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

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Abstract

This study investigates the effects of morphological awareness on the reading comprehension of Grade 2 pupils in selected elementary schools in Cabiao, Nueva Ecija. It specifically examines two components, morphological curiosity and morphological analysis, and their influence on early literacy outcomes. Using a descriptive quantitative design with validated questionnaires and comprehension assessments, the study found that only morphological analysis demonstrated a statistically significant relationship with reading comprehension. This finding highlights the importance of explicit instruction in analyzing root words and affixes to enhance decoding skills and comprehension. The novelty of the study lies in situating morphological awareness not only as a literacy skill but also as an instructional management strategy that strengthens institutional literacy programs and supports sustainable interventions. By emphasizing how morphology-based instruction can complement national policies such as DepEd's Bawat Bata Bumabasa and the Matatag Curriculum, the research demonstrates its practical relevance at both classroom and policy levels. It further contributes to educational management by proposing the integration of work-integrated pedagogy and structured instructional routines to address gaps in early reading comprehension. The results provide a basis for embedding morphological routines in classroom practice, teacher training, and institutional programs, positioning morphology-based approaches as a foundation for literacy reform and management-driven educational innovation.

Article Info

Keywords: Polytechnic University of the Philippines – Cabiao Campus; Bachelor of Elementary Education; Morphological Awareness; Reading Comprehension; Morphological Curiosity; Morphological Analysis; Institutional Literacy Programs; Instructional Management; Work-Integrated Pedagogy

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INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension remains a pressing challenge in the Philippines, as reflected in the 2022 PISA results, where the country ranked 76th of 81 participating nations and only 24% of students reached minimum proficiency in reading. While national initiatives such as Bawat Bata Bumabasa and the Matatag Curriculum aim to address literacy gaps, there is limited research focusing on early-grade morphological awareness in the Philippine context. Morphological awareness, the ability to recognize and manipulate the smallest units of meaning in words, is widely recognized as a key predictor of reading comprehension (Levesque et al., 2017; Enderby et al., 2021). However, explicit instruction in morphology remains underutilized in primary classrooms, and most existing studies prioritize upper-grade learners rather than pupils in Grades 1 and 2 (Silawana et al., 2023).

Addressing this gap is essential because young learners benefit greatly from early exposure to word-formation processes. A solid foundation in morphological analysis not only supports vocabulary growth and word recognition but also strengthens overall comprehension. Conversely, lack of morphological instruction may limit children's ability to decode unfamiliar words, leading to persistent difficulties in reading fluency and comprehension (Apel & Henbest, 2016). Understanding the role of morphological curiosity and analysis among Grade 2 pupils is therefore critical for designing targeted interventions that align with both classroom practice and institutional literacy policies.

This study contributes to the discourse on literacy management by examining how morphological awareness influences reading comprehension among Grade 2 pupils in Cabiao, Nueva Ecija. By generating localized data, it supports evidence-based instructional strategies that can inform both teachers' classroom practices and school-level literacy management programs. Moreover, its findings can guide policymakers in embedding morphology-focused instruction into institutional frameworks, thereby strengthening early literacy outcomes and preparing Filipino learners for improved performance in national and international assessments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review shows that morphological awareness, especially the ability to break down root words and affixes, is essential for helping early-grade students understand what they read. Morphological curiosity may make people more interested in words, but it doesn't have much of an effect on its own. Levesque et al. (2017) and Deacon et al. (2016) are two studies that found that people who are good at morphology tend to do better in reading. On the other hand, Kearns (2019) and other researchers have said that curiosity alone does not have a significant effect on understanding. There is evidence in the literature that structured morphological instruction, like affix games and journals, can help improve reading skills. This is especially relevant in the Philippines, where national assessments consistently reveal low reading performance among early-grade learners. For instance, results from the SEA-PLM (2019) and the Phil-IRI (2021) indicate that many Grade 2 and 3 pupils struggle with comprehension. Recent local studies (e.g., Gonzales & Custodio, 2020; Malipot, 2022) further highlight the importance of explicit vocabulary and morphology-based instruction in addressing these literacy gaps. By situating morphological awareness within the Philippine context, this study underscores its alignment with national initiatives such as Bawat Bata Bumabasa (3Bs Initiative) and the Matatag Curriculum, positioning it as a foundational approach to strengthening early literacy.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study outlines the systematic procedures followed to investigate the effects of morphological awareness on the reading comprehension of Grade 2 pupils. It presents the research design, participants, instruments, data gathering process, and methods of data analysis used to arrive at valid and reliable findings.

1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to examine the relationship between morphological awareness and reading comprehension among Grade 2 pupils. This design was

appropriate since it allowed the researchers to describe pupils' performance in both areas and to determine whether a significant relationship exists between the two variables.

2. Participants

The participants consisted of 114 Grade 2 pupils selected through quota sampling from seven elementary schools in Cabiao, Nueva Ecija, namely: Concepcion Elementary School, Maligaya Elementary School, San Fernando Sur Elementary School, Jose Rico Cruz Elementary School, San Roque Elementary School, Cabiao Central School, and Sta. Rita Elementary School. The sample was determined using results from the district-led Oplan: Bawat Batang Kabyawenyo Pre-Reading Assessment, which identified learners at frustration, instructional, and independent reading levels.

