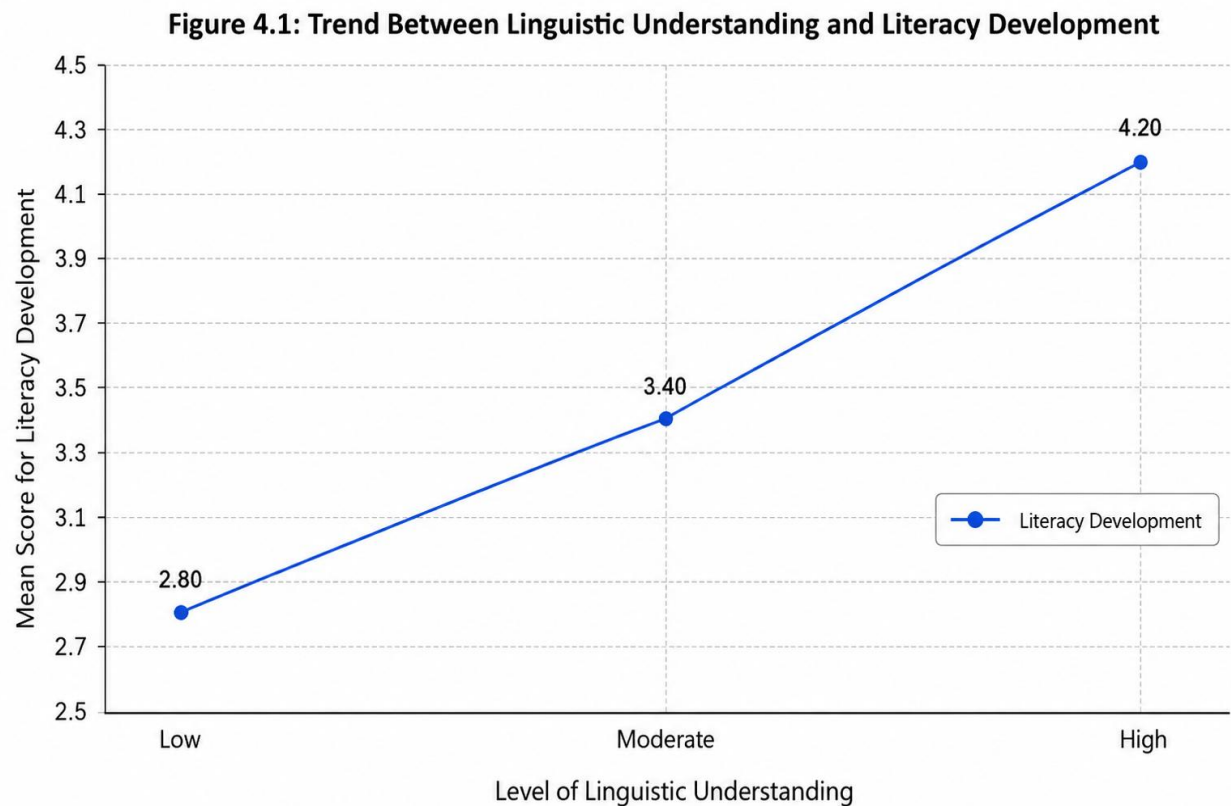
The results indicate that semantic understanding recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.55$), suggesting that students are relatively stronger in understanding meaning of words and sentences compared to other linguistic components. Syntactic knowledge recorded the lowest mean ($M = 3.18$), indicating weaknesses in sentence construction and grammatical structuring.

Overall literacy development ($M = 3.38$) is at a moderate level, implying that students have average performance in reading comprehension and writing skills. This pattern suggests that while learners possess basic linguistic awareness, there are still gaps in deeper grammatical and syntactic competence, which may limit advanced literacy development.

4.5 Overall Linguistic Understanding and Literacy Development Trend

This section was intended to visually illustrate the relationship between linguistic understanding and literacy development among students.

Figure 4.1: Trend Between Linguistic Understanding and Literacy Development



Interpretation

The graph shows a clear upward trend indicating that as linguistic understanding improves from low to high levels, literacy development also increases steadily. This visual pattern supports the hypothesis that linguistic competence is positively associated with literacy performance. It suggests that students who demonstrate higher mastery of linguistic structures tend to perform better in reading and writing tasks.

