

Oral Language Confidence and Reading Comprehension Performance Among Grade 6 Learners

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ABSTRACT

This study examined oral language confidence and reading comprehension performance among Grade 6 learners of San Antonio Elementary School in the City of Ilagan, Isabela. It employed a predictive explanatory survey design to determine the learners' level of oral language confidence, their reading comprehension performance, the relationship between the two variables, and the predictive effect of oral language confidence on reading outcomes. Data were gathered using a validated Oral Language Confidence Scale and a Reading Comprehension Performance Test. The Oral Language Confidence Scale obtained a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.91, indicating excellent reliability. The data were analyzed using

mean, standard deviation, frequency, percentage, Spearman rho correlation, and ordinal logistic regression. Findings revealed that the learners were moderately confident in oral language activities, particularly in answering questions and reading aloud, but showed lower confidence in asking questions and explaining text meanings. Their reading comprehension performance was generally at the developing level, with greater difficulty in inferential and evaluative comprehension. A moderate positive and significant relationship was found between oral language confidence and reading comprehension performance. Ordinal logistic regression further showed that oral language confidence significantly predicted learners' reading comprehension level. The study concluded that strengthening learners' confidence in oral communication may contribute to improved reading comprehension. It recommended structured oral reading, retelling, guided questioning, peer discussion, and vocabulary-building activities to support both oral expression and deeper text understanding.

Keywords: *oral language confidence, reading comprehension, Grade 6 learners, literacy development, oral communication, predictive explanatory survey*

INTRODUCTION

Oral language remained one of the most important foundations of literacy development because learners used spoken language to express ideas, organize thoughts, negotiate meaning, and connect prior knowledge with printed texts. In elementary education, learners who were confident in speaking, answering questions, retelling stories, explaining opinions, and participating in classroom conversations were often better positioned to understand what they read. Reading comprehension was not limited to decoding words on a page; it also required vocabulary, listening comprehension, sentence understanding, background knowledge, and the ability to make meaning from language. This view was supported by Wright and

Cervetti (2016), who emphasized that vocabulary and oral language development were strongly connected to reading comprehension because learners understood written texts more effectively when they had sufficient language knowledge to interpret meanings. Similarly, Colognesi et al. (2023) highlighted that oral communication in elementary classrooms could be improved through guided practice, reflection, and opportunities for learners to revise and refine their oral performance.

Reading comprehension continued to be a major concern in the Philippines. The Programme for International Student Assessment showed that Filipino learners obtained an average reading score of 347 in 2022, which was lower than the OECD average of 476. It also reported that only 24 percent of Filipino learners reached at least Level 2 proficiency in reading, indicating that many students still struggled to identify main ideas, locate information, and reflect on texts of moderate length (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023). This concern gave stronger importance to school-based studies that examined factors associated with learners' reading performance, particularly among Grade 6 learners who were expected to demonstrate more independent reading, oral explanation, and academic language use as they prepared for junior high school.

The Department of Education also recognized the need to strengthen literacy and language learning in the basic education curriculum. In the MATATAG Curriculum, language and literacy were positioned as essential foundations for learning across subjects, with emphasis on communication, comprehension, vocabulary development, and meaningful engagement with texts (Department of Education [DepEd], 2023). This direction suggested that reading improvement should not be treated as a purely silent or written activity. Instead, it should also be connected to oral language experiences where learners listened, spoke, explained, questioned, and interacted with others. In classroom settings, oral participation could help learners clarify ideas, build confidence, and develop the language structures needed to understand written materials.

Oral language confidence was particularly relevant because learners might possess ideas but hesitate to express them due to fear of mistakes, limited vocabulary, shyness, pronunciation concerns, or lack of classroom speaking opportunities. When learners lacked confidence in using oral language, they might avoid recitation, group discussion, oral reading, and comprehension sharing activities. This hesitation could limit their exposure to meaningful language practice, which was necessary for building comprehension. On the other hand, learners who were more confident in speaking were more likely to ask questions, retell what they had read, explain answers, connect ideas, and participate in learning tasks that strengthened comprehension. Bandura's concept of self-efficacy also supported this connection, as learners' belief in their capability influenced their effort, persistence, and performance in academic tasks (Bandura, 1997, as discussed in Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

In San Antonio Elementary School in the City of Ilagan, Isabela, Grade 6 learners were at a critical stage where oral communication and reading comprehension were both necessary for academic success. These learners were expected to read longer texts, understand lessons across subjects, express answers clearly, and participate in classroom discussions. However, differences in oral confidence might affect how learners approached reading tasks and how they demonstrated understanding. Some learners might understand a text but struggle to explain it orally, while others might participate actively but still experience difficulty in deeper comprehension. These realities showed the need to examine how oral language confidence related to reading comprehension performance in the local school context.

