

READING COMPREHENSION DIFFICULTIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG GRADE 7 LEARNERS

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Abstract

Reading comprehension remained a critical concern among early secondary learners because difficulty in understanding texts affected both classroom learning and academic achievement. This study examined the reading comprehension difficulties, motivation, study habits, and academic performance of Grade 7 learners as a basis for a school-based reading intervention. Using a quantitative descriptive-correlational design, the study involved 61 Grade 7 learners from Basista National High School during the 2025–2026 school year. Data were gathered from Phil-IRI reading comprehension results, English academic grades, and an adopted questionnaire on motivation and study habits. Frequency counts, percentages, weighted means, and Pearson product-moment correlation were used to analyze the data. Findings showed that only 31.15% of the learners were at grade level, while 52.46% were two levels below grade level and 16.39% were three levels below grade level. Reading comprehension was positively correlated with academic performance ($r = .62, p < .05$). Motivation and study habits were negatively correlated with reading difficulties but positively correlated with academic performance. The findings implied that reading difficulty was both a literacy and an academic achievement concern. Thus, a school-based READ intervention was proposed to strengthen vocabulary, fluency, inferential comprehension, motivation, and self-regulated study habits among struggling readers.

Keywords: *reading comprehension, academic performance, Grade 7 learners, motivation, study habits*

Introduction

Reading comprehension is a foundational competency in secondary education because it enables learners to interpret subject-matter texts, construct meaning, make inferences, and participate in higher-order academic tasks. International large-scale assessment data continue to show substantial literacy gaps. In the Philippines, the 2022 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) reported that only about 24% of 15-year-old students attained at least Level 2 proficiency in reading, the minimum level associated with locating main ideas and using explicit criteria in texts. This pattern indicates that reading difficulty is not only a language issue but also a broader educational equity concern with implications for achievement across disciplines (OECD, 2023).

Current reading scholarship also suggests that comprehension depends on more than decoding alone. The active view of reading emphasizes the interaction of word recognition, language comprehension, bridging processes such as inference-making, and active self-regulation, while intervention research highlights the importance of metacognitive strategy use in improving comprehension outcomes (Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Juhkam et al., 2023). Recent studies further show that reading motivation, reading

frequency, and supportive learning environments are associated with better reading outcomes among elementary and secondary learners (Ma & Zhao, 2025; Pelletier et al., 2025).

Against this backdrop, the present study investigated the reading comprehension difficulties of Grade 7 learners at Basista National High School and examined their relationship with academic performance, motivation, and study habits. Based on the uploaded draft, the study was designed not only to describe reading performance but also to generate an evidence-based intervention program for learners experiencing reading difficulty.

Methodology

This study employed a **quantitative descriptive-correlational design**. The descriptive component assessed learners' reading performance and reading comprehension difficulties, while the correlational component examined the relationships among reading comprehension, academic performance, motivation, and study habits. The design is appropriate for school-based literacy research because it allows the analysis of naturally occurring learner differences without manipulating classroom conditions.

The participants were **61 Grade 7 learners** enrolled at Basista National High School during the 2025–2026 school year. The uploaded draft describes the sampling approach as purposive random sampling, with respondents selected from the Grade 7 cohort relevant to the study's objectives. Although purposive procedures can help researchers focus on relevant participants, they also require careful explanation of selection criteria when reporting for journal submission (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024).

Three main data sources were used. First, reading performance data were obtained from the **Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) Comprehension Test**. Second, academic performance was derived from learners' English grades. Third, learner motivation and study habits were measured through an adopted questionnaire patterned after the **Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ)**, using a five-point response format. Data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, mean scores, weighted means, and **Pearson product-moment correlation** at the .05 level of significance. Ethical safeguards in the uploaded study included parental consent, learner assent, confidentiality, and non-disruption of regular instruction.

Ethical Considerations

This study observed ethical standards in the conduct of research involving Grade 7 learners. Permission from school authorities, parental consent, and learner assent were secured before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by reporting data in summarized form and using the information solely for research purposes. The researcher ensured that the process did not disrupt regular classes or cause psychological, emotional, or academic harm. Data were analyzed honestly and objectively, with proper acknowledgment of all sources and instruments used.

Results

The study found that reading achievement was concentrated below grade expectations. Of the 61 learners, **19 (31.15%)** were at grade level, **32 (52.46%)** were two levels below grade level, and **10 (16.39%)** were three levels below grade level. Overall, **68.85%** of the learners were below grade level, indicating that reading difficulty affected more than two-thirds of the cohort.

The uploaded results further showed that learners' comprehension difficulties were not limited to one area. Reported weaknesses included **limited vocabulary**, **weak inferential skills**, **difficulty connecting ideas across sentences**, and **difficulty understanding implicit meanings**. Learners in the

more severe reading-difficulty groups also showed frustration-level performance and reduced independence in processing texts.

Reading comprehension was significantly related to academic achievement. The Pearson correlation analysis reported a **strong positive relationship** between reading comprehension scores and academic performance ($r = .62, p < .05$). Learners at grade level had the highest reported mean grade (**69.19**), followed by learners two levels below (**52.12**) and three levels below (**50.00**). These figures indicate that lower reading proficiency was associated with weaker academic performance.

