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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Assessing Language and Literacy Achievement of Grade One Students: Foundations for Strategic Educational Planning

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| ABSTRACT

This study assessed the language and literacy achievement of learners. The objectives were to determine the level of learners' receptive and expressive language skills, measure their literacy skills in terms of letter sounds, rhyming words, and letter names, and test the relationship between language and literacy skills as the basis for a Literacy Skills Enhancement Plan. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed to provide a comprehensive description of learners' competencies and to establish the statistical relationship between the two domains. The respondents included 85 Grade One pupils selected through purposive sampling, while their teachers served as evaluators of the learners' performance. The Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Checklist, adapted from the Department of Education, was used as the main instrument. Findings revealed that learners had moderate proficiency in expressive and receptive language, with notable gaps in phonological awareness and letter-sound recognition. Results further confirmed a significant relationship between oral language and literacy achievement. The study concluded that oral language proficiency served as a strong predictor of literacy development. It was recommended that the proposed Literacy Skills Enhancement Plan be implemented to strengthen foundational literacy through integrated classroom instruction and home-based support.

| 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 stands as one of the most essential skills that young learners must acquire during their initial years of formal schooling. It acts as the foundation for lifelong learning and academic achievement. Oral reading, in particular, serves as a key bridge between word recognition and comprehension by helping learners map written symbols to their corresponding sounds, thereby fostering fluency and understanding (Snow & Matthews, 2022). However, reading is not an automatic process. It requires the systematic development of both oral language and literacy skills. Many children in the early grades struggle with decoding words, identifying letter–sound correspondences, and constructing meaning from text often due to limited vocabulary exposure and deficiencies in early literacy instruction (Cabell et al., 2022). These challenges highlight the urgent necessity of strengthening foundational reading instruction to avert long-term literacy difficulties.

A central debate in literacy education revolves around the relative effectiveness of phonics-based versus meaning-based instructional approaches in cultivating reading fluency and comprehension. Phonics instruction emphasizes the systematic

teaching of letter–sound relationships, whereas meaning-based approaches focus primarily on word recognition and comprehension through context (Scarborough & Brady, 2021). Contemporary research affirms that the most effective approach is a balanced or integrated approach combining systematic phonics with meaning-oriented instruction (Duke & Mesmer, 2021). In the Philippine context learners continue to experience reading difficulties, reflected in nationwide assessments and local studies pointing to inconsistent progress in foundational literacy skills; contributing factors include large class sizes, limited teacher training in literacy pedagogy, and insufficient access to developmentally appropriate instructional materials.

Language development plays a pivotal role in literacy acquisition: both receptive (listening and understanding) and expressive (speaking and word use) language abilities form the foundation for reading and writing. Receptive language enables learners to comprehend spoken instructions and vocabulary, while expressive language supports sentence formation, storytelling, and word recall key precursors to fluent reading (Ferraz França & Guaresi, 2024). Studies show that children with strong oral language skills tend to perform better on reading comprehension and phonological awareness tasks; conversely, weaknesses in these domains are often correlated with slower literacy growth and persistent reading difficulties. Thus, assessing receptive and expressive language among Grade One learners is vital for identifying children at risk of reading failure and designing targeted literacy interventions.

Beyond oral language, early literacy skills such as letter-sound knowledge, rhyming awareness, and letter-name identification are essential indicators of reading readiness. Research confirms that mastery of letter–sound correspondence strongly predicts success in decoding and word recognition (Bautista, 2024), while familiarity with rhyming patterns enhances phonemic awareness the ability to recognise and manipulate sounds within words. Additionally, letter-name knowledge serves as a robust predictor of later reading fluency and spelling proficiency (Acha, 2023; Hertz, 2024). Despite this, many Filipino learners in the primary grades including those at show inconsistent progress in these foundational skills, often due to limited diagnostic assessments and insufficient integration of phonological awareness activities in classroom instruction.

Despite the considerable body of research on early reading development, there remains a significant gap in understanding how oral language skills specifically receptive and expressive relate to early literacy outcomes such as letter-sound knowledge, rhyming awareness, and letter-name recognition among Filipino learners. Most empirical studies focus on reading comprehension and fluency rather than the foundational language competencies that underpin these higher-order literacy skills. Furthermore, few investigations examine these relationships within actual classroom settings where teachers directly assess learners' abilities. Addressing this gap is crucial for the design of context-responsive and evidence-based literacy programs that support children's oral language development and reading growth concurrently. Accordingly, this study assesses the language and literacy skills of Grade One learners at Don Calyxto C. Yongco Sr. Elementary School to determine their levels of receptive and expressive language, their proficiency in early literacy indicators letter sounds, rhyming words, and letter names and the relationships that exist among these domains. The findings aim to inform the strengthening of early reading instruction and guide the development of targeted literacy interventions in the primary education setting.

