

Reading Comprehension Difficulties and Reading Level of Learners in the Division of Cagayan De Oro City

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Abstract

Reading comprehension is a crucial ability for success in school and everyday activities, yet many learners, particularly young children, find it difficult to understand written texts and materials. Hence, this study was conducted to examine the reading comprehension difficulties and reading levels of learners. Specifically, it aimed to measure learners' reading difficulties in vocabulary, spelling, finding the main idea, concentration, and reading motivation, examined the relationship between reading difficulties and reading level. The study involves 250 Grade 7 students from five public secondary schools in West 2 District Cagayan de Oro City during School Year 2024-2025. Employing stratified sampling techniques and descriptive-correlational research design. The primary research instruments were a validated questionnaire assessing reading difficulties and selected passages from the PHIL-IRI assessment tool. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, as well as Pearson correlation, to test the significance of relationships.

Results revealed that student's concentration on reading had the highest difficulty while identifying the main idea had the lowest mean score. Students frequently struggle with maintaining focus during reading and significantly affects their reading comprehension. The majority of learners fall under the independent level in all passages indicating that most students can read and understand texts with minimal assistance. A significant correlation was found between the learners' reading comprehension difficulties and their reading level particularly in concentration. It was concluded that targeted interventions dealing on concentration and reading comprehension strategies are essential, hence, reading comprehension is influenced not only by attention and learning condition. The study recommends that teachers are encouraged to implement interventions and practices that will nurture concentration while reading at the same time addressing the reading needs of students under frustration reading level.

Keywords: reading comprehension difficulties, vocabulary, spelling, finding the main idea, concentration, motivation, reading level

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is an essential skill that helps learners understand information, solve problems, think critically, and succeed in school and everyday life. However, many students experience difficulties due to language barriers, cognitive challenges, and instructional approaches, making early identification

and appropriate intervention necessary. In the Philippines, reading comprehension remains a major concern, as shown by the country's low performance in the 2023 Programme for International Student Assessment. In response, the Department of Education introduced Catch Up Fridays, which encourages reading activities such as Drop Everything and Read to address learning gaps and strengthen reading skills. The Philippine Informal Reading Inventory also helps teachers assess learners' reading levels and identify areas that require further support. During the 2024 to 2025 Phil IRI pretest in West 2 District, only 25.71% of the 2,088 Grade 7 learners assessed were classified as Grade Ready, while 30.51% were three grade levels below and 43.79% were two grade levels below their expected reading level, indicating that approximately 75% required additional reading support. Reading comprehension is particularly important in Araling Panlipunan, where learners must understand historical narratives, concepts, and subject specific terms. Therefore, examining difficulties in vocabulary, spelling, identifying main ideas, concentration, and reading motivation is necessary to determine the factors affecting learners' comprehension and guide appropriate instructional interventions.

2. Research Questions

This study attempted to determine the level of reading comprehension difficulties and the reading level of learners in West II District, Cagayan de Oro City, during the School Year 2024-2025. It specifically answered the following questions:

1. What is the respondents' level of reading comprehension difficulties in the areas of: vocabulary, spelling, finding the main idea, concentration and reading motivation?
2. What is the respondent's level on reading in terms of Independent, Instructional, and Frustration using the PHIL-IRI passages?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the respondents' reading comprehension difficulties and their reading level?

Significance

The findings of this study may benefit various stakeholders by providing a better understanding of learners' reading comprehension difficulties and serving as a basis for improving literacy programs and instructional practices. The Curriculum and Teaching Department may use the results to identify priority literacy needs, allocate resources, and develop appropriate programs with effective monitoring and evaluation systems. School administrators may use the findings to design targeted interventions addressing difficulties in vocabulary, spelling, identifying main ideas, concentration, and reading motivation. Teachers may benefit from professional development opportunities, evidence based instructional strategies, and personalized learning resources that support struggling readers. Parents may gain practical guidance on supporting their children through regular reading schedules, home reading spaces, shared reading activities, and additional tutoring when necessary. Overall, the study may strengthen collaboration among stakeholders, improve learners' reading comprehension and academic performance, and provide valuable insights for future research on literacy development and effective reading interventions.

3. Scope and Limitations

This study focused on reading comprehension difficulties and learners' reading levels based on PHIL-IRI at West 2 District, Division of Cagayan de Oro City, for the School Year 2024-2025. The researcher

randomly selected only 250 Grade 7 learners from the schools as participants in the study regardless of their reading level.

