Psycholinguistic Profiles of Proficient and Struggling Readers in Relation to Reading Fluency

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ABSTRACT

This research delves into the psycholinguistic profiles of proficient and struggling readers among junior secondary Tamil students in Sri Lanka, with the aim of enhancing literacy instruction and intervention. Grounded in the Simple View of Reading (SVR) Theory, the study explores distinct psycholinguistic profiles and predictive factors for reading success or challenges. The research involves 140 carefully chosen students; 70 struggling readers and 70 good readers were identified based on their performance in the national Grade 5 Scholarship exam of 2021 in Puttalam South Divisional Education. A psycholinguistic screening test (PST) aligning with the SVR framework was employed to evaluate decoding and linguistic comprehension skills. The data analysis reveals notable disparities in decoding and linguistic comprehension skills between proficient and struggling readers. Linear regression analysis yields a robust model, elucidating a substantial portion of the variance in the PST profiles and reinforcing the influence of psycholinguistic profiles on reading fluency. The findings substantiate the existence of distinctive reader profiles, underscoring the significance of decoding and linguistic comprehension skills. Proficient readers excel across multiple components, while struggling readers may grapple with deficits in both decoding and linguistic comprehension. The interplay between these skills and reading comprehension is complex and dependent on reading proficiency. This study emphasizes decoding and comprehension in reading fluency development. It enhances understanding of reading dynamics, with broader implications for literacy education, transcending Sri Lanka's borders.

Keywords: psycholinguistic profile; proficient readers; struggling readers; simple view of reading; reading fluency

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a multifaceted process that involves the transformation of written language into spoken words and meaningful linguistic representations (Snowling & Hulme, 2020). The ultimate goal of children's reading development is to attain a comprehensive and fluid understanding of textual content (Lonigan et al., 2018). This skill serves as the cornerstone for lifelong learning and academic success, making literacy proficiency indispensable, regardless of linguistic background (Herbert et al., 2019). When students struggle to rapidly connect spoken language sounds,

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syllables, and morphemes with written symbols, it impedes their ability to store words in their mental lexicons (Moats, 2020).

The Simple View of Reading (SVR) postulates that successful reading necessitates proficiency in both decoding and linguistic comprehension. Weaknesses in one skill domain can restrict the impact of skills in the other domain (Lonigan et al., 2018). While numerous studies have explored profiles of proficient and struggling readers using the SVR framework, limited research has focused on junior secondary students with a Tamil linguistic background, particularly in the psycholinguistic context within Sri Lanka. This study aims to address this gap by conducting an in-depth exploration of the psycholinguistic profiles of both proficient and struggling readers through the SVR Theory lens. By concentrating on junior secondary students with a Tamil linguistic background in the Sri Lankan context, this research seeks to provide valuable insights into the psycholinguistic profiles of proficient and struggling readers, with specific emphasis on their alignment with the SVR Theory.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE SVR THEORY

The Simple View of Reading (SVR) theory offers a valuable framework for understanding the intricacies of reading. It emphasizes the importance of assessing both decoding and comprehension skills and underscores the need for balanced literacy instruction, encompassing phonics instruction and meaningful text reading (Snowling & Hulme, 2020). At its core, the SVR Theory posits that reading comprehension, i.e., the ability to understand written text, is primarily determined by two cognitive capacities: decoding, i.e., the ability to recognize words in print, and language comprehension, i.e., the ability to understand spoken language (Hoover & Tunmer, 2018). This theory underpins the Reading for Understanding (RfU) initiative, which describes reading comprehension as the result of decoding and listening comprehension and serves as its primary theoretical model (Cervetti et al., 2020).

In this SVR model, reading comprehension is seen as the outcome of the interaction between decoding, the ability to translate printed words into speech, and listening comprehension, the ability to understand spoken language. These two skills are intricately related; without the ability to decode a text, comprehension becomes challenging. Conversely, some children may decode text effectively but struggle to comprehend it due to language comprehension issues (Snowling & Hulme, 2020). The SVR Theory proposes that reading comprehension and language comprehension engage the same cognitive abilities, differing only in the mode of access: one through printed text and the other through spoken language (Hoover & Tunmer, 2018). Decoding and linguistic comprehension skills are pivotal in fluency development (Francis et al., 2018).