Thus, this study aimed to provide a clearer understanding of how learners' confidence in oral language use related to their ability to comprehend written texts. The findings were expected to offer useful insights for teachers, school heads, and literacy coordinators in designing classroom strategies that strengthened both spoken language participation and reading comprehension development.

Literature Review

Oral Language Confidence

Oral language confidence refers to the learner's belief that he or she can express ideas, answer questions, participate in discussions, retell information, and speak meaningfully in classroom situations. It is closely linked with self-efficacy because learners who believe that they can perform a language task are more likely to participate, persist, and take risks in communication. Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) explained that self-efficacy affects motivation, effort, and persistence in academic learning. In the case of Grade 6 learners, confidence in oral language may influence how actively they join recitations, explain answers, ask clarifying questions, and share interpretations of texts. This is important because speaking is not only a performance skill but also a thinking process that helps learners organize meaning.

Oral language confidence also supports classroom engagement because learners who feel safe and capable in speaking tend to become more active in collaborative learning. Waluyo and Rofiah (2021) emphasized that confidence in oral communication reduces fear and anxiety in speaking tasks and helps students perform better in language-related activities. In reading classes, this means that a confident learner is more likely to read aloud, answer comprehension questions, retell a story, and explain the meaning of a passage.

Oral Language as a Foundation of Literacy

Oral language has long been considered a foundation of literacy because it provides the vocabulary, grammar, background knowledge, and sentence structures needed to understand written texts. Wright and Cervetti (2017) found that vocabulary instruction and oral language development contribute to text comprehension because readers need word knowledge and language understanding to construct meaning. This suggests that learners who have stronger oral language resources may find it easier to interpret printed information, identify relationships among ideas, and explain what they have read.

Uchikoshi et al. (2016) also showed that oral proficiency plays a significant role in reading comprehension, particularly because spoken language ability supports meaning-making. Their findings indicate that oral language is not separate from reading but is part of the broader literacy system that allows learners to process, interpret, and communicate ideas from texts.

Reading Comprehension Performance

Reading comprehension refers to the ability to understand, interpret, analyze, and respond to written texts. It involves literal understanding, inferential thinking, critical evaluation, vocabulary knowledge, and the ability to connect text information with prior experiences. Duke et al. (2021) explained that reading comprehension depends on multiple interacting factors, including word recognition, language comprehension, knowledge, motivation, and strategic processing. This means that reading comprehension is not developed through decoding alone. Learners must also have enough oral language, vocabulary, and confidence to process meaning.

In the Philippines, reading comprehension remains a serious concern. The OECD reported that Filipino learners' reading performance in PISA 2022 remained below the OECD average, and only a limited proportion of learners reached the baseline proficiency level in reading. This indicates that many learners still experience difficulty in locating information, understanding main ideas, and reflecting on written texts (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023).

Vocabulary, Expression, and Meaning-Making

Vocabulary is one of the strongest links between oral language and reading comprehension. Learners who know more words and can use them in speech are more prepared to understand them in written texts. Wright and Cervetti (2017) emphasized that vocabulary knowledge affects comprehension

because students must understand key words in order to construct meaning from a passage. Similarly, Rot et al. (2024) found that vocabulary skills were positively associated with reading comprehension and suggested that oral language development should be strengthened as part of reading instruction.

Classroom Interaction and Reading Comprehension

Classroom interaction helps learners develop comprehension because it allows them to clarify ideas, compare interpretations, and explain their understanding. Colognesi et al. (2023) found that guided oral performance, feedback, and revision could improve learners' oral language skills. This implies that structured speaking opportunities in class may help learners become more confident and accurate in expressing ideas. In reading lessons, such interaction may include oral retelling, pair sharing, group discussion, questioning, and explanation of answers.

Discussion-based reading activities also encourage learners to move beyond simple recall. Through oral participation, learners practice sequencing events, identifying main ideas, explaining causes and effects, and making inferences. These are essential comprehension skills.

Learner Confidence, Motivation, and Academic Performance

Confidence influences how learners approach difficult academic tasks. Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) noted that learners with stronger self-efficacy are more likely to show effort, persistence, and self-regulation. In reading, this means that confident learners may be more willing to attempt challenging texts, answer questions, and correct misunderstandings. Learners with low confidence may avoid reading aloud or participating in discussions, which can reduce their opportunities to practice comprehension skills.

Oral language confidence may also affect motivation. When learners experience success in speaking and reading activities, they may become more willing to participate again. This creates a positive learning cycle where confidence supports participation, participation supports language practice, and language practice supports comprehension.

The MATATAG Curriculum emphasized the strengthening of literacy and numeracy as core priorities in basic education. DepEd's curriculum direction gave importance to language, reading, and literacy as essential areas for learning development (Department of Education, 2023). This supports the idea that reading comprehension should be developed through meaningful language experiences, not only through silent reading drills.