Literature Review

Language development particularly receptive abilities (listening and comprehension) and expressive skills (verbal production and vocabulary use) is consistently recognized as a cornerstone of early literacy acquisition. According to Hulme et al. (2022), oral language competence strongly predicts children's phonological awareness and later reading performance. Similarly, Justice and Petscher (2020) reported that children with more advanced vocabulary and language comprehension skills demonstrated superior emergent literacy outcomes across early grades. These results demonstrate that children who effectively understand and produce language often begin reading with stronger foundational competencies. Early literacy skills including knowledge of letter–sound correspondences, rhyming ability, and letter-name recognition serve as essential building blocks for decoding and early word reading. Research indicates that phonological awareness skills, particularly rhyming and sound manipulation, are among the most powerful predictors of beginning reading achievement (Carroll & Snowling, 2023). Fostering alphabet awareness is likewise critical; Piasta et al. (2020) emphasized that early letter-name and letter-sound fluency significantly supports reading growth. Despite extensive evidence linking language to literacy, fewer studies have examined how specific oral language domains relate to discrete literacy tasks such as rhyming or naming letters particularly in multilingual and resource-constrained educational contexts where children may experience varied language exposure.

Methodology

This study utilized a descriptive-correlational research design to examine the language and literacy competencies of Grade One learners at Don Calixto C. Yongco Sr. Elementary School, which served as the basis for developing a targeted Literacy Enhancement Program. The participants were Grade One teachers, deliberately chosen through purposive sampling because of their direct role in classroom instruction and their close knowledge of pupils' developmental progress. Data were gathered through a teacher-rating checklist adapted from the Department of Education's Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Checklist (DepEd

Order No. 33, s. 2014) to assess receptive and expressive language abilities, paired with a Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment focusing on letter-sound mastery, recognition of rhyming words, and identification of letter names. Language skills were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1.00–1.80 = Not Skilled to 4.21–5.00 = Highly Skilled), while literacy performance was evaluated using a three-tier scoring rubric (0–3 = Beginner, 4–7 = Intermediate, 8–10 = Advanced). Teachers evaluated learners through actual classroom observations and individual performance tasks to ensure authentic representation of pupils' abilities. Descriptive statistics including frequency distribution, weighted mean, and percentage were used to summarize proficiency levels, while the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson r) was applied to determine the degree and direction of association between language development and emerging literacy skills. The study adhered to ethical standards, including securing informed parental permission, obtaining approval from school administrators, and maintaining strict confidentiality of learner data.

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.	3.75	1.21
Points to five body parts on himself when asked to do so.	3.64	1.24
Points to five named pictured objects when asked to do so	3.64	1.15
Follows one-step instructions that include simple prepositions (e.g. in, on, under, etc.)	3.58	1.21
Follows two-step instructions that include simple prepositions.	3.38	1.12
Aggregate Weighted Mean	3.60	
Aggregate Standard Deviation		1.19

Table 1 presents the level of receptive language skills of learners. The results show that learners generally demonstrate developing to proficient receptive language abilities, with an aggregate weighted mean of 3.60 and a standard deviation of 1.19, indicating moderate variability in performance across learners. The highest-rated indicator was the ability to point to a family member when asked (WM = 3.75, SD = 1.21), suggesting that children respond well to familiar contextual cues. Learners also showed strong skills in identifying body parts (WM = 3.64, SD = 1.24) and recognizing pictured objects (WM = 3.64, SD = 1.15), reflecting emerging vocabulary knowledge and visual-verbal association abilities. Meanwhile, following one-step instructions involving spatial cues (WM = 3.58, SD = 1.21) was rated slightly lower, and the least developed skill was following two-step prepositional instructions (WM = 3.38, SD = 1.12). This pattern highlights that while learners can understand simple commands and basic vocabulary, they may struggle with multi-step directions requiring higher cognitive processing and working memory. hese results imply that many Grade One learner possesses foundational receptive language skills but may require structured support to enhance comprehension of complex instructions. Strengthening receptive language is critical, as this skill underpins learners' ability to engage in classroom routines, follow academic tasks, and develop reading and writing fluency.

