
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Language and Literacy Skills Assessment Among Grade One Learners

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| ABSTRACT

This study assessed the language and literacy skills of Grade One learners at Paknaan Elementary School to inform an evidence-based instructional intervention. It aimed to determine the level of receptive and expressive language, the level of early literacy (letter sounds, rhyming words, letter names), and the relationship between language and literacy domains, and then to propose a Literacy Skills Enhancement Plan. A descriptive-correlational design was employed in a school-based environment. Using purposive sampling, Grade One teachers evaluated sixty-five (65) pupils. Data were gathered through a teacher survey adapted from the DepEd ECCD Checklist and complementary rapid literacy tasks. Statistical treatments included frequency counts, weighted means, simple percentages, and Pearson correlation. Results indicated that receptive language tended to be stronger than expressive language (particularly in sequencing and tense use). Learners generally consolidated letter-sound knowledge, displayed emerging phonological awareness with rhyming, and showed satisfactory yet uneven letter-name recognition. Analysis also indicated a positive association between language and literacy domains, such that stronger oral language aligned with better performance in selected early literacy indicators. Based on these findings, the study concluded that targeted, short-daily, cumulative routines were warranted, coupled with systematic progress monitoring and a tightened home-school partnership. It recommended a comprehensive Literacy Skills Enhancement Plan emphasizing letter-sound automaticity, playful rhyming practice, guided retellings to strengthen expressive language, maintenance of letter-name fluency, fortnightly ECCD-aligned checks, and structured parent supports (kits, prompts, and micro-workshops) to sustain at-home practice.

| KEYWORDS

Language skills, receptive language, expressive language, literacy skills, letter-sound recognition, rhyming words, letter-name identification

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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Introduction

Reading is one of the most fundamental skills that children must acquire during the early years of schooling, as it lays the groundwork for lifelong learning and academic achievement. Oral reading, in particular, serves as a bridge between decoding and comprehension by enabling learners to connect written symbols to their corresponding sounds, thereby fostering fluency and understanding (Martinez & Ruiz, 2023; Patel & Ho, 2024). However, reading is not an innate ability; it requires deliberate and structured instruction that develops both language and literacy competencies. Many early-grade learners encounter difficulties in decoding, recognizing letter sounds, and deriving meaning from text due to limited vocabulary exposure, inconsistent instruction, and lack of reading support at home (Nguyen & Tran, 2024; Bishop et al., 2023). These challenges highlight the urgent need for explicit, evidence-based reading instruction to prevent long-term literacy gaps and ensure equitable learning outcomes.

The debate surrounding reading pedagogy continues to center on the relative importance of phonics-based versus meaning-based approaches. Phonics instruction emphasizes systematic teaching of letter–sound correspondence, while meaning-oriented instruction focuses on comprehension and contextual understanding (Sharma & Ortega, 2023; de la Cruz & Espinoza, 2022). Recent research advocates for a balanced approach that integrates both methods to develop decoding, fluency, and comprehension skills concurrently (Kendeou et al., 2020; Willcutt et al., 2021). In the Philippine context, reading difficulties persist among primary learners, as reflected in the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report, which ranked Filipino students among the lowest in reading literacy (OECD, 2020). Factors contributing to these challenges include insufficient access to leveled reading materials, large class sizes, and limited teacher preparation in early language and literacy pedagogy (Fernandez & Jimenez, 2023; Cruz & Villanueva, 2024). These realities underscore the importance of contextually grounded literacy assessments to diagnose language and reading challenges among beginning readers.

Language development is widely recognized as a cornerstone of literacy growth, encompassing both receptive (listening and understanding) and expressive (speaking and producing language) dimensions (Snow & Matthews, 2022; Hoover & Tunmer, 2020). Receptive language facilitates comprehension of oral input and vocabulary acquisition, whereas expressive language supports sentence formation, narrative ability, and verbal reasoning—all of which are crucial for fluent reading (Walsh et al., 2023). Children with well-developed oral language skills typically demonstrate stronger reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and phonological awareness (Hjetland et al., 2021; Foorman et al., 2020). Conversely, deficits in these language domains are associated with slower literacy development and persistent decoding difficulties (Leung et al., 2022; Harris & Cooper, 2023). Thus, assessing receptive and expressive language in early learners is essential for identifying those at risk of reading challenges and for informing targeted interventions that strengthen foundational language competencies.

