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Decoding Abilities that Affect the Reading Comprehension of Grade 2 Pupils in Selected Elementary Schools in Cabiao, Nueva Ecija

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine how decoding skills influence the reading comprehension of Grade 2 pupils in selected elementary schools in Cabiao, Nueva Ecija. The focus was on phonics and reading fluency, as these are closely associated with how children develop the ability to read and make sense of texts. The research used a descriptive–quantitative design. To gather data, the researcher made use of validated surveys and reading tests to check the pupils' level in decoding and in comprehension. Results showed that pupils reached a "Good" level in fluency but only a "Developing" level in phonics. However, the analysis revealed that phonics and fluency did not have a significant effect on pupils' reading comprehension. This suggests that understanding a text may also depend on other skills apart from these two. Results show that pupils could improve through more organized lessons in fluency and phonics. Consistent activities like letter–sound practice, blending drills, and oral reading can support faster word recognition and allow them to focus more on comprehension. This study emphasizes the vital role of balanced and structured decoding instruction in the early grades as a foundation for strong reading development. Future research is recommended to extend to additional grade levels, include a larger number of participants, and incorporate qualitative approaches. Greater focus on decoding skills such as prosody, automaticity, and self-correction may also provide deeper insights into strengthening reading comprehension.

Article Info

Keywords: Polytechnic University of the Philippines–Cabiao Campus, Bachelor in Elementary Education, Decoding Abilities, Reading Comprehension, Phonics, Reading Fluency

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INTRODUCTION

In order to succeed in school and throughout one's life, reading comprehension was a crucial ability. Nonetheless, students in the Philippines continue to face [many] difficulties in this area. Merely 24% of Filipino students were able to read at least Level 2 according to the 2022 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). This implies that they were able to gather information and comprehend the main idea of a brief document by using specific criteria. With an average reading score of 347 out of 81, the Philippines came in at number 76, far below the OECD average of 476. These findings demonstrate how urgent it is to raise Filipino students' reading proficiency, particularly in the early grades when the foundational skills of literacy are being formed. Phonics and fluency are two crucial components of reading instruction.Phonics teaches students how letters and sounds combine to form words, and fluency—the ability to read fluently, accurately, and expressively—helps them understand what they read. With parental guidance, these abilities can be developed via consistent, pleasurable practice both at home and in the classroom.

Decoding skills are known to be crucial, but little is known about how they impact young Filipino students' comprehension of what they read. Because the majority of earlier research focused on older [children], it was challenging to determine how phonics and fluency improved reading for younger [children]. Other schools had to be built in places like Cabiao, Nueva Ecija, where there might not have been as many before. Actions taken early on might have made a big difference.

This study examined the effects of two types of decoding skills, phonics and reading fluency, on second graders' text comprehension in a number of Cabiao, Nueva Ecija schools. Helping teachers develop instructional strategies that aligned with initiatives like the Department of Education's Bawat Bata Bumabasa program and the MATATAG Curriculum, which assisted [children] in learning to read and write, was the aim. Performing this research as third-year BEED students will help you better understand the literacy difficulties your students are facing and come up with workable solutions. This is one aspect of the effort that needs to be made to improve the caliber of education and training.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The foundational elements of learning to read are phonics and reading fluency. Children can recognize words more quickly and automatically when they receive structured phonics lessons and adequate practice reading fluently, according to research by Castles, Rastle, and Nation (2018) and Hudson, Lane, and Pullen (2020).

Repeated oral reading practice can increase fluency, according to Rasinski et al. (2017), and children who comprehend the relationship between letters and sounds are able to read more accurately and with greater confidence. Despite these advantages, research indicates that reading success cannot be entirely explained by decoding alone. According to Gunnerud et al. (2022), a child's ability to understand what they read is greatly influenced by their vocabulary, prior experiences, and language comprehension. This is consistent with Hoover and Gough's (1990) Simple View of Reading, which holds that language comprehension results from both decoding and understanding. To put it another way, decoding is crucial, but it is insufficient to guarantee complete understanding. According to the results of the Philippines' 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), it is imperative to improve early reading abilities. The Philippines ranked 76th out of 81 countries, with only 24 percent of students achieving at least Level 2 in reading. These findings highlight how urgently early reading instruction needs to be improved. This conclusion is also supported by local studies. Second-graders who took part in guided reading exercises and structured phonics lessons demonstrated increased confidence and better academic performance, according to Hernandez (2019) and Dela Cruz (2020). The fact that many kids still have trouble understanding what they read suggests that full comprehension requires more than just word decoding. Because children from low-income families frequently have less access to books, less parental support, and fewer opportunities to practice reading outside of school, their social and economic circumstances also play a significant role. Variations in teacher preparation and the use of reading programs such as the MATATAG Curriculum and Bawat Bata Bumabasa, however, can also affect how effective instruction is. Together, these components demonstrate the need for a more comprehensive and equitable approach to reading instruction. Decoding is still crucial, but it should be used in conjunction with comprehension techniques and tailored to the needs of Filipino students. Although decoding skills are widely

