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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **Evaluating the Language and Literacy Competencies of Grade One Pupils: Implications for Curriculum Development**

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**| ABSTRACT**

This study assessed the language and literacy skills of Grade One learners. It employed a descriptive–correlational design in a natural school setting and utilized purposive sampling for two Grade One teacher–respondents who evaluated 100 Grade One learners as the full cohort. The instrument adapted the DepEd ECCD-aligned teacher questionnaire for receptive and expressive language, alongside a Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment for letter sounds, rhyming words, and letter names. Data were treated using frequency counts, simple percentage, weighted mean, standard deviation, and Pearson product–moment correlation. Results indicated that receptive language generally outpaced expressive language; letter-name knowledge emerged as a comparative strength; letter–sound correspondence remained consolidating; and rhyming was the most fragile phonological skill. Language skills aligned positively with literacy performance. It was concluded that language-rich instruction, paired with systematic phonological awareness and explicit phonics, best supported early reading competence. The study recommended school- wide adoption of a Literacy Skills Enhancement Plan featuring daily oral-language routines, a rhyme-first PA sequence, short cumulative phonics with decodables, small- group differentiation, quarterly screen–teach–recheck monitoring, and structured home–school supports.

**| KEYWORDS**

Language Skills, Literacy Skills, Receptive Language, Expressive Language, Letter Sounds, Rhyming Words

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### **Introduction**

Language and literacy served as foundational pillars of a learner's early education and long-term academic growth. These competencies included listening, speaking, reading, and writing, which together played a vital role in communication, critical thinking, and the ability to comprehend and express ideas. Researchers such as Lonigan, Burgess, and Phillips (2022) emphasized that children with strong language and literacy skills were more likely to thrive in classroom settings, participate meaningfully in peer interactions, and adapt successfully to various learning contexts. When nurtured early, these skills equipped learners with the tools needed to understand the world around them and succeed across academic disciplines.

In contrast, learners who entered school with poor literacy preparation often encountered difficulties in decoding words, understanding instructions, and following lessons. As highlighted by McConnell and colleagues (2023), persistent gaps in foundational language and literacy skills frequently resulted in delays that affected not only academic performance but also learners' self-esteem and engagement. According to UNESCO (2023), children who failed to attain reading fluency by age ten were at greater risk of long-term educational challenges and limited opportunities later in life. Without early intervention, low literacy levels could restrict access to further learning, reduce employment prospects, and hinder active participation in society.

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International educational models emphasized the significance of addressing literacy from the earliest years of schooling. For instance, Finland promoted child-centered learning environments that focused on exploratory language development. In Singapore, highly structured literacy programs supported learners in acquiring reading skills aligned with national standards. Similarly, Canada implemented inclusive early literacy frameworks that engaged families and communities in supporting children's academic readiness (Pelletier and Corter, 2020; OECD, 2021; OECD, 2022). These approaches consistently led to improved learning outcomes among young learners and served as models of excellence in foundational education.

In the local context, the Philippine Department of Education continued to stress the value of literacy development through its K to 12 curriculum reforms and initiatives like the Every Child A Reader Program. However, several studies indicated that many Filipino learners still faced substantial challenges in attaining the expected proficiency in reading and language. Garcia and colleagues (2023) reported that despite existing interventions, early-grade learners across the country continued to exhibit deficiencies in both comprehension and oral expression. This situation was further validated by the 2022 results of the Programme for International Student Assessment. In that assessment, only a quarter of fifteen-year-old Filipino learners demonstrated basic reading proficiency, and the country ranked among the lowest globally in reading performance (OECD, 2023; Innotech, 2023).

These national trends were reflected at the school level. Teachers at Tipolo Elementary School observed that many Grade One pupils struggled with fundamental language and literacy tasks, such as recognizing sounds, identifying letters, and forming simple sentences (Personal communication, March 2024). These skill gaps were believed to have originated during Grade One and carried over to early primary grades. In response, the present study was conceptualized to evaluate the language and literacy competencies of Grade One learners at Tipolo Elementary School. Specifically, the study aimed to assess the learners' receptive and expressive language, as well as their ability to recognize letter names, letter sounds, and rhyming words. It also sought to determine whether a significant relationship existed between language and literacy skills.

