

Relationship Between Decoding Skills and Reading Comprehension of Struggling Grade 4 Learners in Armenia Elementary School

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between decoding skills and reading comprehension among struggling Grade 4 learners in Armenia Elementary School. It was anchored on the Simple View of Reading, the Construction-Integration Model of Reading Comprehension, and the Interactive Compensatory Model of Reading, which collectively explain the contribution of word-level processing and meaning-making processes to reading comprehension. A descriptive-quantitative correlational design was employed involving 30 struggling Grade 4 learners selected through purposive sampling. Data were gathered using a structured, expert-validated questionnaire covering letter-sound correspondence, syllable decoding, word decoding, multisyllabic word decoding, and literal, inferential, and evaluative comprehension. The instrument was pilot-tested for internal consistency, while weighted mean and Pearson r correlation were used for data analysis. Results showed adequate decoding skills in letter-sound correspondence, syllable decoding, word decoding, and multisyllabic word decoding, with composite means of 3.20, 3.17, 3.14, and 3.03, respectively. Literal comprehension obtained the highest composite mean of 3.32, while inferential and evaluative comprehension recorded 3.07 and 3.03, indicating comparatively greater difficulty in higher-level comprehension. Pearson r analysis yielded a coefficient of 0.60, indicating a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between decoding skills and reading comprehension. The study concludes that stronger decoding skills are associated with better comprehension among struggling learners. It recommends sustained decoding activities, greater emphasis on inferential and evaluative comprehension, and strengthened school-based reading support. The study primarily supports SDG 4 – Quality Education by addressing foundational literacy and responsive support for struggling learners. Its sustainability contribution lies in strengthening educational and institutional capacity through evidence-based literacy intervention and sustained support for learners' continuing academic development.

Keywords: Decoding Skills; Inferential Comprehension; Literal Comprehension; Multisyllabic Word Decoding; Reading Comprehension; Struggling Learners; Word Decoding

1. Introduction

Reading is a fundamental academic skill that enables learners to understand lessons, follow instructions, acquire information, and engage meaningfully with written texts. For struggling readers, however, recognizing or pronouncing words does not necessarily result in understanding. Reading comprehension develops through the interaction of foundational word-reading abilities, particularly decoding, with fluency, vocabulary, language knowledge, background knowledge, cognitive processes, and comprehension strategies. The present study therefore examines the relationship between decoding skills and reading comprehension among struggling Grade

4 learners in Armenia Elementary School, with particular attention to letter-sound correspondence, syllable decoding, word decoding, and multisyllabic word decoding in relation to literal, inferential, and evaluative comprehension. Reading is a fundamental academic skill that enables learners to understand lessons, follow instructions, acquire information, and engage meaningfully with written texts. As learners progress through the elementary level, reading becomes increasingly important because it serves as a foundation for learning across different subject areas. However, for struggling readers, being able to recognize or pronounce words does not always mean that they fully understand what they read. Reading comprehension develops through the interaction of several skills, including decoding, fluency, vocabulary, language knowledge, background knowledge, cognitive processes, and comprehension strategies. Among these, decoding is particularly important because it allows learners to connect printed letters and words with their corresponding sounds and meanings. Difficulties in decoding may slow down reading and require learners to focus more attention on recognizing words rather than understanding the message of the text. These difficulties may become more evident among Grade 4 learners, as reading materials begin to include longer sentences, unfamiliar vocabulary, and more complex or multisyllabic words. Weaknesses in foundational decoding skills may therefore affect learners' ability to identify directly stated information, make inferences, and evaluate ideas presented in a text. Understanding the relationship between these skills can help identify specific areas where struggling readers need additional support. The present study therefore examines the relationship between decoding skills and reading comprehension among struggling Grade 4 learners in Armenia Elementary School. Specifically, it focuses on letter-sound correspondence, syllable decoding, word decoding, and multisyllabic word decoding in relation to literal, inferential, and evaluative comprehension. The findings may provide a basis for developing more focused reading interventions that address learners' specific decoding and comprehension difficulties.

