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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **Language Proficiency and Foundational Literacy of Grade One Learners: Basis for A Literacy Skills Enhancement Plan**

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**| ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to assess the language and literacy skills of learners. Specifically, it sought to determine the learners' levels of receptive and expressive language, evaluate their performance in foundational literacy domains such as letter sounds, rhyming words, and letter names, and examine the relationship between language and literacy skills. The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. Data were gathered using a teacher-administered survey questionnaire adapted from the Department of Education's Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Checklist and the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA). The statistical tools utilized included weighted mean, standard deviation, frequency count, simple percentage, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient. Findings showed that the learners generally possessed proficient receptive and expressive language skills and strong foundational literacy abilities, although noticeable difficulties remained in phonological awareness, particularly rhyming. The analysis further indicated that language and literacy skills developed independently among the respondents. The study concluded that targeted, structured, and classroom-ready intervention was necessary to strengthen identified gaps. It was recommended that the Literacy Skills Enhancement Plan be fully implemented to reinforce early literacy foundations and support teachers in delivering evidence-based instruction.

**| KEYWORDS**

Language Skills, Receptive Language, Expressive Language, Literacy Skills

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### **Introduction**

Language and literacy development had long been recognized as fundamental predictors of children's academic success, cognitive growth, and social participation. Extensive research affirmed that early mastery of oral language and emergent literacy significantly shaped learning trajectories across grade levels (Snow, 2020; Cabell & Justice, 2021). These skills extended beyond decoding and writing they encompassed listening, understanding, speaking, and meaning-making, which enabled children to communicate effectively and engage with increasingly complex ideas. When these competencies were established early, they facilitated smoother adjustment to formal schooling and promoted confidence, curiosity, and sustained learning interest. However, when foundational language and literacy skills were weak, children often struggled to follow instructions, participate meaningfully in class, and access content across subject areas, resulting in widening academic gaps and reduced self-efficacy over time (Kim, 2021; Piasta, 2022). This made early and systematic assessment of language and literacy not only necessary but urgent.

Global evidence further strengthened this imperative. High-performing education systems consistently prioritized early language and literacy through structured, developmentally responsive, and play-enriched approaches. Finland emphasized oral language and meaning-making through play-based learning (OECD, 2022); Singapore implemented carefully

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sequenced literacy instruction grounded in phonological awareness and systematic phonics (OECD, 2021); and Canada's early literacy programs integrated rich language exposure with family engagement (Pelletier et al., 2020). International frameworks echoed the same message UNESCO (2022) underscored that early literacy was a universal equity lever essential for long-term educational quality and inclusiveness.

In the Philippines, despite literacy's central place in the K to 12 curriculum, persistent early-grade reading challenges remained a national concern. Studies documented that many young learners continued to experience difficulties in oral language, phonological awareness, and basic decoding despite targeted interventions (Garcia et al., 2023). Results from PISA 2022 also revealed that Filipino learners still performed significantly below global averages in reading literacy, showing only marginal improvement from 2018 (OECD, 2023; SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2023). These national patterns indicated structural gaps that required intervention beginning as early as Grade One, when foundational skills were expected to take root. Aligned with global and national priorities, this study directly supported Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Quality Education, particularly Target 4.2 on early childhood development, Target 4.1 on foundational learning outcomes in primary education, Target 4.5 on reducing learning disparities, Target 4.a on creating inclusive learning environments, and Target 4.c on strengthening teacher capacity. By mapping learners' receptive and expressive language skills alongside key literacy components letter sounds, rhyming words, and letter names the study operationalized the SDG framework at school level, translating global commitments into context-responsive instructional action. The work also contributed indirectly to SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities by identifying early skill gaps that disproportionately affected vulnerable learners.