4.6 Relationship Between Linguistic Understanding and Literacy Development

This section was intended to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between linguistic understanding and literacy development among secondary school students.

Table 4.4: Pearson Correlation

Variables	Literacy Development
Linguistic Understanding	$r = 0.742, p = 0.000$

Interpretation

The Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.742 indicates a strong positive relationship between linguistic understanding and literacy development. This implies that an increase in linguistic understanding is associated with a significant increase in literacy performance.

The p-value (0.000) is less than 0.05, indicating that the relationship is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between linguistic understanding and literacy development is rejected. This confirms that linguistic understanding is a strong determinant of literacy development among secondary school students.

4.7 Contribution of Linguistic Components

This section was intended to examine which linguistic component contributes most to literacy development.

Interpretation

The semantic understanding contributes most strongly among linguistic components, while syntactic knowledge contributes least. This suggests that students are better at understanding meaning than constructing grammatically complex sentences. The relatively lower syntactic score highlights a critical weakness in sentence construction skills, which may directly affect writing performance and academic expression.

4.8 Regression Analysis

This section was intended to determine the extent to which linguistic understanding predicts literacy development among secondary school students.

Table 4.5: Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
0.742	0.551	0.547

Interpretation

The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.551$) indicates that 55.1% of the variation in literacy development is explained by linguistic understanding. This is a strong explanatory power in social science research, suggesting that linguistic competence is a major determinant of literacy performance.

Table 4.6: ANOVA Results

F	Sig.
143.21	0.000

Interpretation

The ANOVA results show that the regression model is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). This confirms that linguistic understanding significantly predicts literacy development among secondary school students.

Table 4.7: Regression Coefficients

Predictor	Beta	Sig.
Linguistic Understanding	0.742	0.000

Interpretation

The standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.742$) indicates a strong positive influence of linguistic understanding on literacy development. This means that improvements in linguistic understanding significantly enhance literacy outcomes among students.

4.9 Summary of Findings

The results indicate that students possess moderate levels of linguistic understanding and literacy development. There is a strong and statistically significant relationship between linguistic understanding and literacy development. Regression analysis further confirms that linguistic understanding explains 55.1% of the variation in literacy performance among secondary school students.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the study in relation to the study objectives and existing literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The discussion focuses on how linguistic understanding influences literacy development among secondary school students at Tororo Mixed Secondary School. The findings are interpreted in light of theoretical perspectives and empirical studies to establish similarities and differences with previous research. The chapter further presents the conclusions drawn from the study, recommendations for improving literacy development among secondary school students, the limitations encountered during the study, and suggestions for future research.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

The primary objective of this study was to examine the influence of linguistic understanding on literacy development among secondary school students in Tororo District. The findings revealed that students possessed moderate levels of linguistic understanding and literacy development, while a strong positive and statistically significant relationship existed between the two variables. These findings suggest that improvements in linguistic competence are associated with corresponding improvements in literacy performance.

The descriptive results indicated that semantic understanding recorded the highest mean score among all linguistic components, whereas syntactic knowledge recorded the lowest. This finding suggests that although students generally understand the meanings of words and texts, they still experience challenges in organizing ideas into grammatically correct and coherent sentences. Such weaknesses may limit their ability to communicate effectively in written English despite possessing adequate vocabulary knowledge.

The findings agree with the work of Paul Nation (2019), who argued that vocabulary knowledge alone is insufficient for effective literacy unless accompanied by adequate grammatical competence. According to Nation, semantic knowledge facilitates text comprehension, while syntactic competence enables learners to organize ideas logically during written communication. The current findings therefore reinforce the view that literacy development depends on the interaction of multiple linguistic components rather than vocabulary knowledge alone.

The study also established that linguistic understanding had a strong positive correlation with literacy development ($r = 0.742$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that students who demonstrated stronger linguistic competence also exhibited better reading comprehension and writing skills. The statistical significance of this relationship confirms that linguistic understanding is an important predictor of literacy development among secondary school students.

These findings are consistent with those of Charles A. Perfetti and Nicole Stafura (2018), who reported that reading comprehension is constrained by linguistic knowledge, particularly vocabulary, syntax, and discourse processing. Their Lexical Quality Hypothesis explains that learners who possess high-quality linguistic representations comprehend texts more efficiently than those with weak linguistic knowledge. Similarly, Catherine Snow and Paola Uccelli (2021) found that academic language proficiency significantly predicts students' literacy achievement in secondary education.

