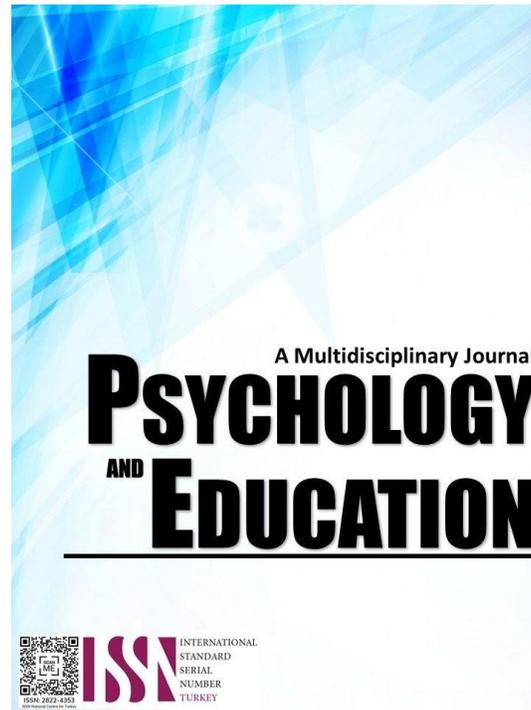


**PROFICIENCY IN READING COMPREHENSION IN THE
AGUTAYNEN AND FILIPINO LANGUAGES: BASIS
FOR A PROPOSED INTERVENTION**



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Proficiency in Reading Comprehension in the Agutaynen and Filipino Languages: Basis for a Proposed Intervention

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Abstract

The Agutaynen language has long played a vital role in the lives of people in a part of Palawan, both in the past and in the present. It serves not only as a marker of tribal identity but also as a bridge for understanding and communication among community members. Thus, this study aimed to determine the proficiency of Grade 4 students of Agutaya Elementary School in reading comprehension using the Agutaynen and Filipino languages. This research employed a quantitative-comparative research design, wherein the researcher administered a test to 26 Grade 4 student-respondents. The pre-test was conducted using the Agutaynen language, while the post-test was conducted in Filipino, with the same number of students and the same grade level. The pre-test instrument consisted of a 10-item story written in Agutaynen by the researcher, while the post-test consisted of a 10-item short story in Filipino, sourced from the Grade 4 textbook. A T-test was used to analyze the data and determine any significant similarities or differences between the two test results. Findings revealed that the Grade 4 students demonstrated a higher level of comprehension when reading in the Agutaynen language compared to Filipino, which they had more difficulty understanding. As a result, the researcher proposed the development of an intervention material—reading passages in Filipino aimed at enhancing the students' critical reading and comprehension skills. Through the use of Filipino reading materials, it is hoped that students' comprehension levels will improve, addressing the gap observed in their performance when compared to their proficiency in Agutaynen.

Keywords: *intervention material, level of comprehension, critical reading, tribal identity, pre-test, post-test, Agutaynen language, quantitative-comparative research design*

Introduction

The Agutaynen language has played a significant role in the lives of the people in a region of Palawan, both in the past and in the present. It serves as a marker of tribal identity and acts as a bridge for communication among community members, allowing them to express their thoughts and feelings freely. This dialect is spoken in parts of Palawan by approximately 10,000 individuals and is integrated into their way of life, including music. The language is used in various folk songs and musical traditions such as komposo, pagsenti, and agdeleman, often performed using handmade instruments.

Agutaynen originated in the municipality of Agutaya, Palawan, and is believed to trace its roots to the Malayo-Polynesian settlers who have long inhabited the province. Today, most speakers are still found in Agutaya, which is composed of several barangays, including Diit, Maracanao, Matarawis, Algeciras, Concepcion, and Quinluban. After the Second World War, some Agutaynen speakers migrated to other municipalities such as San Vicente, Roxas, Brooke's Point, Balabac, Linapacan, and Puerto Princesa.

According to the Department of Education (DO 52, s. 1987), the implementation of bilingual education was approved, allowing for the use of two official languages as mediums of instruction in schools. This approach was designed to enhance students' understanding of classroom lessons. It emphasized the development of oral communication, reading, and writing skills from Grades 1 to 3. Research conducted by the Thomasites demonstrated that a child's first language significantly contributes to cognitive development, thereby supporting better learning in school.