In the early school years, decoding skills play a dominant role in explaining variance in reading comprehension. However, as decoding becomes more automatic, and reading materials become more complex in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and discourse, language comprehension takes precedence, particularly in later grades (Catts, 2018). For children in third through fifth grades, both decoding and linguistic comprehension are crucial for reading comprehension, with decoding playing a more significant role for younger children, while vocabulary's importance increases for those with higher reading comprehension skills (Lonigan et al., 2018).

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PSYCHOLINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF READING

The study delves into the psycholinguistic aspects of reading, concentrating on SVR decoding and linguistic comprehension development. Decoding encompasses phonological, sound-symbol, syllabic, and morphological elements, while linguistic development involves syntax, semantics, and reading comprehension. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the skills of both proficient and struggling readers.

Phonemes, as the smallest units of sound, can alter the meaning of words. Language development hinges on implicit representations of the sound aspects of words which are often initially stored as unanalyzed wholes at the lexical level (Duncan, 2018). The significance of phonological awareness as a predictor of word reading is particularly pronounced in early readers (Liu et al., 2017). Among these, phonological awareness, with a specific emphasis on phonemic awareness, stands out as the most robust independent predictor of early reading outcomes (Kenner et al., 2017).

Knowledge of sound-symbol mapping is crucial in developing word recognition (Moats, 2020). Alphabetic orthographies represent individual speech sounds or phonemes, necessitating the establishment of mental representations for these speech sounds to facilitate sound-symbol mapping within the learner's mind (Moats, 2019a). Efficient word reading primarily involves automatically retrieving familiar written words from memory by sight. Sounding out letters or making educated guesses from context typically occurs when unfamiliar words are encountered. The process of storing written words in memory for immediate recall is termed orthographic mapping (Miles & Ehri, 2019).

Syllable awareness is a crucial skill in literacy development, helping children become proficient readers and spellers by enabling them to navigate the structure of words with confidence. As children expand their vocabulary, they naturally start to notice recurring spelling patterns in words. Over time, they apply these patterns to aid in reading and spelling. When children grasp common spelling patterns and learn how to generalize them, they become more adept at analyzing and recognizing unfamiliar words while also becoming strategic spellers (Scanlon et al., 2016). The ability to recognize written syllable patterns helps readers break down longer words into manageable segments and comprehend spelling rules, such as consonant doubling (Moats, 2019b).

Morphology involves the study of morphemes, which are the smallest units of meaning in a language and serve as the fundamental building blocks for encoding meaning. Research increasingly demonstrates the importance of morphological skills in literacy outcomes, such as word reading, spelling, and reading comprehension (Levesque et al., 2020). Morphemes represent the core elements that convey meaning within words; early in language development, children spontaneously combine morphemes to create new words to expand their vocabulary (Duncan, 2018). Studies centered on morphological awareness have revealed its significant role in reading comprehension. Morphological structure awareness, which pertains to a child's understanding of the minimal units of meaning in language, has been identified as a crucial skill that influences reading comprehension. Both morphological decoding and morphological analysis make unique contributions to enhancing reading comprehension (Deacon et al., 2015).

Syntactic awareness, a fundamental component of language development, is instrumental in enhancing children's comprehension of text with specific grammatical structures. It empowers children to decipher and comprehend the structural organization of sentences, encompassing the arrangement of words, phrases, and clauses. This awareness equips them with the ability to navigate the intricate rules and conventions governing word order within sentences, which, in turn, facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the text's meaning (Moats, 2019b). Research has

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highlighted the pivotal role of syntactic awareness in reading comprehension. Syntactic knowledge directly contributes to significant variations in reading comprehension, and syntactic awareness indirectly impacts reading comprehension through syntactic knowledge (Brimo et al., 2015). Moreover, syntactic skills are robust predictors of word reading and reading comprehension, particularly for dyslexic readers (Chung et al., 2013).

