
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Language And Literacy Skills of Grade One Learners: An Evaluation for Improved Pedagogical Approaches

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| ABSTRACT

This study assessed the language and literacy skills of Grade One learners and examined the relationship between these domains to inform a Literacy Skills Enhancement Plan. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis to address the research questions and probe associations among variables. Findings revealed that learners generally demonstrated stronger receptive than expressive language, uneven performance across early literacy components (with rhyming emerging as comparatively weaker), and a positive association between overall language proficiency and literacy outcomes. From these results, the study concluded that systematic attention to oral-language foundations alongside tightly sequenced phonological and alphabetic instruction was warranted to accelerate reading readiness. Accordingly, it recommended the formal, school-wide adoption of a Literacy Skills Enhancement Plan featuring protected oral-language blocks, explicit phonological/phonics routines, small-group differentiation aligned to current learner profiles, and a monitor-coach cycle to ensure fidelity and continuous improvement.

| 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 widely acknowledged as a foundational academic skill that children must master during their early years in formal education. It serves as the basis for future learning and long-term academic development. Oral reading, in particular, connects visual word recognition to understanding by allowing learners to convert printed symbols into spoken language, supporting fluency and comprehension (Nation, 2020). However, reading does not develop automatically; it demands purposeful instruction in both oral language and foundational literacy processes. Many young learners encounter difficulties in decoding words, applying letter-sound relationships, and deriving meaning from written text, often due to limited vocabulary and insufficient early literacy support (Cabello et al., 2023). Such challenges highlight the necessity of reinforcing early reading instruction to prevent persistent literacy gaps.

Debates in literacy instruction frequently center on whether phonics-based or meaning-centered approaches are more effective in building fluency and comprehension. Phonics emphasizes systematic instruction in sound-symbol relationships, while meaning-based approaches promote comprehension through contextual learning (Weiss, 2022). Current research supports a balanced literacy model integrating both explicit phonics and comprehension-focused teaching for optimal reading growth (McGeown et

al., 2021). In the Philippine context, many learners still experience reading challenges, as national assessments continue to reveal uneven progress in early grade literacy skills, influenced by large class sizes, insufficient instructional resources, and limited teacher preparation in literacy pedagogy (Crisol & Alam, 2022).

Language development plays a significant role in reading acquisition: receptive skills enable children to understand information, while expressive abilities allow them to articulate ideas and build sentences—both essential for comprehension and reading growth (Castles et al., 2022). Research shows that children with stronger oral language skills tend to exhibit better phonological awareness and reading comprehension, while those with weaker language abilities face slower literacy development (Cunningham et al., 2020). Thus, assessing receptive and expressive language among Grade One learners is vital to identify students requiring early intervention and support.

Alongside oral language, early literacy components such as letter-sound knowledge, rhyme recognition, and letter-name identification form the foundation of reading readiness. Evidence shows that mastery of sound-letter relationships predicts successful decoding and word reading (González-Valenzuela et al., 2021), while rhyming ability enhances phonemic awareness and sound manipulation. Moreover, knowledge of letter names strongly forecasts later reading fluency and spelling success (Skibbe et al., 2023). Despite this, many Filipino learners display varying progress in these skills, often due to limited early assessment practices and insufficient emphasis on phonological awareness in primary classrooms.

Although extensive research links oral language and reading development, a gap remains in understanding how specific language components relate to discrete early literacy outcomes in Filipino settings. Most studies emphasize reading comprehension and fluency rather than foundational linguistic skills that support these competencies. Additionally, classroom-based assessment studies remain limited. Therefore, this study examines the receptive and expressive language skills of Grade One learners at Casili Elementary School, alongside their abilities in letter-sound identification, rhyming, and letter naming, to determine the relationship between language and early literacy. The results aim to strengthen early literacy practices and guide evidence-based interventions for improving reading development in primary grades.