Reading readiness provides an important foundation for literacy development. Saguing (2024) found differences in learners' competencies in decoding, word recognition, fluency, and comprehension and emphasized the importance of appropriate activities, parental support, reading materials, and teaching strategies. Similarly, Ehm et al. (2023) found that phonological awareness and letter knowledge contributed to decoding development and that both decoding and language skills helped explain differences in reading comprehension. Metsala (2023) further showed that gains in word-reading fluency, morphological awareness, and listening comprehension contribute to later reading development. Difficulties in these foundational abilities are particularly important among struggling readers. Cho et al. (2022) found weaknesses in word reading, fluency, spelling, comprehension, and phonological, orthographic, and morphological awareness among learners with poor reading skills. At the comprehension level, DelaRosa and Paragas (2024) identified vocabulary, background knowledge, comprehension strategies, motivation, and text-understanding difficulties as relevant concerns. Míguez Álvarez et al. (2022) demonstrated that comprehension may also vary according to text type and the level of understanding required, while Babayiğit et al. (2022) showed that vocabulary limitations can constrain comprehension even when learners possess other cognitive strengths. Philippine evidence similarly indicates that the ability to recognize words does not automatically guarantee comprehension. Paguyan and Taoc (2022) identified vocabulary, background knowledge, teacher involvement, and parental involvement as important factors related to Grade 3 pupils' reading performance. Reading support can therefore extend beyond ordinary classroom instruction. Yedra (2023) demonstrated the use of home-based reading activities and parental monitoring, while Resma (2023) reported improvement in comprehension among frustration readers following a targeted intervention, although some learners continued to require additional assistance. Collectively, these findings establish decoding as an important foundation while recognizing that comprehension remains a multidimensional reading process. The present study addresses this concern by examining struggling Grade 4 learners in Armenia Elementary School. It determines their decoding performance and reading comprehension and investigates whether a significant relationship exists between these two domains. The focus is particularly relevant because weaknesses in foundational word processing may limit the cognitive resources learners can devote to understanding, interpreting, and evaluating written material.

The literature consistently shows that decoding, word recognition, fluency, and comprehension are closely related but distinct components of reading. Baker, et.al. (2023), Poulsen, et.al. (2024), Kapalková, et.al. (2023), Hsu, Chan, and Ho (2023), Choi, et.al. (2022), Bell and Wheldall (2022), and Vousden et al. (2022) emphasized that early decoding, oral language, word-reading efficiency, fluency, and structured instruction contribute to comprehension, although their influence may vary according to learners' proficiency. Comprehension is also shaped by vocabulary, cognitive, and metacognitive processes. Ludewig, et.al. (2023), Aşıkcın and Bakkaloğlu (2023), Sanir, Ozmen, and Ozer (2023), Krenca, et.al. (2023), Paige, Rupley, and Ziglari (2024), Wang et al. (2024), and Escobar, Espinoza, and Balboa (2024) highlighted the roles of vocabulary, prior knowledge, comprehension monitoring, reasoning, listening comprehension, theory of mind, and executive functions. Moreover, Daniel and Barth (2023), Cho et al. (2023), Kulesz et al. (2024), and Keelor, et.al. (2023) demonstrated that struggling readers have varied language, cognitive, motivational, and attentional profiles, supporting differentiated rather than uniform reading support. Instructional quality and intervention are likewise important. Parrila, et.al. (2024), Nurmahanani (2023), Kurniawan, Amalia, and Indrawati (2024), Sanabria, et.al. (2022), and Alqahtani (2024) showed that teacher knowledge, differentiated instruction, technology, storytelling, and

