

The Effects of Vocabulary Skills on the Reading Comprehension of Grade 2 Pupils in Selected Elementary Schools in Cabiao, Nueva Ecija

Janna Mirella G. Turla¹, Hellah Pearl P. Escobido², Annabelle P. Manlang³, Joana P. Mendoza⁴, Allysia Shane O. Samson⁵, Ms. Jenny Q. Estingor⁶

¹²³⁴⁵⁶Bachelor in Elementary Education, Polytechnic University of the Philippines – Cabiao Campus, Nueva Ecija
jmgurla@gmail.com, escobidohellah69@gmail.com, anabellemanalang1@gmail.com, mendozajoana1919@gmail.com, samsonallysia@gmail.com, jgestingor@pup.edu.ph

ORCID: 0009-0004-6769-0410, 0009-0000-8201-9861, 0009-0005-4683-5024, 0009-0006-1257-7845, 0009-0007-2240-6596, 0000-0003-2068-3251

Abstract	Article Info
<p>This study examined the impact of vocabulary skills on the reading comprehension of Grade 2 pupils in selected elementary schools in Cabiao, Nueva Ecija. Specifically, it examined independent vocabulary awareness, support, and application, and how these factors relate to comprehension levels. Using a descriptive quantitative design with quota sampling, the researchers assessed 114 pupils identified as struggling readers through validated questionnaires and secondary reading comprehension data. Results showed that independent vocabulary awareness, support, and application were rated as "Good," while overall reading comprehension remained at the instructional level. Statistical analysis using Pearson's r indicated no significant correlation between vocabulary skills and reading comprehension. The findings suggest that although vocabulary development supports reading readiness, it does not predict comprehension outcomes in isolation. This highlights the need for varied instructional approaches addressing decoding skills, fluency, and contextual reading strategies.</p>	<p>Keywords: <i>Polytechnic University of the Philippines–Cabiao Campus, Bachelor in Elementary Education, Vocabulary Skills Reading Comprehension, Independent Vocabulary Awareness, Vocabulary support and Application</i></p>

INTRODUCTION

The most important part of reading comprehension is being able to recognize, understand, and use new words in context. As students learn more about what words mean, they are better able to understand the ideas in texts, answer comprehension questions, and take part in academic discussions. A lot of Filipino students still have trouble with this. Out of 81 countries that took the 2022 PISA test, the Philippines came in 76th. Only 24% of students could read at or above the minimum level of skill.

This poor score means that early graders need to learn more words. Students can better understand texts when they have a larger vocabulary. They can figure out how words are related, guess what words mean based on the context, and use new words in both writing and speaking. Elleman (2017) says that knowing a lot of words helps students understand what they read and lets them read harder books. Hernandez (2019) also said that students who know a lot of words do better in reading and other subjects. It's hard for students to understand important ideas, follow plots, and come to conclusions when they don't know enough about language. Research done in the area supports the idea that learning new words is very important in elementary school. According to Garcia and Dela Cruz (2020), teaching that is relevant to the culture helps kids learn and use new words better. Santos (2018) says that teaching methods that involve the students, like storytelling, help them remember more of what they learn and stay interested in it. These results show that teaching vocabulary in a planned way is important for helping kids learn to read and write, and it should be a part of regular classroom work.

There is still a lack of research on vocabulary skills at the Grade 2 level, particularly in public primary schools in rural areas such as Cabiao, Nueva Ecija, despite the growing understanding of the importance of vocabulary for comprehension. It is important to know how students learn, use, and apply vocabulary in this situation when you help them with their reading problems. The point of this study is to see how well some second graders at Cabiao Elementary School can read and understand what they read.

A third-year student in the Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) program says that the first step in figuring out what problems young students have when they try to understand written materials is to study reading comprehension. The purpose of this study is to find out what specific reading comprehension issues elementary school students are having. The results will be used to create effective teaching methods that are based on research. This study shows that future teachers need to do more than just meet academic standards; they also need to make sure that the quality of teaching and learning is better. The study looks at things that have to do with literacy to give students useful information that will help them read better and do better in school.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies underscore the central role of vocabulary in reading development (Cain & Oakhill, 2016; Rasinski, 2014). It has been demonstrated that contextual learning, morphological awareness, and explicit instruction all significantly aid in the acquisition of new vocabulary and its meaning (Elleman, 2017; Sedita, 2018). Studies conducted in their own communities by Garcia and Dela Cruz (2020) and Santos (2018) demonstrated the effectiveness of contextualized tactics like interactive exercises and storytelling.

