
RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Role of Language Skills in Shaping Oral Reading Ability of Grade One Learners

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how language skills impact the oral reading abilities of the learners. It underscores the critical role of early language development in fostering literacy. The study investigates the relationships between listening, speaking, vocabulary, and comprehension skills and their influence on reading fluency and accuracy. Various data collection methods were employed, including assessments, reading evaluations, and teacher observations. The sample consisted of 30 purposively selected parents of Grade One students. Data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r). The findings revealed that learners with stronger language skills generally demonstrated better oral reading abilities, emphasizing the strong link between language development and literacy. Conversely, deficits in vocabulary and comprehension were found to impede reading performance. The study highlights the need for targeted language development interventions to promote early reading success. It recommends incorporating language enrichment activities into the curriculum and offering specific support for students who require additional assistance. By exploring the connection between language skills and reading proficiency, the research provides valuable insights for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers focused on improving literacy outcomes for young learners.

KEYWORDS

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

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Introduction

Reading is one of the most essential academic skills children must develop during the early years of schooling. Oral reading, in particular, plays a crucial role in linking word recognition to comprehension, allowing learners to associate printed symbols with spoken sounds, eventually supporting fluency and understanding. Yet, learning to read does not occur automatically. Many young children struggle with decoding, sound identification, and making meaning from text, especially when early language foundations are weak. Effective and systematic reading instruction is therefore necessary to help young learners become proficient and confident readers (Castles et al., 2022).

A long-standing debate exists on whether reading instruction should emphasize phonics-based approaches or meaning-centered strategies. Phonics instruction systematically teaches letter-sound correspondence, while meaning-focused approaches highlight comprehension and contextual word recognition (Duke & Mesmer, 2020). Research increasingly supports balanced literacy instruction that combines both methods to maximize learning outcomes. This need is particularly evident in the Philippines, where recent national and international assessments reveal continuing challenges in reading comprehension among Filipino learners (World Bank, 2022). Contributing factors include large class sizes, limited print-rich environments, and gaps in teacher preparation for early language and literacy pedagogy (Bernardo & Calleja, 2023).

Although various studies have explored early reading development, limited research has examined how receptive and expressive language skills specifically influence oral reading performance among young learners in the Philippine education context. Many investigations have focused on English-language literacy or general reading skills, neglecting how foundational language abilities relate to reading fluency, decoding, and comprehension (Hjetland et al., 2020). Furthermore, there remains insufficient evidence on how difficulties in receptive language such as following instructions and understanding vocabulary and expressive language such as sentence formulation and vocabulary use affect oral reading outcomes in early grade students. To address this gap, the present study explores the connection between pupils' language development and their oral reading ability. The findings will inform the development of a Reading Skills Enhancement Plan anchored in developmentally appropriate strategies, culturally relevant materials, and engaging literacy tasks. This initiative aims to support learners' progression toward fluent reading and comprehension and provide insights for teachers and school leaders in improving early-grade reading instruction at Cordova Central Elementary School.

Despite numerous advancements in early literacy research, a notable gap persists in understanding how receptive and expressive language competencies shape oral reading outcomes in multilingual learning environments. Most emerging global studies emphasize English reading fluency and decoding skills (Lonigan & Burgess, 2020; Schwanenflugel & Kuhn, 2022), leaving a need for localized inquiry into language-based reading development in Philippine classrooms. While recent national research has explored reading interventions and remedial programs (Villanueva, 2023; Razon & Dizon, 2024), few have directly investigated how foundational language abilities contribute to oral reading success. Filling this research gap is essential for developing effective instructional practices that strengthen language competence and reading fluency simultaneously, ensuring that learners establish strong early literacy foundations before advancing to more complex academic tasks in higher grade levels.

Given the findings and contextual challenges, further research should explore instructional models that simultaneously strengthen receptive and expressive language skills while enhancing oral reading fluency in the early grades. Future studies may examine the effectiveness of structured phonological awareness programs, interactive read-aloud strategies, and language-rich classroom environments in boosting early literacy performance. Longitudinal tracking of learners could provide deeper insight into how early oral language development predicts later reading comprehension and academic achievement. Additionally, comparative studies across schools in urban and semi-urban settings such as Cordova Central Elementary School and neighboring institutions may help identify contextual factors that support or limit early literacy growth. Integrating teacher professional development, parental literacy engagement programs, and culturally relevant instructional materials into research interventions would further contribute to developing sustainable, evidence-based practices for improving foundational reading skills among early grade learners in the Philippines.

