

Assessing the Functional Literacy of Grade 3 Pupils in Dmmmsu-Mluc Laboratory Elementary School

Glecel M. Ramos*, Raiza Joy C. Abanera, Gwyneth Roi F. Aquino, Lyka Jasmine C. Gavina, Maria Aurora N. Palabay, Connie L. Giron, Oscar O. Ancheta Jr.

College of Education, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University Mid-La Union Campus, San Fernando City, Philippines

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the functional literacy of Grade 3 learners, focusing on their reading and writing abilities as essential skills for learning and communication. It aimed to assess how well pupils understand written texts and express their ideas clearly through writing tasks. Functional literacy plays a vital role in helping young learners apply what they read and write in real-life situations. The research utilized a descriptive approach to gather information on learners' performance in reading comprehension and written expression. Data were collected through reading tests, writing exercises, and teacher observations. Findings revealed that most learners were at a developing stage in both reading and writing. They could read short and familiar words but often found it difficult to comprehend longer passages and organize their ideas in writing. Weak vocabulary, limited reading exposure, and lack of writing practice were identified as common challenges. The study emphasizes the need for daily reading activities, guided writing instruction, and active collaboration between teachers and parents. Strengthening these literacy foundations in the primary grades will enhance learners' confidence, comprehension, and ability to use language effectively across learning areas and everyday situations.

Keywords: assessment, comprehension, functional literacy, grade 3 learners, literacy skills,

INTRODUCTION

Functional literacy refers to being able to read, write, comprehend, analyze and apply information in real-life situations. This skill is quite essential as it helps individuals apply reading, writing and math in daily lives that makes their life easier and help them to become more independent. Teachers plays a crucial role in helping students become functionally literate by using different strategies. These strategies give many benefits because they are the ways on how learning is easier and more enjoyable like by using activities, games, stories, group work, and real life examples, teachers can help students understand lessons better and remember them longer.

There are numerous ways to assist children in cultivating their reading interest (Master et al., 2023). This is a crucial starting point for their intellectual, academic, and social inspiration". Familiarity with books and literacy from an early age will make it easier for them to be interested in learning (Masitah et al., 2022). According to Grøver et al., (2023), books are "exciting" for them. Discussing reading interest in Indonesia, the AN 2021 results are consistent with PISA findings over the past twenty years, indicating that Indonesian children have low reading literacy scores, remaining significantly below the OECD country average, highlighting the root problem of literacy in Indonesia.

Functional literacy should be distinguished from common literacy, which presupposes a person's possession of such skills as reading, writing, listening, and solving arithmetic actions of different levels. The modern world has become much more complex, the visual-digital world has replaced the analogue-textological surrounding world, which requires the expansion and reinterpretation of the concept of "functional literacy". Since functional literacy is understood as the ability of a person to use the knowledge acquired during life to solve a wide range

of life tasks in various fields of human activity, communication and social relations, its development in school children (Mangnus et al., 2021).

Early Childhood Education (ECE), also referred to as integrated early childhood development (IECD) in Nigeria, encompasses the educational experiences of children during their early childhood years (REAP, 2021). Additionally, Early Childhood Education can serve as a valuable supplement to a child's formal education. The significance of early childhood education lies in its impact on the development of children's mental functions, including language, motor skills, psychosocial skills, cognitive skills, and learning (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2021).

DepEd Region I (2021) explains that the Functional Literacy Assessment Tool (FLAT) is an alternative method of assessing reading proficiency of learners by giving meaning to the activity rather than assessing based on literacy skills. FLAT was developed in association with the World Vision Philippines and it provides a shift in the assessment on the decoding to functional comprehension. This paper provides a discussion of the sociocultural and multi literacies frameworks applied to explain the classroom influences of FLAT and how this teaching approach can make Filipino schools more inclusive and contextual with regard to the assessment of literacy in education. As Karol Mark Yee (2023-2025) notes that functional literacy does not merely concern the ability to read and write simple texts and messages, but it also concerns comprehension and application to practice. It is the sum of this macrosystem whereby national policy and cultural expectations determine the priorities of education to lead towards this general definition. The microsystem includes the teacher student interaction and home support, and the mesosystem bridges the gap between the two systems due to the similarity in literacy practices. The evolution of La Union can be traced back to these multi-layered support mechanisms, which can also be emulated in other parts of the Philippines seeking to enhance functional literacy using ecologically-based and context-specific approaches.

Early childhood literacy development in the Philippines, particularly in areas like La Union, remains understudied and underassessed. Functional literacy, which involves reading, writing, interpreting, and applying information in real-life contexts, is a significant concern. Despite its importance, many children struggle to comprehend and utilize literacy skills in everyday life, hindering their academic and social progress. Limited studies on functional literacy development, particularly in resource-limited and diverse learning environments in La Union. Lack of localized information on effective instructional practices to enhance literacy outcomes. Insufficient practical interventions to bridge the gap between current literacy levels and desired outcomes. Early childhood literacy development levels have not been carefully assessed, making it challenging to develop targeted interventions. The Philippine Statistics Authority-La Union's recent training workshop aimed to address this gap by enhancing literacy outcomes among students. Encouraging early exposure to libraries and literacy-rich environments can foster lifelong reading habits and lay a strong foundation for functional literacy.