Semantic skills are integral to understanding the meaning of words, concepts, and language relationships. They encompass vocabulary, interpreting phrases and sentences, and grasping text organization, thereby facilitating oral and written language comprehension (Moats, 2019b). Semantics plays a crucial role in unraveling how language conveys meaning, encompassing word senses, polysemy, word formation, and contrastive lexical semantics (Mao et al., 2023). During early reading development, semantic knowledge can support word reading, regardless of regularity, highlighting the interplay between lexical-semantic knowledge and context in word recognition (Ricketts et al., 2016).

Reading comprehension skills are essential for understanding written texts, involving the processing, interpretation, and evaluation of information. Successful reading comprehension relies on decoding words, understanding their meanings, and making connections within the text. It is an active process that combines text-based information with the reader's prior knowledge (Scanlon et al., 2016). Interventions targeting reading comprehension development aim to enhance individuals' understanding of written texts. These interventions can be particularly beneficial for students with reading difficulties. By identifying areas of morphological awareness where students struggle, clinicians can develop specific instructional plans (Apel et al., 2022).

PSYCHOLINGUISTIC PROFILES OF PROFICIENT AND STRUGGLING READERS

Numerous studies have delved into the psycholinguistic profiles of proficient and struggling readers, revealing several distinct reader profiles. Li et al. (2021) identified three groups in each language: typically developing readers, poor decoders (with low decoding but average comprehension skills), and poor comprehenders (with low comprehension but average decoding skills). Good comprehenders exhibited strong performance across all component skills, demonstrating that proficient reading comprehension results from robust phonological and orthographic processing, semantic skills, and listening comprehension (O'Connor et al., 2018).

Notably, proficient readers demonstrated high scores on various reading measures, showcasing above-average component skills in word-level abilities, vocabulary, and comprehension, with fluency being their sole average-level skill (Hock et al., 2009). Children with persistent poor reading skills were distinguishable from good readers when considering both reading measures and verbal abilities (Holahan et al., 2016).

The relationship between reading component skills and reading comprehension is not uniform and can vary based on reading proficiency. This phenomenon might also apply to oral language proficiency (Rodríguez Ortiz et al., 2021). Readers with reading comprehension difficulties (RCD) exhibited lower reading-specific cognitive flexibility than typically developing peers, even when controlling for decoding, verbal ability, nonverbal reasoning, and vocabulary (Cartwright et al., 2017). Struggling readers demonstrated deficits in both decoding and linguistic comprehension, with the most severe subgroup performing substantially worse than other subgroups (Capin et al., 2023). Slow reading and a lack of reading accuracy were identified as significant risk factors, with children lacking reading accuracy being at the highest risk for future standardized test performance issues (Tortorelli, 2018).

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To summarize, previous research reveals the existence of diverse psycholinguistic profiles among proficient and struggling readers, with decoding, linguistic comprehension, fluency, and reading accuracy playing critical roles in reading success and comprehension. The relationship between component skills and reading comprehension varies with reading proficiency, necessitating targeted interventions and support for struggling readers.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The primary goal of this research is to unveil distinct psycholinguistic profiles and identify predictive factors for reading success or difficulties among junior secondary Tamil students in Sri Lanka. This investigation utilizes a psycholinguistic screening test rooted in the SVR framework. Specifically, the study objectives are as follows:

1. To assess and compare decoding skills between proficient and struggling readers, guided by the SVR framework.
2. To assess and compare linguistic comprehension skills among proficient and struggling readers, following SVR principles.
3. To analyze the significant distinctions in the psycholinguistic (decoding skills and linguistic comprehension skills) profiles of proficient and struggling readers predicting reading fluency, guided by the SVR framework.

HYPOTHESES

$H_0$1: There is no significant difference in decoding skills between proficient and struggling readers, guided by the SVR framework.
$H_0$2: There is no significant difference in linguistic comprehension skills among proficient and struggling readers, following SVR principles.
$H_0$3: There are no significant distinctions in the psycholinguistic profiles (decoding skills and linguistic comprehension skills) between the proficient and struggling readers that can predict reading fluency, as guided by the SVR framework.