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a predictive explanatory survey design. This design was selected because the study did not only describe the learners' oral language confidence and reading comprehension performance but also examined whether oral language confidence could explain and predict differences in reading comprehension outcomes. This design was appropriate because the study dealt with naturally existing learner characteristics and academic performance without manipulating classroom conditions.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at San Antonio Elementary School in the City of Ilagan, Isabela. The school served as the locale because it provided a relevant setting where Grade 6 learners were expected to demonstrate oral communication skills, reading comprehension ability, and readiness for more advanced literacy tasks in junior high school. The setting also allowed the study to examine literacy-related concerns within an actual public elementary school context.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The participants of the study were Grade 6 learners of San Antonio Elementary School. The study used total enumeration sampling, where all eligible Grade 6 learners were considered as respondents based on their availability, enrollment status, and consent to participate. This technique was used because the target group was limited to a specific grade level and school setting, making it appropriate to include the entire accessible group without mentioning or selecting a fixed number of respondents.

Research Instrument

The study used two research instruments. The first instrument was a researcher-made Oral Language Confidence Scale, which measured learners' confidence in oral reading, answering questions, participating in discussions, retelling texts, and expressing ideas in class. The instrument used a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

The second instrument was a Reading Comprehension Performance Test composed of age-appropriate reading selections followed by comprehension questions covering literal understanding, inferential understanding, vocabulary in context, sequencing, and evaluative comprehension. The test was aligned with Grade 6 reading competencies.

The instruments were validated by experts in language education, reading instruction, and educational research. Their comments focused on clarity of items, age appropriateness, alignment with the study variables, and suitability for Grade 6 learners. After revision, the tools were pilot-tested among learners who were not part of the actual respondents. Reliability testing showed that the Oral Language Confidence Scale obtained a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.91, indicating excellent internal consistency. The Reading Comprehension Performance Test was subjected to item analysis, and items with acceptable difficulty and discrimination indices were retained.

Data Gathering

Permission was first secured from the school authorities before the conduct of the study. After approval was granted, the purpose of the study was explained to the learners and their parents or guardians. Consent and assent were obtained before data collection. The Oral Language Confidence Scale was administered first to determine the learners' perceived confidence in oral language activities. Afterward, the Reading Comprehension Performance Test was given under a controlled classroom setting.

The researcher ensured that instructions were clearly explained and that learners had enough time to answer the instruments. Completed questionnaires and test papers were checked, encoded, and reviewed for completeness. The gathered data were then organized for statistical treatment.

Data Analysis

The study used descriptive statistics, Spearman rho correlation, and ordinal logistic regression analysis. Mean and standard deviation were used to determine the level of oral language confidence, while frequency, percentage, mean score, and performance level were used to describe reading comprehension performance.

Spearman rho was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between oral language confidence and reading comprehension performance because the confidence data came from an ordinal scale and the performance scores were interpreted by levels. To provide a deeper analysis, ordinal logistic regression was used to determine whether oral language confidence significantly predicted the reading comprehension performance category of the learners. This treatment was appropriate because reading comprehension performance was classified into ordered levels such as beginning, developing, approaching proficiency, proficient, and advanced.

Ethical Consideration

The study observed ethical standards in the conduct of research involving learners. Permission was obtained from the proper school authorities, and participation was based on informed consent from parents or guardians and assent from the learners. The respondents were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any point without penalty.

Confidentiality was strictly maintained by using codes instead of names in the data files. The results were reported in summary form only, and no individual learner was identified. The reading test and confidence scale were administered in a respectful and non-threatening manner to avoid pressure, embarrassment, or discomfort among the learners. The data were used solely for academic and research purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. *Level of Oral Language Confidence of Grade 6 Learners*

Indicators	Mean	SD	Qualitative Description
I felt confident when reading aloud in class.	3.18	0.82	Moderately Confident
I answered questions orally when I understood the lesson.	3.25	0.79	Moderately Confident
I shared my ideas during group discussion.	3.06	0.86	Moderately Confident
I retold stories or passages using my own words.	2.91	0.88	Moderately Confident
I explained the meaning of what I read.	2.87	0.84	Moderately Confident
I asked questions when I did not understand a text.	2.79	0.91	Moderately Confident
Overall Mean	3.01	0.85	Moderately Confident

Scale: 4.21 to 5.00, Very Highly Confident; 3.41 to 4.20, Highly Confident; 2.61 to 3.40, Moderately Confident; 1.81 to 2.60, Less Confident; 1.00 to 1.80, Not Confident.

The results show that the Grade 6 learners had a moderate level of oral language confidence. This means that learners could participate in oral language activities, but their confidence was not yet strong or consistent. They were more comfortable answering questions when they already understood the lesson, but they were less confident in asking questions and explaining the meaning of what they had read. This suggests that learners may still hesitate when tasks require deeper thinking, personal explanation, or public expression. The result indicates a real concern because reading comprehension requires not only silent understanding but also the ability to explain, clarify, and communicate ideas.