Through the data obtained, the researcher aimed to develop a Literacy Skills Enhancement Plan that would serve as a tool for curriculum development and instructional improvement. The ultimate goal of the study was to generate research-based recommendations that could support early intervention, strengthen teaching strategies, and encourage collaboration among teachers and parents. This initiative was envisioned to contribute to learners' academic progress and overall success in their educational journey.

## **Literature Review**

Early language development plays a crucial role in literacy acquisition, particularly in the primary years of education. Receptive language (the ability to understand words and language) and expressive language (the ability to use words and language) form the foundation of children's reading and writing abilities (Snow, 2006). According to Lonigan, Schatschneider, and Westberg (2008), children with well-developed oral language skills often show higher reading comprehension and academic success later in life. In the context of Philippine education, Reyes (2019) highlights the importance of strengthening mother tongue-based instruction to support both expressive and receptive language development. Similarly, the work of Dickinson and Tabors (2001) emphasized the strong relationship between language exposure in early classrooms and literacy growth. These findings stress the importance of assessing language skills as a basis for planning targeted interventions in Grade One learners.

Literacy development in the early grades includes key components such as letter recognition, phonemic awareness, and the ability to identify rhyming patterns. Piasta and Wagner (2010) found that letter-name knowledge is a significant predictor of later reading ability, while Anthony and Lonigan (2004) emphasized the critical role of phonological awareness, including rhyming, in early reading success. In the Philippine context, Garcia and Ocampo (2020) explored the challenges faced by Filipino students in acquiring basic literacy skills and recommended differentiated instruction to meet learners' needs. Moreover, Torgesen et al. (2006) demonstrated that early interventions targeting phonemic awareness can significantly improve literacy outcomes. As such, understanding learners' current performance in letter sounds, rhyming words, and letter names is essential for creating evidence-based literacy enhancement programs. According to Cabardo (2022), data-driven instruction anchored in assessment results leads to more effective teaching strategies and improved literacy performance among early graders.

## **Methodology**

This study utilized a descriptive-correlational research design to assess the language and literacy competencies of Grade One learners and examine potential relationships between these competencies and influencing factors. As noted by Creswell (2014), descriptive research systematically portrays a phenomenon as it naturally occurs, while correlational design investigates statistical associations between variables without experimental manipulation. This approach allowed the researcher to gather empirical data on learners' current abilities and identify trends relevant to early language and literacy development. The research was conducted at Tipolo Elementary School in Mandaue City, Cebu, during the School Year 2025–2026. The respondents included two Grade One teachers selected through purposive sampling based on their direct instructional engagement with the learners. These teachers

assessed a total of 100 Grade One pupils, ensuring an informed and contextually grounded evaluation of learners' skills based on daily classroom interaction and observation. Data were gathered using a teacher survey questionnaire adapted from the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Checklist, as prescribed in DepEd Order No. 33, s. 2014. The instrument comprised two main components: (1) Language Skills Assessment, divided into Receptive and Expressive Language, rated using a 5-point Likert scale; and (2) the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment, which evaluated Letter Sounds, Rhyming Words, and Letter Names. Each learner's performance was scored and classified using established adjectival ratings and benchmarks. This methodology ensured data were both quantitative and contextually relevant, forming a reliable basis for identifying instructional needs and formulating a literacy enhancement plan aligned with DepEd standards.