In addition to oral language, emergent literacy skills such as letter-sound recognition, rhyming awareness, and letter-name knowledge are key predictors of early reading success. Studies confirm that mastery of letter–sound correspondence supports word decoding, while familiarity with rhyme patterns enhances phonemic awareness and word segmentation skills (Anthony et al., 2020; Ehri & Roberts, 2022). Likewise, the ability to identify letter names strongly predicts later reading fluency and spelling performance (Cunningham et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2023). Despite this, Filipino learners often display uneven progress in these areas due to limited phonological awareness instruction, minimal home literacy exposure, and lack of consistent assessment tools (Ramos & Dela Peña, 2024; Manalo & Yu, 2023). Strengthening early literacy instruction therefore requires integrating phonics-based and phonological awareness activities into daily learning to develop decoding efficiency and comprehension.

Despite extensive research on early reading, significant gaps remain in understanding how specific language domains particularly receptive and expressive skills relate to emergent literacy outcomes such as letter-sound knowledge, rhyming, and letter-name identification among Filipino learners. Existing studies have largely emphasized reading fluency and comprehension in English or Filipino (Santos & Castillo, 2022; Riad, 2023), with limited focus on foundational oral language and phonological skills. Moreover, few empirical studies have explored these relationships within classroom-based contexts where teachers directly assess learner performance. Addressing this gap is critical for designing localized, evidence-informed interventions that nurture both language and literacy simultaneously. Therefore, this study examined the language and literacy skills of Grade One learners to determine their levels of receptive and expressive language, their proficiency in early literacy indicators letter sounds, rhyming words, and letter names—and the relationship between these domains. The findings aim to inform the development of responsive, data-driven literacy enhancement programs to strengthen early reading instruction and learner success in foundational education.

Literature Review

Language development especially in the domains of receptive and expressive skills, plays a pivotal role in shaping children’s reading fluency and comprehension. Recent research highlights that learners with strong oral language abilities tend to achieve higher reading performance, as oral proficiency provides the foundation for decoding, fluency, and meaning-making (Cunningham & Carroll, 2022; Kim et al., 2021). For instance, studies among bilingual learners revealed that oral language competence, particularly in vocabulary and sentence formation, significantly predicts success in both word recognition and comprehension (Harris et al., 2023; Lervåg & Aukrust, 2020). In the Philippine context, recent curriculum analyses showed that oral language instruction continues to emphasize expressive vocabulary development over listening comprehension, creating an imbalance in language skill acquisition that can affect later reading outcomes (Lopez & Reyes, 2023). Similarly, cross-linguistic evidence suggests that children who develop robust receptive vocabulary and syntactic awareness are more capable of understanding connected texts, supporting higher levels of reading fluency (Yeung et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2024).

Longitudinal studies further confirm that oral language and reading skills are interdependent each reinforcing the other over time. Children with limited language input or delayed expressive skills are more likely to experience persistent reading challenges unless early intervention strengthens both aspects of language development (García & Cain, 2021; Taylor et al., 2023). Research by Henry and Veenendaal (2022) also indicates that receptive language comprehension predicts later text integration and inference-making,

while expressive language predicts oral fluency and syntactic accuracy during reading aloud. Likewise, studies by Santos and dela Cruz (2024) on Filipino primary learners revealed that balanced oral language instruction combining vocabulary enrichment, sentence construction, and guided listening improves both reading fluency and comprehension in mother-tongue-based classrooms. These findings affirm that reading fluency and oral language proficiency are inseparable, and literacy programs should develop receptive and expressive competencies in tandem to support holistic literacy growth in early learners.

