

# A Comparative Study of Reading Ability between Bilingual and Monolingual Grade 4 Pupils

Gretchen J. Portillas<sup>1</sup>, Sharmaine A. Sabornido<sup>2</sup>, Lyn H. Roxas<sup>3</sup>, April Love B. Labares<sup>4</sup>,  
\*Sophomore Talle Vacalares<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup>Department of Teacher Education, Opol Community College, Philippines

Email address: occ.gretchen.portillas@gmail.com<sup>1</sup>, occ.sabornido.sharmaine@gmail.com<sup>2</sup>, occ.roxas.lyn@gmail.com<sup>3</sup>,  
aprillovelabares16@gmail.com<sup>4</sup>, \*sophomore.vacalares@gmail.com<sup>5</sup>

**Abstract**— Monolingual individuals are those who can only speak and understand one language, while bilingual individuals can speak and understand two languages. This research aims to determine whether there is a notable distinction in the reading skills of Grade 4 pupils between those who are bilingual and those who are monolingual. The focus areas of comparison include fluency, accuracy, intonation, and expression. The data collection method involved structured observations of Grade 4 pupils in a face-to-face setting at the Elementary School. The study included the entire Grade 4 population, with 18 monolingual and 22 bilingual students as respondents. The findings showed that bilingual students demonstrated strong phonics skills, surpassing their monolingual counterparts. On the other hand, monolingual students excelled in word accuracy and displayed good proficiency in expression. The results indicate a significant difference in the reading abilities of bilingual and monolingual Grade 4 pupils, particularly in phonics, fluency, accuracy, and expression. Thus, it is recommended to prioritize regular reading assessments for both bilingual and monolingual students to enhance their reading skills.

**Keywords**— Bilingual; Grade 4 Pupils; Monolingual; Reading Ability.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Reading ability refers to the skill and proficiency in reading, including decoding and understanding written material. It is crucial for academic success as it helps individuals comprehend different types of texts. Evaluating a child's reading ability is important as it indicates their mastery of this skill. Additionally, reading ability plays a key role in communication, enabling individuals to effectively engage with others through written language.

Reading is described as a crucial process for acquiring language skills, expanding vocabulary, effective communication, and sharing knowledge. Developing reading proficiency requires a supportive environment involving various cognitive skills like writing, speaking, listening, and critical thinking. Almutairi (2018) argues that reading should be seen as equally important as listening, speaking, writing, and thinking, as it contributes to effective communication and intellectual development.

Bilingual language development starts at birth, according to Heinlein et al. (2010). Their study compared newborns whose mothers only spoke English during pregnancy with those whose mothers spoke both English and Tagalog. The results showed that newborns exposed to both languages had

an equal liking for English and Tagalog, while those exposed only to English preferred English. Importantly, this preference for two languages doesn't mean confusion. The study also found that both English monolingual and Tagalog-English bilingual newborns could tell the difference between English and Tagalog. This suggests that the natural processes of perception and learning in the environment are key for learning two languages.

Some learners struggle with reading and understanding Filipino or English, while others excel in both languages. Bilingualism offers practical advantages in today's globalized world, allowing individuals to communicate effectively in two languages. In bilingual cultures, children can easily learn two languages simultaneously, considering both as their native languages. According to the US Census Bureau, around 22% of school-age children speak a language other than English at home, with a higher percentage among Hispanic youngsters. However, concerns about potential confusion when teaching multiple languages to children still exist.

The 1987 Policy on Bilingual Education strives to foster fluency in Filipino and English at a national scale. This is accomplished by teaching both languages and using them as instructional mediums throughout all levels of education. Regional languages are also utilized as additional languages in Grades I and II. The purpose of this policy is to equip Filipino citizens with the linguistic abilities needed to fulfill their duties within the country, while also enabling them to interact globally in English, meeting the country's international needs.

In their study, Castro et al. (2022) revealed that the concept of monolingualism encompasses more diversity than previously assumed, as it pertains to the proficiency in speaking and comprehending a single language. Language learning, on the other hand, involves the acquisition of a second language in addition to one's native or first language. Typically, the native language corresponds to an individual's mother tongue, while the second language refers to a foreign language acquired through instruction or exposure (Dewaele, 2015). Therefore, this research aims to investigate the reading proficiency of monolingual and bilingual primary school students in a private educational institution where they receive instructions in both English and Bisayan.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW & HYPOTHESIS

In the US, one-third of children under eight have a non-English-speaking parent at home (Park et al., 2017). However, only about 9.6% of American students were ESL learners in 2016 (McFarland et al., 2019). This trend is also observed in other countries. Scholars studying borders and democracy have highlighted the United States' challenging relationship with multilingualism throughout its history.

