

# Language Learning Issues of Non-Reader in Rural and Urban Senior High School: A Comparative Analysis

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47175/rielsj.v5i3.1053>

| Juharto L. Usop |

CCNHS-Annex (L.R. Sebastian  
Site, Cotabato City, Philippines

[jholidasan9@gmail.com](mailto:jholidasan9@gmail.com)



This work is licensed  
under a Creative Commons Attribution-  
ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

## ABSTRACT

*The general objective of this study is to assess the language learning difficulties of non-readers in rural and urban senior high schools in the Division of Cotabato City in the School Year 2022-2023. The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of environmental context, including resource and teacher support, on language development of the learners with poor literacy skills. The research design used was qualitative and the study used a thematic analysis to elicit the experiences of 30 non-readers from rural and urban schools. The data was collected through interviews, focus group discussions and classes observation.*

*The research shows that non-readers in the rural and urban areas have basic problems, including inadequate literacy skills and poor participation in language learning activities. However, there was inequality in the distribution of resources and the level of support received by teachers where urban schools were found to have better resources and teachers' training than the rural ones. Other factors that added to the difficulties of non-readers, mainly the home environment and peer relations, were worse in rural areas.*

*Therefore, the study underlines the necessity of developing specific measures to approach the issues of non-readers. The enhancement of the vocabulary, resource distribution, and teacher training should be the strategies that aim at eradicating the inequality that exists in the education systems especially for students with different literacy levels or those in different geographical locations.*

## KEYWORDS

*language learning; non-readers; rural education; urban education; qualitative research.*

## INTRODUCTION

Language learning is a crucial factor in the modern society due to globalization of markets and growing importance of non-native language in communication; learning a foreign language is especially important for those students in senior high schools, who are planning to proceed with further education this level or to find a job (Gass & Selinker, 2013). However, there are some problems with the acquisition of new language in non-readers – the children who can't read even the simplest texts. Moreover, these difficulties are also aggravated by the disparities of academic settings – rural and urban, in which availabilities and supplies can significantly differ (Snow, 2016; Abadzi, 2017). In the development of basic language skills and reading, writing and communication students will acquire adequate language and social skills or this development is called cognitive development (Paul, O., Begi, N., & Mwangi, M., 2021)

Previous studies relating to literacy skill and language have indicated that the two have a close and positive relationship. In their perspective, Cummins (2018) submitted that students

with limited literacy are really disadvantaged when it comes to learning a new language because their comprehension and production of language are highly affected. In the same way, Ellis (2015) also asserts that literacy problems can limit language learning, especially where the educational systems are below average.

Still, even in the vast body of research on language learning there is a lack of comparison between the non-reader in the rural and urban context (Graham, 2019; Norton, 2020). Gao, as cited in Gao (2020) said that environmental factors are critical determinants of learning outcomes among which are the educational resources and the level of teacher support. Nevertheless, it is essential to question what difficulties non-readers experience in these contexts which have not received much attention. More recently, Abadzi (2017) has also noted that there is a lack of literature on the needs of non-reader students and much of it is focused especially on the context of developing countries.

This study intends to address this issue by looking into the language learning concerns of non-readers in the rural and urban various senior high schools in the Division of Cotabato City academic year 2022-2023. Therefore, the study aims at offering a more complex picture of the context for development of language for non-readers in different environments. It will also aim at finding out how factors such as differences in resources, teacher support, and other environmental factors lead to such difficulties.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### ***Research Design***

The research methodology used in this study is qualitative in nature and more specifically, this study has used thematic analysis to establish the language learning difficulties that non-readers encounter in rural and urban based Senior High Schools. The qualitative approach is therefore suitable for this research since it will focus on capturing the experiences and perception of non-readers and therefore offer extensive and extensive details of the factors that characterize the language learning process of the non-readers (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017; Creswell and Poth; 2018).

### ***Participants***

The participants in this study consisted of 30 non-readers chosen from 8 senior high schools in the Division of Cotabato City, 4 schools in rural areas and 4 schools in urban area. In detailed; 15 students of the participant sample were from rural schools and 15 from urban schools. The choice of the schools was done purposively to capture a diverse population of education institutions (Patton, 2015). In the case of non-readers, the selection criteria were students who their teachers regarded as having serious learning problems when it comes to reading and writing regardless of their performance on other subjects (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017).