As a student of Filipino, the researcher observed that the Filipino language is not frequently used for everyday communication in some areas of Agutaya. Children naturally converse in Agutaynen, enabling them to articulate their thoughts more clearly. Teachers have had to adapt their teaching strategies to ensure that students can understand lessons taught in Filipino. This observation prompted the researcher to investigate the issue more deeply, particularly how this language gap affects student comprehension.

This study seeks to draw the attention of Grade 4 students at Agutaya Elementary School to the importance of using the Filipino language. In doing so, the goal is to improve their level of comprehension when reading texts written in Filipino. This marks the beginning of what can be considered a "transition"—a phase of preparing students to acquire academic knowledge in Filipino, and to develop their reading, writing, and speaking skills in the language.

The study also aims to determine the challenges that students, who are accustomed to using Agutaynen at home and in school, may encounter when learning Filipino. It explores their abilities in speaking and writing in Filipino and identifies potential gaps in instruction. Through the proposed intervention, the study aims to address these gaps and improve the reading comprehension skills of Grade 4 learners. With appropriate guidance from teachers and parents, students can enhance their understanding of Filipino texts and perform better in academic settings.

Research Questions

This study aimed to determine the level of proficiency in reading comprehension using the Agutaynen and Filipino languages among Grade 4 students of Agutaya Elementary School for the school year 2023–2024, as a basis for a proposed intervention. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of reading comprehension in the pre-test using:
 - 1.1. Agutaynen as the medium of instruction (Mother Tongue-Based); and
 - 1.2. Filipino as the medium of instruction?
2. What is the level of reading comprehension in the post-test using:
 - 2.1. Agutaynen as the medium of instruction; and
 - 2.2. Filipino as the medium of instruction?
3. Is there a significant difference in the level of reading comprehension of students between the pre-test and post-test?
4. What challenges did the students encounter in understanding texts written in Filipino?
5. Based on the results of the study, what intervention can be proposed to enhance the students' reading comprehension skills?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a correlational research design, which is used to determine the relationship between two variables without the need to manipulate or control either one. This method was selected because the primary goal of the research is to assess students' abilities to comprehend reading materials written in Agutaynen and Filipino. The study also aimed to identify the students' proficiency in reading and understanding texts in both languages.

In addition, the researcher utilized a comparative research design, wherein the results of a pre-test and post-test—both administered in Agutaynen and Filipino—were compared. The same group of student-respondents answered both assessments. After comparing the results of the pre-test and post-test, the data were further examined using a quantitative-descriptive research design. According to Shona McCombes (2019–2022), this approach provides accurate and honest descriptions of populations, events, or unexpected outcomes. It seeks to answer questions such as what, where, when, and how many, but not why. Descriptive research is commonly used in studies that involve data collection.

As Pritha Bhandari (2023) emphasized, quantitative research often involves numerical data collection and analysis to conclude. In this study, quantitative methods were appropriate for evaluating the performance differences in reading comprehension using two languages.

Respondents

The respondents of this study were 26 Grade 4 students from Central Elementary School in Agutaya, Palawan. The school has a total of approximately 149 students and seven (7) teachers, two of whom handle the Filipino subject. The respondents were currently enrolled in the academic Filipino program and belonged to the only Grade 4 section in the school.

Instrument

The researcher developed a self-made questionnaire, which an expert validated to ensure its credibility and relevance to the quantitative-descriptive nature of the study. This instrument was used to measure students' responses and gather essential data related to their proficiency in both Agutaynen and Filipino. Aside from the questionnaire, the researcher also created localized reading assessments for both the pre-test and post-test, using texts written in Agutaynen and Filipino, respectively.

Procedure

The researcher secured permission from the district supervisor of Palawan and the school principal or head teacher of Central Elementary School. Upon receiving approval, each respondent was given a short children's story to read in ten (10) minutes, followed by ten (10) minutes to answer comprehension questions related to the text. Another ten (10) minutes were allocated to assess vocabulary understanding by translating words from Agutaynen to Filipino. Students selected their answers based on their knowledge by marking checkboxes on the provided test sheets.

