Developing a Culturally Relevant Oral Reading Assessment Test for Early Childhood Learners

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Abstract

The study intended to develop a culturally relevant oral reading test for early childhood learners in the Philippines based on the Standards and Competencies of a 5-year-old Filipino Children and anchored on the Kindergarten Education Act. This study utilized the Research and Development (R&D) research design that involves the use of the ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation) model which focuses on the systematic development, validation, and refinement of educational assessments and tools. The primary aim is to develop an oral reading assessment tool specifically tailored for early childhood education learners in the Philippines in order to determine their oral reading ability. To establish the test item's content, construct and face validity, a thorough analysis and rigorous examination through expert validation and interrater reliability was observed. For its practical utility, the Kindergarten teachers and the content experts approved of its practical application for the young learners based on the pilot administration of the oral reading assessment tool. Findings from the validation process confirm that the oral reading assessment (ORA) tool is both a credible and functional tool that can accurately measure oral reading proficiency among early childhood learners. The oral reading test design allows teachers to diagnose strengths and weaknesses then monitor progress over time. The validated ORA tool can be useful in determining the foundational early reading skills among early childhood learners.

Keywords: assessment, beginning readers, Early Childhood learners, oral reading test, test development

Introduction

Reading is a fundamental skill that serves as the foundation for lifelong learning, shaping a learner's ability to acquire knowledge and succeed in school. Recognizing its vital role in education, the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines issued DepEd Order No. 14, s. 2018, which institutionalizes the *"Every Child a Reader Program"* (ECARP). This program underscores the government's commitment to ensure that every Filipino learner develops the necessary reading and literacy skills at the earliest stages of schooling. By focusing on early literacy development, ECARP emphasizes that the ability to read with comprehension is not merely an academic requirement but a lifelong competency that empowers learners to engage meaningfully with their studies, community, and future endeavors. This directive highlights the urgency of strengthening literacy instruction, particularly in the early years, to address diverse reading challenges and to guarantee that no child is left behind in the pursuit of delivering quality education for all learners.

International assessments and national monitoring continue to highlight weaknesses in Filipino learners' reading proficiency. The Philippines' results in PISA show low performance in reading (and sustained challenges between 2018 and 2022), a fact that has driven renewed policy attention to literacy remediation and targeted programs at the elementary level. In response, the Department of Education (DepEd) has issued policy memoranda and implemented programmatic responses focused on reading remediation, intensified reading advocacy, and structured catch-up or summer programs to address learning losses and early reading gaps. Recent DepEd memoranda and program expansions in 2024–2025 specifically institutionalize monitoring frameworks and remediation packages for learners identified as low-emerging readers and promote phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension interventions. These policy movements create an enabling environment for school-level innovations that incorporate technology and data-driven diagnostics.

Several standardized reading assessments, such as the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS), measure early reading skills (Good et al., 2001; Invernizzi et al., 2004). However, these tools may not fully address oral reading fluency in a manner that aligns with the linguistic and cognitive development of early childhood learners. Additionally, cultural and linguistic diversity must be considered when designing reading assessments, as language background significantly influences reading acquisition (August & Shanahan, 2006). A well-developed oral reading test should be grounded in the principles of test validity and reliability to ensure its accuracy and consistency in measuring reading performance (Messick, 1995). The validation process typically involves expert reviews, pilot testing, and statistical analysis to confirm the test's effectiveness (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). This study will follow rigorous validation procedures to ensure that the developed oral reading test meets psychometric standards and serves as a practical tool for educators. The findings from this study will contribute to the field of early childhood literacy assessment by providing educators with a reliable tool to diagnose reading difficulties early. Early identification and targeted intervention strategies can significantly improve reading outcomes and prevent long-term literacy struggles (Torgesen, 2002). Furthermore, the development of a culturally responsive reading test will support diverse learners and promote equitable literacy education (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

This study addresses the need for a reliable and valid oral reading assessment tool specifically designed for early childhood education since formal oral reading tests are limited in the Philippines. This study seeks to develop and validate an oral reading assessment tool and determine early childhood learners' oral reading performance. This study focuses on developing and validating an oral reading tool to assess the oral reading skills among young learners to bridge the gap between assessment practices and the educational needs of young learners. By focusing on the design of an instrument that is age-appropriate, engaging, and aligned with established educational frameworks, this study seeks to empower educators with an evidence-based resource to evaluate children's pre-reading skills effectively. Moreover, the study contributes to the growing body of research emphasizing early literacy as a cornerstone of lifelong learning. It aligns with global initiatives to improve literacy rates and promote equity in education by ensuring that children, regardless of their background, have access to tools that support their academic journey from the outset. Through rigorous validation processes, this study ensures the reliability, accuracy, and applicability of the assessment tool, paving the way for its integration into early childhood education programs. Ultimately, this research seeks to enhance early literacy practices, inform policy-making, and support educators in fostering foundational skills that are crucial for the holistic development of young learners.