structured interventions can improve reading outcomes, although effectiveness depends on learners' initial abilities and needs. Philippine studies similarly identified difficulties in comprehension, oral and silent reading, letter sounds, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and word recognition (Gultiano, 2022; Fernandez and Arriola, 2022; Canoy and Loquias, 2022; Bangoy and Tan, 2024; Liwanag, 2023; Garcia, 2023). Broader contextual influences also include limited resources, socioeconomic conditions, parental support, attitudes, study habits, and multilingual learning (Idulog et al., 2023; Costino-Sanoria and Oco, 2023; Gilbas, 2022; Luis, 2024; Pastera and Gaitano, 2024; Rebollos and Rebollos, 2024). Studies on instructional practices and intervention further support phonics, guided reading, reciprocal reading, routine practice, and structured remediation as useful approaches, although gains may vary by reading skill (Abellana et al., 2023; Alarcio, 2024; Dinoro et al., 2023; Saloma and Tantiado, 2023; Coranez, 2024; Sandicho and Padilla, 2022; Pocaan et al., 2022; Cayabyab et al., 2023; Baltonado and Velasco, 2023; Kidlo et al., 2023). Foreign studies further establish decoding and comprehension as connected but non-identical constructs. Vaz (2024), Kargin et al. (2024), Alatlı et al. (2022), Altamimi (2024), Pang and Son (2024), and Cai and Liao (2024) emphasized foundational decoding, phonological and morphological awareness, vocabulary, and word reading. Fluency also serves as an important link between word recognition and meaning, as shown by Mutema and Pretorius (2024), Makebo et al. (2022), and Cadime et al. (2023). At the same time, Pasqualotto et al. (2024), Dujardin et al. (2023), Gunnerud et al. (2022), Kheang et al. (2024), Inharjanto and Lisnani (2023), Capin et al. (2022), Kuvač Kraljević et al. (2024), and Sleeman et al. (2024) demonstrated that comprehension is also influenced by language, attention, motivation, and home factors. Guo et al. (2023) further showed that some learners experience comprehension difficulties despite adequate decoding, reinforcing the need to examine the relationship empirically rather than assume it. Consequently, intervention studies by Cockerill et al. (2023), Fälth et al. (2023), Peng et al. (2024), and Chandra and Chand (2024) emphasize matching instruction to learners' specific decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension needs.

Philippine studies provide corresponding evidence at the foundational level. Estrella (2022) emphasized teacher preparedness, while Belbes et al. (2022) examined systematic phonics instruction. Balgua et al. (2022) reported improvement through the Marungko approach, Oplas et al. (2023) examined oral blending, and Omar et al. (2022) considered guided oral reading and pronunciation. Amtalao (2023) highlighted instructional language, while Dimzon (2023) focused on oral reading fluency assessment. Studies of struggling and non-reading learners similarly support targeted intervention. Dumamba-Salilama (2024) developed Project EL AR for non-readers, and Bataliran et al. (2024) investigated Project SEL-P among struggling readers. Casilac et al. (2023), Gomez (2024), Navarra (2023), and Jordan and Tabernilla (2023) documented reading difficulties and emphasized identifying learners' specific challenges before designing support. Federe et al. (2023) and Altivo (2023) assessed comprehension levels as bases for intervention, while Acheron (2024) identified a positive relationship between parental involvement and reading performance. Abejo et al. (2023) further considered the influence of reading emotions. Other Philippine studies demonstrate the importance of early instruction, assessment, and remediation. Mejala (2024) examined early language-reading interventions; Mendoza and Cruz (2024) compared silent and oral reading approaches; Abril et al. (2022) examined the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory as an assessment and intervention-support mechanism; Perez (2023) related reading remediation to academic progress; Galibo and Ater (2024) investigated audio-video presentations for comprehension; and Canuto et al. (2024) examined repeated reading and Big Books for oral reading fluency. Taken together, the literature demonstrates that decoding is an important foundational component of successful reading, but its relationship with comprehension occurs within a broader system involving fluency, vocabulary, language comprehension, cognition, motivation, home support, instructional practices, assessment, and intervention. This complexity makes direct examination of decoding and comprehension among a defined group of struggling readers necessary rather than assuming that difficulty in one automatically determines difficulty in the other.

Globally, studies involving learners from different linguistic and educational settings consistently show that decoding, oral language, vocabulary, fluency, cognition, and comprehension interact in reading development. However, the relative contribution of each component varies according to learners' proficiency, language background, reading profile, and instructional context. This international evidence provides a broad empirical foundation but also demonstrates why findings from one population cannot automatically be generalized to another. At the national level, Philippine studies consistently document challenges involving word recognition, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, multilingual learning, access to materials, parental participation, instructional practices, and intervention. These studies also show continuing efforts to address literacy difficulties through phonics, remediation, guided reading, strategic reading activities, repeated reading, technology-supported resources, and assessment-based intervention. Locally, the study is situated in Armenia Elementary School in Uson, Masbate and focuses specifically on struggling Grade 4 learners. The manuscript describes the school as a long-established educational institution with strong community connections and a continuing commitment to elementary education. The local setting is important because the study seeks evidence from the actual reading performance of learners within this school rather than extrapolating findings from other grade levels, schools, regions, or countries.