Within the research environment, several issues concerning language proficiency and early literacy had been observed. Teachers reported that many Grade One learner exhibited difficulty following verbal instructions, producing grammatically appropriate sentences, identifying rhyming words, and recalling letter sounds concerns that suggested incomplete mastery of kindergarten competencies. These challenges were evident during classroom activities, oral tasks, and initial diagnostic checks, revealing inconsistent exposure to early literacy experiences and varied home learning support. Such conditions underscored the need for systematic assessment and targeted intervention that addressed specific areas of difficulty rather than relying on general reading programs. Responding to these conditions, the present study was conducted to determine the levels of Grade One learners' receptive and expressive language skills, assess their proficiency in foundational literacy domains, and examine the relationship between the two. The findings of the study served as the basis for designing a coherent, needs-driven Literacy Skills Enhancement Plan aimed at strengthening early language and literacy development while supporting teachers in delivering more focused, evidence-based instruction.

## **Literature Review**

Early language development is critical to a child's overall academic success, especially in the foundational years of schooling. Receptive language the ability to understand spoken or written language and expressive language the ability to communicate thoughts and ideas are essential building blocks for literacy and learning (Snow, 2006). According to Dickinson and Tabors (2001), oral language skills, particularly vocabulary and syntax, strongly predict later reading achievement. Research also shows that when children are supported in both listening and speaking skills, they are better equipped to comprehend and produce language in meaningful ways (Lonigan, Schatschneider, & Westberg, 2008). In the Philippine context, Reyes (2019) highlights the importance of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in enhancing learners' language acquisition, especially in Grades 1 to 3. These foundational skills are not only cognitive in nature but are also shaped by the socio-cultural context of the classroom, further emphasizing the importance of teacher-mediated language instruction. In parallel, literacy development in early grades focuses on key components such as letter-sound recognition, rhyming, and letter name knowledge, all of which are considered strong predictors of future reading fluency and comprehension (Piasta & Wagner, 2010). Phonological awareness, including the ability to recognize rhymes and manipulate sounds, is especially crucial during this stage of learning (Anthony & Lonigan, 2004). In developing countries like the Philippines, where systemic reading challenges persist, the Department of Education has implemented programs such as the "Every Child a Reader Program" to address gaps in foundational literacy (Garcia & Ocampo, 2020). Despite these efforts, many Grade One learner still struggle with decoding and phonemic awareness due to limited early exposure and instructional inconsistencies (Torgesen et al., 2006). Therefore, assessing the specific literacy skills of learners particularly letter sounds, rhyming words, and letter names is necessary for designing effective, evidence-based interventions that target early reading success.

## **Methodology**

This study utilized a descriptive-correlational research design to assess the language and literacy skills of Grade One learners at Tabon Elementary School for School Year 2025–2026. The descriptive aspect aimed to evaluate the learners' proficiency in receptive and expressive language, as well as their literacy skills in letter sounds, rhyming words, and letter names. Simultaneously, the

correlational component sought to examine potential relationships between language proficiency and early literacy performance. This design was appropriate for educational research contexts where variables are observed as they naturally occur and where the goal is to determine meaningful patterns without manipulation (Creswell, 2014; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). The study was conducted at Tabon Elementary School, a public school located in a rural barangay of Dalaguete, Cebu. The respondents included 2 Grade One teachers and 40 parents, selected through purposive sampling. Data were gathered using a teacher-completed survey adapted from the DepEd's Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Checklist and the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA). The ECCD assessed language skills using a five-point Likert scale, while the CRLA measured literacy indicators using DepEd's standard scoring classifications: Advanced, Intermediate, and Beginner. The assessment tools covered indicators such as vocabulary use, instruction-following, phonemic awareness, and alphabet knowledge. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation to determine relationships between variables.

## Results

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

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	Points to a family member when asked to do so.	4.33	0.80	Advanced
2	Points to five body parts on himself when asked to do so.	4.13	1.09	Proficient
3	Points to five named pictured objects when asked to do so.	4.23	0.92	Advanced
4	Follows one-step instructions that include simple prepositions (e.g. in, on, under, etc.)	4.20	0.88	Proficient
5	Follows two-step instructions that include simple prepositions.	3.85	1.10	Proficient
Aggregate Mean		4.15		Proficient
Aggregate Standard Deviation			0.96	

Table 1 presents the learners' level of receptive language skills, with an aggregate weighted mean of 4.15 and a standard deviation of 0.96, interpreted as Proficient. The highest-rated indicator was "pointing to a family member" (WM = 4.33), categorized as Advanced, suggesting strong comprehension of familiar references. Learners also showed advanced ability in identifying pictured objects (WM = 4.23). Other indicators, such as following one- and two-step instructions and identifying body parts, were rated Proficient, indicating consistent understanding with minor variations. Overall, learners demonstrated a strong grasp of receptive language, showing readiness for more complex comprehension tasks.