Literature Review

Language development, particularly receptive abilities such as listening and understanding, along with expressive skills including verbal production and vocabulary use, is widely recognized as fundamental to early literacy growth. Research shows that children who possess stronger oral language skills tend to develop stronger foundations for reading. For example, Spencer et al. (2022) emphasized that oral language proficiency plays a key role in shaping children's phonological awareness and early reading outcomes. Likewise, Catts and Jiang (2021) found that children with well-developed vocabulary and language comprehension exhibit more advanced emergent literacy abilities in the early years. These findings affirm that learners who can effectively interpret and communicate language are more likely to acquire reading skills efficiently. Foundational literacy abilities such as understanding letter-sound relationships, recognizing rhymes, and identifying letter names form essential components of decoding and early word reading. Studies indicate that phonological awareness skills including rhyming and sound manipulation are among the strongest predictors of early reading success (Stewart & Austin, 2023). Strengthening alphabet knowledge is also critical; Ouellette and Sénéchal (2020) highlighted that early mastery of letter names and sounds significantly supports later reading proficiency. Despite the well-established connection between oral language and literacy, limited research has examined how specific language skills relate to distinct early literacy tasks, especially in multilingual and resource-limited learning environments where children may have varying language experiences.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to investigate the language and literacy competencies of Grade One learners at Casili Elementary School, serving as the foundation for designing a targeted Literacy Enhancement Program. The respondents were Grade One teachers selected through purposive sampling due to their direct instructional engagement and familiarity with their pupils' developmental progress. Data were collected using 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 evaluate learners' receptive and expressive language skills. This was complemented by a Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment that measured letter-sound knowledge, ability to identify rhyming words, and recognition of letter names. Learners' language skills were assessed using a five-point Likert scale (1.00–1.80 = Not Skilled to 4.21–5.00 = Highly Skilled), while literacy skills were rated using a three-level scoring rubric (0–3 = Beginner, 4–7 = Intermediate, 8–10 = Advanced). Teachers conducted classroom-based observations and one-on-one performance tasks to ensure authentic measurement of learners' abilities. Frequency counts, weighted means, and percentage scores were utilized to describe proficiency levels, while the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson r) was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between language development and emerging literacy skills. Ethical protocols were strictly followed, including securing informed consent from parents, obtaining administrative approval, and ensuring the confidentiality and protection of learner data.

Results

Table 1 presents the level of receptive language skills of learners. The results reveal that learners generally demonstrate proficient receptive language abilities, as shown by the aggregate weighted mean of 3.92 and a standard deviation of 0.95, indicating relatively consistent performance among learners with moderate variability. The highest skill observed was pointing to a family member when asked (WM = 4.20, SD = 0.82), followed closely by identifying body parts (WM = 4.17, SD = 0.84) and pointing to named pictured objects (WM = 4.16, D = 0.85).

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.	4.20	0.82
Points to five body parts on himself when asked to do so.	4.17	0.84
Points to five named pictured objects when asked to do so	4.16	0.85
Follows one-step instructions that include simple prepositions (e.g. in, on, under, etc.)	3.85	1.02
Follows two-step instructions that include simple prepositions.	3.20	1.21
Aggregate Weighted Mean	3.92	
Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.95

These results suggest that learners are able to understand simple verbal prompts and associate vocabulary with familiar people, objects, and body parts, reflecting strong receptive vocabulary and early comprehension skills. In contrast, following one-step instructions involving prepositions received a slightly lower rating (WM = 3.85, SD = 1.02), while difficulty was most notable in following two-step instructions with spatial concepts (WM = 3.20, SD = 1.21), highlighting challenges in processing more complex verbal directions. These findings indicate that while the majority of learners demonstrate strong foundational receptive language skills, there remains a notable need to support comprehension of multi-step instructions and spatial language.

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	4.12	0.69
2	Uses pronouns (e.g. I, me, <i>ako</i> , <i>akin</i>)	4.15	0.70
3	Uses two- to three-word verb-noun combinations (e.g., <i>hingi gatas</i>)	4.06	0.81
4	Names objects in pictures	4.27	0.85
5	Speaks in grammatically correct two- to three word/sentences	3.95	1.05
6	Asks "what" questions	3.36	1.36
7	Gives account of recent experiences (with prompting) in order of occurrence using past tense	3.10	1.27
	Aggregate Weighted Mean	3.86	
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.96