The study is anchored on three complementary theories. Gough and Tunmer's Simple View of Reading (1986) explains reading comprehension through the interaction of decoding and linguistic comprehension. It directly supports the examination of letter-sound correspondence, syllable decoding, word decoding, and multisyllabic word decoding as foundational abilities potentially associated with comprehension. Kintsch's Construction-Integration Model of Reading Comprehension (1988) conceptualizes comprehension as an active process in which readers construct meaning from textual information and integrate it with existing knowledge. The model supports the study's distinction among literal, inferential, and evaluative comprehension because understanding involves retrieving explicit information, deriving unstated meanings, connecting ideas, and evaluating textual information. Stanovich's Interactive Compensatory Model of Reading (1980) views reading as an interactive process in which readers use multiple sources of information and may rely more heavily on contextual, linguistic, or prior-knowledge cues when weaknesses occur in another component. For struggling Grade 4 learners, weaknesses in decoding may consequently impose additional processing demands during meaning construction. Together, the three theories justify examining an association between decoding and comprehension without assuming that decoding alone determines comprehension. Conceptually, the manuscript employs an Input-Process-Output (IPO) system approach. The input consists of the learners' decoding skills and reading comprehension dimensions. The process involves assessing these variables and statistically determining their relationship, while the output consists of empirical information concerning decoding and comprehension that can inform reading support and intervention. Feedback from the findings is intended to connect the evidence with educational stakeholders and future program refinement.

Although substantial literature addresses decoding, fluency, vocabulary, language, cognition, reading difficulties, and literacy interventions, fewer studies directly examine the relationship between specific decoding components and specific comprehension levels among struggling Grade 4 learners in a defined Philippine elementary-school context. Existing research frequently treats decoding and comprehension as broad constructs, examines other predictors of reading achievement, or evaluates intervention effectiveness. The specific gap concerns the relationship of letter-sound correspondence, syllable decoding, word decoding, and multisyllabic word decoding with literal, inferential, and evaluative comprehension. Moreover, evidence showing that some learners experience poor comprehension despite adequate decoding makes it inappropriate to presume a causal or automatic relationship. The present study therefore empirically examines whether decoding and comprehension are significantly related among struggling Grade 4 learners in Armenia Elementary School. This localized analysis may provide a more precise basis for identifying learners' needs and selecting reading support suited to their actual performance.

The study aligns most directly with SDG 4 – Quality Education because it addresses foundational literacy among struggling elementary learners, particularly their decoding skills and reading comprehension. Identifying specific weaknesses in letter-sound correspondence, syllable and word decoding, multisyllabic word reading, and different levels of comprehension can contribute to more evidence-based reading assessment, differentiated instruction, remediation, and educational support. These forms of intervention are essential in helping learners develop the literacy competencies required for continued learning across subject areas and succeeding grade levels. The study's focus on determining specific reading difficulties also supports the broader objective of making learning opportunities more responsive and inclusive, particularly for learners who have not yet achieved expected reading competencies. By generating localized evidence on areas where learners experience difficulty, the findings may assist teachers in designing more appropriate instructional activities and intervention strategies based on actual learner needs. Its potential application to school-based reading programs, teacher decision-making, parental support, instructional planning, and educational policy implementation further reinforces its relevance to the promotion of inclusive, equitable, and sustained quality education. The study contributes principally to educational and institutional sustainability by emphasizing the importance of strengthening foundational literacy as a basis for continuous academic development. Educational sustainability requires learners to acquire essential competencies that allow them to participate meaningfully in classroom instruction, understand learning materials, and progress successfully across grade levels. Because reading is fundamental to interpreting instructions, accessing curricular content, acquiring new knowledge, and completing academic tasks, persistent difficulties in decoding and comprehension may limit learners' participation and future academic achievement. Identifying these difficulties at an early stage can provide a basis for sustained, targeted, and developmentally appropriate literacy support. At the institutional level, evidence regarding learners' decoding and comprehension performance can help teachers, school heads, Division-level personnel, and the Department of Education refine reading programs, prioritize areas for intervention, allocate appropriate instructional resources, and strengthen monitoring and school-based remediation initiatives. The study also acknowledges the important role of parents and communities in supporting reading development, highlighting the value of coordinated literacy support that extends beyond the classroom. From a multidisciplinary perspective, the study intersects education, language and literacy development, cognitive learning processes, educational assessment, instructional practice, family participation, and school governance. Its contribution therefore extends beyond measuring reading performance; it provides localized evidence that may support more responsive educational decisions and help sustain long-term literacy development among struggling learners.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

