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Reading Literacy Gaps Among Grade One Learners: Evidence from Comprehensive Reading Literacy Assessment (Crla)

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the reading literacy gaps among Grade One learners of San Rafael Elementary School and Tubod Elementary School in Barili District, Division of Cebu Province, during School Year 2025–2026, as a basis for developing a contextualized Reading Intervention Program. It employed a descriptive-correlational research design and purposive sampling involving 62 Grade One learners, with two teachers serving as assessment facilitators. Data were obtained through a structured learner profile questionnaire and existing Comprehensive Reading Literacy Assessment (CRLA) results. Frequency counts, percentages, means, standard deviations, and Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient were utilized for data analysis. Findings revealed that most learners demonstrated favorable word reading, reading fluency, and comprehension performance and were classified as Grade Ready. However, difficulties remained in oral reading fluency, particularly phrasing, punctuation, and expression, while a few learners exhibited substantial comprehension difficulties. Fathers' educational attainment demonstrated a significant but weak negative relationship with overall CRLA performance, whereas other learner profile variables showed no significant relationships. The study concluded that favorable reading performance did not eliminate individual literacy gaps and emphasized the importance of assessment-based instructional support. It recommended the adoption and implementation of the proposed contextualized Reading Intervention Program to strengthen foundational reading competencies through differentiated instruction, guided reading activities, and continuous progress monitoring.

KEYWORDS

Reading literacy, Grade One learners, Comprehensive Reading Literacy Assessment, word reading, reading fluency, reading comprehension, literacy gaps, reading intervention program

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1. Introduction

Reading literacy has long been recognized as a fundamental competency that supports learners' academic achievement, cognitive development, and meaningful participation in society. It enables children to acquire knowledge, communicate effectively, comprehend texts, and develop essential thinking skills. During the early years of schooling, foundational reading competencies were particularly important because they supported learning across subject areas and prepared children for increasingly complex academic tasks. UNESCO (2023) emphasized that early literacy development was essential in preventing persistent learning difficulties. Similarly, Darling-Hammond et al. (2021) highlighted the importance of quality early learning experiences in children's academic development. Within Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), literacy instruction supported phonological awareness, word recognition, fluency, and comprehension. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2023) also emphasized developmentally appropriate instruction responsive to individual learning needs. These perspectives supported Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which promoted inclusive and equitable quality education.

Globally, reading literacy remained a significant educational concern. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 revealed persistent challenges in reading comprehension among learners across participating countries (OECD, 2023). UNICEF (2023) likewise highlighted learning poverty among children in low- and middle-income countries. Educational disruptions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic further intensified inequalities in access to instruction, learning materials, and academic support. These circumstances emphasized the importance of early literacy assessment and targeted interventions.

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In the Philippines, reading literacy continued to challenge the basic education system. The PISA 2022 results indicated that Filipino learners performed below international benchmarks in reading comprehension and interpretation (OECD, 2023). Consequently, the Department of Education strengthened literacy initiatives consistent with Republic Act No. 10533, or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, which emphasized learner-centered and contextualized instruction. Republic Act No. 10157, or the Kindergarten Education Act of 2012, and Republic Act No. 10410, or the Early Years Act of 2013, further supported foundational literacy development during early childhood.

Within Cebu Province, reading difficulties remained evident. Cebu Daily News Digital (2026), citing findings discussed by the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II), reported substantial proportions of struggling readers in several localities, including Cebu Province at 39.31%. These findings reflected continuing concerns regarding learners' ability to read and comprehend simple texts, reinforcing the importance of localized literacy assessment and instructional support. At the local level, San Rafael Elementary School and Tubod Elementary School in Barili District served rural communities where differences in socioeconomic circumstances and access to educational resources could have influenced children's literacy experiences. Classroom observations revealed that some Grade One learners experienced difficulties in letter-sound recognition, rhyming words, sentence reading, fluency, and comprehension. These challenges highlighted the need to assess learners' reading competencies systematically and identify specific areas requiring intervention. The study was anchored on Emergent Literacy Theory (Teale & Sulzby, 1986), the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986), and Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978).Thesetheoriesexplainedreadingdevelopmentthrough earlyliteracy experiences, decoding and language comprehension, and social interaction. Together, they provided a foundation for understanding learners' reading difficulties and the relevance of family-background characteristics.