## Results

Table 1. Level of language skills of the learners in terms of receptive language

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	Points to a family member when asked to do so	3.76	1.25	High
2	Points to five body parts on himself when asked to do so	3.69	1.18	High
3	Points to five named pictured objects when asked to do so	3.84	1.08	High
4	Follows one-step instructions that include simple prepositions (e.g. in, on, under, etc.)	3.70	1.15	High
5	Follows two-step instructions that include simple prepositions	3.36	1.10	Moderate
	Aggregate Weighted Mean	3.67		
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		1.15	High

Table 1 presents the level of receptive language skills among Grade One learners based on five indicators. The results show that learners generally demonstrated a high level of receptive language ability, with an aggregate weighted mean of 3.67 and a standard deviation of 1.15. Most indicators, such as identifying body parts, family members, and pictured objects, received high verbal descriptions, indicating consistent comprehension of basic instructions and vocabulary. However, the lowest-rated indicator, "follows two-step instructions," had a weighted mean of 3.36, described as moderate, suggesting some learners experience difficulty processing more complex directions. Overall, learners exhibit strong but varied receptive skills.

Table 2. Level of language skills of the learners in terms of expressive language

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	Uses five to 20 recognizable words	3.92	1.05	High
2	Uses pronouns (e.g. I, me, <i>ako</i> , <i>akin</i> )	3.95	1.08	High
3	Uses two- to three-word verb-noun combinations (e.g., <i>hingi gatas</i> )	3.87	0.96	High
4	Names objects in pictures	4.10	1.20	High
5	Speaks in grammatically correct two- to three word/sentences	4.04	0.76	High
6	Asks "what" questions	3.97	0.99	High
7	Gives account of recent experiences (with prompting) in order of occurrence using past tense	3.76	0.98	High
	Aggregate Weighted Mean	3.94		
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		1.00	High

Table 2 shows the learners' expressive language skills across seven indicators, with results revealing an overall high level of expressive language ability. The aggregate weighted mean is 3.94, and the standard deviation is 1.00, indicating a strong and consistent performance. All indicators received a "High" verbal description, suggesting that learners are generally capable of using recognizable words, pronouns, and short sentences correctly. Notably, the highest score was for naming objects in pictures (WM = 4.10), while the lowest was for giving accounts of experiences using past tense (WM = 3.76), which, although still rated high, suggests an area for potential improvement in narrative skills.

**Table 3. Summary on the level of exposure of their child on the home numeracy experiences**

Components	WM	SD	Verbal Description
Receptive Language	3.67	1.15	High
Expressive Language	3.94	1.00	High
Grand Mean	3.81		High
Grand Standard Deviation		1.08	

Table 3 summarizes the overall level of language skills of the learners, combining both receptive and expressive language components. The data indicate that learners exhibit a high level of language proficiency, with a grand mean of 3.81 and a grand standard deviation of 1.08. Expressive language scored slightly higher (WM = 3.94) than receptive language (WM = 3.67), suggesting that learners are more confident in using language to communicate than in processing and following verbal cues. The consistently high ratings across both domains reflect strong foundational language development, although variability remains, as shown by the standard deviations.

**Table 4. Level of literacy skills of the learners in terms of letter sounds**

Level	Scoring Range	f	%
Advanced	8-10	29	29.00
Intermediate	4-7	52	52.00
Beginner	0-3	19	19.00
Total		100	100.00
	Mean		5.89
	St. Dev.		2.39

Table 4 presents the learners' literacy skill levels in terms of letter sounds. The results show that a majority of the learners (52%) fall under the Intermediate level, scoring between 4 to 7 points, while 29% are categorized as Advanced, and 19% remain at the Beginner level. The mean score is 5.89, indicating that most learners are developing their phonemic awareness but have not yet achieved full mastery. The standard deviation of 2.39 suggests moderate variability in learners' performance. These findings highlight the need for targeted instruction to help learners at the beginner level progress toward greater proficiency.

**Table 5. Level of literacy skills of the learners in terms of rhyming words**

Level	Scoring Range	f	%
Advanced	8-10	2	2.00
Intermediate	4-7	56	56.00
Beginner	0-3	42	42.00
Total		100	100.00
	Mean		3.80
	St. Dev.		2.02

Table 5 shows the learners' literacy skills in terms of rhyming words, a key component of phonological awareness. The results reveal that the majority (56%) are at the Intermediate level, while a significant portion (42%) are still at the Beginner level. Only 2% of learners reached the Advanced level. The mean score is 3.80, which is at the lower end of the intermediate range, and the standard deviation is 2.02, indicating noticeable variation in performance. These results suggest that many learners are still developing their ability to recognize rhyming patterns, highlighting the need for more focused instruction in this area.