While numerous countries value children's proficiency in multiple languages, the United States differs in this regard. For a long time, many Americans have held the view that bilingualism is advantageous only if obtained through travel, preferably to Paris, or formal education, preferably at Harvard. However, acquiring bilingualism through other means has been viewed negatively. Sociolinguist Joshua Fishman and his colleagues presented this belief in their work.

Speaking a language other than English is still viewed as a problem in the United States, described as a "language-as-problem orientation." As a consequence, the increasing multilingualism among the nation's children is challenging our current teaching methods and, more importantly, our educational institutions. We lack the necessary tools, resources, infrastructure, and support across the country to effectively handle the linguistic diversity of our children. However, fluency in multiple languages offers numerous benefits, and therefore, we should embrace and value this diversity, as stated by Chan (2022).

Furthermore, Quiñones & Salas (2021) define monolingualism as the capacity to communicate in a single language. However, the concept of monolingualism is based on the notion that communication can only occur using one language at a time. A more accurate examination of common linguistic practices reveals that individuals can fluently speak multiple dialects even if they are only knowledgeable about one language family, such as English.

The United States, despite having a population of over 70 million bilingual individuals, maintains the largest monolingual population globally. In contrast, approximately two-thirds of Europeans possess multilingual skills. The number of Chinese students learning English exceeds 300 million, whereas the count of American students studying Chinese is just over two hundred thousand. The prevalence of English as the dominant language in global commerce and diplomacy, along with its status as the most widely studied second language worldwide, may contribute to Americans' lack of motivation to learn foreign languages. However, it is important to recognize that fluency in English among others does not replace the need for Americans to attain proficiency in foreign languages (Dincer & Dariyemez, 2020).

The impact of language exposure on reading skills development in bilingual and monolingual children is examined (Papastefanou, 2021). The study focuses on primary school students in the United Kingdom who are learning both Greek and English as their second language. The main goal of the research is to compare the language and literacy performance of bilingual and bi-literate children with that of their monolingual peers during the first four years of primary school.

The researcher used assessments to measure children's language and reading abilities in Greek and English. Both bilingual and monolingual participants underwent the same testing procedures, including parallel versions of the assessments in both languages. The data was collected through individual sessions in quiet settings, either at home or school, with two testing sessions of about 45 minutes each. The findings revealed that bilingual children performed better in reading than monolingual children. The author suggests that exposure to a first language with consistent spelling may aid children's word-reading skills.

Implementing a bilingual policy in the Philippines can enhance students' communication skills in both English and the Filipino language. The Mother Tongue Based - Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) curriculum has been introduced to address linguistic discrimination and improve English instruction, focusing on the cognitive development of students' first language (Dumanig, 2019). Additionally, the advancement of technology has had a significant influence on language acquisition and learning. Several studies have explored the impact of media on language acquisition, highlighting the relevance of research on the effects of digital platforms on English language learning (Tridianti, 2017).

English learning in the Philippines is shaped by various factors, including access to technology and the language's prevalence in sectors valuing literacy and social standing. This leads parents to prioritize English education and enroll their children in private schools, initiating their English instruction from an early age (Reyes, 2018).

In the Philippines, bilingual education refers to the utilization of both Filipino and English as separate languages of instruction in specific subjects. According to DECS Order No. 25, Filipino (formerly known as Pilipino) is used as the medium of instruction for social studies/social sciences, music, the arts, physical education, home economics, practical arts, and character education. Conversely, English takes precedence in science, math, and technological topics. This allocation of subjects is also specified in the 1987 Policy on Bilingual Education, as outlined in Department Order No. 52, issued in 1987.

According to a 2013 estimate by UNESCO, millions of Filipinos struggle with basic math and reading skills, resulting in the Philippines being referred to as "the nation of fifth graders." In response to this, a recent senate investigation focuses on declining English proficiency among Filipino children and suggests examining current curricula, providing training, and exploring different learning methods. There seems to be a misconception that teaching children two languages might lead to confusion and hinder their English proficiency in the long run. As a result, it is recommended that children establish a strong foundation in their first language (L1) and gradually introduce their second language (L2), be it English or Filipino (Alicias, 2015).