METHODOLOGY

This quantitative investigation delves into the psycholinguistic profiles of proficient and struggling readers among junior secondary Tamil students in Sri Lanka, employing the theoretical foundations of the Simple View of Reading. The study applies linear regression analysis to explore the influence of predictor variables, specifically decoding and linguistic comprehension skills, on the differentiation between proficient and struggling readers.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION

In this study, a total of 140 students were meticulously chosen, comprising 70 struggling readers and 70 proficient readers aged 11. Struggling readers were identified based on their performance in the national Grade 5 Scholarship exam of 2021 in Puttalam South Divisional Education, Sri Lanka (N=800), in which those who scored below 70 marks out of 200 were categorized as such (N=*188*). This scholarship exam comprises two papers, with the first assessing general skills and the second aligning with the national curriculum's content.

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Their term test scores and assessments by classroom teachers were taken into account in defining the struggling readers (*N=100*). Subsequently, the selection process for struggling readers (*N=70*) included a classroom-based reading test, encompassing evaluations of oral word reading and text-based reading comprehension. Conversely, proficient readers (*N=70)* were recognized as students who achieved scores above 120 marks out of 200 in the Grade 5 Scholarship exam (*N=165*) and demonstrated excellent performance in classroom-based assessments of oral word reading and text-based reading comprehension.

INSTRUMENT

The instrument employed in this study is the psycholinguistic screening test (PST), designed in accordance with the SVR framework. It assesses participants' decoding skills and linguistic comprehension abilities. The test comprises two sections: one for evaluating decoding skills, covering phonological awareness, sound-symbol association, syllables, and morphology, and another for assessing linguistic comprehension skills, including syntax, semantics, and reading comprehension. To ensure the quality of the PST, it underwent face and content validity assessments by experts, and its reliability was confirmed through pilot studies. In these pilot studies, 18 junior secondary students participated. Test-retest reliability was demonstrated, showing consistent assessment over time, with higher post-test scores (M=26.0, SD=7.8) compared to pre-test (M=16.6, SD=4.2), supported by a moderate positive correlation (r=.527, $p < .05$).

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The data collection procedure involves administering the psycholinguistic screening test to all participants. This process ensures that the test administration is standardized and takes place in a controlled environment. The controlled environment in the data collection procedure involves administering the psycholinguistic screening test to all participants under standardized conditions. This includes maintaining consistent lighting, room temperature, and seating arrangements to minimize external influences. The testing environment is carefully curated to be quiet and distraction-free, ensuring participants' focus during the assessment. Uniform test administration procedures are employed, with trained administrators providing clear instructions and adhering to predetermined time limits. External stimuli are minimized to prevent factors unrelated to the test from influencing participants' responses. Communication between participants is restricted, and proctors or monitors oversee the process to maintain adherence to guidelines. Consistent timing is maintained for all participants, and the testing environment is secure and confidential, safeguarding test materials and ensuring participant privacy. These control measures collectively contribute to the reliability and validity of the psycholinguistic screening test results, allowing for a clear distinction between struggling and proficient readers based on their psycholinguistic profiles as assessed by the PST. This data collection procedure aimed to provide a clear distinction between struggling readers and proficient readers and to assess their psycholinguistic profiles using the PST.

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DATA ANALYSIS

The PST scores were subjected to processing using SPSS version 28 to facilitate analysis. The analytical phase entailed a comprehensive evaluation of the test results, focusing on the assessment and comparison of the decoding and linguistic comprehension skills exhibited by both proficient and struggling readers. This analysis harnessed statistical techniques, specifically the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test, to discern significant distinctions between these two reader groups.

Moreover, the study conducted linear regression to delve into the relationship between psycholinguistic profiles, with independent variables encompassing decoding skills, and linguistic comprehension skills considering both proficient and struggling readers as a combined cohort. Additionally, the research included the implementation of cross-validation procedures, effectively segmenting participants into two distinct categories: struggling readers and proficient readers, to ensure a comprehensive assessment of the findings.