3. Instruments

Research instruments were used in the study, Morphological Awareness Questionnaire a researcher-made and validated used in measuring two dimensions: morphological curiosity ($\alpha = 0.840$) and morphological analysis ($\alpha = 0.853$). Also, reading comprehension scores obtained from the district-administered pre-reading assessment tool, which served as the measure of comprehension levels. The instruments were pilot-tested and validated by Master Teachers and Grade 2 teachers before full administration. Reliability indices were computed using the Jamovi statistical program, and Cronbach's Alpha confirmed strong internal consistency.

4. Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, formal permissions were secured from the Division of Nueva Ecija (Dr. Ronaldo A. Pozon, Superintendent, December 4, 2024), the District Supervisor (Dr. Noemi C. Sagcal, January 9, 2025), and all participating school principals. The study adhered to ethical standards for research with children. Written parental consent was also obtained to ensure ethical compliance. Data collection was conducted in classroom settings with the assistance of teachers, who facilitated questionnaire administration and monitored student responses. Confidentiality of pupil data was observed at all times, and responses were used solely for research purposes.

5. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (weighted mean) to summarize the pupils' performance and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (Pearson r) to determine the strength and significance of the relationship between morphological awareness and reading comprehension. Results showed that morphological analysis correlated significantly with reading comprehension ($r = 0.777$, $p = 0.008$), while morphological curiosity did not have a significant effect ($p = 0.170$).

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The study found that Grade 2 students demonstrated good levels of morphological awareness, particularly in identifying and breaking down root words. Morphological analysis had a weighted mean of 2.92 and showed a strong correlation with reading comprehension ($r = 0.777$, $p = 0.008$), confirming that learners who can effectively analyze word structures achieve stronger comprehension. Morphological curiosity, on the other hand, did not show a significant effect on comprehension ($p = 0.170$). This may be because curiosity reflects interest and motivation to explore words rather than direct analytical skills; while it can foster engagement, it may not immediately translate into measurable comprehension gains at the Grade 2 level, where decoding and structural analysis are still more critical predictors of reading success.

These findings echo international studies (Enderby et al., 2021; Levesque et al., 2017) that emphasize morphology as a core predictor of comprehension. However, compared with higher-performing systems such as Singapore and Finland, where early morphological instruction is systematically embedded, Filipino Grade 2 pupils continue to lag in comprehension levels. This aligns with the 2022 PISA results, where only 24% of Filipino students reached minimum proficiency in reading, underscoring the urgency of strengthening early literacy foundations.

Moreover, most pupils in the study performed at instructional or frustration levels of comprehension, highlighting the need for targeted interventions. This supports the objectives of national literacy programs such

as Bawat Bata Bumabasa and the Matatag Curriculum, which both advocate for early, skills-based literacy instruction. By underscoring the predictive role of morphological analysis, the study provides evidence for integrating explicit morphology instruction into classroom practices, school-level instructional management, and institutional literacy policies, thereby enhancing teacher strategies, improving literacy programs, and ultimately contributing to stronger reading outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The results showed that both morphological curiosity and analysis were present in students, but only morphological analysis had a direct, significant effect on how well they understood what they read. This means that teaching students about affixes and root words is very important for helping them read better at a young age. However, the overall link between morphological awareness and reading comprehension was not statistically significant. This shows how important it is to teach specific things or targeted instruction instead of just being interested or aware.

Beyond classroom instruction, these results carry broader implications for educational management. Teacher training programs should integrate strategies for embedding morphological instruction in daily lessons, ensuring that early-grade teachers are equipped to develop word analysis skills systematically. Curriculum design must provide structured opportunities for pupils to practice morphological skills alongside comprehension activities, rather than treating them as separate competencies. Finally, assessment practices should move beyond surface-level word recognition to include measures of students' ability to analyze and manipulate word parts, enabling schools to monitor literacy growth more effectively. By aligning teaching strategies, curriculum frameworks, and assessment tools, institutions can strengthen literacy outcomes and support the objectives of national programs such as Bawat Bata Bumabasa and the Matatag Curriculum.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers should use tools like the *Morpho-Mastery Routine* to teach and use one affix each week as part of their weekly reading routines. To help with vocabulary and decoding, morphology discovery journals and interactive affix games such as the *Prefix-Suffix Match-Up* can also be incorporated to make learning more engaging. Beyond classroom practice, schools should collaborate with colleges, universities, and NGOs to encourage students to read more widely and meaningfully.

To expand the impact of these interventions, teacher training modules on morphological instruction should be developed so that educators are equipped with systematic strategies for embedding morphology into daily reading lessons. Integrating these approaches into DepEd literacy programs such as *Bawat Bata Bumabasa* and the *Matatag Curriculum* will ensure alignment with national priorities in strengthening early literacy. In addition, the use of digital or technology-assisted morphology tools such as interactive apps, online affix games, and AI-based reading platforms can enhance learner engagement and reflect the growing role of educational technology. Finally, researchers in the future should investigate the various roles of morphological curiosity and analysis by utilizing larger sample sizes, exploring other grade levels, or applying qualitative methods to gather more comprehensive insights.

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