study utilized a descriptive-quantitative research design with a correlational component. The descriptive approach was used to determine the learners' levels of decoding skills and reading comprehension based on the specified indicators, while the quantitative approach involved collecting and analyzing numerical data obtained from the respondents. Correlational analysis was used to determine whether a significant relationship existed between decoding skills and reading comprehension. No learning conditions or variables were manipulated; instead, the learners' existing abilities were measured and statistically examined.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The respondents were Grade 4 learners from Armenia Elementary School in Uson, Masbate. The methodology chapter, however, also states in its introductory description that the study was conducted in San Pascual, Masbate. These locations are retained as stated in the original manuscript because no additional information is provided in the methodology chapter to reconcile the difference.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents were Grade 4 learners of Armenia Elementary School who had been identified as struggling readers based on their reading performance. The study was limited to learners who met the criteria established for inclusion as struggling readers. Thirty copies of the survey instrument were reproduced and distributed to the respondents.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was employed to select respondents who met the criteria of the study. Only identified struggling Grade 4 learners were included, ensuring that the participants represented the specific learner group targeted by the investigation.

2.5 Research Instrument

The study used a structured questionnaire consisting of two major parts. The first assessed decoding skills in terms of letter-sound correspondence, syllable decoding, word decoding, and multisyllabic word decoding. Responses were measured using a four-point scale interpreted as 4 – Strongly Agree, 3 – Agree, 2 – Disagree, and 1 – Strongly Disagree. The second part assessed reading comprehension in terms of literal, inferential, and evaluative comprehension using a four-point scale interpreted as 4 – Always, 3 – Often, 2 – Rarely, and 1 – Never. The instrument underwent content validation by a language teacher, a reading specialist, and an education research adviser knowledgeable in literacy instruction and educational assessment. They evaluated the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the items for the intended respondents. Their recommendations were incorporated to improve wording, eliminate ambiguity, and ensure alignment between the items and the constructs being measured. A pilot test was subsequently conducted among learners who were not included in the actual study. Their responses were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha to determine the internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire and identify possible difficulties in interpreting and answering the items. Based on expert validation and reliability testing, the instrument was finalized for data collection. The manuscript does not report the obtained Cronbach's Alpha coefficient.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

After the thesis proposal was approved by the school thesis committee, the researcher secured a permit to conduct the study. The permit was noted by the thesis adviser and submitted to the Schools Division Superintendent of Masbate Province Division for approval before the survey questionnaires were released to the school and respondents. The questionnaire was prepared with the approval of the thesis adviser, validated, revised, and finalized before 30 copies were reproduced and administered to the selected respondents. Retrieval of the questionnaires extended beyond the intended one-month period, resulting in delays in data processing. After retrieval, the responses were tallied and subjected to statistical treatment with the assistance of an expert statistician. The resulting data were described, analyzed, interpreted, and used to derive the study findings and implications.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Weighted mean was used to provide numerical representations of the respondents' decoding skills and reading comprehension based on their questionnaire responses. The computation considered the frequency of each response, the numerical weight assigned to each rating, and the total number of responses. Pearson R Correlation was employed to determine whether a significant relationship existed between decoding skills and reading comprehension. In the analysis, decoding skills served as the X variable and reading comprehension as the Y variable. The statistical computation used 30 data points and yielded an (r) value of **0.60** for the relationship between the two variables.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Decoding Skills of Struggling Grade 4 Learners

3.1.1 Letter-Sound Correspondence

The learners obtained a composite mean of 3.20, interpreted as Agree, indicating an adequate level of letter-sound correspondence. The highest mean was 3.30 for their ability to say the sound of a letter, while the lowest was 3.10 for using letter sounds to read a new word. The findings indicate that learners were more confident in recognizing and producing individual letter sounds than in applying this knowledge to unfamiliar words. This pattern suggests that knowledge of individual letter sounds does not necessarily translate immediately into effective decoding of unfamiliar words. The relatively lower ability to use letter sounds when reading new words may indicate difficulty in blending individual sounds and connecting them to complete word forms. Although learners possess basic phonics knowledge, they may still require repeated and guided opportunities to apply such knowledge during actual reading tasks. This is particularly important for struggling readers, since successful decoding requires learners not only to identify letter sounds but also to combine these sounds accurately and efficiently when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary. Continued practice may therefore be needed to strengthen the application of sound-symbol relationships during actual word reading. Activities involving phoneme blending, word building, and guided decoding of unfamiliar words may help learners move from simple sound recognition toward more fluent word reading. Fernandez and Arriola (2022) found that primary learners experienced difficulties in oral and silent reading and that some learners had difficulty with letter sounds, suggesting that weaknesses in basic reading skills may influence learners' capacity to understand written material. The present findings further emphasize the importance of reinforcing foundational decoding skills as a prerequisite for more effective reading comprehension.