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	4.00	1.00
2	Uses pronouns (e.g. I,me, *ako, akin*)	4.06	0.98
3	Uses two- to three-word verb-noun combinations (e.g., *hingi gatas*)	4.06	0.92
4	Names objects in pictures	4.26	1.01
5	Speaks in grammatically correct two- to three word/sentences	3.94	0.81
6	Asks "what" questions	4.02	1.03
7	Gives account of recent experiences (with prompting) in order of occurrence using past tense	3.79	0.99
	Aggregate Weighted Mean	4.02	
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.96

Table 2 shows the expressive language skills of Grade One learners, reflecting their ability to use spoken language to communicate needs, ideas, and experiences. The overall results indicate a high level of expressive language development, as demonstrated by the aggregate weighted mean of 4.02 and an aggregate standard deviation of 0.96, suggesting that most learners consistently

demonstrate strong expressive abilities with moderate variation among individual performances. The highest-performing skill is the ability to name objects in pictures (WM = 4.26, SD = 1.01), showing that learners can successfully label familiar objects, a foundational skill for vocabulary growth and meaningful communication. Learners also effectively use pronouns (WM = 4.06, SD = 0.98) and produce verb-noun combinations (WM = 4.06, SD = 0.92), indicating emerging grammatical understanding and sentence structure development. Meanwhile, the skill with the lowest mean is giving accounts of experiences in sequence using past tense (WM = 3.79, SD = 0.99), suggesting that although learners can express themselves, they may still require support with narrative skills and verb tense usage. These findings imply that while expressive language skills are generally well-established, targeted instructional activities may enhance learners' narrative competence and grammatical accuracy. Teachers are encouraged to integrate story retelling, guided oral sharing, picture sequencing tasks, and language-rich classroom routines to further strengthen expressive abilities and support continued literacy development.

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

Level	Scoring Range	f	%
Advanced	8-10	28	32.94
Intermediate	4-7	39	45.88
Beginner	0-3	18	21.18
Total		85	100.00
	Mean	5.95	
	St. Dev.	2.51	

Table 3 presents the distribution of learners' literacy skills in terms of letter-sound recognition, a foundational component of early reading development. The results show that most learners fall within the intermediate level (f = 39, 45.88%), indicating that nearly half of the class demonstrates developing but not yet fully automatic skills in identifying letter sounds. A substantial proportion of learners reached the advanced level (f = 28, 32.94%), revealing that about one-third of the class has already achieved strong phonemic knowledge and can consistently match letters to their corresponding sounds. Meanwhile, 21.18% of the learners (f = 18) are categorized as beginners, suggesting that one in five learners struggles with sound-letter associations and may experience challenges in decoding and early reading. The computed mean score of 5.95 and a standard deviation of 2.51 further emphasize variability in learners' abilities, indicating that while many learners perform at expected levels, a noticeable group still requires foundational support. These findings highlight the need for differentiated instruction in phonemic awareness and systematic phonics teaching within the classroom. Learners in the beginner group may benefit from intensive targeted interventions, such as multisensory phonics activities, explicit modeling of sound-letter associations, and frequent guided practice.

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

Level	Scoring Range	f	%
Advanced	8-10	2	2.35
Intermediate	4-7	46	54.12
Beginner	0-3	37	43.53
Total		85	100.00
	Mean	3.60	
	St. Dev.	2.27	

Table 4 illustrates the learners' literacy performance in identifying rhyming words, which is a crucial component of phonological awareness and an early predictor of reading success. The results show that the majority of learners fall within the intermediate level (f = 46, 54.12%), indicating that more than half of the learners demonstrate developing skills in recognizing rhymes but have not yet reached mastery. A substantial portion of the group is classified as beginners (f = 37, 43.53%), showing that a significant number of learners struggle to identify rhyming patterns and may have difficulty hearing and manipulating sounds within words. Only 2.35% of learners (f = 2) reached the advanced level, suggesting that very few learners possess strong rhyming proficiency. The mean score of 3.60 and standard deviation of 2.27 further emphasize the wide variability among learners, indicating mixed levels of phonological awareness within the class. These findings indicate an urgent need to strengthen instruction in rhyming and phonological awareness, as nearly half of the learners are still at the beginning stage. Teachers should incorporate rhyming games, songs, word play activities, read-alouds with rhyming texts, and sound-matching exercises to reinforce auditory discrimination and phonemic sensitivity.