acknowledged to be crucial, little is known about how they impact young Filipino students' comprehension of what they read. It was challenging to determine how phonics and fluency improved reading for younger [children] because the majority of earlier research focused on older [children]. More schools had to be built in places like Cabiao, Nueva Ecija, where there might not have been as many before. Early intervention might have made a big difference. This study examined how second graders in several schools in Cabiao, Nueva Ecija, understood texts in relation to two types of decoding skills: phonics and reading fluency. The objective was to assist educators in developing instructional strategies that aligned with initiatives such as the MATATAG Curriculum, which assisted [children] in learning to read and write, and the Department of Education's Bawat Bata Bumabasa program. This research will help you, as third-year BEED students, better understand the literacy difficulties your students face and come up with workable solutions. This is a part of what needs to be done to improve the standard of instruction and learning.

METHODOLOGY

Our demonstration method aims to clearly share the research design, findings, and real-life implications of our study on how decoding skills affect reading comprehension in second-grade pupils. We've organized it into key steps to make the process easy to follow and the results meaningful for teaching and learning.

1. Objective Definition

The main goal of this study was to look into how decoding skills—like phonics and reading fluency—affect the reading comprehension of Grade 2 pupils. It tried to highlight how important these skills are in helping young readers understand what they read. The research looked at common problems such as limited word recognition, wrong decoding, and not reading expressively. To fix these issues, the study stressed the importance of structured phonics lessons and regular oral reading practice to improve fluency. The effectiveness and teaching value of decoding were measured using things like weighted mean analysis, correlation tests, and feedback from teachers.

2. Scenario Development

We made realistic classroom situations that show the usual decoding and comprehension problems Grade 2 students face, especially those who are still learning at the instructional and irritation levels. These scenarios came from real classroom practices where teachers used focused activities like phonics drills, matching sounds to letters, and oral reading exercises to help students get better at reading. Each scenario was designed to fit the learning needs of early graders and to get them more involved. These methods also match national reading programs like Bawat Bata Bumabasa and support the basic literacy goals of the MATATAG Curriculum.

3. Setup and Configuration

The research was carried out in seven primary schools located in Cabiao, Nueva Ecija. A total of 118 Grade 2 students were chosen via quota sampling, according to their comprehension levels determined by the "Oplan: Bawat Batang Kabyawenyo Bumabasa" Pre-Reading Assessment. To evaluate decoding skills, the researchers employed validated Likert-scale questionnaires, whereas comprehension data were obtained from official school records. Classroom educators facilitated the implementation of the tools. Prior to the major data collection, the instruments were pilot-tested and validated to ensure dependability. The Jamovi statistical program produced Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.785 for reading fluency and 0.831 for phonics, signifying strong internal consistency. Crucial clearances were obtained from Dr. Ronaldo A. Pozon, Division Superintendent (December 4, 2024), Dr. Noemi C. Sagcal, District Supervisor (January 9, 2025), and the principals of the participating schools. The data collection complied with ethical norms, including parental agreement and institutional approval, to ensure the privacy and safety of all student participants.

4. Step-by-Step Execution

The research adhered to a coherent and systematic framework. The study commenced by outlining the background, aims, and significance pertaining to early literacy development. The fundamental findings were emphasized, concentrating on the definition, measurement, and correlation of decoding skills—specifically phonics and reading fluency—with reading comprehension. Educators engaged in the process by corroborating the outcomes and providing classroom insights. The study's recommendations were exemplified through

activities such as phonics blending exercises, sound-symbol matching, and repeated oral reading procedures, illustrating their applicability in daily teaching practice.

5. Data Collection

This study made use of both primary and secondary data. The main data came from the students' answers to a survey prepared by the researcher to measure their decoding skills. Meanwhile, the secondary data was obtained from the district's "Oplan: Bawat Batang Kabyawenyo Bumabasa" pre-reading assessment, which evaluated the students' ability to understand what they read. With the assistance of the school's teachers, the process was conducted to maintain accuracy and uphold ethical standards. The analysis was done using the Jamovi software, which calculated the weighted mean scores for decoding performance, identified the statistical significance through p-values, and assessed the strength of the relationship between variables using r-values.

6. Evaluation and Iteration

The data analysis revealed important insights and showed areas where teaching methods could be better. Even though the pupils' overall decoding skills were rated as "Good," the statistics showed no significant connection between decoding skills—like phonics and reading fluency—and reading comprehension ($p = 0.80$). This means that even if students have some decoding skills, those skills might still be inconsistent or not developed enough to really help them understand the text. Because of this, the study recommended strengthening phonics lessons and adding regular activities focused on improving reading fluency. It also suggested tweaking teaching approaches to better highlight how decoding supports comprehension, so the findings can be more helpful for teachers and literacy advocates.