Pre-Data Gathering

The researcher first submitted a letter of permission to the Dean of the Graduate School to conduct the study, along with a request for recommendations and insights from the research panel. The researcher complied with the ethical requirements outlined by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and proceeded only after receiving the official Notice to Proceed (NTP).

Actual Data Gathering

The researcher ensured that a letter of approval from the school authorities was secured to begin the study at Agutaya Elementary

School formally. Once granted, the letter was presented to the school principal, who endorsed it to the teachers of the Grade 4 students. The researcher explained that the activity was part of a thesis requirement. A total of 30 minutes was allotted for the questionnaire and pre-test administration. After the activity, the researcher expressed sincere gratitude to the participants, assuring them that all collected data would be treated with strict confidentiality.

Post-Data Gathering

After completing the data collection, all responses were tabulated and securely stored. No identifying information, such as names or email addresses, was recorded; instead, coding systems were used. The data were treated as accurate and reliable, as they came directly from student responses to the questionnaire, pre-test, and post-test.

Data Analysis

The T-test was employed to compare the students' reading comprehension performance in the two languages. This test aimed to determine whether students' skills in Agutaynen influenced their ability to understand Filipino texts in academic settings. The researcher ensured that the selected respondents were appropriate and that all permissions from the school were properly obtained.

Respondents were divided into two categories: those who took the pre-test to measure prior knowledge using a single-language text, and those who took the post-test after reading new materials in both Agutaynen and Filipino. The results served as the basis for data analysis.

The primary objective was to evaluate the students' reading comprehension in both languages. The collected data were analyzed using the T-test with equal variance, a statistical method used to compare two groups. This test involved hypothesis testing to determine whether the instructional intervention had a significant effect. It helped identify the areas in which students performed better and the areas in which they needed improvement.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher conducted this study with the utmost regard for the rights, privacy, and well-being of the respondents. Ethical principles of fairness and integrity guided the study. All responses were valued and treated as confidential, with no personal information disclosed.

This study aimed to support students in improving their academic Filipino skills and followed proper procedures to collect relevant data. Before implementation, the researcher sought official permission from the school principal, Filipino teachers, and the Grade 4 adviser. A 25-minute orientation was conducted to explain the tasks involved clearly.

The research was conducted at Central Elementary School in Agutaya, Palawan, with 26 Grade 4 students as respondents. The researcher committed to sharing the results with participants and assured them of access to the findings through the school's official channels. Students or their parents could also reach the researcher via personal contact or email.

Participation in the study was strictly voluntary and aligned with the academic requirements of the researcher's institution.

Results and Discussion

This section presents essential information, including the analysis and interpretation of the data gathered from the assessment results of the Grade 4 students at Central Elementary School in Agutaya. It explores their reading comprehension skills and identifies their levels of understanding in both Agutaynen and Filipino through the administration of pre-tests and post-tests.

Level of Reading Comprehension in the Pre-Test

The statistical description illustrates the results gathered from the pre-test and post-test conducted in both Agutaynen and Filipino. The table displays differences in the numerical values of the results and shows the corresponding performance levels of each test. It reveals how students varied in their comprehension based on the overall scores.

Table 1. *Level of Reading Comprehension in the Pre-Test*

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Level</i>
Pretest_MTB Agutaynen	26	5.19	5	1.50	0.29	Average
Posttest MTB- Agutaynen	26	8.15	8	1.22	0.24	Outstanding
Pretest_Filipino	26	5.31	6	1.62	0.32	Average
postest_Filipino	26	8.08	8	1.23	0.24	Outstanding

Note. Level : 0.00-3.33 =low performer ; 3.34 - 6.66=average; 6.67 - 10.00 = Outstanding

This table presents the pre-test results obtained by the Grade 4 student respondents. The pre-test in MTB Agutaynen recorded a mean of 5.19 and a standard deviation (SD) of 1.50, corresponding to a performance level of Average.

Meanwhile, the Filipino pre-test recorded a slightly higher mean of 5.31, with an SD of 1.62, also interpreted as Average. Although the scores differ somewhat, both results were interpreted as demonstrating an Average level of reading comprehension.