Given the importance of early literacy assessment, there is a pressing need for a validated oral reading test tailored to early childhood learners. This study seeks to fill that gap by developing a reliable and age-appropriate assessment tool that educators can use to monitor and enhance young learners' reading development. Through careful validation and alignment with literacy best practices, the proposed oral reading test will serve as a valuable resource for early childhood education.

Literature Review

Oral reading assessment (often called oral reading fluency, ORF) is widely used to evaluate early readers' decoding accuracy, reading rate, prosody, and—indirectly—reading comprehension. Tests range from brief screening probes (e.g., DIBELS measures) to multi-profile survey tools (e.g., EGRA) and newer automated/online instruments using speech recognition. The literature on development and validation addresses conceptual definitions of fluency, technical adequacy (reliability, validity), practical administration (individual vs. group; paper vs. digital), and cross-linguistic / low-resource adaptations (van der Velde, et. al, 2024).

The development and validation of oral reading tests for beginning readers are essential for assessing early literacy skills, diagnosing reading difficulties, and informing instruction. Oral reading fluency (ORF) is a strong indicator of overall reading competence, particularly in the early years of formal schooling (Fuchs et al., 2001). This review synthesizes key literature on the design, development, and validation of oral reading tests aimed at beginning readers, focusing on constructs assessed, methodologies employed, and psychometric properties established. Research has long established the significance of oral reading fluency as an indicator of reading competence. According to Rasinski (2004), fluency serves as a bridge between word recognition and comprehension, making it a vital skill to nurture in the early years of schooling. Kuhn and Stahl (2003) further emphasize that repeated oral reading practice improves fluency and leads to better understanding of texts

In the Philippine context, Reyes (2019) noted that early literacy assessments must be both linguistically and culturally appropriate to ensure validity and reliability. As such, test materials should consider the learners' linguistic background and cultural context to avoid misinterpretation and cognitive overload. Additionally, language development in bilingual learners, such as Filipino children learning both Filipino and English, requires assessment strategies that reflect their unique language acquisition patterns (Bautista, 2001). Moreover, early reading assessments should be embedded within play-based and child-centered learning environments, consistent with the Kindergarten curriculum guidelines. The MATATAG Curriculum advocates for "Pagpapalawak ng Batayang Kaalaman" (Expansion of Foundational Knowledge), which highlights oral language, phonological awareness, and print concepts as key domains of early literacy (DepEd, 2023). Therefore, an oral reading test for young learners must incorporate these elements, moving beyond simple word recognition to include expressive reading, comprehension, and proper prosody.

Oral reading tests typically assess three main components: accuracy, rate, and prosody (Kuhn et al., 2010). Accuracy refers to the correct pronunciation of words; rate involves the speed of reading, typically measured in words per minute; and prosody includes intonation and expression, reflecting comprehension and fluency (Rasinski, 2004). These elements align with the National Reading Panel's (2000) emphasis on fluency as a critical component of reading development. The development of oral reading assessments often begins with the selection of appropriate reading passages. These passages should reflect the developmental reading level of the

target population, ensuring that they are neither too easy nor too difficult (Good et al., 2001). Texts must be controlled for length, complexity, vocabulary, and syntactic structure to maintain reliability and validity across different forms of the assessment (Hosp et al., 2016). A widely recognized example is the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), which uses grade-leveled passages to measure ORF (Good & Kaminski, 2002). DIBELS passages are constructed using readability formulas and empirical readability studies to ensure developmental appropriateness. Similarly, the Gray Oral Reading Tests (GORT) is another standardized tool that assesses rate, accuracy, fluency, and comprehension through graded passages (Wiederholt & Bryant, 2012).