The independent variables were limited only to the learner's reading comprehension difficulties such as vocabulary, spelling, identifying the main idea, concentration, and reading motivation. The dependent variables were also limited to selected 5 passages from PHIL- IRI while following its scoring system.

4. Literature Review

Reading Comprehension Difficulties

Reading comprehension difficulties are influenced by vocabulary limitations, spelling problems, difficulty identifying the main idea, poor concentration, and low reading motivation. Dong et al. (2020), Gedik and Akyol (2022), and González Fernández and Schmitt (2020) emphasized that vocabulary knowledge supports word recognition, fluency, and understanding of texts. Kim and Petscher (2023) and Da Costa and Arias (2021) highlighted the importance of effective spelling instruction and meaningful word study activities in developing reading skills. Fuqaha and Wartim (2023), Ramadhianti and Somba (2023), and Isaqjon (2022) explained that identifying main ideas requires sufficient vocabulary, appropriate reading strategies, and active engagement with texts. Concentration may also be affected by environmental distractions, digital reading challenges, and unfamiliar academic content, while silent reading and purposeful reading environments can support comprehension. Spjeldnæs and Karlsen (2024), Gheewalla et al. (2021), and Mendoza and Cruz (2024) highlighted the importance of minimizing distractions and providing suitable reading activities. Furthermore, reading motivation can be strengthened through parental involvement, remedial reading programs, positive reading experiences, and engaging instructional strategies. Bakkaloglu and Pilten (2022), Kuhn et al. (2022), and Maglunob and Tabernal (2023) emphasized that motivation and supportive home and school environments contribute to learners' reading development. Overall, the reviewed literature provides a foundation for examining the factors associated with learners' reading comprehension difficulties and identifying appropriate strategies to improve their reading performance.

Learner's Reading Level

The decline in reading performance among fourth grade learners, as reported by the National Assessment of Educational Progress in 2022, highlights the continuing need to strengthen reading comprehension and provide effective reading interventions. Dorado and Medina (2022) found that the HAMON: Bawat Bata Bumabasa initiative improved learners' word recognition and comprehension through appropriate interventions and parental involvement. Duque and Fortes (2023) emphasized that difficulties in phonological awareness, particularly onset rime deletion, can hinder early reading development, while Gedik and Akyol (2022) demonstrated that word repetition can reduce reading errors. Similarly, Tomas et al. (2021) identified limited vocabulary, weak comprehension, low motivation, and inadequate support as factors affecting reading development, noting that structured interventions can improve learners' reading skills, confidence, and independence. These findings emphasize the importance of identifying learners' reading difficulties and determining their reading levels to provide appropriate instructional support. Therefore, the present study aimed to determine the reading comprehension difficulties and reading levels of learners in West 2 District, Cagayan de Oro City, during School Year 2024 to 2025, and to examine

whether a significant relationship exists between their reading comprehension difficulties and reading levels.

5. Methodology

Research Design

The study employed the descriptive correlation method to investigate the relationship between two or more variables without altering or controlling them. This method helped identify patterns, trends, or connections in a specific situation and indicates whether the variables are related and the strength of that relationship. By using this approach, researchers collected detailed information, identified meaningful relationships between variables, and utilized the results to inform future research or make informed decisions, all while maintaining a study's relevance to real-life conditions.

This study gathered data using Phil-IRI passages to determine the reading level in terms of independent, instructional, and frustration. Furthermore, this approach described the level of respondents' reading comprehension difficulties, including vocabulary, spelling, finding the main idea, concentration, and reading motivation. Lastly, this study examined the significant relationship of the variables.

The researcher used a questionnaire to gather data, as it served as a quantitative method for collecting evidence, facts, or information in numerical form. One key advantage in using a questionnaire over an interview is its ability to reach a larger and more diverse audience efficiently.

Participants

The respondents were 250 Grade 7 learners selected from five public secondary schools in West 2 District, Cagayan de Oro City. The sample was allocated proportionately across the participating schools based on their respective Grade 7 populations. They were chosen as the target population, as the researcher believed this grade level is most suitable for the study's objectives. All students had an equal opportunity to be selected and voluntarily participated in both the survey questionnaire and the PHIL-IRI assessment.

Data Collection

The instrument used a questionnaire in 2 sets. Set 1 inquired about the learner's reading comprehension difficulties, including vocabulary, spelling, identifying the main idea, concentration, and reading motivation. The researchers based this study on the research instrument developed by Herrera, Limos-Galay, and Lazaro (2024) in their work, Learning Domains Affecting the Reading Comprehension of Grade 10 Students in Magsaysay, Occidental Mindoro.

