
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Language Skills: Impacting the Oral Reading Proficiency of Grade One Pupils

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| ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between language skills specifically receptive and expressive language and the oral reading ability of Grade 1 learners. Employing a quantitative correlational research design, the study aimed to determine the extent to which language proficiency influences oral reading fluency and comprehension in the context of mother-tongue-based multilingual education using Sinugbuanong Binisaya. Data were collected from 30 Grade 1 learners, along with inputs from their teachers and parents, through a Language Skills Assessment Tool measuring receptive and expressive language competencies and an oral reading test assessing fluency, accuracy, and comprehension. Statistical analysis using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) revealed a positive but non-significant correlation between receptive language and oral reading ability and between expressive language and oral reading ability. These results suggest that while language skills contribute to reading development, they alone do not fully explain variations in learners' oral reading performance. The study concludes that integrating language-rich instruction with structured reading activities, including phonics-based practice, storytelling, and guided oral reading, can enhance learners' literacy outcomes.

| KEYWORDS

Receptive language, Expressive language, Oral reading ability, Reading fluency, Early literacy, Language development, Sinugbuanong Binisaya

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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Introduction

Reading is one of the most fundamental skills that learners must acquire in the early years of schooling. Oral reading in particular plays a vital role in helping children bridge the gap between recognizing words and understanding their meaning. It allows learners to connect written symbols with sounds, and later on, develop fluency and comprehension. However, learning to read is not an automatic process, and many children face challenges in decoding words, recognizing sounds, and making meaning from print (Petscher & Kim, 2020). Effective reading instruction is therefore essential to ensure that pupils become proficient readers.

Debates have long existed on whether reading instruction should focus more on phonics or meaning-based approaches. The phonics method emphasizes systematic instruction on letter-sound relationships, while meaning-focused instruction prioritizes word recognition and comprehension (Engelmann, 2022; Austin, 2022). Both perspectives highlight that oral reading skills serve as a strong predictor of future literacy development. When learners fail to master these skills early, they risk lagging behind in later academic tasks. The urgency of improving literacy instruction is particularly acute in the Philippines: recent assessments show Filipino students continue to struggle in reading comprehension compared to international peers. In this multilingual context especially in Sinugbuanong Binisaya pupils face additional difficulties in fluency, spelling, and vocabulary due to the scarcity of instructional resources and limited teacher training in mother-tongue instruction. These realities highlight the

need for relevant strategies and interventions to strengthen reading acquisition among Grade One pupils, tailored to children's natural interests and abilities.

While existing research has explored general reading development and the effectiveness of various instructional methods, there remains a notable gap in understanding the specific relationship between learners' language skills particularly receptive and expressive language and their oral reading ability within the context of Sinugbuanong Binisaya. Most prior studies have focused on English or Filipino language proficiency, overlooking how learners' native linguistic competence influences reading fluency, comprehension, and word recognition in the mother tongue. Additionally, there is limited empirical evidence on how deficiencies in receptive (listening and understanding) and expressive (speaking and word use) language skills directly impact oral reading performance among early-grade learners. Addressing this gap is crucial for designing effective, language-based interventions that holistically develop pupils' oral reading abilities and overall literacy proficiency in their first language. Identifying the pupils' strengths and weaknesses in these areas, this study aims to design a Reading Skills Enhancement Plan that integrates mother-tongue based instruction, culturally relevant materials, and engaging learning activities suited to the local context. Ultimately, this research intends to bridge the gap between language development and reading fluency, providing practical insights and interventions that can guide teachers, school administrators, and curriculum developers in improving early literacy instruction not only in Anajao Elementary School in Argao but also in other binisaya-speaking communities.

Despite the growing body of research on early literacy instruction, a significant research gap persists in understanding how receptive and expressive language skills specifically influence oral reading ability among young learners in mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) contexts such as those in the Philippines. Most contemporary studies on reading fluency and comprehension such as those by Petscher and Kim (2020) and Mokhtari and Thompson (2023) have primarily focused on English language instruction, leaving limited empirical data on indigenous or regional languages like Sinugbuanong Binisaya. Moreover, while recent Philippine literacy studies (e.g., Pascual, 2022; Canuto & Lumidao, 2024) have explored interventions to enhance oral reading fluency, few have examined the underlying language skills that contribute to these outcomes. This lack of localized and language-specific research hinders the development of culturally relevant instructional frameworks tailored to the linguistic realities of young learners in rural and multilingual settings. Addressing this gap is essential to creating context-sensitive reading programs that integrate both linguistic competence and fluency development, ensuring that children become confident and proficient readers in their first language before transitioning to additional languages in later grades.