RESULTS

The researcher confirmed the data distribution's normality for both decoding skills and linguistic comprehension skills scores before conducting the statistical analysis. Table 1 provides an overview of the normality assessment for the distribution of decoding scores and linguistic comprehension.

TABLE 1. The normality of the data distribution for decoding scores and linguistic comprehension

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Decoding	.185	140	.000	.888	140	.000
Linguistic comprehension	.208	140	.000	.787	140	.000

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistic = 0.185, df = 140, p=0.000, and the Shapiro-Wilk test statistic = 0.888, df =140, p=0.000 on the decoding score data indicate significant deviation from normal distribution ($p < 0.05$). The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistic = 0.208, df = 140, and p= 0.000, and the Shapiro-Wilk test statistic is 0.787, df =140, and p= 0.000, on the linguistic comprehension score data indicates significant deviation from normal distribution ($p < 0.05$). Both tests returned very low p-values, underscoring non-normality. Consequently, a non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was performed to analyze potential differences in decoding and linguistic comprehension scores among groups.

DECODING SKILLS OF PROFICIENT AND STRUGGLING READERS

The first objective is to assess and compare decoding skills between proficient and struggling readers, guided by the SVR framework. Mann-Whitney U test was performed to analyze potential differences in decoding skills between proficient and struggling readers. Table 2 illustrates ranks for the decoding skills between proficient and struggling readers based on the PST profile.

TABLE 2. Ranks for the decoding skills between proficient and struggling readers

	PST profile	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Decoding score	Struggling readers	70	35.55	2488.50
	Proficient readers	70	105.45	7381.50
	Total	140		

As shown in Table 3, the struggling readers group (*N*=70) has a mean rank of 35.55, with a sum of ranks totaling 2488.50. In contrast, the proficient readers group (*N*=70) exhibits a mean rank of 105.45, with a sum of ranks equating to 7381.50. These statistics indicate a notable difference in mean ranks, with proficient readers demonstrating a significantly higher mean rank than struggling readers. Furthermore, the researchers conducted Mann-Whitney U tests to evaluate the statistical significance of these differences in mean ranks. The outcomes of the Mann-Whitney U tests are displayed in Table 3.

TABLE 3. The Mann-Whitney U tests for the decoding skills between proficient and struggling readers

	Decoding score
Mann-Whitney U	3.500
Wilcoxon W	2488.500
Z	-10.216
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

As observed in Table 3, the Mann-Whitney U statistic equals 3.500, the Wilcoxon W statistic stands at 2488.500, and the *Z*-score is -10.216. The low *p*-value of 0.05 signifies a highly significant distinction in decoding skills between the two groups, ruling out randomness as an explanation. In summary, the Mann-Whitney U test underscores a statistically significant contrast in decoding skills between proficient and struggling readers within the PST profile.

Based on the analysis and results, Hypothesis H01 is rejected. The Mann-Whitney U test outcomes demonstrate a statistically significant difference in decoding skills between proficient and struggling readers, as guided by the Simple View of Reading (SVR) framework. The low *p*-value ($p < 0.001$) indicates that the differences in decoding skills between these groups are highly significant and not due to random chance. Therefore, the evidence suggests that there are indeed significant distinctions in decoding skills between proficient and struggling readers.

LINGUISTIC COMPREHENSION SKILLS OF PROFICIENT AND STRUGGLING READERS

The second objective is to assess and contrast the linguistic comprehension abilities of proficient and struggling readers, in line with SVR principles. The rankings and Mann-Whitney U test results are generated based on the PST profile. Tables 4, and 5 illustrate the rank information and Mann-Whitney U tests for linguistic comprehension skills in the comparison between proficient and struggling readers.