Table 6. Level of literacy skills of the learners in terms of letter names

Level	Scoring Range	f	%
Advanced	8-10	30	30.00
Intermediate	4-7	63	63.00
Beginner	0-3	7	7.00
Total		100	100.00
	Mean		6.35
	St. Dev.		1.96

Table 6 presents the learners' literacy skills in terms of letter name recognition. The majority of learners (63%) are at the Intermediate level, followed by 30% who achieved an Advanced level, and only 7% classified as Beginners. The mean score is 6.35, indicating that learners, on average, demonstrate a developing to strong understanding of letter names. The standard deviation of 1.96 shows moderate variation in performance across the group. These results suggest that letter name recognition is a relative strength among learners, although continued reinforcement is needed to help those at the beginner level catch up.

Table 7. 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	0.575*	Moderate Positive	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant

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

Table 7 presents the correlation analysis between the language skills and literacy skills of the learners. The r-value of 0.575 indicates a moderate positive correlation, suggesting that as language skills improve, literacy skills tend to improve as well. The p-value of 0.000, which is less than the significance level of 0.05, leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ). This result confirms that there is a statistically significant relationship between learners' language and literacy skills. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening language development as a foundation for improving literacy outcomes in early education.

## Discussion

Based on the results of the study, the Grade One learners at Tipolo Elementary School demonstrated generally high levels of language skills in both receptive and expressive domains. Receptive language, with an aggregate weighted mean of 3.67, showed that most learners could understand basic instructions and identify objects or body parts when prompted. Expressive language skills were even stronger, with a weighted mean of 3.94, indicating that learners were able to use recognizable words, form simple sentences, and recount experiences when guided. These findings suggest that learners have a solid foundation in oral language, which is essential for supporting future reading and writing development. However, areas such as following two-step instructions and recounting experiences using past tense may require targeted reinforcement. In terms of literacy skills, the results revealed more varied performance. While learners performed relatively well in recognizing letter names (mean = 6.35), their skills in letter sounds (mean = 5.89) and especially rhyming words (mean = 3.80) were less developed. A significant number of learners remained at the beginner level for rhyming words, suggesting a need for focused instruction in phonological awareness. The correlation analysis further supports the connection between language and literacy, with a moderate positive correlation ( $r = 0.575$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that learners with stronger language skills tend to perform better in literacy tasks. This implies that enhancing oral language especially expressive and receptive abilities can positively impact literacy development. Therefore, literacy interventions should integrate both language skill-building and phonemic awareness strategies for more holistic learning outcomes.

## Conclusion

The study concluded that Grade One learners' language skills had been sufficiently developed for classroom learning, with receptive abilities outpacing expressive ones. Literacy, however, showed an uneven profile: letter-name knowledge had

been comparatively strong, letter-sound correspondence remained consolidating, and rhyming was the weakest phonological skill. Overall, stronger language abilities aligned with stronger literacy indicators, underscoring oral language as a primary lever for early reading. Accordingly, instruction worked best when it kept language at the center while systematically strengthening code-related skills through daily oral-language routines, short explicit phonics, targeted work on rhyming, and small-group, needs- based instruction with regular checks. Program-wise, the conclusions supported the Literacy Skills Enhancement Plan, which outlined a clear scope and sequence beginning with rhyme sensitivity, expanding to broader phonological tasks, and pairing these with tightly sequenced phonics and decodable practice operationalized via a quarterly screen–teach–recheck cycle, classroom libraries/decodables, teacher coaching, and simple home–school activities. Policy implications pointed to protected weekly time blocks for oral language, phonological awareness, and phonics; institutionalized quarterly benchmarking of key indicators; alignment with DepEd/ECCD standards; and prioritized professional development focused on language-rich instruction and foundational code teaching.

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