7. Conclusion and Next Steps

At the end of the study, the researchers pointed out how helpful this could be for teaching and for helping kids get better at reading. Even though the pupils were reasonably fluent and could use phonics to decode words, these abilities were insufficient to greatly improve their reading comprehension. To address this issue, the study suggested doable tactics like giving students leveled reading materials, holding frequent blending drills, and putting in place supervised oral reading sessions. According to the study, schools should collaborate with universities and non-governmental organizations to offer additional support, such as training sessions, follow-up assistance, and reading consultations, to children who are still having difficulties. Over time, these programs seek to enhance fundamental reading comprehension.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

According to the study's findings, Grade 2 students did well in decoding overall, with reading fluency standing out as their strongest ability (weighted mean of 3.03). However, with a lower mean score of 2.51, their phonics proficiency was still in its early stages. These results align with past studies (Dela Cruz, 2020; Hernandez, 2019) that highlighted the importance of combining the development of fluency and phonics to build a solid basis for reading comprehension in the early grades. Despite the positive decoding results, the analysis showed no significant relationship between decoding abilities and reading comprehension ($p = 0.80$). To put it another way, although the students could read words and show some fluency, their comprehension of what they read was not adequately supported by these abilities because they were not fully developed or automatic. This result could have arisen for a number of reasons. Correct word pronunciation is only one aspect of understanding a text. Vocabulary, past knowledge, and language proficiency are all equally significant in creating meaning from print, according to the Simple View of Reading (Hoover & Gough, 1990). Even if students can read the words correctly, their comprehension of the passage may be hampered by a small vocabulary or inadequate prior knowledge. Another factor is the literacy environment at home. Students who lack books at home, speak little orally, or have little parental guidance frequently find it difficult to improve their comprehension abilities. These circumstances might reduce the efficacy of reading programs that are taught in classrooms. Additionally, teacher practices and curriculum requirements may have had an effect on the results. Higher-order skills like inference and critical thinking were often required for the comprehension tests, despite the fact that decoding instruction was offered. If these skills had not been consistently included

in the curriculum, students might not have been sufficiently prepared to meet the test requirements.
The misalignment between instruction and assessment may account for the study's lack of a significant correlation between decoding and comprehension.
The findings demonstrate that, despite its importance, decoding alone is insufficient to guarantee strong comprehension. It is necessary to implement a thorough reading program that incorporates phonics, fluency, vocabulary, prior knowledge, and comprehension strategies. Schools can support students' long-term reading skill development with this method.

CONCLUSION

The study found that the students were good at both phonics and fluency, but fluency was really the only skill that stood out as strong. Still, neither skill had a big effect on how well they understood what they read. This shows that just being able to read words correctly isn't always enough to really make sense of a text—especially when the skill isn't automatic or backed up by good comprehension strategies. Because of this, there's a clear need for focused and well-planned teaching in both phonics and fluency, with regular, guided practice instead of just general reading activities. Building these specific skills is especially important for younger learners, who do best with structured, consistent, and carefully planned reading support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are certain limitations to this study. First, a sample of 118 Grade 2 kids was selected from certain schools in Cabiao, Nueva Ecija. Although the results are useful, not all pupils in the region or the country are fairly represented in them. A bigger and more varied sample might yield more comprehensive conclusions. Second, the study's primary focus was on quantitative data. Even though statistical methods like weighted mean analysis and correlation tests produced quantifiable results, they were unable to identify the underlying reasons why students performed poorly. This study might have missed some aspects of the students' reading development because qualitative inputs like classroom observations and interviews were not included.

Furthermore, it ignored other important components like vocabulary, teaching strategies, and literacy support at home in favor of concentrating mostly on two decoding skills: phonics and fluency. Future studies should use a larger sample of students from different grade levels and schools and integrate quantitative and qualitative data to provide a more complete understanding of reading development. One of the most advanced techniques for determining which skills best predict comprehension is regression analysis. One can gain a more thorough and practical understanding of the role decoding plays in reading comprehension by examining these topics.

Instructors can help students improve their reading fluency and phonics skills by using enjoyable yet structured activities.

For example, they could set aside a certain amount of time each week for repeated oral reading assignments that are suitable for the students' current proficiency level, letter-sound correspondence, and blending exercises.

In a "Reading Progress Notebook," students can also log newly learned words and monitor their development over time. To make learning more interesting, they can take part in exercises that increase accuracy, speed, and expression, such as reader's theater, echo reading, or word family games. On the other hand, schools can work with nearby universities, organizations that promote literacy, and volunteer organizations to offer extra reading assistance, especially for students who have reading difficulties. In the future, researchers might work with larger student groups that span grade levels to examine the smaller components of decoding, such as prosody, visual word recognition, and reading automaticity. They could also use qualitative methods like focused reading interviews and classroom observations to get a deeper understanding of the connection between decoding and reading comprehension.

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