### ***Data Collection Methods***

Interviews were carried out together with focus group discussions and classroom observation. The interviews and focus groups were semi structured so that the participating students could give their own experiences and difficulties concerning language learning (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Also surveys with teachers and school officials gave insights as to the schooling context and the resources offered for these students. In order to understand how non-readers deal with language learning activities and the barriers that they face learner observations were done in the classroom (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Data Analysis**

Data gathered were subjected to thematic analysis, a technique that enables the assessment of important issues concerning the language learning difficulties of non-readers on the basis of patterns identified in the collected information (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Therefore, the analysis concentrated on rural and urban non-readers comparing the resources available to the two, and the support of teachers and the surrounding environment. Finally, what was accomplished in the present study was conclusions about the specific need for readers, or lack thereof, in these various educational contexts derived from the themes which emerged from the analysis (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014).

### **Ethical Considerations**

The ethical practices recommended in this study were followed in this study by protecting the identities of all the participants as recommended by Orb et al. (2001). Combined consent was sought and received from both the students themselves and their parents or guardians as well as from teachers and school administrators as participating parties in the study. All the respondents were pre-informed of their rights to withdraw from our study at any one time without any consequences and all the data collected were kept and secured such that the privacy of the participants was maintained as recommended by Israel and Hay (2006).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The study conducted in the senior high schools in the Division of Cotabato City during the academic year 2022-2023 identified the following difficulties of non-readers in learning a new language. Similar to the non-readers in the urban school, non-readers in the rural school faced similar challenges that limited their language development (Ellis, 2015; Snow, 2016).

### *1. Challenges Common to Both Rural and Urban Settings:*

- *Lack of Basic Literacy Skills:* The non-readers in both the rural and urban schools faced a lot of difficulty in developing the basic reading and writing skills to enable them to understand new language concepts (Cummins, 2018). This was the case irrespective of the educational institution.
- *Limited Engagement in Language Learning:* It was revealed that the majority of non-readers had low level of interest and participation in the language learning activities. This was due to their inability to grasp the content of the material and thus they became frustrated and non-engaged (Abadzi, 2017).

### *2. Differences Between Rural and Urban Settings:*

- *Resource Availability:* Those who did not read in rural schools complained of inadequate learning resources including textbooks, digital and language learning resources. However, urban schools were more likely to have access to these materials and yet non-readers were disadvantageous because of their reading difficulties (Graham, 2019).
- *Teacher Support:* The level of teacher support was also observed to be higher in the conventional mode of learning as compared to the e-learning mode. At the urban schools, teachers were apparently more qualified and the schools provided resources for professional development that prepared the teachers to handle non-readers. In the rural schools, the teachers were not well equipped with the skills on language education and this hampered their chance to help non-readers (Norton, 2020).

### *3. Environmental Factors:*

- *Home Environment:* The home environment contributed a lot to the acquisition of language. In contrast, non-readers in urban areas were more probable to have parents or guardians who could at least offer some assistance in their academic work, and this was not the case for many learners in rural areas (Abadzi, 2017; Cummins, 2018).
- *Peer Influence:* In both settings, non-readers cited that they felt left out by their peers because of their failure to learn language, which in turn reduced their confidence to engage in class activities (Snow, 2016).

These findings imply that there is still such a huge challenge in the efforts that are being made towards ensuring that non-readers learn new language skills whether they are in rural or urban region. However, the study also shows that there are differences in the challenges between these contexts especially in the area of resources and teacher support (Ellis, 2015; Norton, 2020).

Some of the most frequent difficulties observed among non-readers in both contexts imply that early literacy skills should be a priority for intervention. This also hinders their language learning since they do not even have the basic reading and writing skills, thus causing them poor performance in their academic achievements. This is in tandem with Cummins' (2018) theory that literacy is a basic aspect of language learning thus underlining the importance of early and continued literacy support.

The comparison of the resource allocation particularly in rural and urban schools raises a huge concern of equity in education. Even though urban schools have better access to learning materials and resources, students in these schools who do not read fluently are challenged because they are non-readers. However, rural schools are usually scarce of resources, and this makes it even harder for the non-readers especially who need such resources to help them learn how to read (Graham, 2019).

