

## **The impact of phonics instruction on reading fluency and comprehension of Grade 1 pupils in the elementary schools of Legislative District 5, Isabela**

**Cristita E. Bautista\***

Northeastern College, Santiago City, Isabela, Philippines

### ABSTRACT

Reading development in the early grades is essential for building learners' academic success and lifelong learning skills. However, despite the widespread implementation of reading programs, many Grade 1 pupils continue to experience difficulties in reading fluency and comprehension, particularly in bridging decoding skills and understanding. This study examined the impact of phonics instruction on the reading fluency and comprehension of Grade 1 pupils in the elementary schools of Legislative District 5, Isabela. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed, involving 80 respondents composed of school heads and teachers. Data were collected using a validated questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation. Findings revealed that phonics instruction was implemented at a very high level. Pupils demonstrated high reading fluency and comprehension, with accuracy as the strongest component, while speed and expression remained moderate. Significant relationships were found between phonics instruction and reading fluency, and between fluency and comprehension. The study highlights the importance of phonics instruction in strengthening foundational literacy skills.

**Keywords:** Phonics instruction, reading fluency, reading comprehension, Grade 1 pupils, literacy development, descriptive-correlational design.

Date Submitted: March 12, 2026

Date Accepted: March 19, 2026

Date Published: April 9, 2026

### INTRODUCTION

Learning to read is a step-by-step process that builds the foundation for understanding new ideas. It enables individuals to access information and participate effectively in society (Nicolas, 2021). In the early years of schooling, particularly in Grade 1, children begin developing their reading skills. Two key components of reading are fluency and comprehension, which enable learners to read smoothly and understand what they read. Without these skills, students may struggle to keep up with lessons across subject areas (Xin & Yunus, 2020). Early success in reading builds confidence and encourages continued learning. Strengthening reading skills at this stage supports long-term academic growth.

Reading is a complex cognitive activity that involves several processes working together. It is more than recognizing words on a page; it requires decoding written symbols,

---

\*Corresponding author/ Email: [cristita.bautista001@deped.gov.ph](mailto:cristita.bautista001@deped.gov.ph)  
DOI: <http://doi.org/10.69651/PIJHSS0502921>

#### Recommended citation:

Bautista, C. E. (2026). The impact of phonics instruction on reading fluency and comprehension of Grade 1 pupils in the elementary schools of Legislative District 5, Isabela. *Pantao (The International Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences)* 5 (2), 520-527. <http://doi.org/10.69651/PIJHSS0502921>

understanding vocabulary, and constructing meaning from text (Zhu et al., 2020). Decoding enables readers to translate letters and sounds into words, while vocabulary knowledge allows them to understand word meanings in context. Comprehension involves connecting ideas, making inferences, and interpreting both explicit and implicit meanings. Reading also includes recognizing written language forms, identifying unfamiliar words, and interpreting relationships between ideas through grammar and structure. These processes must be developed simultaneously for learners to achieve both fluency and comprehension. Without these foundational skills, students may struggle to meet classroom reading demands.

Phonics instruction is a method of teaching reading that emphasizes the relationship between letters and their corresponding sounds. Its primary purpose is to help learners decode words by sounding them out, which is especially important for beginning readers (Barbutto, 2023). Phonics provides a strong foundation for both fluency and comprehension. Early mastery of phonics in the primary grades supports long-term reading success. When children decode words automatically, they can allocate more cognitive resources to understanding the text (Eldredge, 2005).

Although the Philippines maintains a high basic literacy rate, challenges in developing deeper reading comprehension and functional literacy persist. According to the 2024 Functional Literacy, Education, and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), the country has a basic literacy rate of 93.1% among individuals aged 10 to 64. However, the functional literacy rate is only 70.8%, indicating that nearly three out of ten Filipinos struggle to understand and apply information effectively. These findings highlight the need to strengthen critical thinking and comprehension skills, particularly among young learners. In response, the Department of Education (DepEd) has intensified efforts through programs such as the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) and the National Reading Program. Despite these initiatives, many early-grade learners continue to experience reading difficulties, often demonstrating the ability to decode words but failing to comprehend their meaning. This gap between basic and functional literacy underscores the need for targeted interventions, such as phonics-based instruction, to build strong reading foundations.

In the elementary schools of Legislative District 5, Isabela, many Grade 1 pupils exhibit reading difficulties, particularly in fluency and comprehension, as reflected in the results of the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA). The CRLA is an assessment tool used by teachers to determine pupils' reading levels and classify them as frustration, instructional, or independent readers (ABC+, n.d.). This issue is further compounded by the K–12 curriculum, which is literature-based and requires learners to engage with increasingly complex texts. Without early intervention, pupils may fall behind, affecting their long-term academic performance. Therefore, there is a need for a focused phonics-based intervention to strengthen decoding and comprehension skills during this critical stage.