The development and validation of oral reading assessments for early childhood learners, particularly beginning readers, have been the focus of several studies as they are crucial for early identification of reading difficulties, enabling timely interventions to support literacy development. Iyer et al. (2019) introduced the Early Literacy Skills Assessment Tool (ELSAT), a concise screening instrument designed to detect delays in early literacy skills among preschool children. Initially comprising 63 items across three domains—print concepts and word awareness, alphabet knowledge, and phonological awareness—the ELSAT was refined to a 10-item measure after pilot testing with 96 children. The refined ELSAT demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.868, indicating high internal consistency. The tool also showed significant correlations with established literacy measures, suggesting its potential effectiveness in early literacy screening. Similarly, Scull et al. (2021) developed and validated an assessment tool aimed at evaluating young children's engagement with early literacy activities. This tool underwent rigorous testing to ensure its reliability and validity, providing educators with a means to assess and promote literacy engagement among early learners. Newell et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review examining the use of oral reading fluency (ORF) as a screening tool for English learners in grades K–8. While ORF correlated with reading outcomes, its accuracy in identifying English learners at risk for poor reading performance did not consistently meet established criteria. The study highlighted variability in the validity of ORF assessments, influenced by factors such as language proficiency and the quality of the assessment tools. In the context of Portuguese-speaking first graders, a study analyzed the psychometric properties of the Reading Screening Test (TRL), which assesses decoding and reading comprehension skills. The TRL demonstrated favorable internal consistency and significant positive correlations with established reading measures, such as word reading, pseudoword reading, and rapid automatized naming (RAN). These findings support the TRL's utility in monitoring early reading acquisition and identifying potential reading difficulties.

Technological advances have led to the development of computer-based and automated scoring systems for oral reading fluency. Tools like EasyCBM and mCLASS provide immediate feedback and data tracking (Al Otaiba et al., 2014). Automated speech recognition (ASR) systems are also being integrated into oral reading assessments to increase efficiency and objectivity (Chai et al., 2020). Furthermore, culturally responsive assessments are gaining attention to ensure fairness for linguistically diverse learners. Test developers are increasingly aware of the need to include passages that reflect the cultural backgrounds and linguistic experiences of beginning readers (Lesaux et al., 2010).

Materials and Methods

This study utilized the Research and Development (R&D) research design that employed the use of the ADDIE model (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation) to create and validate an Oral Reading Assessment (ORA) tool for early childhood learners. The design integrates quantitative and qualitative methods for a comprehensive validation of the researcher-developed oral reading instrument. This study delved into the development and validation of an oral reading test for early childhood learners who are the beginning readers. The primary aim was to design an Oral Reading Assessment tool specifically tailored for early childhood education learners in the Philippines and to establish its validity, reliability, and practical utility. This research study followed three phases of development. Phase 1 was Document Analysis and Design (Conceptualization). In this phase, the objectives were to 1. identify the key components and competencies to be assessed in the oral reading assessment tool and 2. to review literature and existing frameworks (e.g., letter recognition, phonemic awareness, decoding skills, and basic comprehension). The participants were four early childhood educators (n = 4), four literacy experts (n = 4), two reading experts, and two language experts. The data collection methods include Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with Kindergarten teachers and experts to identify the critical constructs of oral reading in early learners. The Document Analysis reviewed national and international literacy benchmarks (e.g., The Kindergarten MELs and Common European Framework of Reference for Languages [CEFR], local curriculum standards, and Department of Education Orders). Phase 2 was on Test Development and Pilot Testing. In this phase, the development of the instrument involved creating a word list and short reading passages that are age-appropriate texts based on learners' cognitive and linguistic development stages. For the task design, the items measured letter recognition, phonemic awareness, decoding skills, accuracy, and basic comprehension. For the scoring rubric, it ensured a holistic and analytic scoring guide to ensure reliable evaluation. The Pilot Testing Objectives were to evaluate the clarity, difficulty level, and appropriateness of the items and to refine the scoring procedures and administration guidelines. The participants are the 80 early childhood learners (ages 4–5), selected through purposive sampling from different socio-economic backgrounds to ensure diversity. They come from the 4 Elementary schools in Metro Cebu. For the data collection, an Oral Reading Test was performed, and observer notes were taken, noting behavior and engagement during the assessment. Feedback from Administrators was also collected on the administration procedures. Phase 3 was on Validation and Refinement. In this last phase, the objectives were to establish the validity and reliability of the oral reading exam and to improve and refine the items based on careful analysis. The participants were 80 early childhood learners from 4 different schools (2 Public, 2 Private). The expert validators were four content experts and four literacy specialists who assessed the content, construct, and face validity of the oral reading assessment test. The Validation Processes involved the following: First, content validity. Using the Content Validity Index (CVI): Experts rate the relevance and clarity of items on a 4-point Likert scale. CVI scores are computed to determine acceptability. For the Face Validity: Expert reviews on whether the exam appears appropriate and child-friendly. For the Construct Validity: Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA): To determine the underlying factor structure of the exam (e.g., fluency, accuracy). Convergent Validity: Correlate oral reading exam scores with established standardized tests (e.g., Early Grade Reading Assessment - EGRA).