Literature Review

Language development particularly in terms of both receptive and expressive skills, plays a critical role in shaping children's reading fluency and comprehension. For example, research shows that children with stronger oral language abilities tend to perform better in reading tasks: one study found that young bilingual students' overall oral language competence significantly predicted both decoding and comprehension outcomes. (Adlof et al., 2020) Likewise, in the Philippine setting, an investigation of the kindergarten curriculum revealed that oral language components especially semantic (vocabulary) and expressive discourse were much more emphasised than receptive language components, suggesting a mismatch in how language skills are fostered. (Diaz et al., 2022). Further, longitudinal studies on early reading demonstrate that oral language and reading ability are deeply interconnected: children's expressive vocabulary and sentence-production abilities contribute to later reading fluency and accuracy, while receptive language supports their ability to understand text. For instance, a longitudinal analysis found that young children with limited language skills were at higher risk of becoming poor readers unless their vocabulary and syntax improved. (Adlof et al., 2020) These findings underscore that reading fluency cannot be separated from oral language proficiency both receptive and expressive skills must be targeted together to support young learners in becoming proficient readers.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to investigate the relationship between language skills (receptive and expressive) and the oral reading ability of Grade 1 learners at Anajao Elementary School in Argao, Cebu. The correlational approach was selected to determine the extent to which learners' language proficiency influences their oral reading performance without introducing experimental manipulation. The research was guided by an input-process-output framework, wherein the input phase focused on assessing learners' receptive and expressive language abilities, the process stage involved analyzing their oral reading fluency and comprehension, and the output aimed to establish the relationship between these variables and recommend strategies to enhance reading proficiency. The participants of the study included 30 Grade 1 learners together with their teachers and parents, who provided valuable insights into the children's language development and reading practices. Data collection utilized a Language Skills Assessment Tool to measure the pupils' receptive and expressive language competencies and an oral reading test to evaluate their fluency, accuracy, and comprehension. To maintain reliability and validity, the gathered data were subjected to statistical analysis using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson r) to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between language skills and oral reading ability. The findings from this analysis served as the basis for proposing targeted reading interventions and instructional strategies aimed at enhancing early literacy development among Grade 1 learners in the local context.

Results

Table 1. Level of language skills of the learners in terms of receptive language

Indicators	WM	SD
Points to a family member when asked to do so.	4.63	0.49
Points to five body parts on himself when asked to do so.	4.60	0.56
Points to five named pictured objects when asked to do so	4.30	0.84
Follows one-step instructions that include simple prepositions (e.g. in, on, under, etc.)	4.40	0.62
Follows two-step instructions that include simple prepositions.	4.40	0.72
Aggregate Weighted Mean	4.47	
Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.65

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that the Grade 1 learners at Anajao Elementary School demonstrated a very high level of receptive language skills, as reflected by an aggregate weighted mean of 4.47 and an aggregate standard deviation of 0.65. This suggests that the pupils are generally proficient in understanding spoken language, following directions, and identifying familiar people and objects. The highest-rated indicator, "Points to a family member when asked to do so" (WM = 4.63), reveals that learners easily comprehend simple and familiar verbal cues, reflecting strong listening comprehension and contextual understanding. Similarly, high mean scores were recorded for "Points to five body parts on himself when asked to do so" (WM = 4.60) and "Follows one-step and two-step instructions involving prepositions" (WM = 4.40 each), suggesting that most learners can process and respond accurately to both basic and slightly complex verbal instructions. The lowest, though still high, mean was observed in "Points to five named pictured objects when asked to do so" (WM = 4.30), indicating that while learners can recognize common objects, there may be slight variations in vocabulary familiarity or exposure to visual learning materials. The relatively small standard deviation implies consistent performance across respondents. Overall, these findings suggest that learners possess well-developed receptive language abilities, which form a strong foundation for reading comprehension and oral reading fluency. However, continuous reinforcement through activities such as listening exercises, storytelling, and interactive commands is recommended to further enhance comprehension and attention to linguistic detail.