The Comprehensive Reading Literacy Assessment (CRLA) provided information regarding learners' foundational reading competencies, including letter sounds, rhyming words, sentence reading, fluency, and comprehension. Its recorded indicators also described word reading proficiency, oral reading fluency, comprehension performance, and overall reading classifications. However, limited localized research had examined these competencies alongside learner profiles in Barili District or utilized the findings to develop contextualized reading interventions. To address this gap, the study employed a descriptive-correlational design involving 62 Grade One learners from the two schools during School Year 2025–2026. It utilized a learner profile questionnaire and existing CRLA results administered in March 2026. The study examined age, gender, parents' educational attainment, birth order, number of siblings, and combined family monthly income alongside learners' reading performance. Descriptive statistics and Spearman's rank-order correlation were employed to analyze the data. The findings revealed generally favorable word reading, reading fluency, and comprehension performance, with most learners classified as Grade Ready.

Nevertheless, specific difficulties remained evident in oral reading fluency, particularly phrasing, punctuation, and expression. No learner attained the highest oral reading fluency level, while some required additional support in foundational reading and comprehension. Fathers' educational attainment demonstrated a statistically significant but weak negative relationship with overall CRLA performance, whereas the other analyzed profile variables showed no significant relationships. These findings emphasized that favorable overall reading performance did not eliminate individual literacy gaps. They also highlighted the importance of prioritizing assessed reading needs rather than relying solely on demographic characteristics when planning interventions. Differentiated instruction, guided oral reading, comprehension activities, and continuous progress monitoring were therefore considered appropriate instructional responses. Consequently, the study developed a contextualized Reading Intervention Program organized into three phases aligned with DepEd's academic terms for School Year 2026–2027. The phases focused on foundational reading skills, oral reading fluency and expression, and reading comprehension. The proposed program incorporated developmentally appropriate activities, home-school collaboration, and systematic monitoring to address identified reading difficulties and strengthen foundational literacy among Grade One learners.

2. Literature Review

Research on early reading development emphasizes that Grade One is a critical period for establishing foundational literacy skills that support later academic achievement. Word reading is central to this process because beginning readers must learn to connect printed letters with speech sounds and develop increasingly accurate recognition of familiar and unfamiliar words. Ehri (2020) explained that systematic phonics instruction strengthens word-reading development by helping children form connections between spellings and pronunciations. Castles et al. (2018) likewise emphasized that successful reading instruction requires explicit development of decoding and word-recognition skills alongside opportunities to construct meaning from text. Reading fluency becomes increasingly important as learners move from effortful decoding toward more automatic and expressive reading. Kim et al. (2021) found that text-reading fluency is closely associated with reading comprehension and develops through the integration of accuracy, speed, and language processes. Petscher et al. (2020) further highlighted the importance of foundational reading competencies within the science of reading, while Duke and Cartwright (2021) argued that skilled reading develops through interacting word-recognition, language, and cognitive processes rather than through a single isolated ability.

Reading comprehension represents another essential component of early literacy assessment because learners must not only read words accurately but also understand and interpret what they read. Cabell et al. (2022) showed that early oral-language and decoding development contributes substantially to later literacy outcomes, demonstrating the importance of examining

comprehension together with foundational reading skills. Rehfeld et al. (2022) reported that phonemic-awareness instruction improves early reading-related competencies, particularly for children experiencing reading difficulty. Kittle et al. (2024) likewise concluded that multilingual learners benefit from systematic instruction that integrates foundational reading skills with oral-language and comprehension development. Foorman et al. (2016) emphasized that early literacy instruction should include word reading, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies in an integrated manner. In addition, Quinn et al. (2020) showed that individual differences in reading comprehension are influenced by both word-reading efficiency and broader language abilities.

3. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to assess the reading literacy gaps among Grade One learners of San Rafael Elementary School and Tubod Elementary School in Barili District, Division of Cebu Province, during School Year 2025–2026. The descriptive component examined the learners' demographic and socioeconomic profiles in terms of age, gender, parents' highest educational attainment, birth order, number of siblings, and combined family monthly income. It also described their reading literacy competencies using existing Comprehensive Reading Literacy Assessment results. The correlational component determined the relationships between selected learner profile variables and overall CRLA performance using Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient at the 0.05 level of significance. The study involved 62 Grade One learners and two Grade One teacher from the two participating schools. Data were gathered using two instruments: a structured learner profile questionnaire and the existing CRLA results administered in March 2026. The profile questionnaire was completed by parents or guardians, while the CRLA records provided information on letter sounds, rhyming words, word reading, sentence reading, reading fluency, and comprehension. The study also examined word reading profile, reading fluency scores, reading comprehension levels, Grade One CRLA Part 1 reading profile, oral reading fluency level, and reading comprehension performance. No additional CRLA testing was conducted. After securing institutional approvals, ethical clearance, and informed consent from parents or guardians, the researcher retrieved the official CRLA records and administered the profile questionnaire. Learner assent was also secured when appropriate. The data were coded, verified, tabulated, and analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and Spearman's rho. Family monthly income was excluded from the correlational analysis because all respondents belonged to the same income category. Confidentiality, voluntary participation, anonymity, and compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 were observed throughout the study.

4. Results

Table 1. Age

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
8 years old	2	3.23
7 years old	2	3.23
6 years old	58	93.55
Total	62	100.00

Table 1 shows that most Grade One learners were six years old, accounting for 93.55 percent of the 62 respondents. Only 3.23 percent were seven years old and another 3.23 percent were eight years old. This indicates that the majority of learners were within the expected age range for Grade One. The result implies that age-related differences were minimal, allowing reading literacy gaps to be examined within a relatively homogeneous age group and supporting more focused instructional interventions.

Table 2. Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	28	45.16
Female	34	54.84
Total	62	100.00

Table 2 shows that female learners comprised the larger proportion of the respondents, with 34 or 54.84 percent, while male learners accounted for 28 or 45.16 percent. The distribution indicates a relatively balanced representation of both genders, although females slightly outnumbered males. This implies that the assessment of reading literacy gaps reflects the performance of both male and female Grade One learners and allows gender to be considered as a possible factor when examining differences in reading outcomes.

Table 3. Mother's Highest Educational Attainment

Educational Attainment	Frequency	Percentage
High School Graduate	25	40.32
High School Level	31	50.00
Elementary Graduate	6	9.68
Total	62	100.00

Table 3 shows that half of the mothers, representing 50.00 percent, reached the high school level, while 40.32 percent were high school graduates. Only 9.68 percent were elementary graduates. The findings indicate that most mothers had attained some level of secondary education but had not progressed to higher education. This implies that parental educational background may influence the level of literacy support available at home, highlighting the importance of providing parents with practical strategies for supporting Grade One learners' reading development.

Table 4. Father's Highest Educational Attainment

Educational Attainment	Frequency	Percentage
High School Graduate	31	50.00
High school level	30	48.39
Elementary graduate	1	1.61
Total	62	100.00

Table 4 shows that 50.00 percent of the fathers were high school graduates, while 48.39 percent reached the high school level. Only 1.61 percent were elementary graduates. The findings indicate that nearly all fathers had secondary-level educational experience, although only half completed high school. This implies that fathers may possess basic educational skills that can support their children's reading development, but schools may still need to provide simple and practical home-based reading strategies to strengthen parental involvement.

Table 5. birth order

Birth Order	Frequency	Percentage
Eldest	9	14.52
Second	9	14.52
Middle	9	14.52
Youngest	27	43.55
Only child	8	12.90
Total	62	100.00

Table 5 shows that the largest group of learners were the youngest children in their families, accounting for 43.55 percent of the respondents. The eldest, second-born, and middle children each represented 14.52 percent, while only children comprised 12.90 percent. The distribution indicates that many learners had older siblings at home. This implies that sibling interactions may provide additional opportunities for reading assistance, modeling, and language exposure, which may contribute to the learners' early literacy development.

Table 6. number of siblings

Number of Siblings	Frequency	Percentage
5 or more	1	1.61
3–4	26	41.94
1–2	27	43.55
None	8	12.90
Total	62	100.00

Table 6 shows that 43.55 percent of the Grade One learners had one to two siblings, while 41.94 percent had three to four siblings. Only 1.61 percent had five or more siblings, whereas 12.90 percent had none. The findings indicate that most learners belonged to households with siblings. This implies that sibling relationships may provide opportunities for shared reading, language interaction, and academic support, although larger sibling groups may also affect the amount of individualized parental attention available for literacy development.