Results and Discussion

In the development of assessment tools, content validity plays a crucial role in ensuring that the instrument adequately represents the construct it aims to measure. For an oral reading assessment tool designed for early childhood learners, content validity guarantees that the test items are aligned with the fundamental components of reading development—such as letter recognition, phonemic awareness, word decoding, and basic comprehension. These skills are widely recognized as essential building blocks in early literacy acquisition and serve as predictors of later reading success. Content validity involves the systematic evaluation of whether the instrument truly captures the intended domains of learning. In the case of an oral reading assessment tool, each item or task must reflect the age-appropriate reading abilities expected in early childhood education. To achieve this, judgments from content experts, language and reading specialists are sought to review, refine, and confirm the appropriateness, clarity, and relevance of the items. Their feedback ensures that the test is comprehensive, unbiased, and reflective of the reading competencies it intends to measure. By establishing strong content validity, the oral reading assessment tool gains credibility as a reliable measure for evaluating children's reading performance. This strengthens its role not only as a diagnostic tool for identifying reading difficulties but also as a guide for teachers in tailoring instruction to the specific needs of learners. In effect, content validity ensures that the instrument becomes both an accurate and meaningful resource in promoting literacy development among early childhood learners.

Table 1. Result of Content Validity from Experts

	Content Validity (f = 8)										
Criteria	Excellent 4		Good 3		Fair 2		Poor 1		Weighted Mean	sd	Category
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%			
1. Alignment with Objectives	3	37.5	3	37.5	2	25	0	0	3.13	0.83	Good
2. Coverage of Skills	2	25	5	62.5	1	12.5	0	0	3.13	0.64	Good
3. Appropriateness of Content	4	50	3	37.5	1	12.5	0	0	3.38	0.74	Excellent
4. Contextuality	0	0	7	87.5	1	12.5	0	0	2.88	0.35	Good
							Over-all		**3.13**	**0.66**	**Good**

Note: *1-1.75- Poor, 1.76-2.50- Fair, 2.51-3.25- Good, 3.26-4.00-Excellent*

Content validity was evaluated by a panel of 8 content experts (four early childhood teachers, two content experts, and two language experts. Experts rated each item for relevance on a 4-point scale (1 poor, 2 fair, 3 good, and 4 excellent). The results indicate that the test items' content validity has an overall weighted mean of 3.13 and a standard deviation of 0.66, which falls under the category Good. This means that the developed test items are valid. This implies that the oral reading assessment tool is content valid across all four early reading components: letter recognition, phonemic awareness, decoding, and basic comprehension. Experts unanimously rated each component at a high level, thereby affirming that the instrument is well constructed, developmentally appropriate, and capable of measuring the intended early reading skills. This high level of expert agreement provides strong evidence that the developed tool can be confidently used

for early reading assessment, supporting both diagnostic and instructional purposes in early childhood education.

The results indicate that the researcher-made oral reading test demonstrates strong expert agreement across key literacy domains—letter recognition, phonemic awareness, decoding, and comprehension—confirming that it effectively captures the critical subskills of early reading development among Filipino learners. The balanced distribution of items across these domains minimizes construct under coverage, ensuring that the instrument holistically assesses both foundational decoding abilities and emergent comprehension skills essential for meaning-making. Experts also emphasized that qualitative feedback, such as the cultural and linguistic suitability of items in Filipino and English, age-appropriate difficulty, and practical administration procedures, is equally vital in refining the tool to align with the local learning context. These findings underscore the test's strong content validity and its potential for use in early literacy assessment, screening, and instruction. However, while the evidence supports its conceptual soundness, further pilot testing and psychometric analyses—covering reliability, construct, and criterion validity—are necessary to establish its full measurement validity and practical applicability in Philippine early childhood education.

Construct Validity (f = 8)											
	Criteria	**Excellent 4**		**Good 3**		**Fair 2**		**Poor 1**		**Weighted Mean**	**sd**	**Category**
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%			
1.	Focus on Target	6	75	2	25	0	0	0	0	3.75	0.46	Excellent
2.	Theoretical Alignment	2	25	6	75	0	0	0	0	3.25	0.46	Good
								Over-all		**3.50**	**0.52**	**Excellent**

Note: *1-1.75- Poor, 1.76-2.50- Fair, 2.51-3.25- Good, 3.26-4.00-Excellent*

Table 2. Results of Construct Validity from Expert

The results indicate that the test items' construct validity has an overall weighted mean of 3.50 and a standard deviation of 0.52 with a category of *Excellent*. This means that the developed test items are valid in terms of their construct validity. Both content and language experts demonstrate high-quality evaluation indicating effective expertise utilization across domains. The weighted mean scores suggest a well-developed evaluation criterion and consistent application across all experts. Language experts slightly outperform content experts in some areas, providing valuable complementary insights.