3.1.2 Syllable Decoding

The learners obtained a composite mean of 3.17, interpreted as Agree, indicating an adequate level of syllable decoding. The highest mean of 3.23 was recorded for identifying syllables in a word, while the lowest mean of 3.10 was obtained for using syllables to read a new word. Thus, learners appeared more capable of identifying and separating syllables than independently applying syllabic knowledge to unfamiliar words. This difference suggests that although learners understand the basic structure of syllables, they may still experience difficulty transferring this knowledge to actual word-reading situations, particularly when encountering unfamiliar or more complex words. The findings indicate that learners possess developing phonological skills but may require additional opportunities to combine, segment, and manipulate syllables during unfamiliar word reading. Classroom activities involving syllable blending, word segmentation, word-building exercises, and guided oral reading may further strengthen their decoding ability. Repeated exposure to words with varying syllable patterns may also help learners become more confident and automatic in applying syllabic knowledge when reading new vocabulary. Altamimi (2024) explored the connection between phonological awareness and reading ability and emphasized the role of phonological skills in reading development. Phonological awareness enables learners to recognize and manipulate the sounds that comprise words, which is essential in learning to decode written language. This supports the present findings, as learners who develop stronger awareness of syllable structures are more likely to improve their ability to decode unfamiliar words and eventually achieve greater reading fluency.

3.1.3 Word Decoding

The learners achieved a composite mean of 3.14, interpreted as Agree, demonstrating an adequate level of word decoding. Their strongest performance was in reading familiar words, which obtained a mean of 3.37 and was interpreted as Strongly Agree. The lowest mean of 3.03 was obtained for reading a new word without guessing. This indicates that learners were more proficient in recognizing familiar words than in independently decoding unfamiliar ones. The difference between familiar and unfamiliar word reading suggests that the learners' decoding skills remain developing and may rely partly on previous exposure to words. Familiar words may be processed more easily because learners have encountered their spelling patterns and pronunciation repeatedly. In contrast, unfamiliar words require learners to apply phonics, letter-sound relationships, and other word-analysis strategies more independently. Greater difficulty with unfamiliar words therefore indicates the need to strengthen the application of decoding strategies rather than reliance on recognition, memorization, or guessing. This finding also suggests that instructional activities should provide learners with opportunities to encounter unfamiliar words in controlled and meaningful contexts. Explicit practice in blending sounds, identifying word patterns, and applying phonics rules may help learners develop greater accuracy and confidence when reading new words. Cai and Liao (2024) also explored vocabulary depth, word reading, and reading comprehension among Chinese learners. Their findings showed that vocabulary knowledge had direct links with reading comprehension, while vocabulary meaning also influenced comprehension through word reading. These findings reinforce the importance of developing both accurate word recognition and vocabulary knowledge to support overall reading comprehension.

3.1.4 Multi-Syllabic Word Decoding

The learners obtained a composite mean of 3.03, interpreted as Agree, indicating an adequate but developing level of multi-syllabic word decoding. The highest mean of 3.10 was recorded for breaking a long word into smaller

parts, whereas the lowest mean of 2.97 was obtained for determining the meaning of a long word after reading it. The learners therefore appeared more capable of segmenting longer words than of accurately deriving meaning after decoding them. These results indicate that segmenting a long word into manageable parts may be easier for struggling readers than integrating those parts and connecting the decoded word with its meaning. Although learners may recognize syllables or smaller word units, successful reading of multi-syllabic words also requires them to combine these units accurately and relate the resulting word to their existing vocabulary. Thus, being able to pronounce a long word does not necessarily mean that the learner fully understands its meaning. The findings further suggest that instruction should move beyond simple syllable segmentation and include explicit teaching of prefixes, suffixes, root words, and other meaningful word parts. Providing contextualized exercises in which learners decode a multi-syllabic word and then explain or use it in a sentence may help connect word recognition with comprehension. Further development of word-structure awareness may therefore strengthen both decoding accuracy and meaning construction. Pang and Son (2024) focused on morphological awareness and reading comprehension among Chinese children with reading difficulties. Their findings showed that morphological awareness contributed to reading comprehension and that word-related skills were involved in the process of understanding text.