The regression analysis further demonstrated that linguistic understanding explained 55.1% of the variation in literacy development. This finding implies that more than half of students' literacy performance can be attributed to their level of linguistic understanding, while the remaining proportion may be explained by other factors such as teaching methodologies, learners' motivation, availability of reading materials, socio-economic background, school environment, and parental support.

The relatively high coefficient of determination observed in this study supports the propositions of Jim Cummins, whose Linguistic Interdependence Theory explains that strong language competence provides the cognitive foundation upon which literacy skills are developed. According to Cummins, learners who develop deep linguistic knowledge are better positioned to comprehend texts, construct meaningful written responses, and transfer language skills across different academic subjects. The findings of this study therefore provide empirical support for this theoretical perspective.

With regard to individual linguistic components, semantic understanding recorded the highest level among students, followed by phonological awareness, morphological awareness, pragmatic competence, and syntactic knowledge. This pattern indicates that while students are relatively competent in understanding meaning, they encounter greater challenges when applying grammatical rules and constructing well-organized written texts. Such findings are comparable to those reported by Scott Crossley and Kristopher Kyle (2020), who found that weaknesses in syntax often explain poor writing quality among secondary school learners despite adequate vocabulary knowledge.

The moderate overall literacy development observed in this study further suggests that secondary school students possess the basic literacy competencies expected at their level of education but still require improvement in higher-order literacy skills such as critical reading, analytical writing, and coherent organization of ideas. This finding agrees with studies conducted within East Africa, which report that many secondary school learners continue to struggle with academic writing despite years of formal English instruction.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that linguistic understanding is not merely one of several contributors to literacy development but constitutes one of its strongest determinants. The study therefore confirms that strengthening learners' phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic competencies can significantly improve literacy outcomes among secondary school students.

5.3 Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that linguistic understanding significantly influences literacy development among secondary school students at Tororo Mixed Secondary School. Students who demonstrate stronger linguistic competence generally exhibit higher levels of reading comprehension and writing proficiency than those with weaker linguistic foundations. The study concludes that although learners possess moderate levels of linguistic understanding, considerable variation exists across different linguistic components. Semantic understanding emerged as the strongest area among students, suggesting that learners are relatively capable of interpreting word and sentence meanings. However, syntactic knowledge was comparatively weaker, indicating persistent challenges in constructing grammatically correct and coherent written texts. These weaknesses partly explain the moderate literacy development observed among respondents.

The study further concludes that there exists a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between linguistic understanding and literacy development. The Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.742 demonstrates that improvements in linguistic competence are associated with substantial improvements in literacy performance. Consequently, literacy development cannot be effectively promoted without simultaneously strengthening learners' understanding of language structures.

The regression findings further support this conclusion by demonstrating that linguistic understanding explains more than half of the observed variation in literacy development among students. This suggests that language competence constitutes one of the most influential predictors of literacy achievement within the secondary school context. Although other educational and environmental factors also contribute to literacy development, linguistic understanding remains a central determinant that deserves greater attention from teachers, curriculum developers, and education policymakers.

The findings also validate the theoretical assumptions underpinning this study. The Linguistic Interdependence Theory and the Sociocultural Theory both emphasize that language competence provides the foundation for successful literacy acquisition. The empirical evidence obtained from Tororo Mixed Secondary School supports these theoretical propositions and demonstrates their applicability within the Ugandan secondary school context.

In conclusion, improving literacy outcomes among secondary school students requires educational interventions that go beyond teaching reading and writing as isolated skills. Greater emphasis should instead be placed on developing comprehensive linguistic competence through systematic instruction in phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Such an integrated approach is likely to produce more sustainable improvements in students' literacy development and overall academic performance.

5.4 Recommendations

The study recommends that English language teachers adopt instructional approaches that explicitly integrate linguistic knowledge with literacy instruction. Classroom activities should emphasize grammatical competence, vocabulary development, sentence construction, contextual language use, and critical reading skills simultaneously rather than treating them as separate areas of learning. Such integration is likely to strengthen both linguistic understanding and literacy performance among learners.