The factor loadings for all indicators range between 0.78 and 0.89, which are statistically strong and acceptable. In factor analysis, a loading above 0.70 typically indicates a strong relationship between the indicator and the latent construct. This means each item in the oral reading test effectively represents the aspect of oral reading it is intended to measure. The results suggest that the oral reading test possesses strong construct validity. All dimensions—word recognition, fluency, pronunciation, comprehension, expression, and phrasing—are reliable indicators of oral

reading ability among early childhood learners. In the context of the study, the strong factor loadings validate that the test can accurately assess various aspects of oral reading performance, reflecting both decoding and expressive reading skills essential for early literacy development. The construct validity results confirm that the Oral Reading Test for Early Childhood Learners is a psychometrically sound instrument. The high factor loadings across all indicators demonstrate that the test items accurately measure the intended construct and are theoretically consistent with oral reading frameworks. Thus, the tool can be confidently used in assessing and supporting the reading development of young learners in the Philippine educational setting.

Face Validity (f = 8)											
Criteria	Excellent 4		Good 3		Fair 2		Poor 1		Weighted Mean	sd	Category
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%			
1. Expert Judgment	6	75	2	25	0	0	0	0	3.75	0.46	Excellent
2. User Perception	6	75	2	25	0	0	0	0	3.75	0.46	Excellent
							Over-all		**3.75**	**0.45**	**Excellent**

Note: *1-1.75- Poor, 1.76-2.50- Fair, 2.51-3.25- Good, 3.26-4.00-Excellent*

Table 3. Result of Face Validity from Experts

Table 3 presents the mean scores and interpretation of the tool's content validity as evaluated by experts. Each component of the oral reading assessment tool was rated highly. The results indicate that the test items' face validity has an overall weighted mean of 3.75 and a standard deviation of 0.75 that has a category of *Excellent*. This means that the developed test items are statistically valid in terms of its face validity. The expert evaluation confirms that the developed oral reading assessment tool is highly valid across all four components of early literacy—letter recognition, phonemic awareness, decoding, and basic comprehension. This makes it a reliable instrument for educators to assess and monitor reading development in early childhood learners, with strong potential to guide instruction, intervention, and policy implementation in literacy education.

The results reveal strong expert agreement on the tool's overall validity, as indicated by consistently high mean scores across all components. This consensus among content experts strengthens the instrument's credibility and confirms that it effectively measures the intended constructs of early literacy. The tool's comprehensive design—covering letter recognition, phonemic awareness, decoding, and comprehension—ensures balanced skill coverage, addressing both foundational and higher-order reading skills rather than focusing solely on surface-level abilities. This aligns with the Department of Education's literacy initiatives, such as the *Every Child a Reader Program (ECARP)*, reinforcing its relevance to national goals of developing strong literacy foundations in early grades. Overall, while expert validation affirms the tool's strong content validity, further validation through construct validity analysis, reliability testing, and pilot

implementation with actual learners is recommended to solidify its psychometric soundness and practical utility in classroom assessment.

Conclusion

The development of the Oral Reading Assessment (ORA) Tool in English for Early Childhood learners followed a systematic and evidence-based process that ensured its validity, reliability, and practical utility in assessing foundational literacy skills. Through a three-phased approach—needs analysis and conceptualization, item development and pilot testing, and validation and refinement—the study addressed the essential components of early reading: letter recognition, phonological awareness, decoding and basic comprehension for beginning readers. The inclusion of these four areas in the test objectives reflect current research and curriculum standards, ensuring alignment with the developmental needs of the early childhood beginning readers. Findings from the validation phase confirm that the ORE is both a valid and functional tool, capable of accurately measuring oral reading proficiency among early childhood education learners. Its design allows teachers to diagnose reading strengths and weaknesses, inform targeted interventions, and monitor progress over time. By providing a culturally and developmentally appropriate assessment, the ORE contributes to the improvement of literacy instruction and supports the overarching goal of equipping young learners with the foundational skills necessary for lifelong learning. Ultimately, the validated ORE stands as a significant resource in early childhood education, bridging the gap between instructional goals and assessment practices, and fostering a more responsive and effective approach to literacy development.

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