TABLE 4. Ranks for the linguistic comprehension skills between proficient and struggling readers

	PST profile	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Linguistic comprehension score	Struggling readers	70	35.50	2485.00
	Proficient readers	70	105.50	7385.00
	Total	140		

TABLE 5. The Mann-Whitney U tests for the decoding skills between proficient and struggling readers

	Linguistic comprehension score
Mann-Whitney U	.000
Wilcoxon W	2485.000
Z	-10.313
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

As shown in Table 4, among the group of struggling readers (*N*=70), the mean rank is 35.50, and the total sum of ranks is 2485.00. Conversely, within the group of proficient readers (*N*=70), the mean rank is notably higher at 105.50, with the sum of ranks reaching 7385.00. These statistics underscore a substantial disparity in mean ranks, indicating that proficient readers exhibit significantly higher mean ranks compared to struggling readers.

As shown in Table 5, the Mann-Whitney U statistic is recorded as .000, the Wilcoxon W statistic is 2485.000, and the *Z*-score associated with the Mann-Whitney U test stands at -10.313. The *p*-value is reported as .000, which is less than the conventional significance level of 0.05. In summary, the Mann-Whitney U test outcomes provide robust evidence of a statistically significant disparity in the linguistic comprehension score between struggling readers and proficient readers. The remarkably low *p*-value (0.000) underscores that this difference is not a result of chance and holds high statistical significance.

Based on the analysis, it appears that Hypothesis H02 is rejected. The Mann-Whitney U test results and the associated *p*-values indicate a statistically significant difference in linguistic comprehension skills between proficient and struggling readers, aligning with the principles of the Simple View of Reading (SVR) framework. These results show that there are indeed significant distinctions in linguistic comprehension abilities between these two groups, and the differences are not attributable to random chance.

PSYCHOLINGUISTIC PROFILES OF PROFICIENT AND STRUGGLING READERS

The third objective is to analyze the significant distinctions in the psycholinguistic (decoding skills and linguistic comprehension skills) profiles of both groups of proficient and struggling readers predicting reading fluency, guided by the SVR framework. To achieve this, the researcher initially conducted a linear regression analysis and obtained crucial results indicative of the model's performance, including metrics like Mean Squared Error (MSE) and *R*-squared values. Subsequently, cross-validation was carried out for two distinct groups: struggling readers and proficient readers, yielding noteworthy correlation results. Tables 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 provide an in-depth presentation of the outcomes derived from the initial linear regression analysis.

TABLE 6. The model summary of the linear regression

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.968[a]	.937	.936	.12729	.937	1011.491	2	137	.000

As indicated in Table 6, the *R*-squared (R^2) in the initial analysis is 0.937. This metric signifies the portion of the variance in the PST profile that can be accounted for by the model. In this instance, this model effectively explains around 93.7% of the variance, which is a notably high proportion.

TABLE 7. ANOVA table of the linear regression

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	32.780	2	16.390	1011.491	.000[b]
	Residual	2.220	137	.016		
	Total	35.000	139			

Table 7 reveals key insights from the analysis. In the regression section, we observe the sum of squares (SS) for the regression model, amounting to 32.780. This SS is divided by the degrees of freedom (2), resulting in a mean square of 16.390. The accompanying F-statistic of 1011.491 is of utmost significance ($p < 0.001$), signifying that the model as a whole is a robust fit. Conversely, the residual section signifies the presence of error or unexplained variance. Here, the sum of squares for the residuals is 2.220, which is divided by the degrees of freedom (137) to produce a mean square of .016. The total sum of squares for the PST profile variable is 35.000.

TABLE 8. Coefficients table of the linear regression

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.105	.030		-3.499	.001
	Decoding	.002	.001	.096	1.489	.139
	Linguistic comprehension	.010	.001	.877	13.620	.000

Referencing Table 8, the coefficients table exhibits essential details including unstandardized coefficients (B), standard errors (Std. Error), and standardized coefficients (β) for critical elements, namely the constant (intercept), decoding score, and linguistic comprehension score. Notably, each predictor's *p*-value (Sig.) is presented for assessment. In this context, the decoding score yields a *p*-value of 0.139, indicating a moderate level of significance. In sharp contrast, the linguistic comprehension score records a *p*-value of less than 0.001, signifying a remarkably high level of significance. This compelling result underscores the significance of linguistic comprehension score as a predictive factor for the PST profile.