The significance of this study lies in enhancing the early literacy of learners, particularly in resource-limited and diverse learning environments such as those found in La Union. It aims to address the persistent challenges in literacy development by identifying the level of functional literacy among Grade 3 pupils, examining the factors that affect their literacy growth, and proposing an intervention program tailored to their needs. The results of the study will assist teachers to spot and embrace better approaches of assisting children to read, write, and apply literacy in real life scenarios. Moreover, the research will add to the current efforts aimed at enhancing literacy education through providing evidence-based suggestions regarding the particular context of La Union. This will make teachers and education stakeholders more empowered to contribute adequately towards the development of literacy of the children, which will, in the end, enable learners to develop the strengths required to succeed not only in school but in the society too.

Jean Piaget's Constructivism Theory explains functional literacy as an active learning process in which children construct meaning through direct experience. In the early grades, this construction of knowledge often occurs through play-based and hands-on activities, such as storytelling, role-playing, and interactive reading tasks. These experiences allow learners to connect written language to real-life situations, supporting the development of comprehension and written expression. This perspective aligns with the Functional Literacy Assessment Tool (FLAT), which emphasizes understanding and application rather than rote decoding. **Louise Rosenblatt's (1988) Transactional Theory of Reading and Writing** supports the study's emphasis on

meaning-making in reading. Through play-based and interactive literacy activities, learners engage emotionally and cognitively with texts, allowing them to interpret meaning based on their experiences. This helps explain why pupils may demonstrate basic word recognition yet struggle with comprehension and application. **Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory** highlights the role of social interaction in literacy development. Play-based learning is embedded within this theory, as collaborative play, guided reading, and shared writing activities provide opportunities for teachers and peers to scaffold learners' skills within the Zone of Proximal Development. This framework directly informs the analysis of teacher interview data, particularly in examining instructional strategies, classroom interaction, and home support that influence pupils' functional literacy. **Play-Based Learning Theory** Play-Based Learning Theory highlights that children learn literacy skills most effectively when they actively engage in meaningful play. Through pretend reading, dramatization, and interactive writing tasks, pupils practice comprehension and expression in authentic situations, directly supporting the development of functional literacy assessed in this study.

This study aimed to analyze the level of functional literacy among Grade 3 pupils in DMMMSU-MLUC Laboratory Elementary School, identify the factors affecting the literacy development, and to craft a proposed intervention program that can boost literacy performance. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions: What is the level of functional literacy of the Grade 3 pupils in DMMMSU-MLUC Laboratory Elementary School? What are the factors affecting the literacy of Grade 3 learners in DMMMSU-MLUC Laboratory Elementary School?

What intervention program can be proposed to address the problems of literacy in DMMMSU-MLUC Laboratory Elementary School?

MAIN BODY

Methodology

The study used a mixed-methods approach to examine the functional literacy levels of Grade 3 learners at DMMMSU-MLUC Laboratory Elementary School. It combined quantitative data from the Functional Literacy Assessment Tool (FLAT) and a writing assessment. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data was done by comparing learners' assessment results with the insights gathered from teacher interviews. The test scores showed the level of learners' reading and writing proficiency, while the interviews helped explain the reasons behind these results and identified factors influencing literacy development. The findings inform intervention programs and teaching strategies in Early Childhood Education (ECE), aiming to improve literacy outcomes for Grade 3 learners. These explanations provided deeper understanding of why learners performed at certain levels and guided the interpretation of the assessment data.

Result

The following section presents the results and discussion derived from the study assessing the functional literacy of Grade 3 pupils in DMMMSU-MLUC Laboratory Elementary School for the academic year 2024-2025. This analysis explores the findings from survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to investigate the functional literacy levels of Grade 3 pupils.

Level of Functional Literacy of Grade 3 Pupils

Quantitative data from thirty-six (36) Grade 3 pupils were analyzed based on FLAT indicators covering reading comprehension, letter and word recognition, and writing skills such as content, organization, language use, and penmanship. The results are presented in the succeeding tables.

Table 1. Overall Reading Level of Grade 3 Pupils

Core Competencies	Percentage	Descriptive Equivalent
Letter Level	8.33	Critical Risk

Paragraph Level	33.33	Critical Risk
Story Comprehension Level	19.44	Critical Risk
Simple Essay Writing	5.55	Critical Risk
TOTAL	66.65	High Risk

The findings reveal that the majority of Grade 3 pupils (36) fall under the high-risk category. This indicates that while pupils can recognize letters and words, they experience difficulty comprehending texts and applying learned concepts in writing. Only 15.8% demonstrated a relatively low-risk level, suggesting that most pupils have not yet reached the expected reading and writing competencies for their grade level. These results support reports highlighting persistent literacy challenges among elementary learners in Region I.