Level of Reading Comprehension in the Post-Test

This section presents the distribution results using the Shapiro-Wilk test to determine how effective the pre-test and post-test assessments were in both Agutaynen and Filipino. The table shows whether the distribution of scores followed a normal pattern and whether improvements occurred following the intervention.

Table 2. *Level of Reading Comprehension in the Post-Test*

		W	p	Distribution
Pretest_MTB Agutaynen	Postest MTB- Agutaynen	0.85	0.00	Not normal
Pretest_Filipino	Postest_Filipino	0.91	0.03	Not normal

Note. A low p-value suggests a violation of the assumption of normality

In the post-test, students demonstrated improved performance. The MTB Agutaynen post-test recorded a mean score of 8.15 and an SD of 1.22, with a performance level interpreted as Outstanding. The Filipino post-test recorded a mean of 8.08 and an SD of 1.23, which was also interpreted as Outstanding. Although the mean scores are not exactly the same, both tests showed similar levels of performance improvement.

Difference in Reading Comprehension Levels of Students

This section interprets the results based on the comparison of pre-test and post-test scores in Agutaynen and Filipino. It highlights how students' performance varied across the two languages.

Table 3. *Difference in Reading Comprehension Levels of Students*

Comparison-wise	statistic	df	p	Mean diff.	SE diff.	Effect Size (Cohen's d)	Interpretation
pretest_MTB Agutaynen	-12.1	25	< .001	-2.96	0.245	-2.37	significant, small
pretest_Filipino	-10.3	25	< .001	-2.77	0.268	-2.03	significant, small

Note. $H_0: \mu \text{ Measure 1} - \text{Measure 2} = 0$

This table compares the scores between the Agutaynen and Filipino tests. The Agutaynen pre-test scores were slightly higher than those in the Filipino pre-test. Statistically, the Agutaynen results exceeded the Filipino results by approximately two percentage points, with a notably higher mean difference of around 1.9 points. However, this was accompanied by a higher standard error difference. The effect size showed a 34 percent advantage in favor of Agutaynen over Filipino.

This finding demonstrates that students were generally more comfortable and proficient in reading and understanding texts in Agutaynen. The data also provides insight into the specific areas where support is needed to strengthen Filipino language instruction.

The same table also offers insight into the challenges encountered by the students when taking the tests. These observations helped the researcher better understand the areas in need of reinforcement, particularly in supporting students' comprehension of academic materials in Filipino.

Challenges Faced by Students in Filipino

In conducting this research, the researcher identified several challenges that students encounter when using the Filipino language, particularly in speaking and reading. Through the help of statistical tables, the difficulties experienced by the learners became evident. One of the foremost challenges is difficulty in comprehension. Another is pronunciation, as many students rarely use Filipino in daily conversations and are more accustomed to speaking it only within school premises. Although some students can read Filipino texts, they are not fully proficient, especially in terms of proper intonation and expression. A third major concern lies in understanding the meaning of the texts they read. For students who are more familiar with using the Agutaynen language, interpreting Filipino passages proves to be a significant challenge.

The tables presented in this study provide a clear view of the number of students who experience difficulties in learning and using Filipino. These findings are consistent with prior research related to language comprehension and instructional strategies.

Table 4. *Challenges Faced by Students in Filipino: Difficulty in Understanding*

	MTB Wikang Agutaynen 0-26	Wikang Filipino 0-26
Mahirap unawain	8	18
Porsyento	30.77%	69.23%

This table presents how students understood the reading texts. Based on the data gathered, it is evident that 18 students struggled to comprehend what they read when the material was in Filipino. This may be attributed to their familiarity with their mother tongue, which makes understanding texts in Agutaynen easier and more natural. When related to the study of Laurente et al., the focus was on reading comprehension and strategies like Gallery Walk to strengthen vocabulary acquisition and comprehension. To address such challenges, teachers are encouraged to provide differentiated reading materials that align with the learners' comprehension levels, thereby allowing students to gradually build reading proficiency and eventually develop fluency in reading longer texts.