Table 7. Family income

Family Income	Frequency	Percentage
₱10,000 and below	62	100.00
Total	62	100.00

Table 7 shows that all 62 respondents, representing 100.00 percent, belonged to families with a monthly income of ₱10,000 and below. This indicates that the learners came from a relatively uniform low-income socioeconomic background. The finding implies that limited financial resources may affect access to books, learning materials, tutoring, and other literacy-related opportunities at home. Therefore, school-based reading interventions and accessible instructional resources are important in addressing reading literacy gaps among these Grade One learners.

Table 8. Word Reading Profile

Level	Numerical Range	f	%
Very High	9–10	52	83.87
High	7–8	8	12.90
Moderate	5–6	1	1.61
Low	3–4	1	1.61
Very Low	0–2	0	0.00
Total	62.00		
Mean	9.06		
St. Dev.	1.16		

Table 8 shows that most Grade One learners demonstrated a very high level of word reading performance, with 52 learners or 83.87 percent scoring within the 9–10 range. Eight learners or 12.90 percent were at the high level, while only one learner each fell under the moderate and low levels. The mean score of 9.06 with a standard deviation of 1.16 indicates generally strong and relatively consistent word reading performance.

Table 9. Reading Fluency

Level	Numerical Range	f	%
Very High	9–10	60	96.77
High	7–8	0	0.00
Moderate	5–6	2	3.23
Low	3–4	0	0.00
Very Low	0–2	0	0.00
Total	62.00		
Mean	9.85		
St. Dev.	0.81		

Table 9 shows that the Grade One learners demonstrated a very high level of reading fluency, with 60 learners or 96.77 percent scoring within the 9–10 range. Only two learners or 3.23 percent were classified at the moderate level, while none fell under the high, low, or very low categories. The mean score of 9.85 with a standard deviation of 0.81 indicates consistently strong fluency performance. This implies that most learners could read with substantial ease, although a few still required additional fluency supports.

Table 10. Reading Comprehension Level of the Respondents

Level	Numerical Range	f	%
Very High	9–10	37	59.68
High	7–8	22	35.48
Moderate	5–6	0	0.00
Low	3–4	0	0.00
Very Low	0–2	3	4.84
Total	62.00		
Mean	8.55		
St. Dev.	2.01		

Table 10 shows that most Grade One learners demonstrated strong reading comprehension, with 37 learners or 59.68 percent classified at the very high level and 22 learners or 35.48 percent at the high level. Only three learners or 4.84 percent were classified at the very low level. The mean score of 8.55 with a standard deviation of 2.01 indicates generally high comprehension, although

performance varied among learners. This implies that targeted comprehension support is needed for the small group experiencing substantial difficulty.

Table 11. Grade 1 CRLA Part 1 Reading Profile of the Respondents

Reading Profile	CRLA Basis	f	%
Grade Ready	Task 1 + Sentence Reading = 17–20	52	83.87
Light Refresher	Task 1 + Sentence Reading = 7–16	8	12.90
Moderate Refresher	Task 1 + Rhyming Words = 15–20	0	0.00
Full Refresher	Task 1 + Rhyming Words = 0–14	2	3.23
Total	62.00		
Mean	17.79		
St. Dev.	2.33		

Table 11 shows that most Grade One learners were classified as Grade Ready, with 52 learners or 83.87 percent meeting the CRLA criterion. Eight learners or 12.90 percent were identified as Light Refresher, while two learners or 3.23 percent were classified as Full Refresher. The mean score of 17.79 with a standard deviation of 2.33 indicates generally strong foundational reading performance. This implies that most learners met expected competencies, but a small group still required focused and intensive reading intervention.

Table 12. Reading Fluency Level of the Respondents

Level	Numerical Range	f	%
Level 4 – Reads fluently with proper expression	3.26–4.00	0	0.00
Level 3 – Reads fluently but needs punctuation/expression	2.51–3.25	40	64.52
Level 2 – Reads words in chunks	1.76–2.50	17	27.42
Level 1 – Reads word by word or lower	1.00–1.75	5	8.06
Total	62.00		
Mean	2.56		
St. Dev.	0.64		

Table 12 shows that 40 learners or 64.52 percent were classified at Level 3, indicating that they could read fluently but still needed improvement in punctuation and expression. Seventeen learners or 27.42 percent were at Level 2, while five learners or 8.06 percent were at Level 1. No learner reached Level 4. The mean of 2.56 with a standard deviation of 0.64 indicates generally high fluency but limited expressive reading. This implies a need for guided oral reading and prosody-focused activities.