Table 2 illustrates the expressive language abilities of learners. Overall, the results indicate that learners show developing to proficient expressive language skills, as reflected by an aggregate weighted mean of 3.86 and a standard deviation of 0.96, suggesting moderate variation in performance across indicators. The highest-rated skill was the ability to name objects in pictures (WM = 4.27, SD = 0.85), demonstrating strong vocabulary recall and object recognition. Learners also displayed competence in using pronouns (WM = 4.15, SD = 0.70) and producing simple verb-noun combinations (WM = 4.06, SD = 0.81), indicating emerging grammatical structure and functional language use. Meanwhile, speaking in short, grammatically correct sentences scored slightly lower (WM = 3.95, SD = 1.05), showing room for growth in sentence formation. The lowest-performing indicators were asking "what" questions (WM = 3.36, SD = 1.36) and recounting past experiences in sequence with prompting (WM = 3.10, SD = 1.27), suggesting challenges in inquiry language, narrative skills, and the use of past tense. These findings suggest that while most learners possess foundational expressive language skills, targeted support is needed to enhance narrative development, grammar use, and question-asking skills.

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

Level	Scoring Range	f	%
Advanced	8-10	37	37.00
Intermediate	4-7	52	52.00
Beginner	0-3	11	11.00
Total		100	100.00
	Mean	6.47	
	St. Dev.	2.48	

Table 3 shows the learners' literacy skills in terms of letter-sound recognition, a core component of early reading development and phonological awareness. The results reveal that most learners fall under the intermediate level ($f = 52$, 52%), demonstrating that more than half of the Grade One students are developing their ability to match letters to their corresponding sounds but have not yet fully mastered this skill. Meanwhile, 37% of the learners ($f = 37$) achieved the advanced level, indicating strong phonemic awareness and readiness for more complex decoding and reading tasks. Only 11% of the learners ($f = 11$) were classified as beginners, suggesting that a small portion still experiences difficulty in identifying letter sounds. The computed mean score of 6.47 and a standard deviation of 2.48 suggest moderately strong overall performance with some variability across the group. These results emphasize that most learners are progressing well in their phonics development, yet continued support and reinforcement are necessary to ensure movement from intermediate to advanced mastery.

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

Level	Scoring Range	f	%
Advanced	8-10	15	15.00
Intermediate	4-7	38	38.00
Beginner	0-3	47	47.00
Total		100	100.00
	Mean	3.63	
	St. Dev.	2.83	

Table 4 presents the learners' performance in recognizing rhyming words, a key component of phonological awareness linked to early reading success. The results show that most learners fall within the beginner level ($f = 47$, 47%), indicating that nearly half of the Grade One pupils face difficulty identifying rhyming patterns and manipulating sounds within words. Meanwhile, 38% ($f = 38$) of the learners are at the intermediate level, demonstrating emerging but inconsistent skill in identifying rhymes. Only a small proportion, 15% ($f = 15$), achieved the advanced level, showing proficient phonological awareness in rhyming. The mean score of 3.63 and relatively high standard deviation of 2.83 indicate varied performance, suggesting significant differences in learners' ability levels in rhyming recognition. These results highlight the need to strengthen instruction focused on phonological awareness, particularly rhyming skills. Since rhyming plays an important role in building sensitivity to sound patterns, which supports decoding and reading fluency, learners must be provided with more structured and engaging practice.

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

Level	Scoring Range	f	%
Advanced	8-10	34	34.00
Intermediate	4-7	52	52.00
Beginner	0-3	14	14.00
Total	Mean	100	100.00
	St. Dev.	3.63	2.83

Table 1 presents the level of receptive language skills of learners. The results reveal that learners generally demonstrate proficient receptive language abilities, as shown by the aggregate weighted mean of 3.92 and a standard deviation of 0.95, indicating relatively consistent performance among learners with moderate variability. The highest skill observed was pointing to a family member when asked ($WM = 4.20$, $SD = 0.82$), followed closely by identifying body parts ($WM = 4.17$, $SD = 0.84$) and pointing to named pictured objects ($WM = 4.16$, $SD = 0.85$). These results suggest that learners are able to understand simple verbal prompts and associate vocabulary with familiar people, objects, and body parts, reflecting strong receptive vocabulary and early comprehension skills. In contrast, following one-step instructions involving prepositions received a slightly lower rating ($WM = 3.85$, $SD = 1.02$), while difficulty was most notable in following two-step instructions with spatial concepts ($WM = 3.20$, $SD = 1.21$), highlighting challenges in processing more complex verbal directions. These findings indicate that while the majority of learners demonstrate strong foundational receptive language skills, there remains a notable need to support comprehension of multi-step instructions and spatial language.