Table 2. Expressive Language

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD
1	Uses five to 20 recognizable words	4.47	0.68
2	Uses pronouns (e.g. I, me, ako, akin)	4.37	0.61
3	Uses two- to three-word verb-noun combinations (e.g., <i>hingi gatas</i>)	4.23	0.82
4	Names objects in pictures	4.20	0.61
5	Speaks in grammatically correct two- to three word/sentences	4.17	0.65
6	Asks "what" questions	4.20	0.71
7	Gives account of recent experiences (with prompting) in order of occurrence using past tense	3.77	0.57
	Aggregate Weighted Mean	4.20	
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.66

The results in Table 2 show learners demonstrated a very good level of expressive language skills, with an aggregate weighted mean of 4.20 and an aggregate standard deviation of 0.66. This indicates that most learners are able to communicate effectively, express ideas, and use language appropriately in daily interactions. The highest-rated indicator, "Uses five to twenty recognizable words" (WM = 4.47), suggests that learners possess an expanding vocabulary and are comfortable using common words in oral communication. Similarly, high scores in "Uses pronouns (e.g., I, me, ako, akin)" (WM = 4.37) and "Uses two- to three-word verb-noun combinations" (WM = 4.23) show that pupils are developing the ability to construct simple, meaningful utterances with appropriate grammatical forms. Indicators such as "Names objects in pictures" (WM = 4.20) and "Asks 'what' questions" (WM = 4.20) further demonstrate that learners can express curiosity and engage in verbal interaction, essential components of expressive language development. However, the lowest mean rating was observed in "Gives account of recent experiences (with prompting) in order of occurrence using past tense" (WM = 3.77), indicating that learners need additional support in narrating experiences sequentially and using correct verb tenses. The moderate standard deviation (SD = 0.66) reflects some variation in expressive ability among pupils, likely influenced by differences in home language exposure and verbal practice. Overall, these findings suggest that learners are developing strong expressive language foundations but would benefit from activities that enhance

narrative skills, sentence formation, and grammatical accuracy such as storytelling, guided conversations, and structured speaking exercises to support their growth in oral communication and literacy development.

Table 3. Level of oral reading ability of the learners

Level	Numerical Range	f	%
Independent	27-30	5	16.67
Instructional	17-26	22	73.33
Struggling	11-16	3	10.00
Non-reader	0-10	0	0.00
Total		30	100.00
Mean		21.60	
St. Dev.		3.94	

The results shown in Table 3 indicate that learners possess a very good level of expressive language skills, as evidenced by an aggregate weighted mean of 4.20 and a standard deviation of 0.66. This suggests that learners are generally capable of expressing themselves clearly and appropriately in various contexts. The highest-rated indicator, "Uses five to twenty recognizable words" (WM = 4.47), reflects the pupils' growing vocabulary and ability to use familiar words confidently during communication. Similarly, high ratings for "Uses pronouns (e.g., I, me, ako, akin)" (WM = 4.37) and "Uses two- to three-word verb-noun combinations" (WM = 4.23) demonstrate that learners are beginning to construct simple, grammatically accurate sentences, showing progress in both vocabulary and syntax development. The ability to "Name objects in pictures" (WM = 4.20) and "Ask 'what' questions" (WM = 4.20) also indicates an emerging curiosity and an increasing capacity to engage in conversational exchanges—important foundations for reading and comprehension. However, the lowest-rated skill, "Gives account of recent experiences (with prompting) in order of occurrence using past tense" (WM = 3.77), reveals that learners need additional support in narrating personal experiences and mastering the use of verb tenses, which are essential for effective storytelling and comprehension. The moderate variability in scores (SD = 0.66) implies that while most learners perform well, some still lag behind, likely due to differences in language exposure at home and classroom participation. These findings emphasize the need for teachers to design language-rich activities—such as guided storytelling, retelling events, picture-based discussions, and oral recitation tasks—to strengthen learners' expressive language skills. Enhancing these competencies not only supports their communication abilities but also fosters reading fluency and comprehension, which are critical components of early literacy development.