### *Hypothesis*

*Ho<sup>1</sup>*: There is no significant difference between children's reading ability to be bilingual and monolingual.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

In this study, a qualitative research design was employed, specifically the correlation research design, which examines the relationships between multiple variables. Since correlation studies are non-experimental, variables are not manipulated or controlled by the researcher. The study focused on collecting and analyzing qualitative data.

B. Respondents

The respondents of this study were grade 4 pupils in a private primary school in Opol, Misamis Oriental. There were 18 monolingual and 22 bilingual learners. In categorizing the participants, the researchers employed DepEd standardized reading materials (Phil-IRI) to evaluate the categories of the participants as mono- or bi-lingual.

C. Research Instrument

The research utilized a structured form of observation, conducted at a specific location and time, where respondents were observed using a standardized procedure. This type of observation falls under the category of qualitative observation, which involves systematically gathering data or information using subjective approaches. The main objective of qualitative observation is to compare differences in quality, as it aims to gather information through subjective methods rather than quantitative measurements or numbers.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results were presented in a tabular format, where the data was systematically arranged to align with the specific research questions outlined in the problem statement.

A. Bilingual Learners

TABLE 1. Percentage Rating of the Bilingual Pupils

Category	Needs Improvement (1)	Fair (2)	Good (3)	Excellent (4)
Phonics	0.00%	13.63%	68.18%	18.18%
Fluency	0.00%	13.63%	50.00%	36.36%
Accuracy	13.63%	18.18%	36.36%	31.81%
Expression	36.36%	40.91%	13.63%	9.09%

The information provided in Table 1 indicates the performance levels of participants in various aspects of literacy. The table shows that 68% of the participants were proficient in phonics, which refers to the understanding and recognition of letter-sound relationships. Additionally, 50% of the participants demonstrated competence in fluency, which suggests their ability to read with speed and accuracy. Furthermore, 36% of the participants exhibited accuracy in their reading, indicating their ability to read without errors.

Interestingly, the findings also revealed that 40.91% of the participants had fair expression skills. This refers to their ability to effectively express themselves while reading, such as using appropriate intonation and expression to convey meaning.

These findings are consistent with a study conducted by O'Brien in 2019, which investigated the effectiveness of teaching English phonics to bilingual Chinese-English

children using a digital text app. The study showed significant effects over time in each of the literacy measures, with the group focusing on phonics demonstrating greater improvement in phonological awareness compared to other groups. In line with Cunningham's (2002) perspective, there is a growing consensus among teachers, guidance counselors, administrators, and school boards that phonics instruction is essential for learners. Phonics has regained popularity as educators recognize its importance in supporting students' reading and language development.

Therefore, the findings suggest that the teaching of phonics using a digital text app can positively impact bilingual children's literacy development, particularly in terms of phonological awareness.

TABLE 2. Mean Rating on Reading Ability Among Bilingual Pupils

Variable	Mean Rating	Description
Phonics	3.04	Good
Fluency	3.22	Excellent
Accuracy	2.86	Good
Expression	1.91	Fair
Over-all	2.85	Good

Based on the information presented in Table 2, the data suggests that a significant portion of the participants excelled in fluency, with 3.22 being classified as excellent. Additionally, a considerable number of participants, 3.04, demonstrated proficiency in phonics. The table also indicates that 2.86 participants performed well in accuracy, while 1.91 were categorized as fair in expression. Overall, 2.85 participants were considered good in terms of their overall performance.

These observations align with the research conducted by Ates (2019), which substantiates the assertion that fluent reading yields several advantages beyond the mere ability to read at an acceptable pace. The reported benefits encompass the expansion of vocabulary, heightened phonemic awareness, and enhanced comprehension of narratives. Ates's study serves to validate the claim that fluency constitutes a pivotal factor in diverse aspects of literacy development.

B. Monolingual Learners

TABLE 3. Reading Ability of Monolingual

Category	Needs Improvement (1)	Fair (2)	Good (3)	Excellent (4)
Phonics	0.00%	11.11%	50.00%	38.88%
Fluency	11.11%	11.11%	33.33%	44.44%
Accuracy	11.11%	22.22%	66.66%	11.11%
Expression	5.55%	16.66%	44.44%	33.33%

The data in Table 3 shows the proficiency levels of participants in different aspects of reading. It reveals that a significant percentage of individuals demonstrated competency in phonics, fluency, accuracy, and expression. Specifically, 50% showed good performance in phonics, 44.44% were excellent in fluency, 66.66% displayed good accuracy, and 44.44% exhibited good expression.