Thus, this study was conducted to serve as a basis for designing and institutionalizing a Reading Intervention Program aimed at addressing existing reading difficulties and improving the academic performance of Grade 1 pupils in English.

This study aimed to determine the impact of phonics instruction on the reading fluency and comprehension of Grade 1 pupils and to evaluate its effectiveness as a strategy for addressing early reading difficulties and improving overall literacy performance.

This study is anchored on the Simple View of Reading (SVR) theory proposed by Gough and Tunmer (1986). The SVR posits that reading comprehension is the product of two primary components: word recognition (decoding) and language comprehension. Decoding refers to the ability to accurately recognize words and relies on phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency. Language comprehension involves understanding the meaning of words, sentences, and texts.

In the context of this study, phonics instruction enhances decoding skills by strengthening the relationship between letters and sounds, thereby improving word recognition and fluency. As decoding improves, learners can focus more on understanding texts, leading to better reading comprehension. The SVR framework emphasizes that both decoding and language comprehension are essential for reading success. It also highlights individual differences in reading development, suggesting that learners may vary in their strengths and weaknesses in decoding and comprehension. These differences may influence the effectiveness of phonics instruction for each learner. Guided by this framework, the study examines how phonics instruction contributes to the development of reading fluency and comprehension among Grade 1 pupils.

### Statement of the problem

This study aimed to assess the impact of phonics instruction on the reading fluency and comprehension of Grade 1 pupils in the elementary schools of Legislative District 5, Isabela, for the school year 2025-2026. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of age, gender, civil status, highest educational attainment, present position, latest performance rating, length of service, and level of in-service training attended?
2. What is the extent of phonics instruction implemented by Grade 1 teachers in terms of frequency of phonics lessons, strategies and methods used, and materials and resources utilized?
3. What is the level of reading fluency of Grade 1 pupils as perceived by their teachers in terms of accuracy, speed, and expression?
4. What is the level of reading comprehension of Grade 1 pupils as perceived by their teachers in terms of literal understanding, inferential understanding, and critical thinking?
5. Is there a significant relationship between the extent of phonics instruction and the reading fluency of Grade 1 pupils?
6. Is there a significant relationship between the extent of phonics instruction and the reading comprehension of Grade 1 pupils?
7. Is there a significant relationship between the reading fluency and reading comprehension of Grade 1 pupils?
8. Based on the findings, what framework can be proposed to enhance phonics instruction and improve pupils' reading fluency and comprehension?

### METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to examine the relationship between the implementation of phonics instruction and the reading fluency and comprehension of Grade 1 pupils in Legislative District 5, Isabela. This design is appropriate for describing existing conditions and determining relationships between naturally occurring variables without manipulation (McBurney & White, 2009). It is also widely used in educational research to assess the strength and direction of associations between instructional practices and learning outcomes (Hassan, 2024). Furthermore, descriptive-correlational designs are effective in identifying patterns and understanding behaviors within real-world classroom contexts (Best & Kahn, 2006).

The study was conducted in public elementary schools across eight municipalities in Legislative District 5, Isabela. The respondents consisted of school heads and Grade 1 teachers

selected through purposive sampling. A total of 80 participants were involved, including 40 school heads and 40 teachers.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire checklist as the primary instrument, supported by documentary analysis and unstructured interviews to validate and enrich the data. The questionnaire was developed based on relevant literature and research materials and included sections on respondents' profiles, the extent of phonics instruction, and the levels of pupils' reading fluency and comprehension. Prior to its administration, the instrument underwent a tryout and validation process, and revisions were made based on feedback from selected respondents and the research adviser.

Data gathering procedures involved securing permission from the Schools Division Superintendent and school administrators before administering the instruments. The researcher personally distributed and retrieved the questionnaires to ensure accuracy and completeness of responses.

For data analysis, descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, and weighted mean were used to summarize respondents' profiles and assess the extent of phonics instruction, as well as the levels of reading fluency and comprehension. Inferential statistics, specifically the Pearson correlation coefficient, were employed to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between phonics instruction and pupils' reading outcomes.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The profile of respondents indicates that both school heads and teachers were predominantly experienced professionals. Most school heads were aged 51–55, while teachers were largely within the 41–50 age range. The teaching workforce was overwhelmingly female (97.62%), and the majority of both groups were married. In terms of qualifications, most school heads held doctoral degrees, whereas the majority of teachers were master's degree holders. Both groups demonstrated high levels of professional competence, with nearly all respondents rated as "outstanding," and most having over two decades of service.