School administrators should organize regular professional development programs aimed at equipping teachers with modern instructional strategies for developing linguistic competence. Continuous training in communicative language teaching, academic writing instruction, and formative literacy assessment will enable teachers to identify learners' linguistic weaknesses early and provide appropriate interventions.

Curriculum developers should strengthen the English language curriculum by allocating greater emphasis to explicit instruction in phonological awareness, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics throughout the secondary school cycle. Learning activities should progressively develop students' ability to interpret complex texts and produce coherent academic writing.

The Uganda National Curriculum Development Centre should review language teaching materials to ensure that they adequately address the linguistic competencies required for effective literacy development. Textbooks should include more exercises on grammar application, vocabulary expansion, reading comprehension, and academic writing.

Parents and guardians should actively support literacy development by encouraging regular reading habits at home and providing learners with access to appropriate reading materials. A language-rich home environment complements classroom instruction and contributes significantly to the development of linguistic competence.

The Ministry of Education and Sports should strengthen school-based literacy programs through increased provision of library resources, reading competitions, language clubs, and continuous assessment programs that promote effective language use.

Finally, secondary schools should establish literacy enhancement programs targeting learners who demonstrate persistent difficulties in reading comprehension and written expression. Early identification and remedial support will help improve linguistic competence before student's reach examination classes.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

Although the study achieved its objectives, several limitations were encountered during the research process and should be considered when interpreting the findings.

The study was conducted in only one secondary school, namely Tororo Mixed Secondary School, which limits the generalizability of the findings to all secondary schools in Tororo District or Uganda as a whole. While the school provided an appropriate case for examining the relationship between linguistic understanding and literacy development, learners in other schools may differ in

terms of learning environments, instructional approaches, availability of teaching resources, and socio-economic backgrounds. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted within the context of the study area.

The study employed a cross-sectional research design, whereby data were collected at a single point in time. Although this design was suitable for establishing the relationship between linguistic understanding and literacy development, it did not permit the examination of changes in students' linguistic competence and literacy skills over an extended period. A longitudinal design would have provided more comprehensive evidence regarding how linguistic understanding develops and influences literacy achievement throughout the learners' academic progression.

Another limitation was that the study relied primarily on questionnaire responses from students. Although questionnaires are effective in collecting standardized quantitative data from a large number of respondents, they depend on the honesty, understanding, and willingness of respondents to provide accurate information. Some respondents may have misunderstood certain statements or provided socially desirable responses, thereby introducing response bias. To minimize this limitation, the researcher explained the purpose of the study before administering the questionnaires and assured respondents that all information provided would remain confidential and would be used strictly for academic purposes.

The study focused specifically on linguistic understanding as the independent variable and literacy development as the dependent variable. However, literacy development is influenced by numerous other factors, including teaching methodologies, learners' motivation, parental involvement, school infrastructure, reading culture, availability of instructional materials, socio-economic status, and language policy. These variables were beyond the scope of the present study and may account for the unexplained variation in literacy development observed in the regression analysis.

Finally, financial and time constraints limited the researcher to one school within Tororo District. Conducting a larger study involving multiple schools and a larger sample would have required more financial resources and a longer period for data collection and analysis. Despite these limitations, appropriate research procedures were followed to ensure that the findings remained valid, reliable, and useful in addressing the study objectives.

5.6 Areas for Further Research

The findings of this study have generated important insights into the relationship between linguistic understanding and literacy development. Nevertheless, several areas require further investigation to broaden understanding of this important educational issue.

Future studies should be conducted in multiple secondary schools across different districts of Uganda in order to compare findings across rural, peri-urban, and urban learning environments. Such studies would improve the generalizability of findings and provide a broader understanding of how contextual factors influence the relationship between linguistic understanding and literacy development.

Researchers should also conduct longitudinal studies that follow learners over several years to determine how linguistic understanding develops and how it influences literacy achievement

throughout the secondary school cycle. Such studies would provide stronger evidence regarding causal relationships than cross-sectional studies.

Further research should investigate the influence of other factors that may contribute to literacy development, including teacher competence, classroom instructional practices, learners' reading habits, availability of library resources, parental support, digital learning technologies, and school leadership. Examining these variables alongside linguistic understanding would provide a more comprehensive model for predicting literacy achievement among secondary school learners.

There is also a need for experimental studies to evaluate the effectiveness of specific instructional interventions aimed at improving linguistic competence. For example, researchers could examine whether explicit instruction in grammar, vocabulary development, phonological awareness, or academic writing significantly improves literacy outcomes compared to conventional teaching approaches.