3.2 Reading Comprehension of Struggling Grade 4 Learners

3.2.1 Literal Comprehension

The learners obtained a composite mean of 3.32, interpreted as Always, indicating a good level of literal comprehension. The highest mean of 3.40 was recorded for identifying characters in a story, while the lowest mean of 3.27 was obtained for identifying where and when a story occurred. Overall, the learners demonstrated the ability to recognize main ideas, stated details, characters, settings, and important events that were explicitly presented in the texts. This indicates that struggling Grade 4 learners were generally more successful when comprehension tasks required them to locate, recall, or recognize information directly stated in the reading material. The relatively high performance in identifying characters may suggest that learners can easily recognize concrete and clearly presented elements of a story. However, the comparatively lower score in identifying the setting indicates that some learners may still experience difficulty in attending to contextual details such as time and place, especially when these are not repeatedly emphasized in the passage. This suggests the need to continue strengthening literal comprehension through activities that require learners to identify who, what, when, where, and other directly stated details. Baltonado and Velasco (2023) developed subject-integrated instructional materials to address least-mastered reading comprehension skills among Grade 5 pupils. Some reading skills improved after the use of the materials, particularly identifying the main idea and answering direct recall questions, although some comprehension skills continued to present difficulties. This supports the value of targeted and structured reading activities in reinforcing basic comprehension skills.

3.2.2 Inferential Comprehension

The learners obtained a composite mean of 3.07, interpreted as Often, indicating a developing level of inferential comprehension. Predicting what might happen next received the highest mean of 3.13, while determining information not directly stated and explaining what the author meant both obtained the lowest mean of 3.03. These findings show that learners were relatively capable of making simple predictions based on obvious textual clues but experienced greater difficulty when they were required to interpret implicit information, understand unstated ideas, or explain deeper meanings. Inferential comprehension requires learners to go beyond the information explicitly stated in the text. They must combine textual clues with vocabulary knowledge, prior experiences, and logical reasoning to construct meaning. For struggling readers, this process may be more difficult because part of their attention may still be focused on recognizing and decoding words. As a result, fewer cognitive resources may be available for making connections or interpreting implied ideas. The findings suggest that teachers should provide more guided activities involving prediction, cause-and-effect relationships, drawing conclusions, interpreting implied meanings, and explaining answers using evidence from the text. Dujardin et al. (2023) investigated vocabulary, word reading, listening comprehension, and reading comprehension among children aged 7 to 10. Their findings showed links among vocabulary, word reading, listening comprehension, and reading comprehension, indicating that both word-level and language skills contribute to understanding text. This further emphasizes the importance of developing language knowledge together with higher-level comprehension skills.

3.2.3 Evaluative Comprehension

The learners obtained a composite mean of 3.03, interpreted as Often, demonstrating a developing level of evaluative comprehension. The highest mean of 3.13 was recorded for determining whether a character made a good choice, while the lowest means of 2.97 were obtained for determining whether information in a text was believable and comparing textual ideas with prior knowledge. These results indicate that learners were more comfortable making judgments about clear and concrete actions of characters than evaluating the reliability of information or relating textual ideas to what they already knew. Evaluative comprehension requires a higher level of reasoning because learners must assess ideas, form judgments, justify opinions, and relate information from the text to their own knowledge and experiences. The lower results in evaluating the credibility of information and connecting ideas with prior knowledge suggest that these skills remain areas for further development. Learners

may require explicit guidance in explaining why they agree or disagree with an idea, determining whether information is reasonable or believable, and providing evidence to support their judgments. Classroom activities such as guided questioning, short discussions, opinion-based responses, and text-to-self or text-to-world connections may help strengthen these skills. Overall, the findings suggest that while the learners already possess a foundation in literal comprehension, greater instructional attention should be directed toward inferential and evaluative comprehension to support deeper, more critical, and meaningful understanding of texts.