Table 2. Reading Comprehension Results

Core Competencies	Mean % Score	Descriptive Equivalent
Letter Recognition (4/5 letters)	92%	Relatively Low Risk
Word Recognition (4/5 words)	78%	Moderate Risk
Story Comprehension (2/3 questions)	58%	High Risk

Pupils performed best in letter and word recognition but showed difficulty in story comprehension. This suggests that decoding skills are relatively developed, while higher-order comprehension skills remain weak. This pattern reflects findings that early readers may recognize words yet struggle to construct meaning from text.

Table 3. Writing Skills Results

Writing Criteria	Mean % Score	Descriptive Equivalent
Content and Organization	63%	High Risk
Language Use	60%	High Risk
Writing Conventions (spelling, capitalization, punctuation)	72%	Moderate Risk
Fine Motor Skill an Penmanship	82%	Relatively Low Risk
Fluency and Cursive Writing	55%	High Risk

Results indicate that pupils generally demonstrate legible handwriting; however, they struggle to organize ideas coherently and apply correct grammar and structure. This suggests limited proficiency in expressive writing despite acceptable motor skills.

Table 4. Overall Functional Literacy Performance

Literacy Component	Mean % Score	Descriptive Equivalent
Reading	76%	Moderate Risk
Writing	66%	High Risk
Comprehension and Application	60%	High Risk

The overall functional literacy performance of Grade 3 pupils falls under the high-risk level. While learners possess basic reading and writing abilities, they have not yet mastered comprehension and application, which are essential components of functional literacy. This section discusses the factors affecting the functional literacy of Grade 3 pupils in DMMMSU–MLUC Laboratory Elementary School. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with five (5) Grade 3 teachers and analyzed using Colaizzi's Thematic Analysis. The findings reveal that pupils' literacy performance is influenced by interrelated learner-related, teacher-related, home-related, and school-related factors. Teachers observed that many pupils show low motivation toward reading and possess a limited vocabulary. While some pupils are able to read words and short sentences aloud, they often struggle to explain the meaning of what they have read. This indicates that although basic decoding skills are present, comprehension and engagement remain weak, limiting the development of functional literacy. These findings are consistent with Piaget's Constructivist Theory, which emphasizes that learning occurs when learners actively construct meaning from experiences rather than merely memorizing information. In terms of instructional practices, teachers reported that the continued use of traditional, teacher-centered methods and the lack of varied and localized reading materials negatively affect pupils' interest and performance in reading and writing activities. Repetitive drills were noted to reduce learners' engagement, making it difficult for them to develop deeper comprehension and expressive skills. This supports Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory of Reading, which highlights the importance of meaningful interaction between the reader and the text in fostering literacy development. Home-related factors were also identified as significant contributors to pupils' literacy challenges. Teachers emphasized that many pupils receive minimal parental support in reading activities at home. Parents often rely solely on school instruction and rarely monitor their children's reading progress, limiting opportunities for practice and reinforcement outside the classroom. From a sociocultural perspective, this lack of family involvement constrains the social interactions necessary for literacy development. Additionally, school-related factors such as limited instructional time, insufficient reading materials, and the absence of child-friendly reading spaces were reported to hinder pupils' functional literacy growth. Teachers noted that the lack of colorful and engaging books, as well as dedicated reading areas, reduces pupils' motivation to read independently. Overall, these findings suggest that improving functional literacy requires a holistic approach that addresses learner motivation, instructional strategies, home support, and the learning environment.

DISCUSSION

They experience difficulty comprehending texts and applying learned concepts in writing. Grade 3 pupils have not yet fully developed functional literacy skills, particularly in reading comprehension and basic writing. Showing that many Grade 3 pupils can read words but struggle to understand texts and write effectively. Most pupils have not yet reached the expected level of reading and writing competency for their grade level which indicates that while foundational decoding skills are present, higher-order literacy skills remain underdeveloped, but struggle in story comprehension. This indicates that while decoding skills are generally developed, higher-order comprehension remains weak.

CONCLUSION

There are various findings to be made from the results of the study, such as the fact that the Grade 3 pupils of DMMMSU-MLUC Laboratory Elementary School still do not demonstrate the required standard of functional literacy acceptable for a third-grade student, especially with regard to reading comprehension and written. This is consistent with the general trends observed by earlier studies at the national and regional levels. The problems with regards to functional literacy among students may come from a multitude of factors that involve the learners, teachers, home life, and educational institutions themselves, though these findings are consistent with established research on literacy development, providing localized knowledge on how these factors manifest with regards to the particular educational institution. The proposed intervention program, Project R.I.S.E (Reading, Integration, Skill-building, Expression), seems to provide a theory-based, context-appropriate intervention strategy. Nevertheless, its architecture is based on established techniques of literacy and its success would depend upon factors of resource availability and implementation that act as constraints to its scalability. Moreover, the research is limited to only one school in the district of La Union, and the implications of the study cannot be generalized to a wide scope. While the research can be helpful in understanding the literacy needs of the locals,

there is no claim of the research's newness in the recognition of the factors affecting literacy and in guiding interventions through strategies supported by well-established principles in early childhood education.

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