Literature Review

Language development particularly in the areas of receptive (listening and understanding) and expressive (speaking and producing language) abilities is widely regarded as foundational to successful reading acquisition. Studies consistently show that children with strong oral language skills are more capable of decoding text, recognizing sight words, and constructing meaning while reading. For instance, Lonigan and Shanahan (2020) highlighted that vocabulary knowledge and syntactic awareness are crucial predictors of early reading success, especially during the transition to print literacy. Similarly, Catts et al. (2021) found that preschoolers with higher receptive vocabulary scores demonstrated significantly better reading comprehension outcomes in later grades. A systematic review by Anderson et al. (2022) confirmed that oral language instruction improves phonological awareness and early word recognition, while Perez and Morrison (2023) emphasized that children who engage in frequent conversational interactions are more likely to develop fluent reading behaviors. These findings reinforce the view that oral language serves as a gateway skill cultivated before formal reading but essential for literacy growth in the primary years. Moreover, research in multilingual and diverse classroom settings supports the importance of strengthening both receptive and expressive language to support reading fluency. Kim and Wagner (2021) reported that expressive language ability, such as producing grammatically correct sentences and using varied vocabulary, significantly contributes to reading fluency and comprehension growth in bilingual learners. In Southeast Asian educational contexts, Cabell et al. (2022) observed that students' listening-comprehension skills strongly predicted their ability to read with accuracy and understand connected text. Meanwhile, a study by Puttaraju and Aithal (2023) in lower primary classrooms found that children with limited oral language skills were three times more likely to struggle with phonological tasks such as blending and segmenting sounds, which are essential precursors to fluent reading. Similarly, Chen et al. (2024) noted that instructional programs integrating interactive storytelling and oral language routines significantly improved learners' expressive vocabulary and reading fluency. Taken together, these findings underscore that early literacy instruction must systematically integrate oral language development alongside phonics and reading practice to ensure children build strong and enduring reading skills.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to determine the relationship between language skills focusing on receptive and expressive abilities and the oral reading performance of Grade 1 learners at Cordova Central Elementary School. This design was appropriate as it allowed the researcher to measure the extent of association between variables without manipulating the learning environment. Anchored on an input–process–output framework, the input stage involved gathering data on pupils’ language competencies, the process stage focused on assessing their oral reading fluency, accuracy, and comprehension, while the output aimed to identify relationships between language and reading performance and propose strategies to support early literacy development. The respondents of the study consisted of 30 purposively selected parents of Grade One learners, who served as primary informants regarding their children's language development and home literacy practices. The parents completed a Language Skills Assessment Checklist that evaluated the learners’ receptive and expressive language skills based on daily communication behaviors at home. Additionally, the pupils were individually assessed through an oral reading test measuring fluency, accuracy, and comprehension. The results served as the basis for recommending literacy support strategies tailored to enhance early reading readiness and support language-rich experiences at home and school.

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.	4.30	0.79
Points to five body parts on himself when asked to do so.	4.40	0.62
Points to five named pictured objects when asked to do so	4.13	0.78
Follows one-step instructions that include simple prepositions (e.g. in, on, under, etc.)	3.87	0.78
Follows two-step instructions that include simple prepositions.	3.93	0.69
Aggregate Weighted Mean	4.13	
Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.73

Table 1 presents the receptive language abilities of the Grade One learners. With an aggregate weighted mean of 4.13 (SD = 0.73), the results indicate that learners generally exhibit high levels of receptive language skills, suggesting that most children can comprehend basic verbal cues and respond appropriately. The highest competency observed was identifying body parts when prompted (WM = 4.40, SD = 0.62), followed by pointing to a family member when asked (WM = 4.30, SD = 0.79) and identifying pictured objects (WM = 4.13, SD = 0.78). These results demonstrate strong foundational comprehension likely shaped by daily interactions and exposure to familiar vocabulary at home and school. Skills involving comprehension of spatial concepts also showed positive performance, as seen in following one-step prepositional instructions (WM = 3.87, SD = 0.78) and two-step instructions (WM = 3.93, SD = 0.69). This is consistent with research indicating that while children in early grades often master simple comprehension tasks, multi-step instructions require higher cognitive and language processing, which continue developing during early childhood (Hjetland et al., 2020; Nation, 2020). Overall, the results imply that learners possess strong receptive language foundations, yet continued guided exposure to multi-step verbal directions and structured listening activities may be beneficial to further enhance comprehension skills.