In the study of Bagayas et al. (2024), the goal was to determine the most effective language to use in teaching social history. Their findings showed that students demonstrated better understanding when Filipino was used rather than English. Students had difficulty comprehending English texts, which affected their academic performance. As such, the researchers recommended strengthening the use of Filipino to support better learning outcomes.

Similarly, Darupan et al. (2024) emphasized that using a language commonly spoken by the majority of students leads to clearer understanding and better classroom communication. Their study also noted the importance of language in preserving cultural identity and promoting clarity in student expression.

Herrera (2019), on the other hand, focused on students' reading comprehension and interpretative skills through the use of the ABAKADAPA program among Grade 7 students. The study revealed a significant increase in reading comprehension scores—from 15.68% to 87.75%—after implementing the program. This underscores the importance of innovative approaches in improving students' comprehension skills.

Hernando et al. (2023) examined the impact of Filipino instruction during the pandemic at UM Panabo College. Their findings showed that students still understood their lessons despite the pandemic, but better comprehension occurred when learning was done face-to-face, thanks to teachers' ability to apply effective strategies that enhanced understanding.

Pontemayor and Quitolbo (2024) explored students' comprehension through audio-visual materials. Their findings affirmed the effectiveness of visual learning aids, as students were able to comprehend lessons better when they could see accompanying images or videos.

Table 5. Challenges Faced by Students in Filipino: Difficulty in Proper Pronunciation

	<i>MTB Wikang Agutaynen</i> 0-26	<i>Wikang Filipino</i> 0-26
Hirap Bigkasin sa Tamang Tono	9	17
Porsyento	34.62%	65.38%

This table reveals that 17 students had difficulty pronouncing Filipino words correctly in terms of tone and intonation. This may be due to their limited exposure to reading Filipino texts. According to Blast (2022), the Agutaynen language belongs to the nasal cluster group, in which there is often a discrepancy between how a word is spelled and how it is pronounced. This linguistic characteristic may lead to challenges in Filipino pronunciation. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers consistently emphasize the importance of proper pronunciation and word articulation, not only during reading activities but also across all language-related tasks.

Bugtong et al. (2024) focused on academic communication skills and found that many students felt shy or reluctant to express themselves in Filipino. This led to difficulties in understanding questions and expressing ideas clearly. Their study highlighted the need for more attention to Filipino instruction, especially in speaking and comprehension.

A related study among Senior High School students explored their grammar and sociolinguistic competence. Researchers found that students generally understood their lessons well and were able to communicate effectively using correct grammar. The researchers recommended strengthening linguistic competence and suggested that schools conduct more academic and communication-oriented activities, particularly during Buwan ng Wika (Language Month), to enhance students' interest and motivation further.

Villamater-Garcia (2022) focused on the reading comprehension of Grade 8 students during the pandemic, noting the negative impact of modular learning on understanding. The absence of face-to-face guidance from teachers made it more difficult for learners to understand texts on their own. Teachers responded to this challenge by visiting students in their homes to provide support, and it was found that students comprehended lessons better when learning in groups rather than individually.

Baustista (2019) studied pronunciation discipline among students from Batangas and found distinct pronunciation styles in different regions, such as Oriental and Occidental Mindoro. Students often pronounced words with emphasis, abruptness, or pauses, which teachers found helpful in in-class communication. It was recommended that teachers continue reinforcing correct pronunciation and oral reading practices.

Valdepeñas (2024) focused on spelling patterns of the Ibanag language in Luzon and used quantitative methods to determine how many students could accurately pronounce words in Filipino. The study showed that Ibanag speakers often insert pauses or stress marks in reading Filipino words, occasionally replacing letters such as "G" with "R" during pronunciation. While native speakers accepted these variations, it was still recommended to guide students in using correct Filipino pronunciation and expand their vocabulary to ensure clarity and understanding in formal academic settings.

Table 6. Challenges Faced by Students in Filipino: Difficulty in Answering Questions

	<i>MTB Wikang Agutaynen</i> 0-26	<i>Wikang Filipino</i> 0-26
Hirap sa Pagsagot	11	15
Porsyento	42.31%	57.69%

This table shows the number of students who struggled with answering comprehension questions. This challenge stems from the students' greater familiarity with Agutaynen and limited exposure to Filipino within the school environment. Students found it difficult to respond to questions such as "Where," "When," and "How." The researcher's questions aligned with those used in the study by Elesia (2018), which also focused on questions like "Who," "When," and "How."