Motivation and study habits also showed meaningful associations with learner outcomes. Motivation was negatively correlated with reading comprehension difficulties ($r = -.65$), and study habits were likewise negatively correlated with reading difficulties ($r = -.70$). In contrast, motivation ($r = .72$) and study habits ($r = .75$) were both positively correlated with academic performance. These findings suggest that learners with stronger motivation and more effective study routines experienced fewer reading difficulties and obtained better academic outcomes.

Discussion

The results indicate a substantial literacy challenge at the beginning of junior high school. The fact that most respondents were reading below grade level is consistent with broader literacy concerns documented in the Philippines and internationally. From an active view of reading perspective, these results suggest that many learners may be struggling not only with decoding but also with vocabulary integration, inferential reasoning, and self-regulated meaning-making processes that support full comprehension (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). The findings also align with OECD evidence showing that many Filipino learners remain below minimum reading proficiency thresholds needed for effective participation in academic learning (OECD, 2023).

The difficulty profile reported in the study is especially important. Vocabulary limitations and weak inferential skills are core barriers to comprehension because they constrain learners' ability to connect ideas, infer meaning, and critically process text. Recent work on adolescent reading shows that inferential comprehension remains a major source of variation in high school reading profiles, while research on strategy-based interventions underscores the importance of metacognitive instruction and guided practice in improving comprehension performance (Nadalini et al., 2025; Juhkam et al., 2023). Studies on critique generation and multiple-text reading also suggest that deeper comprehension improves when learners are explicitly taught to evaluate, connect, and question texts rather than merely decode them (List et al., 2024).

The positive relationship between reading comprehension and academic performance in this study confirms that literacy functions as a cross-curricular gatekeeper. Learners who struggle to understand text are likely to experience difficulties not only in English but also in science, mathematics, and social studies, where reading is essential for following instructions, interpreting information, and responding to written tasks. This pattern is consistent with prior evidence that reading habits, study skills, and academic achievement are interrelated in adolescent learners, and with Philippine studies showing that study-related behaviors and attitudes significantly shape achievement outcomes (Abid et al., 2023; Capuno et al., 2019; Magulod Jr., 2019).

The findings on motivation and study habits are likewise theoretically and practically significant. Motivation appears to function as a protective factor: learners who are more motivated are more likely to persist in reading tasks, allocate more time to reading, and use strategies that reduce difficulty. Recent studies show that reading motivation is positively associated with reading comprehension achievement, while reading support and reading frequency contribute to stronger reading development across school

levels (Ma & Zhao, 2025; Pelletier et al., 2025). Similarly, local and regional studies report that better study habits are often associated with stronger academic outcomes, even though the strength of this relationship may vary by context and modality (Castillo et al., 2023; Abid et al., 2023).

Taken together, the results justify the proposed **READ Program (Raising Excellence through Active Development)** in the uploaded draft. A school-based reading program should combine **diagnostic grouping, guided reading, explicit vocabulary instruction, reciprocal teaching, inferencing tasks, sustained silent reading, and motivation-building routines** such as goal-setting and feedback. These elements are supported by current evidence showing that metacognitive strategy instruction and supportive reading environments strengthen comprehension development, especially among learners experiencing persistent difficulty (Juhkam et al., 2023; Pelletier et al., 2025).

Conclusions

The study demonstrates that reading comprehension difficulty is a significant issue among the Grade 7 learners in the sampled school. More than two-thirds of the respondents were below grade level, and the dominant comprehension problems involved vocabulary limitations, inferential weakness, and difficulty constructing meaning from connected text.

The findings further establish that reading comprehension is strongly associated with academic performance. Learners with stronger reading proficiency obtained better academic results, confirming that literacy development remains central to success in early secondary education.

Motivation and study habits also emerged as important correlates of learner success. Higher motivation and more effective study routines were associated with fewer reading difficulties and higher academic performance, indicating that both cognitive and non-cognitive factors must be addressed in literacy interventions.

Overall, the study supports the implementation of a targeted, school-based reading program that integrates instruction in comprehension strategies, vocabulary development, motivational support, and structured study behaviors to improve both reading and academic outcomes.

Recommendations

1. **Implement the READ Program school-wide at the Grade 7 level.** The intervention should prioritize learners classified below grade level and include baseline and post-intervention assessment using Phil-IRI-aligned tools.
2. **Strengthen explicit instruction in vocabulary and inferential comprehension.** Teachers should routinely model how to identify key words, connect textual clues, infer unstated meanings, and summarize main ideas. These are the specific areas where the uploaded study identified persistent difficulty.
3. **Integrate metacognitive and reciprocal-teaching strategies in English classes.** Predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing should be embedded in reading lessons to help learners monitor understanding and regulate comprehension.
4. **Build learner motivation and structured study habits alongside literacy instruction.** Goal-setting, reading logs, feedback cycles, home reading support, and scheduled independent reading time may help sustain engagement and improve performance.
5. **Conduct follow-up studies with larger and more diverse samples.** Future research should include multiple sections or schools, use validated subscales for motivation and study habits, and assess the READ Program's actual effectiveness using quasi-experimental or longitudinal designs.

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