Despite the strong theoretical backing for this, other research, such as Li et al. (2020), has demonstrated that without additional decoding and fluency instruction, vocabulary skills alone are insufficient to predict comprehension. By examining whether vocabulary proficiency significantly influences how well struggling early-grade readers in the Philippines comprehend what they read, this study contributes to the discussion. In the Philippines, this is crucial because national assessments reveal that pupils perform poorly on reading assessments. Teaching vocabulary to children is an easy way to support initiatives like the Matatag Curriculum and Bawat Bata Bumabasa while also helping them learn to read and write.

METHODOLOGY

Our demonstration methodology is designed to effectively showcase the research design, findings, and practical applications of our study on vocabulary skills and their effects on reading comprehension among Grade 2 pupils. The approach is structured into the following key phases:

1. Objective Definition

The main goal of this study was to determine how vocabulary skills affect the reading comprehension abilities of Grade 2 pupils. It aimed to demonstrate the importance of both independent vocabulary awareness and instructional vocabulary support in enhancing comprehension outcomes. The study addressed challenges such as limited word knowledge, poor retention, and difficulties in understanding texts and proposed targeted solutions, including structured vocabulary activities and contextual learning strategies. Measurable success was defined through statistical testing of correlation, meaningful interpretation of comprehension scores, and validation from teachers, who confirmed the practical relevance of the findings to classroom instruction and early literacy development.

2. Scenario Development

We created classroom scenarios that mirror the problems faced by Grade 2 pupils in Cabiao, Nueva Ecija—especially those reading at the frustration and instructional levels. These scenarios were part of a study exploring how vocabulary skills affect reading comprehension, conducted in selected schools under the PUP Cabiao Campus extension program. Based on real classroom activities, the scenarios addressed varying levels of vocabulary awareness and comprehension. Teachers observed that while students could recall and pronounce new words, they struggled to apply them in context. These efforts supported both classroom practice and national reading goals through DepEd initiatives like *Bawat Bata Bumabasa*, highlighting the need for effective vocabulary instruction in early grades.

3. Setup and Configuration

Seven elementary schools in Cabiao, Nueva Ecija, provided classrooms for the event. Quota sampling chose 114 Grade 2 students based on their reading comprehension levels from the "Oplan: Bawat Batang Kabyawenyo" Pre-Reading Assessment. Validated Likert-scale questionnaires measured vocabulary skills, and school-provided reading scores measured comprehension. Teachers assisted with classroom administration. All technique components were pre-tested during pilot testing and validated, and district assessment data provided context. Jamovi statistical program calculated reliability indices using Cronbach's Alpha (0.868 for independent vocabulary awareness and 0.840 for vocabulary support and application). Dr. Ronaldo A. Pozon, Division Superintendent of Nueva Ecija (December 4, 2024), Dr. Noemi C. Sagcal, District Supervisor (January 9, 2025), and all participating school principals permitted this study. Data was collected with parental agreement and school approval to protect student privacy.

4. Step-by-Step Execution

A logical sequence was used to convey the research. The introduction explained the study's backdrop, goals, and significance to early literacy development. The study's main findings, including independent vocabulary awareness and vocabulary support, and application definition, measurement, and relationship to reading comprehension, were then described. The event included teachers to validate and share insights. Vocabulary journals, sticky notes for unfamiliar words, visual dictionaries, concept mapping, pre-teaching of key terms, and subject-specific vocabulary showed how the study's recommendations could be applied.

5. Data Collection

Data were acquired from primary and secondary sources. Student responses to the researcher-made vocabulary skills questionnaire and district pre-reading assessment instrument reading comprehension scores were primary and secondary data, respectively. Teacher facilitation ensured accurate and ethical student responses throughout data collection. We collected weighted mean scores, r-values for correlation analysis, and p-values for statistical significance.

6. Evaluation and Iteration

The correlation analysis revealed no significant relationship between vocabulary skills and reading comprehension. Specifically, Independent Vocabulary Awareness and comprehension showed $r = 0.241$, $p = 0.802$; Vocabulary Support and Application and comprehension showed $r = 0.348$, $p = 0.722$; and overall

vocabulary skills and comprehension had $r = 0.294$, $p = 0.762$. The results suggest that other factors like phonics, background knowledge, and reading fluency may play a greater role in reading comprehension among struggling learners.