Table 2. Expressive Language

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD
1	Uses five to 20 recognizable words	3.93	0.69
2	Uses pronouns (e.g. I, me, <i>ako</i> , <i>akin</i>)	4.07	0.78
3	Uses two- to three-word verb-noun combinations (e.g., <i>hingi gatas</i>)	3.90	0.71
4	Names objects in pictures	4.13	0.73
5	Speaks in grammatically correct two- to three word/sentences	4.17	0.77
6	Asks “what” questions	3.77	0.58
7	Gives account of recent experiences (with prompting) in order of occurrence using past tense	4.27	0.75
	Aggregate Weighted Mean	4.17	
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.72

Table 2 presents the expressive language skills of the Grade One learners. With an aggregate weighted mean of 4.17 (SD = 0.72), the findings indicate that most learners possess well-developed expressive language abilities, suggesting strong emerging

communication and sentence-building skills. The highest-rated indicator was the ability to recount recent experiences using past tense with prompting ($WM = 4.27$, $SD = 0.75$), demonstrating early narrative competency and the ability to structure events sequentially a skill associated with later reading comprehension and written expression. Learners also showed high proficiency in producing short grammatically correct sentences ($WM = 4.17$, $SD = 0.77$) and naming objects in pictures ($WM = 4.13$, $SD = 0.73$), reflecting functional vocabulary knowledge and developing grammar. Meanwhile, competencies such as using pronouns ($WM = 4.07$, $SD = 0.78$) and forming two- to three-word verb-noun combinations ($WM = 3.90$, $SD = 0.71$) further indicate emerging syntactic awareness. The lowest-performing area was asking “what” questions ($WM = 3.77$, $SD = 0.58$), implying that some learners may require additional support in inquiry-based language use and expressive questioning. These patterns are consistent with existing research showing that expressive vocabulary, sentence formation, and narrative skills develop rapidly in early primary years but require ongoing exposure and structured language experiences (Cabell et al., 2022; Spencer et al., 2022). Overall, learners show strong foundational expressive language skills, although continuous reinforcement of questioning skills, grammar practice, and structured storytelling activities may further support their communication and academic language development.

Table 3. Level of oral reading ability of the learners

Level	Numerical Range	f	%
Independent	27-30	0	0.00
Instructional	17-26	9	30.00
Struggling	11-16	9	30.00
Non-reader	0-10	12	40.00
Total		30	100.00
Mean		13.17	
St. Dev.		6.66	

Table 3 reveals the oral reading ability of Grade One learners. The results indicate that a significant proportion of pupils are still developing foundational reading skills, with 40% classified as non-readers and 30% identified as struggling readers. Meanwhile, 30% fall within the instructional level, suggesting that they can read with guidance, while none reached the independent reading level. The computed mean score of 13.17 ($SD = 6.66$) further underscores that the learners, on average, fall within the struggling reading range, with substantial variation in reading performance among the group. These results highlight the need for intensified early reading support, as a considerable percentage of pupils are not yet able to decode and comprehend text independently. This pattern reflects existing findings showing that early learners in many public-school contexts often experience delays in reading fluency and word recognition due to limited literacy exposure, insufficient phonics-based instruction, and constrained access to developmentally appropriate resources (Crisol & Alam, 2022; Reyes et al., 2023). Moreover, gaps in foundational oral language development can impede reading progress, particularly among young readers who require strong vocabulary and phonological awareness to decode and understand text (Nation, 2020; Spencer et al., 2022). The sizable presence of non-readers and struggling readers emphasizes the need for targeted intervention strategies including structured phonics instruction, guided reading sessions, and home literacy support to support learners' transition from emergent reading stages toward independent reading competence. Without timely instructional intervention, these early reading challenges may persist and affect later academic achievement.