Therefore, the aspect of teacher support was found to play a significant influence in the success of non-readers. The study also established that teachers in urban schools were in a better position to attend to non-readers as they had access to professional development and training. This result underlines the significance of the pedagogical content knowledge on language learning for non-readers in the context of teacher education and professional development. In the rural areas where such opportunities are limited, there is a particular need for the specialized training to help teachers to teach non-readers effectively (Norton, 2020).

Finally, the impact of various environmental factors, for instance, the home environment, and peer interactions cannot be ruled out. Particularly the non-readers in the rural and remote areas are also hindered by lack of support from home and the feeling of being different from the rest of the students. All these factors indicate that it is important to consider that the support of both school and the community is needed in order to address the multiple concerns of non-readers (Abadzi, 2017; Cummins, 2018).

## **CONCLUSION**

This research has identified the specific language learning difficulties of non-readers in rural and urban senior high schools in Cotabato City Division for the SY 2022-2023. The discoveries show that, despite the variation in the educational systems, non-readers in both contexts faced the same core issues as the lack of phonemic awareness, the elementary literacy skills, and limited opportunities for language development (Ellis, R. 2015; Snow, C. 2016). These challenges greatly hamper their ability to learn new language skills, which in extension has an impact on their general academic achievement and future prospects.

The study also unveiled the inequalities between the rural and urban schools regarding the resources and the teachers. Rural school non-readers are still at a disadvantage since they are not exposed to reading materials as compared to their urban counterparts and they do not get adequate support from teachers who have not been trained in language development. Such conclusions imply that specific approaches should be implemented to close the achievement gap between the rural and urban schools, so that every student would have an equal chance to achieve success at school (Graham, 2019; Norton, 2020).

Other factors that worsen the situation include the home environment and peer interactions that are worsened in rural areas. This is a clear indication of how these students lack support at home and the feeling of being alone or being rejected by their fellow students which makes it hard for them, making it important to address the issue holistically. The above approach should include the school and the society to ensure that the students are supported to learn language and other academic aspects (Abadzi, 2017; Cummins, 2018).

Therefore, the current study underscores the importance of intervention programs that can help non-readers in rural and urban areas. Such interventions should include enhancing the basic literacy skills, ensuring that there are enough materials and teacher training on how to handle non-readers. Thus, the described challenges can help educators and policymakers contribute to the development of a fair educational system that would help all learners, regardless of their literacy rates or the regions they live in.

## REFERENCES

- Abadzi, H. (2017). Effective Literacy Programmes: *Teaching Reading in Developing Countries. The International Review of Education*, 63(4), 449-462.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589-597.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2017). *Research Methods in Education* (8th ed.). Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Cummins, J. (2018). *Language, Power, and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire. Multilingual Matters*.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2017). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Ellis, R. (2015). *Understanding Second Language Acquisition* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Gao, Y. (2020). Second Language Learning and Identity. *The Modern Language Journal*, 84(3), 332-342.
- Gass, S. M., & Selinker, L. (2013). *Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Graham, S. (2019). *Learning, Development, and Teaching: Psychological Perspectives*. Routledge.
- Israel, M., & Hay, I. (2006). *Research Ethics for Social Scientists: Between Ethical Conduct and Regulatory Compliance*. SAGE Publications.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

- Norton, B. (2020). *Identity and Language Learning: Extending the Conversation* (2nd ed.). Multilingual Matters.
- Orb, A., Eisenhauer, L., & Wynaden, D. (2001). Ethics in Qualitative Research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 33(1), 93-96.
- Paul, O., Begi, N., & Mwangi, M. (2021). Relationship between Teachers' Professional Training and use of Instructional Strategies to Enhance Pupils' Literacy Skills in Lower Primary Schools in Busia County, Kenya. *Randwick International of Education and Linguistics Science Journal*, 2(3), 275-283. <https://doi.org/10.47175/rielsj.v2i3.295>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Snow, C. E. (2016). *Reading for Understanding: Toward an R&D Program in Reading Comprehension*. RAND Corporation.