Based on the data gathered by Dimas et al. (2022), students faced difficulties in answering questions due to a lack of internet access and financial resources, especially during the pandemic. The absence of teacher support also affected their understanding of the lessons. This study, conducted at Juban National High School, recommended allocating resources to ensure that students in remote areas have access to internet connectivity and learning support.

Cortes et al. (2024) investigated the experiences of students from Mandaue City College in using Filipino for classroom interactions and written responses. The study revealed that students were less comfortable using Filipino, as they were more accustomed to speaking foreign languages. The researchers recommended increasing exposure to Filipino through local films, readings, and participation in Filipino language activities to improve fluency and confidence.

Villamater-Garcia (2022) also studied the influence of millennial slang on students' writing skills in Biñan. The study found that students had difficulty composing well-structured responses in Filipino, often defaulting to short, informal answers due to the influence of slang. Most users of such slang were aged 15 to 17. The study recommended that teachers closely monitor students' use of language and provide immediate feedback to correct errors. Emphasis should also be placed on grammar instruction to ensure students apply proper sentence construction in their written work.

Conclusions

Based on the data gathered and presented, the researcher offers the following conclusions. The students demonstrated a higher level of reading comprehension in the Agutaynen language compared to Filipino, as reflected in the results. Although they understood what they read in Agutaynen, their reading pace was slower due to differences in spelling and pronunciation, unlike in Filipino, where they were able to read the words more quickly. While the respondents were able to read texts in both Agutaynen and Filipino, it appeared that they understood stories better when they listened rather than read them themselves.

The findings align with the theoretical foundations of the study, particularly cognitive and behaviorist perspectives, which emphasize how learners process and respond to tasks. The students' approaches to answering questions—whether in Agutaynen or Filipino—reflect their comprehension strategies. Despite facing difficulties in reading, the challenges can be addressed if students are willing and motivated to improve their knowledge and skills. However, their progress greatly depends on their attitudes toward learning. For this reason, the theories chosen in this study were appropriate and relevant to the context.

This section is primarily intended to benefit teachers who play a crucial role in shaping the academic development of Grade 4 students, particularly in their use of their mother tongue and the transition to using Filipino. These insights may help teachers assess the current academic standing of their students, especially in the subject of Filipino.

The policies related to this study aimed to guide the ethical collection of data while adhering to principles that respect both the rights of the school and the respondents. Participants willingly shared their personal information to support the legitimacy of the research. Through the informed consent process, respondents were made fully aware of the objectives of the study and its potential benefits. Alongside the goals of the research, participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point should they feel the need to do so.

In terms of research practice, the gathering of information was handled with utmost care. The researcher ensured the legitimacy of the collected data and safeguarded all materials used. All responses were treated with confidentiality and used strictly for academic purposes, thereby preserving the integrity and anonymity of the respondents. Given the age of the respondents, printed answer sheets were used to allow them sufficient time to understand and respond to each question. Once data collection was complete, the materials were securely stored to protect the students' personal information.

In line with the conclusions mentioned above, the researcher respectfully recommends the following:

First, students should be consistently provided with appropriate reading materials to further strengthen their reading comprehension skills, particularly in Filipino. Reading is a vital tool in sharpening the mind and expanding knowledge.

Second, students should be encouraged to read texts written in Filipino regularly. Doing so will help improve their reading speed and comprehension over time.

Third, students can be asked to create short and simple stories based on pictures shown to them. This activity can spark creativity and allow teachers to observe how well students can develop narratives using their imagination.

Fourth, students should be encouraged to participate in school-wide activities such as the celebration of Buwan ng Wika, which centers on the Filipino language and identity. Events such as reading contests, writing competitions, debates, singing, and other cultural presentations showcase students' talents and strengthen their confidence in using Filipino.

Fifth, teachers are urged to apply appropriate strategies to address gaps in students' comprehension and overall academic performance. At the same time, they are encouraged to continue promoting the preservation of the Agutaynen language and culture so that it can be passed on to future generations.

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