7. Conclusion and Next Steps

The demonstration concluded with reflections on the benefits of the research and its instructional implications. While vocabulary skills such as Independent Vocabulary Awareness and Vocabulary Support and Application were rated “Good,” the findings revealed no statistically significant correlation between vocabulary and reading comprehension. This suggests that vocabulary, while foundational, must be paired with other literacy elements such as decoding, fluency, and inferencing strategies. Clear and actionable recommendations emerged, including a weekly “Word Power Routine,” Vocabulary Journals, and Word Mapping Exercises to reinforce vocabulary in context. The report also recommends collaboration with NGOs and academic institutions to support follow-up interventions, teacher training, and targeted reading programs for struggling learners in early grades.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The study found that Grade 2 pupils demonstrated “Good” levels of vocabulary skills, particularly in Independent Vocabulary Awareness (WM = 2.95) and Vocabulary Support and Application (WM = 2.74). Pupils showed high confidence in pronouncing new words and sharing vocabulary with others, but struggled with independently discovering and applying new words in various contexts. Despite these encouraging vocabulary results, the statistical analysis revealed no significant correlation between vocabulary skills and reading comprehension levels ($r = 0.294$, $p = 0.762$). Most pupils remained within the Instructional reading level, with some schools falling under Frustration, indicating a continued need for targeted support. These findings suggest that while vocabulary development is important, it alone may not predict comprehension outcomes. This aligns with the conclusions of Li et al. (2020) and Rasinski (2014), who emphasized that vocabulary must be paired with decoding, fluency, and text-based inferencing to meaningfully impact reading comprehension. Teacher interviews further supported the data, noting that although learners could recall and use vocabulary in guided settings, many lacked strategies to transfer this knowledge across subjects or use it independently. The study highlights the need for integrated, strategic vocabulary instruction within a broader framework of literacy development.

CONCLUSION

The results showed that while pupils demonstrated strong vocabulary skills, neither independent vocabulary awareness nor support significantly affected their reading comprehension. This suggests that vocabulary alone is not enough to improve understanding. Instead, it must be taught alongside decoding, fluency, and inference strategies. The study highlights the need for structured and practical instruction rather than relying solely on vocabulary exposure or awareness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers should adopt weekly routines like Vocabulary Mapping to introduce key words across subjects. Tools such as Vocabulary Journals and Context Clue Games can help reinforce vocabulary use and retention. Schools are encouraged to partner with universities and NGOs to support reading initiatives. Future researchers may explore vocabulary skills using varied methods, grade levels, or larger samples to deepen understanding of their impact on comprehension.

REFERENCES

- [1] Cain, K., & Oakhill, J. (2016). *Children’s comprehension problems in oral and written language: A cognitive perspective*. The Guilford Press.
- [2] Elleman, A. M. (2017). Examining the impact of inference instruction on the literal and inferential comprehension of skilled and less skilled readers: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 109(6), 761–781. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000180>

- [3] Garcia, C. F., & Dela Cruz, J. M. (2020). Enhancing vocabulary retention among Grade 2 pupils through culturally relevant instruction. *Philippine Journal of Basic Education*, 42(1), 33–45.
- [4] Hernandez, R. T. (2019). Vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension performance of Grade School pupils. *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 7(2), 88–95.
- [5] Moats, L. C. (2020). *Speech to print: Language essentials for teachers* (3rd ed.). Brookes Publishing.
- [6] Li, M., Wang, Y., & Luo, Y. (2020). The relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension: Evidence from Chinese primary EFL learners. *Reading and Writing*, 33(4), 897–918. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-019-09987-6>
- [7] Rasinski, T. V. (2014). Vocabulary instruction that works. *The Reading Teacher*, 67(7), 547–550. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1243>
- [8] Santos, M. C. (2018). Storytelling as a tool for vocabulary development among Grade 2 learners. *Journal of Philippine Education Research*, 6(1), 12–19.
- [9] Sedita, J. (2018). Effective vocabulary instruction for students with reading difficulties. *Keys to Literacy*. <https://keystoliteracy.com>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researchers thank God for His help and guidance during this study. We want to extend our gratitude to the Polytechnic University of the Philippines – Cabisao Campus, their adviser, Dr. Jenny Q. Estingor, and the panelists, Engr. Fernando F. Estingor, MSIT, Prof. Criselda P. Coronado, MAEd, and Ms. May M. Galang, MAEd. Thank you also to the instrument validators: Mr. Ville Andrei M. Villano, Ms. Dina Grace T. Magnaye, Ms. Kathline Ventura, Ms. Princess Charlyn M. Bayani, Ms. Angelica Mae Casantusan, Mr. Renato E. Apa-ap, Ms. Digna M. Soliman, and Ms. Carmelita F. Sebastian. Thank you to the principals, teachers, and staff of San Fernando Sur Elementary School, Cabisao Central Elementary School, Maligaya Elementary School, Jose Rico Elementary School, San Roque Elementary School, Sta. Rita Elementary School, Concepcion Elementary School, and the Grade 2 students who participated. Finally, a big thank you to their families, classmates, and friends for always being there for them.