Nilsson's (2022) perspective highlights the importance of accuracy in decoding words and emphasizes the goal of achieving automatic decoding for effortless reading. This not only enhances comprehension but also allows for a more

expressive interpretation of the text. These findings underscore the need to address both accuracy and fluency in reading instruction. Educators can provide explicit phonics instruction to develop accurate decoding skills while also fostering fluency to promote automatic and expressive reading.

TABLE 4. Mean Rating on Reading Ability Among Monolingual Pupils

Variable	Mean Rating	Description
Phonics	3.27	Excellent
Fluency	3.11	Good
Accuracy	2.66	Good
Expression	3.05	Good
Over-all	3.07	Good

Table 4 presents the proficiency levels of participants in phonics, fluency, expression, and accuracy. The results show that a significant number of participants demonstrated excellence in phonics, with a good level of proficiency in fluency, expression, and accuracy. These findings support previous research highlighting the benefits of phonics instruction, particularly for younger learners. Phonics approaches have been shown to significantly improve reading skills, especially for children between 4 and 7 years old. These findings emphasize the importance of incorporating phonics instruction in early reading education to build strong foundations and enhance overall reading abilities. Further research can explore effective instructional methods to optimize the benefits of phonics instruction for young learners.

TABLE 5. The Significant Difference Between Bilingual and Monolingual According to Reading Ability

Category	Bilingual (22) $\bar{x}$ $\sigma$	Mono (18) $\bar{x}$ $\sigma$	T-Results $\alpha = 0.05$ $t = \pm 2.021$	Decision
Phonics	3.04	3.28	-1.224	Accept Ho Not Significant
Fluency	3.23	3	0.845	Accept Ho Not Significant
Accuracy	2.86	2.67	0.621	Accept Ho Not Significant
Expression	1.96	3	-3.789	Reject Ho Significant
Over-all	2.77	3	-1.144	Accept Ho Not Significant

Table 5 presents the results of the study, comparing bilingual and monolingual participants in different aspects of reading. In the phonics category, bilingual participants scored 3.04, while monolingual participants scored 3.28. The T-result of -1.224 suggests that this difference is not significant, indicating that the null hypothesis (Ho) is not rejected. Similarly, in the fluency category, bilingual participants scored 3.23, and monolingual participants scored 3. The T-result of 0.845 also suggests no significant difference, leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis.

In terms of accuracy, bilingual participants scored 2.86 and monolingual participants scored 2.67, with a T-result of 0.621, indicating no significant difference and supporting the null hypothesis. However, in the expression category, bilingual participants scored 1.98, while monolingual participants

scored 3. The T-result of -3.789 suggests a significant difference, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis.

The study also highlights the importance of expressive reading, emphasizing that reading aloud with emotion can enhance comprehension and make reading more engaging and enjoyable. This finding aligns with the concept that children who read with expression are more likely to focus on the text and can share their understanding with others. Whether individuals are bilingual or monolingual, the ability to express oneself through reading is an essential aspect of reading proficiency (Friesen et al., 2022).

V. CONCLUSION

The study revealed significant improvements in the reading abilities of learners, specifically in phonics, fluency, accuracy, and expression. The scores indicate that monolingual learners had lower reading abilities compared to the provided rubrics. Importantly, the study highlighted the advantages of bilingual learners in terms of reading ability, suggesting that they outperformed their monolingual counterparts.

Bilingual learners have an advantage in their reading abilities because they have the ability to understand and engage with written material in multiple languages. This expanded language repertoire enables them to access a wider range of texts and comprehend them more effectively. The findings suggest that being bilingual enhances cognitive and linguistic abilities, which positively impact reading comprehension. Bilingual learners are exposed to diverse language structures, vocabulary, and cultural contexts, which contribute to their overall reading proficiency.

