



**LEARNERS' ORAL COMMUNICATION AND READING COMPREHENSION
DIFFICULTIES: BASES FOR FORMULATION OF SCHOOL-BASED
READING PROGRAM**

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative-phenomenological study was conducted to identify learners' oral communication and reading comprehension difficulties as bases for formulating a school-based reading program. It was found that learners' oral communication difficulties include pronunciation challenges, grammatical-usage errors, difficulty in expressing thoughts clearly, limited vocabulary, and low confidence. English teachers observed that learners' oral communication difficulties included pronunciation issues, grammatical and sentence construction mistakes, limited vocabulary, and low confidence in speaking. On the other hand, learners' reading comprehension difficulties included limited vocabulary, difficulty in expressing ideas, and difficulty making inferences. Learners' reading comprehension difficulties were also observed by teachers. These were limited vocabulary, difficulty with expressing ideas, poor at making inferences, poor retention, lack of interest, inadequate reading strategies, and slow reading rate. A school-based reading program was formulated based on the results of the study.

Keywords: *Oral Communication Difficulties, Reading Comprehension Difficulties, School-based Reading Program*

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INTRODUCTION

Language is power. Language has been part of our daily lives, from the sentences in public places, social media, and in the things we use. This illustrates the profound impact of language on our lives. However, effective communication requires that both parties understand. The ability to communicate effectively in oral discourse is an essential twenty-first-century skill for connecting with the rest of the world. Learners must develop this ability for the efficient value of oral communication and reading comprehension, and their proficiency in the modern world. The world has increasingly become a global village (Su, 2021), where individuals from different linguistic backgrounds rely on English as a shared language to conduct business, carry out research, study overseas, and pursue various personal, academic, and professional goals. Proficiency in English is commonly viewed as an advantage in obtaining employment, scholarships, and other academic or career opportunities. Nevertheless, expressing ideas effectively in a language that is not one's mother tongue remains a significant challenge for many learners (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021), and teaching English communication skills in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting is also considered demanding for educators (Ibna Seraj & Habil, 2021).

Effective communication plays a crucial role in achieving both personal and academic success. Strengthening reading comprehension skills enables learners to better understand language and its subtleties. As a result, this enhanced linguistic competence leads to better oral and written communication skills, which are essential for building meaningful interpersonal relationships and performing well in academic settings (Williams, 2023). This

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ISSN: 2704-3010

Volume VII, Issue III

February 2026

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defines the crucial role of reading skills, especially in learners' communication and comprehension skills, allowing them to effectively express ideas clearly across different contexts.

Most emerging global studies emphasize English reading fluency and decoding skills (Lonigan & Burgess, 2020; Schwanenflugel & Kuhn, 2022), leaving a need for localized inquiry into language-based reading development in Philippine classrooms.

The Department of Education has established the organization of reading programs with the goal of increasing learners' comprehension and eventually making them acquire basic English proficiency to become successful in other learning areas. Despite these initiatives, the findings from the 2022 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) reveal that Filipino students continue to lag considerably behind their global counterparts in reading, mathematics, and science (OECD, 2022). In PISA 2022, the Philippines placed 77th out of 81 participating nations, highlighting a significant deficiency in English Communication Skills (ECS) compared to learners from other countries.

As a language and reading teacher, the researcher observed that learners were challenged in expressing and comprehending the English language, especially in daily classroom settings. Therefore, the researcher believed that this study was essential to determine the oral communication and reading comprehension difficulties of learners in order to formulate a school-based reading program that would improve their oral communication and reading comprehension abilities.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the qualitative research study and covers its components, including the research method, research design, study participants, sampling strategy, research instruments, validation of the instruments, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques.

Research Method

The research study employed a descriptive-qualitative method using an in-depth interview guide that determined and interpreted the oral communication and reading comprehension difficulties of learners, which were used as a basis for the formulation of a school-based reading program.

McCombes (2023) explained that the purpose of descriptive research is to provide an accurate and systematic account of a population, situation, or phenomenon. It can address questions such as what, where, when, and how, but not why. This research design is appropriate for examining one or more variables.

Research Design

The study used a phenomenological research design. Phenomenology was considered a philosophical approach to conducting qualitative research. Its goal was to understand how individuals perceived the world and how these perceptions might differ from commonly held views, by focusing on a person's subjective interpretation of their experiences. The phenomenological approach was carried out by interviewing the participants to learn about

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their impressions, and it was frequently applied in fields such as psychology, sociology, and social work.

Phenomenology concentrated on studying the structures of consciousness as experienced from a first-person perspective. Its primary aim was to investigate and describe phenomena as they were consciously experienced, without relying on theories about their causal explanations or being influenced by unexamined assumptions (Biemel & Spiegelberg, 2024).

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study were the eighteen (18) purposefully selected learners from grades seven to twelve and six (6) purposefully selected English teachers from both the junior high school and senior high school departments at Tigbauan National High School in the School Year 2025-2026. To preserve the confidentiality of their identity, the researcher assigned pseudonyms to the learners and teachers.