Table 4. Test of relationship between the language skills and the oral reading ability of the learners

Variables	r-value	Strength of Correlation	p - value	Decision	Remarks
Receptive Language and Oral Reading Ability	0.212	Strong Positive	0.261	Reject Ho	Not Significant
Expressive Language and Oral Reading Ability	0.164	Strong Positive	0.386	Reject Ho	Not Significant

*significant at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed)

The data presented in Table 4 show the test of relationship between the learners' language skills and their oral reading ability at Anajao Elementary School. The results reveal that receptive language and oral reading ability obtained an r-value of 0.212 with a p-value of 0.261, while expressive language and oral reading ability yielded an r-value of 0.164 with a p-value of 0.386. Although both variables indicate a positive relationship, the correlations are not statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. This means that while there is a slight tendency for learners with higher receptive and expressive language skills to perform better in oral reading, the relationship is weak and may be influenced by other intervening factors. The decision to reject the null hypothesis (Ho) but interpret the results as not significant suggests that language skills alone do not sufficiently explain variations in oral reading performance among the learners. These findings imply that the learners' oral reading ability may be influenced by multiple dimensions beyond language proficiency—such as phonemic awareness, decoding skills, reading motivation, and home literacy environment. The relatively weak correlation further suggests that learners may possess adequate listening and speaking skills but still struggle to apply these in reading tasks, possibly due to limited exposure to reading practice or instructional time. In line with previous studies

(e.g., Petscher & Kim, 2020; Mokhtari & Thompson, 2023), this highlights that while oral language development is foundational, it must be complemented with systematic phonics instruction, guided oral reading, and comprehension-building activities. Strengthening both language and reading instruction in an integrated manner could therefore enhance learners' overall reading fluency and comprehension, particularly within mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) contexts.

Discussion

The findings of this study align with current evidence showing that both receptive and expressive language skills are foundational to reading fluency and comprehension, though their influence may vary depending on linguistic exposure and instructional context. The high level of receptive language skills observed among the learners indicated by their ability to identify objects, body parts, and follow multi-step directions corresponds to research showing that receptive vocabulary and listening comprehension significantly predict reading fluency and word recognition (Park & Lee, 2024; Wise et al., 2007). Similarly, Foorman et al. (2015) found that receptive and syntactic language components explain up to 99% of the variance in reading comprehension across grades, underscoring the interdependence of oral language and literacy. Studies conducted among early learners also revealed that receptive language exposure particularly in oral instructions and story-based contexts facilitates word decoding and comprehension by enhancing phonological awareness (Heller, Lervåg, & Grøver, 2019; Vaz, 2024). Furthermore, evidence from English Language Learners demonstrates that receptive vocabulary training promotes reading fluency by supporting lexical access and automaticity during oral reading (Davis, 2018; Barrett, 2015). These results suggest that developing receptive language through listening comprehension activities and contextual vocabulary exposure can significantly strengthen foundational reading skills, especially among multilingual learners.

On the other hand, expressive language development, which encompasses vocabulary use, sentence formation, and narrative ability, also emerged as an essential yet distinct predictor of literacy performance. The findings of this study where learners showed strong expressive skills but required improvement in narrating experiences sequentially mirror prior evidence that expressive vocabulary and syntactic production have a direct effect on reading fluency and writing quality (Zhang et al., 2021; Park & Lee, 2024). According to Heller, Lervåg, & Grøver (2019), expressive and receptive oral language interventions significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition and sentence construction, leading to improved reading comprehension outcomes. Moreover, Alicante and Pontillas (2025) emphasized that fluency gains among Filipino learners are closely tied to their ability to express ideas and retell stories, linking expressive language with reading accuracy and prosody. Similarly, Morrison and Wilcox (2020) found that expressive oral fluency measured through prosody and pacing strongly correlates with comprehension and overall reading performance. Collectively, these studies reinforce that expressive and receptive language skills jointly scaffold early literacy, and interventions targeting both areas are vital to promoting oral reading fluency and comprehension among early-grade learners, particularly in multilingual and mother-tongue-based settings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the profile of the respondents highlights a diverse yet predominantly young group of learners, with most coming from families with moderate educational backgrounds and lower-middle-income households. The learners demonstrate strong receptive language skills and solid expressive language abilities, which are essential for their academic development. However, despite good language skills, there is no significant relationship between language proficiency and oral reading ability, suggesting that other factors may contribute to reading performance. These findings underscore the importance of a holistic approach to early education, addressing both language skills and reading fluency for improved academic outcomes.

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