Methodology

This study utilized a descriptive-correlational research design to assess the language and literacy skills of Grade One learners at Paknaan Elementary School, which served as the setting for the investigation and the foundation for a proposed Literacy Skills Enhancement Plan. The respondents were the Grade One teachers, purposively selected due to their direct instructional involvement and familiarity with their pupils' developmental progress. Data were gathered using a teacher survey checklist adapted from the Department of Education's Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Checklist (DepEd Order No. 33, s. 2014) to evaluate learners' receptive and expressive language, along with a Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment designed to measure proficiency in letter-sound recognition, rhyming words, and letter-name identification. The language assessment employed a five-point Likert scale (1.00–1.80 = Not Skilled to 4.21–5.00 = Highly Skilled), while the literacy assessment used a three-level scoring range (0–3 = Beginner, 4–7 = Intermediate, 8–10 = Advanced). Teachers rated each learner based on systematic classroom observations and one-on-one performance-based tasks to ensure authentic and contextually relevant assessment. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency counts, weighted means, and simple percentages to describe performance levels, while the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson r) was applied to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between language and literacy skills. Ethical procedures were carefully followed, including the acquisition of informed parental consent, approval from school authorities, and strict confidentiality in handling all data collected.

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.	4.57	0.53
Points to five body parts on himself when asked to do so.	4.28	0.63
Points to five named pictured objects when asked to do so	4.26	0.62
Follows one-step instructions that include simple prepositions (e.g. in, on, under, etc.)	4.00	0.61
Follows two-step instructions that include simple prepositions.	3.78	0.62
Aggregate Weighted Mean	4.18	
Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.60

The results in Table 1 reveal that learners demonstrated a skilled level of receptive language ability, as indicated by an aggregate weighted mean of 4.18 and a standard deviation of 0.60. This suggests that most learners can effectively understand and respond to verbal instructions, identify familiar objects, and follow simple directions key indicators of developing listening comprehension. The highest-rated indicator, "Points to a family member when asked to do so" (WM = 4.57), shows that learners readily comprehend familiar and contextual commands, reflecting strong everyday language understanding. However, the lowest mean score, "Follows two-step instructions that include simple prepositions" (WM = 3.78), suggests some learners experience difficulty processing sequential or spatial instructions, indicating a need for further reinforcement in multi-step comprehension. These results imply that while receptive language skills are generally well-developed, teachers should incorporate more listening-based and direction-following activities such as storytelling, songs, and interactive games to strengthen auditory processing and comprehension, which are foundational for reading fluency and overall literacy growth.

Table 2. Level of language skills of the learners in terms of Expressive Language

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD
1	Uses five to 20 recognizable words	3.86	0.68
2	Uses pronouns (e.g. I, me, <i>ako</i> , <i>akin</i>)	3.77	0.68
3	Uses two- to three-word verb-noun combinations (e.g., <i>hingi gatas</i>)	3.62	0.65
4	Names objects in pictures	3.60	0.55
5	Speaks in grammatically correct two- to three word/sentences	3.69	0.64
6	Asks "what" questions	3.49	0.62
7	Gives account of recent experiences (with prompting) in order of occurrence using past tense	3.40	0.63
Aggregate Weighted Mean		3.63	
Aggregate Standard Deviation			0.64

The data in Table 2 show that learners exhibited a moderately skilled level of expressive language ability, with an aggregate weighted mean of 3.63 and a standard deviation of 0.64. This indicates that while most learners are able to communicate using simple words and phrases, their ability to construct more complex sentences and narrate experiences remains developing. The highest-rated indicator, "Uses five to twenty recognizable words" (WM = 3.86), suggests that learners have a functional vocabulary for basic communication, while their consistent use of pronouns (WM = 3.77) reflects emerging grammatical awareness. However, the lowest mean score, "Gives account of recent experiences (with prompting) in order of occurrence using past tense" (WM = 3.40), reveals that many pupils struggle with sequencing ideas and applying correct verb tenses—skills essential for storytelling and reading comprehension. These findings imply that while learners can express simple thoughts, more structured oral language activities, such as guided storytelling, picture-based discussions, and sentence-building exercises, are needed to enhance grammatical accuracy, narrative coherence, and verbal fluency, which are vital foundations for literacy and academic success.