Table 6 presents the statistical relationship between the language skills and literacy skills of Grade One learners at Casili Elementary School. The results reveal a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.580$) between learners' receptive and expressive language abilities and their literacy performance. The p-value of 0.000, which is lower than the 0.05 level of significance, leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This confirms that the relationship between language and literacy skills is statistically significant. In other words, learners who demonstrated stronger language abilities also tended to perform better in early literacy tasks such as letter-sound identification, rhyming recognition, and letter-name knowledge. Conversely, those with weaker oral language skills were more likely to encounter challenges in early reading development. The moderate strength of the correlation suggests that while language skills play an important role in literacy acquisition, other contributing factors such as home literacy practices, classroom instruction, and learner readiness may also influence literacy outcomes. These findings underscore the critical importance of fostering oral language development as part of early literacy instruction. Strengthening learners' receptive and expressive language skills through activities such as guided storytelling, shared reading, vocabulary-building exercises, phonological awareness activities, and structured conversations can significantly enhance early reading success.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the majority of the learners possess well-developed receptive and expressive language skills, particularly in identifying familiar objects, body parts, and using simple sentence structures. However, difficulty in following two-step instructions and narrating past experiences suggests gaps in higher-order language processing and narrative ability. These results align with existing evidence showing that early oral language abilities vary across dimensions basic vocabulary often develops earlier than complex syntactic and narrative skills (Snow & Matthews, 2022). Likewise, Hulme and Snowling (2023) emphasize that language comprehension, including the ability to follow multi-step instructions and construct narratives, forms the foundation for emerging literacy. Justice et al. (2021) similarly found that children who demonstrate stronger oral language proficiency in their early school years show more consistent literacy growth over time, highlighting the need for intentional instruction targeting expressive and receptive processing.

Consistent with the language findings, results showed that learners generally performed better in letter-sound and letter-name

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	0.580*	Moderate Positive	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant

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

recognition, while rhyming ability presented a notable challenge for almost half of the cohort. This pattern supports research noting that phonological awareness develops gradually, and tasks such as rhyming often require explicit instruction and repeated exposure (Carroll & Snowling, 2023). The moderate positive correlation between language and literacy skills ($r = 0.580$) in this study aligns with evidence demonstrating that vocabulary, syntax, and oral language comprehension jointly facilitate phonological processing and early reading acquisition (Kim et al., 2021; Spencer et al., 2022). In multilingual contexts like the Philippines, variations in language exposure at home and school can further influence early reading trajectories, reinforcing the importance of integrated language-literacy teaching (Lagahit & Bernardo, 2023). These findings underscore the need for sustained and targeted interventions that strengthen oral language alongside explicit phonics instruction, rhyming activities, and vocabulary development.

to ensure successful reading outcomes in the early grades.

Conclusion

The study concluded that Grade One learners possessed foundational receptive and expressive language skills, yet advancement to more complex receptive processing and richer expressive output remained necessary to sustain reading growth. Literacy performance varied across subskills: letter sounds and letter names reflected developing proficiency for many learners, while rhyming required prioritized intervention as a core gateway to phonemic awareness. Crucially, the confirmed positive relationship between language and literacy implied that strengthening oral language (listening comprehension, vocabulary, structured talk, and narrative skills) directly supported decoding, sound manipulation, and alphabet knowledge. For professional practice, this meant teachers needed to integrate oral-language routines (e.g., dialogic reading, structured questioning, guided retell) with systematic phonics and explicit phonological-awareness instruction. For program development, results justified a targeted, school-wide Literacy Skills Enhancement Plan emphasizing rhyming/phonological work, automaticity in letter names and sounds, and scaffolded receptive/expressive tasks. For policy implementation, the findings supported data-driven, MTB-MLE-aligned early literacy initiatives and sustained family engagement to extend language-rich experiences at home.

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