CROSS-VALIDATION OF PST PROFILES

The researcher separated the data into struggling readers and proficient readers and calculated correlations for each group. Table 9 shows the results.

TABLE 9. The correlations between the PST profile and the decoding score and linguistic comprehension score for proficient and struggling readers

PST profile			PST profile	Decoding	Linguistic comprehension
Struggling Reader	Pearson Correlation	PST profile	1.000	.	.
		Decoding	.	1.000	.420
		Linguistic comprehension	.	.420	1.000
	Sig. (1-tailed)	PST profile	.	.000	.000
		Decoding	.000	.	.000
		Linguistic comprehension	.000	.000	.
	N	PST profile	70	70	70
		Decoding	70	70	70
		Linguistic comprehension	70	70	70
Proficient reader	Pearson Correlation	PST profile	1.000	.	.
		Decoding	.	1.000	.562
		Linguistic comprehension	.	.562	1.000
	Sig. (1-tailed)	PST profile	.	.000	.000
		Decoding	.000	.	.000
		Linguistic comprehension	.000	.000	.
	N	PST profile	70	70	70
		Decoding	70	70	70
		Linguistic comprehension	70	70	70

Referring to Table 9, the Pearson correlation coefficients and associated *p*-values illuminate the strength and significance of relationships among variables. For instance, within the struggling reader group, the correlation between PST profile and decoding score stands at 0.420, a significant association evidenced by a *p*-value of less than 0.001. Likewise, the correlation between PST profile and linguistic comprehension score, also at 0.420, exhibits notable significance with a *p*-value of less than 0.001. In the proficient reader group, analogous correlations exist between the PST profile and the other two variables. Notably, these correlations appear to be more robust. Collectively, these findings point to the presence of significant associations between decoding and linguistic comprehension scores and PST profiles. However, it is worth noting that the strength of these associations may differ between struggling and proficient readers.

Based on the analysis, it appears that Hypothesis H03 is rejected. The analysis has revealed significant distinctions in the psycholinguistic profiles, particularly decoding skills and linguistic comprehension skills, between the groups of proficient and struggling readers. These distinctions have implications for predicting reading fluency and are guided by the principles of the Simple View of Reading (SVR) framework. The statistical results and correlations suggest that psycholinguistic profiles do play a significant role in predicting reading fluency, and these differences are not due to random chance.

DISCUSSION

The present study contributes to the growing body of literature exploring the psycholinguistic dimensions of reading, with a particular focus on the Simple View of Reading (SVR) framework. The primary objectives are to compare decoding skills and linguistic comprehension abilities

between proficient and struggling readers and to investigate the connection between these psycholinguistic profiles and reading fluency. The study's findings are consistent with the core tenets of the SVR theory, which postulates that reading comprehension hinges on the interplay between decoding and linguistic comprehension skills. This investigation underscores the significant disparities in both decoding skills and linguistic comprehension abilities between proficient and struggling readers, reaffirming the pivotal roles these psycholinguistic profiles play in shaping reading proficiency. These results align with the foundational premise of the SVR theory, emphasizing the necessity of strong competencies in both decoding and linguistic comprehension for effective reading comprehension.

The study's observations regarding decoding skills are in concordance with established research. It reiterates that proficient readers excel in decoding skills compared to their struggling counterparts, as evidenced by their notably higher mean rank. This reiteration resonates with prior studies emphasizing the fundamental role of decoding skills in the early stages of reading development (Catts, 2018). However, it is important to recognize that decoding skills are dynamic and can change in relative importance as children progress in their reading journeys (Lonigan et al., 2018).

Likewise, the study's findings regarding linguistic comprehension skills align with previous research. Proficient readers exhibit significantly stronger linguistic comprehension abilities than struggling readers. This substantiates the notion that as children advance in their reading proficiency, linguistic comprehension assumes greater importance (Catts, 2018). The study underscores that reading comprehension is not solely dictated by decoding but rather results from the synergy of robust decoding and linguistic comprehension abilities, as advocated by O'Connor et al. (2018).