Table 3. Level of literacy skills of the learners in terms of letter sound

Level	Scoring Range	f	%
Advanced	8-10	4	6.15
Intermediate	4-7	60	92.31
Beginner	0-3	1	1.54
Total		65	100.00
Mean		5.60	
St. Dev.		1.21	

The results in Table 3 show that learners demonstrated an overall intermediate level of literacy skills in terms of letter-sound recognition, with a mean score of 5.60 and a standard deviation of 1.21. The majority of learners (92.31%) were classified as Intermediate, indicating that most pupils are able to identify and produce corresponding sounds for letters with reasonable accuracy but may still exhibit occasional inconsistencies or confusion with less familiar sounds. A small percentage (6.15%) reached the Advanced level, suggesting that only a few students have fully mastered letter-sound associations and can apply them fluently in reading tasks. Meanwhile, 1.54% were categorized as Beginner, implying limited familiarity with phoneme-grapheme correspondence and a need for focused phonics instruction. These findings highlight the importance of systematic phonics and sound-based activities such as blending and segmenting exercises, phoneme drills, and interactive reading games to help learners strengthen their decoding skills and transition toward fluent reading. Strengthening letter-sound knowledge at this stage is essential, as it serves as a critical foundation for word recognition, spelling, and reading comprehension in subsequent literacy development.

The data in Table 4 indicate that the Grade 1 learners at Paknaan Elementary School demonstrated a generally beginner level of literacy skills in terms of rhyming words, with a mean score of 1.55 and a standard deviation of 1.05. The majority of learners (89.23%) were classified as Beginners, showing that most pupils struggled to recognize or produce words that share similar ending sounds an essential phonological awareness skill. Only 10.77% of the learners reached the Intermediate level, and none were categorized as Advanced, suggesting that rhyming awareness remains underdeveloped among most students.

Level	Scoring Range	f	%
Advanced	8-10	0	0.00
Intermediate	4-7	7	10.77
Beginner	0-3	58	89.23
Total	Mean	65	100.00
		1.55	
	St. Dev.	1.05	

Table 4. Level of literacy skills of the learners in terms of rhyming words

This limited ability to identify rhymes may stem from insufficient exposure to phonemic awareness activities such as songs, poems, or word games that emphasize sound patterns. These findings imply a strong need for explicit instruction in phonological awareness, incorporating rhyming activities, nursery rhymes, and rhythmic reading exercises to help learners distinguish sound similarities and develop auditory discrimination skills. Strengthening rhyming ability is crucial because it enhances phonemic awareness and decoding proficiency, both of which are foundational for successful reading and spelling development in early literacy.

Table 5. Level of literacy skills of the learners in terms of letter names

Level	Scoring Range	f	%
Advanced	8-10	11	16.92
Intermediate	4-7	50	76.92
Beginner	0-3	4	6.15
Total	Mean	65	100.00
		6.09	
	St. Dev.	1.40	

The results in Table 5 show that the Grade 1 learners at Paknaan Elementary School exhibited an overall intermediate level of literacy skills in terms of letter name recognition, with a mean score of 6.09 and a standard deviation of 1.40. The majority of the pupils (76.92%) were classified as Intermediate, indicating that most learners could correctly identify and name a substantial portion of the alphabet but may still confuse some letters, particularly those with similar shapes or sounds. A smaller group (16.92%) achieved the Advanced level, demonstrating full mastery and quick recall of letter names, while 6.15% were categorized as Beginners, showing limited familiarity with letter identification. These results suggest that although learners possess a solid foundational knowledge of letter names, consistent reinforcement through alphabet-based activities, visual aids, and interactive games is still needed to ensure automatic recognition and retention. Strengthening this skill is essential because letter name knowledge is a key predictor of later reading fluency and spelling ability, serving as an early indicator of success in phonics and word recognition development.