Sampling Design

The participants were chosen using a strategy called "purposeful selection." Also known as judgmental or expert sampling, this approach involves intentionally selecting participants based on the researcher's knowledge and judgment. It is particularly suitable for small populations with a defined research purpose, enabling the researcher to focus on individuals who possess specific attributes relevant to the study (Bisht, 2024).

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In addition, inclusion criteria were applied. These criteria refer to the characteristics or attributes that prospective participants must possess to be eligible for the study. Common inclusion criteria may be demographic, clinical, or geographic in nature (Nikolopoulou, 2023).

Research Instrument

The study employed an in-depth interview schedule as its research instrument. This instrument was suitable because the study required qualitative data, which were primarily narrative in nature.

The interview guide questions have two parts. Part I was about the participants' short profiles. Part II contained the major questions related to the study, focusing only on the learner's oral communication and reading comprehension difficulties, as observed and assessed by English teachers.

Validity of the Research Instrument

Before determining the validity of the interview schedule prepared by the researcher, the adviser, the Dean of the Graduate School, and a panel of jurors—selected for their expertise in research, testing and assessment, and English were asked to review and validate each question for possible revisions.

Validity referred to the appropriateness, meaningfulness, accuracy, and usefulness of the inferences made by the researcher. In terms of content-related evidence of validity, the content and format of a measurement tool needed to align with the definitions of the variables and the characteristics of the sample being measured. This alignment was essential for

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validating the items in the questionnaire and ensuring that the instrument accurately assessed the intended constructs (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

The comments, corrections, and suggestions provided by the panel of validators regarding the interview schedule were incorporated using the Good and Scates framework (Appendix A).

Data-Gathering Procedures

Permissions were secured from the adviser, the Dean of the Graduate School, the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent, and the Office of the District Supervisors to enable the researcher to carry out the study.

Upon approval, a letter of request for the conduct of the research study was submitted to the Principal of Tigbauan National High School, the school head, and, with the consent of the participants. The researcher set a convenient schedule and ensured that no disruption of classes happened. The researcher requested the participants to answer the interview questions as provided in the validated interview guide schedule. The researcher guaranteed the participants the utmost confidentiality of their answers.

In-depth interviews were conducted with the aid of a voice and video recorder to fully capture the participants' responses. All detailed information gathered during the interviews was then transcribed, interpreted, and analyzed.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed.

Data Analyses

The information gathered was analyzed using a thematic approach.

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Thematic analysis is a method used to identify patterns or themes within qualitative data. It is a widely applied approach that enables researchers to interpret and understand the meanings behind information collected from interviews, focus groups, and other qualitative sources (Braun & Clarke, 2023).

The purpose of thematic analysis is to pinpoint themes—patterns in the data that are significant or noteworthy—and use these themes to address the research questions or provide insights on an issue. This involves summarizing, analyzing, and interpreting the collected data to make sense of it.

In this study, the transcribed interview data were examined using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2023), which was suitable for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data.

The analysis followed the standard six-phase process. This includes: (1) familiarization with data, reading and re-reading the transcripts (in local language and English translation); (2) generating Initial Codes: assigning short phrases or labels to meaningful segments of data (e.g., "shared phone," "fear of judgment," "poor signal"); (3) searching for themes: grouping the initial codes into potential overarching themes and sub-themes that captured significant patterns (e.g., Codes like "no insult," "private correction" were grouped under Theme 5: Independent and Self-Paced Learning); (4) reviewing themes: refining and checking the themes against the entire dataset to ensure they accurately reflected the participants' meanings and the study's focus; (5) Defining and naming themes: developing clear, concise, and academically sound names for the final emergent themes (as presented in Chapter 4);

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and (6) producing the report: weaving the themes, supported by direct quotes, into the narrative structure of the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of data (Chapter 4), and linking them to the theoretical framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study sought to identify the oral communication and reading comprehension difficulties of learners as bases for the formulation of a school-based reading program.

The study used a researcher-made in-depth interview guide. The interview was conducted with a total of eighteen (18) learners from grades seven to twelve and six (6) English teachers from both the Junior and Senior High School departments of Tigbauan National High School. These learners and teachers were purposefully selected to meet the study's objectives.

The study employed a descriptive-qualitative research design and utilized an in-depth interview guide. Participants were given the freedom to respond openly to the series of questions to provide the necessary information. After the interviews were completed, the collected data were analyzed and interpreted.

The following are the findings of the study:

The oral communication difficulties of learners are pronunciation challenges, grammar-usage errors, difficulty in expressing thoughts clearly, limited vocabulary, and low confidence.

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The learners' oral communication difficulties, as observed by teachers, include pronunciation issues, grammatical and sentence construction mistakes, limited vocabulary, and low confidence in speaking.

The reading comprehension difficulties of learners are limited vocabulary, difficulty in expressing ideas, and difficulty making inferences.

Learners' reading comprehension difficulties, as observed by the teachers, consist of a limited vocabulary, difficulty with expressing ideas, poor at making inferences, poor retention, lack of interest, inadequate reading strategies, and a slow reading rate.