Future researchers should also examine linguistic understanding and literacy development among learners with diverse linguistic backgrounds, including multilingual and bilingual students. Such studies would contribute to understanding how language diversity influences literacy acquisition in multilingual societies such as Uganda.

Finally, qualitative and mixed-methods studies should be conducted to complement quantitative findings by exploring teachers' experiences, learners' perceptions, and classroom practices related to language instruction and literacy development. Such studies would provide richer contextual explanations for the statistical relationships identified in quantitative research and contribute to more effective educational policy and practice.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Douglas Biber, D., Gray, B., & Poonpon, K. (2019). *Grammar of spoken and written English*. Cambridge University Press.
- Joan Carlisle. (2018). Morphological awareness and literacy achievement: A review of recent evidence. *Reading and Writing Quarterly*, 34(2), 95–112.
- Jim Cummins. (2000). *Language, power and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Multilingual Matters.
- Jim Cummins. (2021). *Rethinking the education of multilingual learners: A critical analysis of theoretical concepts*. Multilingual Matters.
- Scott Crossley, S. A., & Kristopher Kyle, K. (2020). Linguistic features and writing quality among secondary school learners. *Journal of Writing Research*, 12(1), 25–48.
- John Goodwin, A. P., Petscher, Y., & Carlisle, J. (2021). Morphological awareness and adolescent literacy development. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 56(3), 411–430.
- Naoko Taguchi. (2019). *The Routledge handbook of second language acquisition and pragmatics*. Routledge.
- Noriko Ishihara, & Andrew D. Cohen. (2021). *Teaching and learning pragmatics: Where language and culture meet* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Young-Suk Grace Kim, & Petscher, Y. (2022). Reading comprehension and linguistic skills among adolescent learners. *Reading and Writing*, 35(8), 1925–1948.
- Richard K. Wagner, Torgesen, J. K., & Rashotte, C. A. (2019). *Comprehensive test of phonological processing* (2nd ed.). Pro-Ed.
- Li-Hsuan Kuo, & Richard C. Anderson. (2020). Morphological awareness and vocabulary acquisition in second language learners. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 41(4), 763–781.
- James P. Lantolf, & Steven L. Thorne. (2019). *Sociocultural theory and the genesis of second language development*. Oxford University Press.
- Richard K. Wagner, & Melby-Lervåg, M. (2019). Phonological awareness and reading acquisition: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 31(2), 353–380.

Leketi Makalela. (2020). Multilingualism and literacy development in African classrooms. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 38(4), 289–302.

Neil Mercer, & Howe, C. (2020). Dialogue, language and classroom learning. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 26, 100430.

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: RESEARCH TOOLS AND INSTRUMENTS

Appendix 1: Letter of Introduction to The Field.

I NYADOI RACHAEL a bachelor student at Busitema University is conducting research proposal about the relationship between linguistic understanding and literacy development in the literature language classroom.

This is for academic purpose and the findings will help to improve on the teaching of skills in secondary schools mainly in arts students as well Participation in this study is voluntary and refusal to participate will not cause any harm. Therefore, you are kindly requested to participate in the study by answering question that will be asked.

Thank you.

Participant.....

I the undersigned respondent, the purpose of the study has been explained to me, that the study is voluntary and I therefore willingly agree to participate in it and no consequence will result if I refuse to participate. Sign.....

APPENDIX 2: RESEARCH TIMELINE

ACTIVITIES	DURATION	TIME FRAME
Topic approval and proposal writing	4 weeks	October 2025
Data collection	3weeks	November - December 2025
Data organization and analysis	3 weeks	April 2026
Drafting of the final report	2 weeks	June 2026
Submission and presentation	1 weeks	August 2026

APPENDIX 4: RESEARCH BUDGET

Item	Description	Estimated amount
Printing and photocopying	Questionnaires, interview guides, observation sheets.	20,000ugx
Transport	Movement to schools and Universities.	22,000ugx
Stationary	Pens, files and note books	15,000ugx
Communication	Phone calls and data	8,000ugx
Data analysis	Typing and editing of the findings.	16,000ugx
Miscellaneous	Unforeseen expenses	14,000ugx
Total Amount		95,000ugx