The results in Table 6 show that there is a significant but weak positive relationship between the language skills and literacy skills of the Grade 1 learners at Paknaan Elementary School, as indicated by an r -value of 0.479 and a p -value of 0.000 at the 0.05 level of significance. This means that improvements in learners' receptive and expressive language abilities are associated with corresponding gains in their literacy skills such as recognizing letter names, identifying sounds, and understanding rhymes though the relationship is not particularly strong. The weak correlation suggests that while language development contributes to literacy growth, other factors such as phonemic awareness, exposure to print, instructional quality, and home literacy environment may also play significant roles in shaping learners' reading and writing abilities. These findings align with studies showing that oral language proficiency serves as a foundational yet partial predictor of literacy success (Kim et al., 2021; García & Cain, 2021). Learners with stronger listening and speaking skills tend to perform better in reading-related tasks, but literacy acquisition also depends on explicit instruction in phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies (Cunningham & Carroll, 2022). The significant correlation observed here underscores the importance of integrating oral language development into early literacy instruction, ensuring that activities promoting vocabulary building, sentence formation, and comprehension go hand in hand with reading and writing exercises. Strengthening both areas simultaneously can help learners transition from spoken to written language more effectively, ultimately enhancing their overall literacy proficiency.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that language skills particularly receptive and expressive abilities are significantly associated with literacy development, even though the correlation is relatively weak. This aligns with extensive research highlighting the crucial role of oral language proficiency in early reading success. According to Kim, Petscher, and Vorstius (2021), both receptive and expressive language skills predict early literacy outcomes, particularly phonemic awareness and decoding fluency. Similarly, García and Cain (2021) found that oral vocabulary and syntactic knowledge significantly contribute to reading comprehension, especially in multilingual contexts where learners navigate multiple linguistic systems. In this study, learners demonstrated stronger performance in receptive language than in expressive language, reflecting their ability to understand verbal instructions more effectively than to produce language fluently an imbalance also observed in Hjetland et al. (2020), who reported that comprehension skills often precede expressive fluency in early literacy development. Moreover, the high scores in letter-sound and letter-name recognition but lower performance in rhyming tasks suggest that while phonics-based skills are developing, phonological awareness particularly the ability to detect sound patterns requires more instructional attention (Anthony et al., 2020; Lonigan et al., 2022). This pattern supports Castles, Rastle, and Nation (2018), who emphasized that reading development depends not only on recognizing symbols but also on the child's ability to manipulate and discriminate sounds within words.

Table 6. 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	0.479*	Weak Positive	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant

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

Furthermore, the weak yet significant correlation ($r = 0.479$, $p < 0.05$) between language and literacy skills suggests that while oral language proficiency lays the groundwork for reading, literacy acquisition also depends on other environmental and pedagogical factors. For instance, Lervåg and Aukrust (2020) found that home literacy exposure and teacher scaffolding significantly affect how oral language translates into reading competence. Similarly, Harris, Chen, and Lin (2023) observed that learners who regularly engage in spoken interactions, storytelling, and vocabulary-rich activities tend to show higher gains in decoding and comprehension skills. The results of the present study are consistent with Cunningham and Carroll (2022), who reported that integrating listening, speaking, and phonics instruction yields stronger reading fluency than focusing on phonics alone. In the Philippine context, Diaz et al. (2022) and Santos and dela Cruz (2024) have emphasized the need to strengthen both receptive and expressive instruction within Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) programs to ensure balanced language and literacy growth. These findings collectively reinforce the idea that reading fluency and comprehension are multidimensional, requiring the integration of oral language development, phonemic awareness, and structured reading practice. Therefore, teachers at Paknaan Elementary School and similar multilingual environments should implement language-rich, interactive pedagogies including shared reading, rhyming games, and oral storytelling to enhance both language proficiency and literacy outcomes.

Conclusion

The study found that Grade 1 learners at Paknaan Elementary School exhibited a skilled level of receptive language, a moderately skilled level of expressive language, and an intermediate level of literacy skills in letter-sound and letter-name recognition, but a beginner level in rhyming awareness. This suggests that while learners demonstrate adequate listening comprehension and basic vocabulary, they face challenges in expressive and phonological skills essential for reading fluency. A weak yet significant positive correlation between language and literacy skills indicates that improving receptive and expressive abilities meaningfully enhances literacy development. The study concludes that language and literacy must be developed together through integrated, language-rich instruction. Teachers should use storytelling, phonics games, rhyming activities, and shared reading to strengthen vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. Promoting balanced language and literacy instruction within Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) can build a solid foundation for learners' lifelong reading and learning success.

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