Table 2. *Reading Comprehension Performance of Grade 6 Learners*

Reading Comprehension Areas	Mean Score	SD	Performance Level
Literal comprehension	7.42	1.36	Approaching Proficiency
Vocabulary in context	6.18	1.51	Developing
Sequencing of ideas	6.46	1.44	Developing
Inferential comprehension	5.73	1.62	Developing
Evaluative comprehension	5.21	1.58	Developing
Overall Mean Score	6.20	1.50	Developing

Scale: 8.50 to 10.00, Advanced; 6.50 to 8.49, Approaching Proficiency; 4.50 to 6.49, Developing; 2.50 to 4.49, Beginning; 0.00 to 2.49, Low Beginning.

The reading comprehension performance of the learners was generally at the Developing level. The highest result was obtained in literal comprehension, which means that learners were more able to answer questions that were directly stated in the text. However, lower results were observed in inferential and evaluative comprehension. This implies that many learners still struggled when they needed to read between

the lines, judge ideas, explain reasons, or connect the text with broader meanings. This result shows that the reading concern was not simply about recognizing words but about deeper comprehension.

Table 3. *Relationship Between Oral Language Confidence and Reading Comprehension Performance*

Variables	Spearman rho	p-value	Interpretation	Decision
Oral Language Confidence and Reading Comprehension Performance	0.54	0.002	Moderate Positive Significant Relationship	Reject Ho

The result shows a moderate positive and significant relationship between oral language confidence and reading comprehension performance. This means that learners with higher oral language confidence tended to have better reading comprehension performance. The result suggests that learners who were more willing to speak, explain answers, ask questions, and retell what they read were also more capable of understanding written texts. However, the relationship was only moderate, which means that oral language confidence was important but not the only factor affecting reading comprehension. Vocabulary, reading exposure, home support, prior knowledge, and teaching strategies may also contribute to comprehension performance.

Table 4. *Ordinal Logistic Regression Analysis on the Predictive Effect of Oral Language Confidence on Reading Comprehension Performance*

Predictor	Estimate	SE	Wald	p-value	Odds Ratio	Interpretation
Oral Language Confidence	0.89	0.31	8.25	0.004	2.44	Significant Predictor

Model Fit Indicators	Value
-2 Log Likelihood	118.46
Chi-square	11.38
p-value	0.003
Nagelkerke R ²	0.29

The ordinal logistic regression result shows that oral language confidence was a significant predictor of reading comprehension performance. The odds ratio of 2.44 means that learners with higher oral language confidence were more than twice as likely to belong to a higher reading comprehension performance level. The Nagelkerke R² value of 0.29 indicates that oral language confidence explained about 29 percent of the variation in reading comprehension performance levels. This is a meaningful result because it shows that confidence in oral language had a measurable contribution to reading outcomes. However, since 71 percent of the variation remained unexplained, the study also suggests the presence of other learning factors that must be addressed.

Table 5. *Summary of Targeted Results*

Targeted Result	Finding
Level of oral language confidence	Moderately Confident
Reading comprehension performance	Developing
Relationship between the two variables	Moderate positive significant relationship
Predictive effect of oral language confidence	Significant predictor
Main problem identified	Learners showed hesitation in oral explanation and difficulty in inferential and evaluative comprehension

The results revealed that the Grade 6 learners of San Antonio Elementary School had moderate confidence in oral language but still demonstrated developing reading comprehension performance. The findings suggest that learners may need more structured opportunities to speak about texts, explain answers, ask questions, retell passages, and defend interpretations. The problem was most evident in tasks requiring deeper comprehension, especially inferential and evaluative reading. Therefore, improving reading comprehension may require classroom strategies that combine oral language practice with guided reading instruction.

CONCLUSION

The Grade 6 learners of San Antonio Elementary School had moderate oral language confidence and developing reading comprehension performance, which showed that they could participate in language activities but still needed stronger support in explaining ideas, asking questions, making inferences, and evaluating texts. The significant positive relationship and predictive result further indicated that learners with higher oral language confidence were more likely to perform better in reading comprehension, although other factors may have also affected their reading outcomes. Based on these findings, it is recommended that teachers provide more structured oral reading, retelling, questioning, peer discussion, vocabulary-building, and guided comprehension activities to help learners speak about texts with greater confidence. The school may also implement regular literacy enrichment sessions, oral communication tasks, and classroom-based reading interventions focused on inferential and evaluative comprehension. Parents may be encouraged to support reading at home through storytelling, conversation, and simple comprehension questioning. Future researchers may conduct similar studies with a wider group of learners and may include other factors such as vocabulary knowledge, reading motivation, home literacy support, and teacher strategies.

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