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	0.756*	Strong Positive	0.261	Reject Ho	Not Significant
Expressive Language and Oral Reading Ability	0.808*	Strong Positive	0.386	Reject Ho	Not Significant

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

Table 4 presents the relationship between the language skills (receptive and expressive) and the oral reading ability of Grade One learners. The results show strong positive correlations for both receptive language ($r = 0.756$) and expressive language ($r = 0.808$) with oral reading ability, indicating that learners who exhibit stronger language skills tend to demonstrate higher oral reading

scores. Despite the strength of these correlations, the associated p-values ($p = 0.261$ for receptive language and $p = 0.386$ for expressive language) are greater than the 0.05 significance level. Thus, while there is a clear directional association, the findings do not provide statistically significant evidence to conclude that language skills and oral reading performance are strongly linked within this sample. The results suggest that although language development appears meaningfully related to reading ability, this specific study did not establish statistical significance possibly due to factors such as the small sample size, individual learner differences, or variability in literacy exposure at home and school (Adlof et al., 2021; Cabello et al., 2023). Existing literature emphasizes that oral language ability including vocabulary knowledge, listening comprehension, and expressive skill is a foundational predictor of early reading fluency and comprehension (Nation, 2020; Spencer et al., 2022). However, the absence of statistical significance in the present findings may reflect contextual influences such as diverse home language environments, varied parental literacy support, or inconsistent early reading experiences, which can moderate the strength of the language–reading relationship (Lagahit & Bernardo, 2023). These results underscore the importance of providing structured language-building activities alongside systematic phonics instruction to strengthen both oral language and reading skills among young learners.

Discussion

The findings demonstrated that Grade One learners from the study site generally possess strong receptive and expressive language skills, particularly in naming objects, identifying body parts, and responding to verbal cues. These results suggest that learners have acquired foundational oral language abilities essential for early communication and comprehension. Similar findings have been reported in previous research asserting that foundational vocabulary and basic sentence production emerge early as children engage in everyday interactions at home and in school (Cabell et al., 2022). However, slight challenges were observed in tasks requiring multi-step processing and question-asking skills, consistent with literature noting that higher-order receptive language and inquiry-based expressive skills develop gradually and depend heavily on exposure, language modeling, and scaffolded communication experiences (Adlof et al., 2021; Nation, 2020). These results reinforce the importance of intentional oral language stimulation in the early grades, as receptive and expressive language development serves as a core foundation for later literacy and academic success (Spencer et al., 2022).

Despite strong language skills, a significant portion of learners remained non-readers or struggling readers, suggesting a disconnect between oral language development and reading fluency acquisition. Although the study revealed strong positive correlations between receptive and expressive language skills and oral reading scores, the absence of statistical significance may be attributed to sample size, varied home literacy environments, or inconsistent reading practice, which can influence early reading outcomes (Lagahit & Bernardo, 2023; Cabello et al., 2023). These results align with prior studies indicating that while oral language competence supports reading development, additional factors such as explicit phonics instruction, exposure to print, and guided reading experiences are critical for learners transitioning into fluent reading (Castles et al., 2022; González-Valenzuela et al., 2021). The literacy challenges reflected in the results underscore the need for structured phonological awareness instruction, systematic decoding support, and evidence-based reading interventions, particularly in contexts where early reading opportunities may be limited. Strengthening phonics routines, story-based language activities, and home-school literacy partnerships will be essential in closing early reading gaps and supporting learners toward independent reading proficiency.

Conclusion

The study on Grade 1 pupils at Cordova Central Elementary School revealed a strong correlation between the students' language skills and their oral reading abilities. Most of the students demonstrated high proficiency in both receptive and expressive language, which positively impacted their reading performance. However, a significant number of pupils were identified as non-readers, highlighting a gap that needs to be addressed. The findings underscore the importance of improving both language comprehension and expression to enhance early literacy skills. Therefore, implementing targeted strategies to strengthen language skills could greatly improve students' oral reading abilities, leading to better academic outcomes.

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