Table 13. Reading Comprehension Performance of the Respondents

Level	Numerical Range	f	%
Very High	5 correct answers	12	19.35
High	4 correct answers	48	77.42
Moderate	3 correct answers	0	0.00
Low	2 correct answers	0	0.00
Very Low	0–1 correct answer	2	3.23
Total	62.00		
Mean	4.10		
St. Dev.	0.69		

Table 13 shows that most Grade One learners demonstrated high reading comprehension performance, with 48 learners or 77.42 percent obtaining four correct answers. Twelve learners or 19.35 percent achieved a very high level, while only two learners or 3.23 percent were classified as very low. The mean score of 4.10 with a standard deviation of 0.69 indicates generally strong comprehension performance. This implies that most learners understood the assessed texts well, although the small group with very low performance requires targeted comprehension intervention.

Table 14. Relationship Between Learners' Profile and Overall CRLA Performance

Profile Variable	Spearman rho	p-value	Decision	Strength	Remarks
Age	-0.113	0.381	Not Significant	Very weak	Do not Reject Ho
Gender	0.207	0.107	Not Significant	Weak	Do not Reject Ho
Mother's Education	-0.132	0.308	Not Significant	Very weak	Do not Reject Ho
Father's Education	-0.303	0.017	Significant	Weak	Reject Ho
Birth Order	0.028	0.829	Not Significant	Very weak	Do not Reject Ho
Number of Siblings	-0.169	0.190	Not Significant	Very weak	Do not Reject Ho

*Significant at $p < 0.05$.

Table 14 shows that most learner profile variables were not significantly related to overall CRLA performance. Age, gender, mother's education, birth order, and number of siblings all had p-values greater than 0.05, indicating no significant relationships. Only father's education showed a significant weak negative relationship with CRLA performance, with a Spearman rho of -0.303 and a p-value of 0.017. This implies that, among the profile variables examined, father's education was the only factor statistically associated with reading performance, although the relationship was weak.

5. Discussions

The findings indicate that the Grade One learners generally came from similar demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Most were six years old, with a slightly higher proportion of females than males. The majority of their parents had reached or completed high school, while most learners were either the youngest children or had one to four siblings. All respondents belonged to families earning ₱10,000 and below per month, showing a relatively uniform low-income background. Despite this socioeconomic condition, the learners generally demonstrated strong reading performance. Most attained very high levels in word reading and reading fluency, while reading comprehension was also generally high. A large proportion were classified as Grade Ready under the CRLA Part 1 reading profile, although a small number required light or full refresher support. These findings suggest that the majority had already developed important foundational literacy competencies, but a few learners still needed targeted intervention in basic reading skills.

The results also revealed specific areas that require instructional attention. Although overall fluency performance was high, no learner reached the highest oral reading fluency level characterized by fluent reading with proper expression. Many learners still needed improvement in punctuation, phrasing, and expression, while some read in chunks or word by word. Reading comprehension was generally strong, yet a small group demonstrated very low performance and required focused support. In examining relationships between learner characteristics and overall CRLA performance, age, gender, mother's education, birth order, and number of siblings were not significantly associated with reading performance. Only father's education showed a significant weak negative relationship with CRLA performance. This suggests that reading achievement in the group was not strongly determined by most demographic characteristics. The findings therefore support the need for a contextualized reading intervention program that prioritizes individual reading needs, particularly oral reading fluency, expressive reading, and comprehension, rather than relying solely on learners' background characteristics.

6. Conclusion

The study concluded that Grade One learners generally demonstrated favorable reading literacy performance, although some experienced difficulties in oral reading fluency, expression, and comprehension. The null hypothesis was rejected for fathers' highest educational attainment, which showed a significant but weak negative relationship with overall CRLA performance, while it was not rejected for age, gender, mothers' educational attainment, birth order, and number of siblings. These findings emphasized the importance of assessing individual reading needs rather than relying solely on learner profiles. The results supported differentiated instruction, continuous literacy assessment, and the development of a contextualized Reading Intervention Program. Furthermore, they reinforced the implementation of inclusive, assessment-based literacy initiatives and stronger home-school collaboration to improve foundational reading competencies.

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