Findings on the extent of phonics instruction reveal that it was implemented at a very high level across all dimensions. School heads reported an overall mean of 4.54, while teachers reported 4.30, indicating that phonics instruction was consistently integrated into daily teaching practices. This included frequent phonics lessons, varied instructional strategies, and the use of diverse learning materials. These results suggest that phonics instruction is a well-established component of early literacy instruction in the study area.

In terms of reading fluency, the overall level was rated high by both groups (school heads:  $M = 3.56$ ; teachers:  $M = 3.43$ ). Accuracy emerged as the strongest component, with teachers rating it very high ( $M = 4.26$ ), indicating that pupils can decode words effectively. However, speed ( $M = 3.08$ ) and expression ( $M = 2.94$ ) were rated only moderate by teachers, suggesting that while pupils can read correctly, they still struggle with automaticity and expressive reading. This pattern indicates that phonics instruction may be more effective in developing decoding skills than in enhancing fluency components that require prosodic and rapid reading.

Reading comprehension was consistently rated high across all domains. School heads reported an overall mean of 3.84, while teachers reported 3.91. Among the components, literal understanding obtained the highest ratings ( $M = 4.00$  and 3.97), followed by inferential understanding ( $M = 3.75$  and 3.92) and critical thinking ( $M = 3.76$  and 3.85). These findings suggest that Grade 1 pupils are generally capable of understanding texts, making inferences, and engaging in basic evaluative thinking, although higher-order comprehension skills remain slightly less developed than literal comprehension.

Correlation analysis further clarifies the relationships among the key variables. A strong positive relationship was found between phonics instruction and reading fluency ( $r = 0.848$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that increased implementation of phonics instruction is associated with higher levels of reading fluency. In contrast, the relationship between phonics instruction and reading comprehension was weaker but still statistically significant ( $r = 0.264$ ,  $p = .002$ ), suggesting that phonics contributes to comprehension but is not its sole determinant. Additionally, a significant relationship was found between reading fluency and reading comprehension ( $r = 0.222$ ,  $p = .010$ ), indicating that improvements in fluency are associated with better comprehension outcomes.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that phonics instruction plays a critical role in developing foundational reading skills, particularly decoding and fluency. However, the relatively weaker association with comprehension suggests that additional instructional approaches, such as vocabulary development and comprehension strategies, are necessary to fully support learners' reading development.

### Proposed framework

#### Integrated phonics-based reading development framework

The proposed Integrated Phonics-Based Reading Development Framework is designed to enhance pupils' reading fluency and comprehension through the systematic application of phonics instruction in early reading education. The framework is grounded in the premise that strong phonics instruction serves as the foundation of effective reading development. By integrating phonics instruction with appropriate teaching strategies, instructional materials, and continuous reading practice, pupils can develop the essential skills necessary for accurate decoding, fluent reading, and meaningful comprehension of texts.

#### Foundational component: Phonics instruction

This component emphasizes the consistent and systematic teaching of phonics to help pupils develop strong decoding skills. It involves daily phonics lessons focusing on letter-sound relationships, blending and segmenting sounds, word-family patterns, and word-building activities. Teachers guide pupils in recognizing sounds, forming words, and applying phonics skills during reading activities. Through the regular integration of phonics instruction across reading sessions and other language-related subjects, pupils are provided with continuous opportunities to practice and strengthen their decoding abilities.

#### Instructional strategies and methods component

This component highlights the use of varied teaching approaches that actively engage pupils in phonics learning. Teachers employ strategies such as oral reading activities, guided reading, phonics games, songs, rhymes, and small-group instruction for struggling readers. These methods create an interactive learning environment where pupils can practice identifying sounds, forming words, and applying phonics skills in meaningful reading contexts. The use of diverse strategies ensures that phonics instruction remains engaging, effective, and responsive to learners' needs.

### Instructional materials and resources component

This component focuses on the effective use of instructional materials and resources to support phonics instruction. Teachers utilize tools such as flashcards, charts, phonics worksheets, decodable books, multimedia resources, and classroom word walls to reinforce letter–sound relationships and word recognition skills. The integration of visual, auditory, and interactive materials helps pupils better understand phonics concepts and sustain their interest in reading activities. These resources serve as essential supports that facilitate pupils’ active participation in phonics learning.

### Reading fluency development component

This component aims to strengthen pupils’ ability to read accurately, smoothly, and with appropriate expression. Through regular reading practice, guided oral reading, and exposure to simple texts, pupils gradually develop reading accuracy, speed, and expression. Teachers provide structured opportunities for pupils to read words, sentences, and short passages, enabling them to build confidence and automaticity. As pupils become more fluent readers, they can focus less on decoding and more on understanding the meaning of the text.