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

Level	Scoring Range	f		%
Advanced	8-10	29		34.12
Intermediate	4-7	51		60.00
Beginner	0-3	5		5.88
Total	Mean	85	6.61	100.00
	St. Dev.		1.90	

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	0.532*	Moderate Positive	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant

*significant at p<0.05 (two-tailed)

Table 5 presents the learners' performance in letter-name recognition, an essential foundational skill that supports early reading and spelling development. The results show that the majority of learners fall under the intermediate level (f = 51, 60.00%), indicating that most Grade One learners are able to recognize a considerable number of letter names but are still developing consistency and automaticity. Meanwhile, 34.12% of learners achieved the advanced level, demonstrating strong mastery and readiness for more complex literacy tasks such as phoneme blending and word decoding. Only 5.88% (f = 5) were classified as beginners, suggesting that a small minority struggle with identifying letter names, which may impede their progression in reading acquisition. The mean score of 6.61 and standard deviation of 1.90 indicate relatively high performance overall with moderate variability among learners. These findings suggest that learners at Don Calixto C. Yongco Sr. Elementary School generally possess solid foundational alphabet knowledge, positioning them well for subsequent reading development. However, sustained reinforcement is necessary to move intermediate learners toward full mastery and to support the few who remain at the beginning level.

Table 6 displays the correlation between the learners' language skills and literacy skills. The results reveal a moderate positive correlation (r = 0.532) between language proficiency and literacy performance, indicating that learners with stronger receptive and expressive language abilities tend to also demonstrate higher literacy skills. The associated p-value of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance, leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis, confirming that the relationship between language and literacy skills is statistically significant. This suggests that improvements in learners' language competencies are likely to contribute to enhanced literacy outcomes, consistent with the understanding that oral language forms the foundation for reading and writing development. The moderate strength of the correlation further indicates that while language skills play an essential role in literacy acquisition, other factors such as home literacy environment, instructional quality, and learner motivation may also influence literacy progress. The findings underscore the importance of integrating systematic oral language development into early-grade instruction. Teachers at Don Calixto C. Yongco Sr. Elementary School are encouraged to employ strategies that develop both receptive and expressive skills such as interactive read-alouds, guided conversations, storytelling, vocabulary enrichment, and phonological awareness activities.

Discussion

The findings of the study demonstrate that learners generally possess developing to proficient levels of receptive and expressive language skills, with particularly strong performance in naming objects, using pronouns, and producing simple sentences. However, difficulty was observed in comprehending multi-step instructions and narrating past experiences in sequence skills which require more advanced linguistic processing and working memory. These results align with the literature indicating that while foundational vocabulary and simple syntax typically emerge early, higher-order language abilities such as narrative sequencing and complex instruction-following develop more gradually and are influenced by environmental exposure and instructional quality (Hjetland et al., 2020; Justice et al., 2021). Strong oral language abilities are consistently recognized as predictors of reading success, as children

with richer vocabulary and grammar skills are more capable of decoding and comprehending texts (Hulme & Snowling, 2023). Thus, strengthening linguistic input, guided language practice, and structured opportunities for meaningful interaction in early classroom settings remains essential.

Similarly, learners showed moderate to high proficiency in foundational literacy skills such as letter-sound knowledge and letter-name recognition, but exhibited weaker performance in rhyming ability, where nearly half remained at the beginner level. This pattern supports research highlighting that phonological awareness particularly rhyming is a complex yet critical precursor to reading, often requiring explicit instruction and repeated exposure (Carroll & Snowling, 2023; Lonigan & Burgess, 2020). The significant positive correlation ($r = .532$) between language and literacy skills underscores the interconnected nature of oral language and early reading development, consistent with evidence showing that children with stronger receptive and expressive language tend to acquire phonics and decoding skills more efficiently (Kim et al., 2021; Storch & Whitehurst, 2020). Given that the Philippine setting is multilingual, the observed variability may reflect differences in language exposure at home and the linguistic complexity of transitioning between Filipino, Cebuano, and English in school contexts (Lagahit & Bernardo, 2023). These findings reinforce the need for integrated language–literacy instruction, playful and interactive phonological activities, and targeted support for learners demonstrating early phonological weaknesses to ensure successful progression to conventional reading.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concluded that the language and literacy skills of Grade One learners were interdependent. Oral language proficiency both receptive and expressive served as a critical predictor of learners' success in mastering early literacy tasks such as recognizing letter sounds, rhyming, and naming letters. The significant relationship found between the two domains confirmed that literacy growth was deeply anchored in oral language development. The study affirmed that without strengthening oral communication and vocabulary, learners were less likely to achieve fluency in early reading and writing. Thus, any literacy intervention needed to be holistic, integrating both oral and written dimensions to maximize learning outcomes.

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