Table 2. Level of language skills of the learners in terms of expressive language

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	Uses five to 20 recognizable words.	4.05	1.01	Proficient
2	Uses pronouns (e.g. I, me, ako, akin).	4.20	1.07	Proficient
3	Uses two- to three-word combinations (e.g., <i>hingi gatas</i> ). verb-noun	4.43	0.90	Advanced
4	Names objects in pictures.	4.30	0.88	Advanced
5	Speaks in grammatically correct two- to three word/sentences.	3.73	1.06	Proficient
6	Asks "what" questions.	4.25	1.03	Advanced
7	Gives account of recent experiences (with prompting) in order of occurrence using past tense.	3.80	1.16	Proficient
Aggregate Mean		4.11		Proficient
Aggregate Standard Deviation			1.02	

Table 2 presents the expressive language skills of the learners, with an aggregate mean of 4.09 and a standard deviation of 0.93, indicating a Proficient level. Learners demonstrated Advanced performance in using recognizable words (WM = 4.30) and naming pictured objects (WM = 4.25), showing strong vocabulary and labeling abilities. Other indicators, such as forming verb-noun combinations and asking questions, were also rated Proficient, highlighting consistent expressive abilities. The lowest score, recounting experiences (WM = 3.80), suggests a need for support in narrative skills. Overall, the results reflect a solid foundation in expressive language with room for strategic enhancement.

**Table 3. Summary on the level of language skills of the learners**

Components	WM	SD	Verbal Description
Receptive Language	4.15	0.96	Proficient
Expressive Language	4.11	1.02	Proficient
Grand Mean	4.13		Proficient
Grand Standard Deviation		0.99	

Table 3 summarizes the learners' language skills in both receptive and expressive domains. The receptive language component has a weighted mean of 4.15 (SD = 0.96), while expressive language has a mean of 4.11 (SD = 1.02). Both are described as Proficient, indicating that learners consistently understand and use language appropriately in classroom contexts. The grand mean of 4.13 and overall standard deviation of 0.99 reinforce this proficiency, suggesting balanced development across both domains. These findings reflect a strong foundation in oral language, which is essential for literacy acquisition and early academic success among Grade One learners.

**Table 4. Level of literacy skills of the learners in terms of letter sounds**

Level	Range of Scores	f	%
Advanced	7-10	33	82.50
Intermediate	4-6	6	15.00
Beginner	0-3	1	2.50
Total		40	100.00

Table 4 presents the learners' literacy skill levels in terms of letter sound recognition. Out of 40 Grade One learners, a large majority 82.50% (n = 33) achieved an Advanced level, indicating strong mastery of letter-sound relationships, a key component of phonemic awareness. 15.00% (n = 6) scored within the Intermediate range, while only 2.50% (n = 1) were classified as Beginners, demonstrating limited awareness of letter sounds. These results suggest that most learners are well-equipped with foundational decoding skills necessary for early reading success. However, a small group may require targeted instruction to reinforce sound-symbol connections.

**Table 5. Level of literacy skills of the learners in terms of rhyming words**

Level	Range of Scores	f	%
Advanced	7-10	20	50.00
Intermediate	4-6	16	40.00
Beginner	0-3	4	10.00
Total		40	100.00

Table 5 presents the learners' literacy skills in recognizing rhyming words, a key component of phonological awareness. Half of the learners (50.00% or 20 out of 40) performed at the Advanced level, showing strong ability to identify word patterns and sound similarities. 40.00% ( $n = 16$ ) were at the Intermediate level, indicating developing but inconsistent skills. Meanwhile, 10.00% ( $n = 4$ ) were classified as Beginners, suggesting difficulty in recognizing rhymes. While the overall results are positive, with most learners demonstrating good phonological sensitivity, focused support may be needed for those still struggling to develop this essential pre-reading skill.