From all these findings, the researcher drew the basis for the formulation of a school-based reading program that caters to the identified difficulties of learners in their oral communication and reading comprehension. The formulated program is "Read to Speak: Speak to Understand," anchored to the oral communication and reading comprehension difficulties of learners. This program is essential to promote holistic language development and improve academic outcomes.

Based on the findings of the study, the following insights were gathered:

Learners with oral communication difficulties are often interrelated with linguistic limitations and affective factors that collectively hinder effective oral communication. This limits their ability to determine understanding, even when cognitive comprehension is present.

Teacher-observed difficulties highlight the interconnected nature of learners' oral communication challenges.

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Learners struggle to construct meaning from texts and to engage in deeper comprehension beyond surface-level reading. Reading comprehension difficulties hinder learners' capacity to understand instructions, academic texts, and assessment questions, resulting in lower academic achievement across subject areas. Since most learning tasks are text-based, weak comprehension affects performance not only in language subjects but also in other fields.

Teachers' observation of learners' significant reading difficulties suggests that learners struggle not only with understanding texts but also with engaging meaningfully in the reading process due to linguistic limitations, insufficient reading strategies, and motivational factors.

Given the interdependent nature of oral and written language skills, weaknesses in one area often intensify difficulties in the other, emphasizing the need for integrated literacy conventions.

Accordingly, the consistency between learner-based and teacher-observed data underscores the urgency of implementing a school-based reading program. The proposed school-based reading program "Read to Speak; Speak to Understand" is a relevant, evidence-based, and responsive solution to the identified difficulties. This school-based reading program holistically progresses oral communication and reading comprehension skills through systematic and learner-centered activities.

The end goal of conducting the school-based reading program is for learners to strengthen their integrated language skills and to develop their comprehension in reading

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texts and effectively express their understanding through clear and confident oral communication.

CONCLUSION

Considering the findings and insights arrived at in the study, the following recommendations may be considered:

School heads should provide ongoing professional development for teachers, focusing on effective strategies to improve oral communication and reading comprehension that address diverse learner needs. Thus, institutionalizing the proposed school-based reading program as part of the school's literacy and language development initiatives is also being encouraged.

Teachers are encouraged to implement the proposed reading program as a regular instructional strategy to enhance learners' oral communication and reading comprehension skills. They should also adopt integrated reading, speaking, and listening strategies that allow learners to process texts orally and express understanding verbally. Likewise, they should create safe and supportive classroom environments that encourage learners to participate in oral activities without worries of making mistakes.

Parents and other stakeholders are also encouraged to be involved in supporting learners' language development through a home-based reading program and oral interaction.

The study's proposed school-based reading program should be implemented to address the identified difficulties of learners in oral communication and reading

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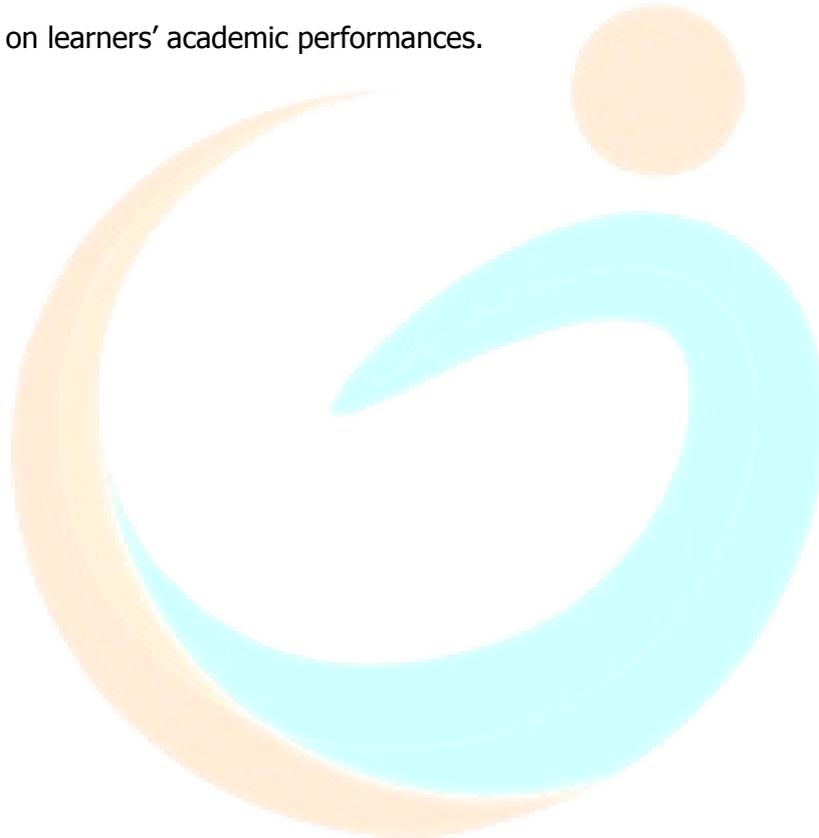
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comprehension. The implementation should be accompanied by continuous monitoring and evaluation to assess its effectiveness. Data gathered from assessments and observations should be used to refine the program and improve instructional practices.

It is also recommended that similar studies be conducted with larger samples and longer implementation periods to examine the long-term effects of integrated reading and oral programs on learners' academic performances.



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