The examination of the relationship between psycholinguistic profiles and reading fluency in the present study reinforces existing knowledge. It underscores the strong association between these profiles and reading fluency, highlighting their significance in predicting reading fluency (Francis et al., 2018). Although the study did not delve into the nuanced interactions among specific components of decoding and linguistic comprehension with reading fluency, it contributes to the broader understanding that these skills collectively exert substantial influence on reading fluency.

While the current study did not explicitly categorize distinct reader profiles, as seen in prior studies (Li et al., 2021), its findings regarding the disparities in decoding and linguistic comprehension between proficient and struggling readers align with the concept of varied reader profiles. These profiles can encompass typical development, poor decoding, or poor comprehension, and understanding these profiles is essential for tailoring targeted interventions (Holahan et al., 2016).

In summary, the present findings are congruent with the existing body of literature on the psycholinguistic aspects of reading and their intricate relationship with reading proficiency. They validate the central roles played by decoding and linguistic comprehension skills in proficient reading, consistent with the principles of the SVR theory. Understanding these psycholinguistic profiles carries implications for educational practices and interventions aimed at enhancing reading skills in both proficient and struggling readers, aligning with the broader objectives of reading research and educational advancements (Cervetti et al., 2020; Apel et al., 2022).

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CONCLUSION

This study has yielded valuable insights into the realms of decoding skills and linguistic comprehension abilities among proficient and struggling readers, all within the framework of the Simple View of Reading (SVR). The primary objective sought to draw a comparison between decoding skills among proficient and struggling readers. The Mann-Whitney U test revealed a statistically significant contrast between these two groups in terms of decoding skills. As a result, Hypothesis H01, which posited the absence of a significant difference in decoding skills, was refuted. The secondary objective centered on the assessment of linguistic comprehension skills within these same cohorts. In parallel to decoding skills, the Mann-Whitney U test uncovered a substantial divergence in linguistic comprehension abilities between proficient and struggling readers. Proficient readers demonstrated notably higher scores. This outcome precipitated the rejection of Hypothesis H02, which posited the nonexistence of a significant difference in linguistic comprehension skills.

The third and final objective ventured into the exploration of the relationship between psycholinguistic profiles (encompassing decoding skills and linguistic comprehension skills) and reading fluency. The linear regression analysis unveiled a robust model capable of elucidating approximately 93.7% of the variance within the PST profile. Additionally, the process of cross-validation unveiled conspicuous correlations between psycholinguistic profiles and PST profiles. These revelations led to the dismissal of Hypothesis H03, indicating that psycholinguistic profiles wield a substantial influence on reading fluency, with these disparities arising from factors beyond mere chance. In summary, this study has convincingly demonstrated that both decoding and linguistic comprehension skills exhibit significant disparities between proficient and struggling readers, thereby influencing reading fluency. These findings harmonize with the fundamental tenets of the Simple View of Reading (SVR) framework, which accentuates the pivotal roles played by these psycholinguistic profiles in shaping reading proficiency.

While this quantitative investigation provides valuable insights into the psycholinguistic profiles of proficient and struggling readers among junior secondary students in Sri Lanka within the framework of the Simple View of Reading, it is subject to several limitations. Importantly, one notable limitation of the study is the relatively small sample size of 140 participants. While the results offer valuable insights, a larger and more diverse sample would enhance the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, this research employed a cross-sectional design, capturing data at a single time point. A longitudinal approach, following the same individuals over an extended period, would provide a more in-depth understanding of the development and transformation of reading skills over time.

This study also offers recommendations to advance research and improve reading outcomes among Sri Lankan Tamil children within the Simple View of Reading (SVR) framework. To enhance future research, working with larger and more diverse samples encompassing varied geographic regions, educational backgrounds, and age groups within the Sri Lankan context is recommended. Conducting longitudinal studies is essential to gain deeper insights into the development of Tamil reading skills among Sri Lankan Tamil children over time, identifying critical intervention periods

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