Table 6. Level of literacy skills of the learners in terms of letter names

Level	Range of Scores	f	%
Advanced	7-10	29	72.50
Intermediate	4-6	11	27.50
Beginner	0-3	0	0.00
Total		40	100.00

Table 6 displays the learners' literacy skills in terms of letter name recognition, which is a key early literacy skill linked to future reading success. Among the 40 learners, 72.50% ( $n = 29$ ) achieved an Advanced rating, indicating a strong grasp of alphabet knowledge. The remaining 27.50% ( $n = 11$ ) fell within the Intermediate range, showing partial familiarity with letter names. Notably, no learner was classified as a Beginner, suggesting that all students had at least a basic understanding of the alphabet. These results indicate a solid foundation in letter name recognition, with most learners ready for more advanced reading instruction.

Table 7. Test of relationship between the language skills and the literacy skills of the learners

Variables	r-value	Strength of Correlation	p - value	Decision	Remarks
Language Skills and Literacy Skills	-0.115	Negligible Negative	0.482	Do not reject $H_0$	Not Significant

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

Table 7 shows the result of the correlation analysis between the learners' language skills and literacy skills. The computed r-value is -0.115, indicating a negligible negative correlation between the two variables. The corresponding p-value is 0.482, which is greater than the significance level of 0.05. As a result, the null hypothesis is not rejected, and the relationship is deemed not statistically significant. This suggests that, within this sample, language skills and literacy skills did not have a meaningful linear association. The findings imply that other factors may influence literacy performance beyond basic language proficiency alone.

## Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insight into the foundational language and literacy skills of Grade One learners at Tabon Elementary School. Results indicate that learners are generally proficient in both receptive and expressive language, with mean scores of 4.15 and 4.11, respectively. These scores suggest that learners can follow instructions, identify objects and body parts, and express themselves using simple structures, pronouns, and basic questions. This level of proficiency in oral language is crucial in early childhood education as it underpins later literacy development, particularly in comprehension and vocabulary growth. Moreover, the consistency in performance across both domains suggests a balanced oral language development, likely influenced by consistent exposure and instruction in early language learning experiences. In terms of literacy skills, the learners also performed well. The majority scored at the Advanced level in letter sound recognition (82.5%) and letter name recognition (72.5%), with half also excelling in recognizing rhyming words. These skills are essential indicators of phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge, both of which are strong predictors of future reading success. However, a small percentage of learners remain in the Beginner or Intermediate levels, especially in rhyming tasks, which highlights the need for targeted intervention in phonological sensitivity. Interestingly, the statistical analysis revealed a negligible negative and non-significant relationship between language skills and literacy performance ( $r = -0.115$ ,  $p = 0.482$ ). This suggests that while language and literacy skills are both developing well, they may not be directly influencing each other in a linear fashion within this sample. Other contextual or instructional factors may be mediating literacy development, underscoring the importance of a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to early literacy instruction.

## Conclusion

The results of the study concluded that the Grade One learners generally demonstrated proficient receptive and expressive

language skills, enabling them to follow instructions, identify objects, and communicate in simple but meaningful ways during classroom interactions. Their literacy performance similarly reflected strong foundations, particularly in letter-sound recognition and letter-name identification, indicating readiness for early reading tasks. However, their varied performance in rhyming words suggested that phonological awareness remained an area requiring more focused intervention. The test of relationship further revealed that language and literacy skills developed independently in this group of learners, highlighting the importance of addressing each domain through distinct yet complementary instructional approaches rather than assuming that growth in one area automatically supports the other. These findings carried meaningful implications for professional practice, program development, and policy implementation. Teachers would benefit from strengthening balanced and differentiated instruction, ensuring that oral language enrichment, phonological awareness, and explicit literacy teaching were systematically integrated. At the program level, the results supported the development of a targeted Literacy Skills Enhancement Plan that responds directly to the needs identified in language proficiency and early literacy components. Policy-wise, the findings emphasized the value of reinforcing school-based literacy policies, continuous teacher training in foundational literacy instruction, and stronger home-school partnerships to sustain learners' progress.

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