Bilingual students demonstrate accelerated acquisition of pre-reading skills in comparison to their monolingual counterparts. Furthermore, bilingualism has been associated with a range of cognitive advantages, such as enhanced multitasking abilities, increased creativity, and improved working memory. In conclusion, the study highlights the superior reading capabilities of bilingual learners compared to monolingual learners. The ability to utilize multiple languages enhances their reading skills, enabling them to comprehend and engage with written material more effectively.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to support the reading abilities of both monolingual and bilingual learners in areas such as phonics, fluency, accuracy, and expression, it is crucial for teachers to regularly assess their progress. It is equally important for students to take responsibility for their own learning and recognize the significance of putting effort into improving their reading abilities. Developing proper intonation, accuracy, fluency, and expression requires time and understanding. Parents also play a vital role by encouraging their children to read and providing a diverse range of materials to spark their interest in learning. Lastly, future researchers can use this study as a reference point or guide when conducting related research on bilingual and monolingual reading abilities.

REFERENCES

- [1] Alicias, E. (2015, September 20). Yes To Filipino-English Bilingualism. Inquirer.net. Retrieved from <https://opinion.inquirer.net/88696/yes-to-filipino-english-bilingualism>
- [2] Almutairi, N. R. (2018). Effective reading strategies for increasing the reading comprehension level of third-grade students with learning disabilities. Dissertations. ScholarWorks at Western Michigan University. Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations/3247/>
- [3] Ates, S. (2019). The impact of repeated reading exercises and performance-based feedback on fluent reading skills. *Reading Improvement*, 56(1), 36-43. DOI: 10.31641/ri.56.1.4
- [4] Castro, S., Wodniecka, Z., & Timmer, K. (2022). Am I truly monolingual? Exploring foreign language experiences in monolingual. *PLoS ONE*, 17(3), e0265563. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0265563>
- [5] Chan, L. (2020). Bilingualism and Biliteracy for All article. American Federation of Teachers. Retrieved from <https://www.aft.org/ae/summer2020/lu>
- [6] Cunningham, P. M. (2017). Phonics they use: words for reading and writing. Boston: Pearson.
- [7] Dewaele, J. M. (2015). Bilingualism and Multilingualism. In *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction* (1st Ed., pp. 56-79). doi:10.1002/9781118611463/wbielsi108
- [8] Dincer, A., & Dariyemez, T. (2020). Proficient Speakers of English as Foreign Language: A Focus-Group Study. *Journal of Education: Language Learning in Education*, 8(1), 83-99. DOI: 10.22492/ije.8.1.05
- [9] Dumanig, E., Jr. (2019). Bilingualism and Multilingualism in Primary Education in the Philippines. In Lorraine P.S., Maria Teresa T., & Ian M. (Eds.), *Education and Childhood Studies*. London: Bloomsbury Academic. doi:10.5040/9781474209472.0016
- [10] Friesen, D. C., Schmidt, K., Atwal, T., & Celebre, A. (2022). Reading comprehension and strategy use: Comparing bilingual children to their monolingual peers and to bilingual adults. *Psychology of Language*, 2. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.986937>
- [11] Heinlein, K. B., Burns, T. C., & Werker, J. F. (2010). The roots of bilingualism in newborns. *Psychological Science*, 2(3), 343-348. doi:10.1177/0956797609360758
- [12] Nilsson, K. (2022). Words don't come easy: Decoding and reading comprehension difficulties in adolescents with intellectual disability. Linköping University. *Studies in Disability Research*, pp. 1-41. Retrieved from <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1710875/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- [13] Papastefanou, T., (2021). The Development of reading comprehension in bilingual and monolingual children—effects of language exposure. *Languages*, 6(4), 166. <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages6040166>
- [14] Park, M., O'Toole, A., & Katsiaficas, C. (2017). *Dual Language Learners: A National Demographic and Policy Profile*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.
- [15] Quiñones, M. P., & Salas, C. C. (2021). How the ideology of monolingualism drives us to monolingual interaction. *Association for Computing Machinery Digital Library*, 28(3). <https://doi.org/10.1145/3457871>
- [16] Reyes, T. (2018). Mind the gap: In the Philippines, Keep in mind that in the Philippines, language is more about class than words. *Coconut Manila*. Retrieved from <https://coconuts.co/manila/features/mind-gap-philippines-language-isnt-words-class/>
- [17] Tridianti, G. (2017). English Introduction Through Digital Storytelling in Early Childhood. *The International Journal of Language and Culture Review*, 3(1), 49-55. doi:10.21009/IJLECR.031.06