3.3 Relationship Between Decoding Skills and Reading Comprehension

The Pearson r analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.60$, indicating a strong positive linear relationship between decoding skills and reading comprehension. With 28 degrees of freedom and a 0.05 level of significance, the computed coefficient exceeded the two-tailed critical value of ± 0.3610 . Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected, showing a statistically significant relationship between the two variables. This means that learners who demonstrated stronger abilities in letter-sound correspondence, syllable decoding, word decoding, and multisyllabic word decoding also tended to obtain higher levels of reading comprehension. The finding highlights the important role of decoding in helping learners understand written texts. When learners can recognize and decode words more accurately, they can devote greater attention to identifying ideas, connecting information, and understanding the meaning of a passage. In contrast, difficulty in decoding unfamiliar or complex words may interrupt the reading process and make comprehension more challenging. However, decoding and comprehension are not identical skills. Other factors such as vocabulary, reading fluency, prior knowledge, motivation, and language ability may also contribute to how well learners understand what they read. Overall, the result suggests that reading interventions for struggling Grade 4 learners should strengthen decoding and comprehension together. Teachers may provide systematic practice in word and multisyllabic decoding while also engaging learners in activities that develop literal, inferential, and evaluative comprehension. Nevertheless, the significant relationship should be interpreted as an association and not as evidence of causation. The findings indicate that stronger decoding skills are related to better reading comprehension within the group studied, but they do not establish that decoding alone directly causes improved comprehension.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concluded that the struggling Grade 4 learners demonstrated satisfactory to adequate decoding skills in letter-sound correspondence, syllable decoding, word decoding, and multisyllabic word decoding. However, greater difficulty was observed when learners encountered unfamiliar, longer, and more complex words, indicating the need for further development of decoding automaticity and flexibility. In terms of reading comprehension, the learners performed better at the literal level, where information was directly stated in the text, while inferential and evaluative comprehension remained developing. They experienced difficulty in interpreting unstated information, drawing conclusions, explaining deeper meanings, supporting opinions, and connecting textual ideas with prior knowledge and experiences. Moreover, the study found a strong positive linear relationship between decoding skills and reading comprehension, indicating that learners with stronger decoding skills also tended to demonstrate better comprehension. This suggests that accurate and efficient word decoding is closely associated with the ability to understand and interpret written texts.

Based on the findings, language and reading teachers should provide regular and systematic activities that strengthen letter-sound correspondence, syllable blending, word reading, multisyllabic word decoding, and independent reading of unfamiliar words. Teachers and ARAL teachers should also incorporate activities that develop inferential and evaluative comprehension, such as predicting outcomes, drawing conclusions, interpreting implied meanings, explaining answers, providing textual evidence, expressing supported opinions, and relating texts to learners' experiences. School heads and teachers should strengthen reading intervention programs by addressing both decoding and comprehension and by regularly monitoring learners' progress to identify specific areas requiring additional support. Future researchers are also encouraged to conduct similar studies involving larger samples and different school settings and to examine additional factors that may contribute to learners' reading development.

The study was limited to selected struggling Grade 4 learners and focused only on the identified dimensions of decoding skills and reading comprehension. It did not examine other factors that may influence reading performance, such as reading fluency, vocabulary knowledge, oral language proficiency, phonological awareness, spelling, writing ability, motivation, attendance, home literacy environment, parental support, teaching strategies, access to reading materials, and socioeconomic background. In addition, the study examined only the relationship between decoding skills and reading comprehension and did not establish a cause-and-effect relationship between the two variables. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted within the context of the respondents included in the study and should not be generalized to all Grade 4 learners or to learners from other schools, grade levels, or educational settings.

5. Compliance with ethical standards

The authors affirm that no conflicts of interest exist in relation to this study. The research was conducted in accordance with accepted ethical principles for studies involving human participants, particularly elementary school learners. Prior to data collection, the necessary permission to conduct the study was secured from the appropriate education authorities, including the Schools Division Superintendent of Masbate Province Division and the concerned school authorities of Armenia Elementary School in Uson, Masbate. Considering that the respondents were struggling Grade 4 learners, participation was undertaken with due consideration for informed consent, voluntary participation, and the protection of the learners' rights and welfare. The respondents were informed of the purpose and procedures of the study and were assured that participation would not affect their academic standing. Confidentiality and privacy were maintained by collecting only information necessary for the research and by reporting the findings in aggregated form without identifying individual learners. The data-gathering procedures were non-invasive and focused solely on the respondents' decoding skills in terms of letter-sound correspondence, syllable decoding, word decoding, and multisyllabic word decoding, as well as their literal, inferential, and evaluative reading comprehension. All information gathered was handled securely and used exclusively for academic and research purposes.

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