### Reading comprehension development component

This component focuses on helping pupils understand and interpret the texts they read. Pupils are guided to recall details, identify characters and settings, explain events, make predictions, and express their opinions. Through questioning, discussion, and reflective reading activities, pupils develop literal, inferential, and critical thinking skills. These comprehension skills enable pupils to connect textual information with prior knowledge and deepen their understanding of reading materials.

### Expected outcome

The integration of systematic phonics instruction, varied instructional strategies, appropriate learning materials, and consistent reading practice leads to improved reading fluency and comprehension among Grade 1 pupils. Through this framework, pupils are expected to develop strong foundational reading skills that support their overall literacy development and long-term academic success.

### CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that both school heads and teachers possess strong professional qualifications, extensive teaching experience, and a high level of professional competence. School heads demonstrate advanced academic preparation and active engagement in professional development, while teachers likewise exhibit continuous academic growth and participation in training activities. These characteristics enable them to effectively implement educational programs and support pupils’ learning development. To sustain and further enhance instructional quality, school administrators are encouraged to continue strengthening phonics instruction programs by providing adequate institutional support, relevant instructional materials, and ongoing professional development opportunities.

Phonics instruction is consistently and systematically integrated into Grade 1 classroom practices through regular lessons, varied teaching strategies, and the use of appropriate

instructional resources. This confirms that phonics-based instruction serves as a foundational component of early literacy development. In this regard, teachers should continue employing varied and evidence-based phonics strategies, such as blending, segmenting, word-family activities, and the use of decodable texts, to further enhance pupils' decoding skills and reading proficiency. Moreover, schools should ensure the availability of diverse learning resources, including phonics-based books, visual aids, multimedia tools, and assessment materials, to support effective and engaging instruction.

The findings further reveal that Grade 1 pupils demonstrate strong reading accuracy; however, their reading speed and expressive reading remain areas that require further development. While pupils are able to decode words correctly, they still need additional support to achieve automaticity and expressive fluency. To address this, teachers are encouraged to implement targeted reading interventions such as guided oral reading, repeated reading, and interactive storytelling activities that can improve reading rate and prosody.

In terms of comprehension, Grade 1 pupils exhibit satisfactory performance across literal, inferential, and critical levels of understanding. Pupils are capable of interpreting explicit information, making simple inferences, and expressing personal responses to texts. These findings indicate that pupils possess the necessary comprehension skills appropriate to their grade level. However, continued support from both school and home environments remains essential. Parents, therefore, play a vital role and should be encouraged to actively support their children's reading development by providing reading materials, facilitating phonics practice, and promoting consistent reading habits at home.

Finally, the study confirms that significant relationships exist among phonics instruction, reading fluency, and reading comprehension. Phonics instruction contributes substantially to the development of reading fluency, which in turn supports improved comprehension. This underscores the critical role of phonics-based instruction in strengthening foundational literacy skills. Given these findings, future researchers are encouraged to conduct similar studies in different contexts, grade levels, or regions to validate the results and further explore additional factors influencing reading development.

## REFERENCES

- ABC+: Advancing Basic Education in the Philippines. (n.d.). Comprehensive rapid literacy assessment (CRLA) two-pager. <https://earlygradelearninghub.org/briefers/comprehensive-rapid-literacy-assessment-crla-two-pager>
- Barbuto, G. (2023). Phonics instruction. <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/phonics-instruction>
- Best, J. W., & Kahn, J. V. (2006). *Research in education* (10th ed.). Pearson Education. <https://www.pearson.com/en-us/subject-catalog/p/research-in-education/P200000000058/9780205458400>
- Eldredge, J. L. (2005). Foundations of fluency: An exploration. *Reading Psychology*, 26(2), 161–181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02702710590930519>
- Gough, P. B., & Tunmer, W. E. (1986). Decoding, reading, and reading disability. *Remedial and Special Education*, 7(1), 6–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/074193258600700104>

The impact of phonics instruction on reading fluency and comprehension of Grade 1 pupils in the elementary schools of Legislative District 5, Isabela by Cristita E. Bautista

Hassan, M. (2024). Correlational research: Methods, types, and examples. Research-Methodology.net.

McBurney, D. H., & White, T. L. (2009). Research methods (8th ed.). Cengage Learning.

Nicolas, V. (2021). Utilization of online oral reading test in determining the reading skills of the Grade 6 pupils in English. *Journal of World Englishes and Educational Practices*, 3(4), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.32996/jweep.2021.3.4.1>

Xin, T. C., & Yunus, M. M. (2020). Improving oral reading fluency of struggling ESL readers with assisted repeated reading using graded readers. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(9), 4201–4208. <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2020.080947>

Zhu, X., Cheong, C. M., Li, G. Y., & Wu, J. (2020). Primary school teachers' conceptions of reading comprehension processes and its formulation. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, Article 615. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00615>