On the other hand, set 2 is an assessment tool evaluated the reading levels of Grade 7 respondents. Includes passages from PHIL-IRI tailored for Grade 7 students, such as Rocks from Outer Space, Diving, Beetles, The Brain, and Just How Fast. Each passage included eight questions. These passages are useful for checking reading comprehension because they present a range of interesting topics. They test how well readers understand facts, learn unfamiliar words, and use thinking skills like making inferences and identifying cause-and-effect relationships. Their variety keeps readers interested and helps measure understanding across different types of information. This adapted instrument provides all the necessary information and data for the study.

Data Analysis

After collecting and recording the data that were gathered in the study, the researcher utilized the following statistical tools:

The first research problem is to determine the respondents' level of reading comprehension difficulties in the areas of vocabulary, spelling, finding the main idea, concentration, and reading motivation, while the second aimed to identify their reading level in terms of Independent, Instructional, and Frustration, as measured using the Phil-IRI passages. Both problems were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The third problem examined whether there was a significant relationship between the respondents' reading comprehension difficulties and their reading level, using Pearson's Correlation r to determine the significance of the relationship among learners in the Division of Cagayan de Oro City.

6. Results and Discussions

Problem 1. What is the respondent's level of reading comprehension difficulties in the areas of vocabulary, spelling, finding the main idea, concentration and reading motivation?

Table 1

Summary Distribution of the Respondent's Level of Reading Comprehension Difficulties

Variable	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Vocabulary	3.36	0.84	Moderate
Spelling	3.35	0.84	Moderate
Finding the Main Idea	3.28	0.83	Moderate
Concentration	3.48	0.87	High
Reading Motivation	3.42	0.87	High
Overall	3.38	0.85	Moderate

Table 1 presents the respondents' level of reading comprehension difficulties across vocabulary, spelling, finding the main idea, concentration, and reading motivation, with an overall mean of 3.38 (SD = 0.85), interpreted as Moderate. This indicates that learners experience varying difficulties that may affect their understanding of texts, with challenges in one area potentially influencing their performance in others. Concentration obtained the highest mean of 3.48 (SD = 0.87), interpreted as High, suggesting that maintaining attention during reading is the most common concern among respondents. Distractions, tiredness, lack of interest, insufficient sleep, and personal circumstances may contribute to this difficulty. Providing an organized reading environment, interactive activities, regular reading schedules, and appropriate support at home may help learners sustain their attention and improve comprehension. In contrast, finding the main idea obtained the lowest mean of 3.28 (SD = 0.83), interpreted as Moderate, indicating that although this skill presents fewer difficulties than concentration, it remains an important area for improvement. Guided reading, summarization, questioning, and distinguishing central ideas from

supporting details may help learners develop this skill. Overall, the findings suggest that reading comprehension difficulties are interconnected and require appropriate instructional strategies, supportive learning environments, and collaboration among teachers, school administrators, and parents to strengthen learners' reading performance.

Problem 2. What is the respondent's level on reading based on PHIL-IRI?

Table 2

Distribution of Respondent's Level of Reading based on comprehension (PHIL-IRI)

Level on Reading Comprehension	Passages									
	A		B		C		D		E	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Independent 80 – 100 %	138	55.2	181	72.4	145	58	136	54.4	178	71.2
Instructional 59 – 79 %	86	34.4	59	23.6	81	32.4	82	32.8	56	22.4
Frustration 58 and below	26	10.4	10	4	24	9.6	32	12.8	26	6.4
Total	250	100	250	100	250	100	250	100	250	100
Mean	77.9		78.84		78.04		76.89		78.87	
Standard Deviation	0.83		0.86		0.87		0.84		0.83	

Table 2 presents the respondents' reading levels based on their PHIL IRI comprehension scores, with mean scores ranging from 76.89 to 78.84 across the five passages. Passage B obtained the highest mean, while Passage D had the lowest, indicating slight differences in learners' performance depending on the reading material. However, none of the passages reached the 80% threshold for the Independent Reading Level, suggesting that respondents generally performed within the upper range of the Instructional Level and still required teacher guidance to understand unfamiliar words and complex ideas. The findings indicate that familiar, interesting, and appropriately leveled reading materials may improve learners' engagement and comprehension. Although only a small number of respondents fell under the Frustration Level, particularly in Passage B, these learners still need focused support through guided reading, small group instruction, individualized interventions, and regular assessment. Overall, the results suggest that learners possess developing reading comprehension skills but require continued instructional support, contextualized reading materials, and targeted remediation to address individual difficulties and progress toward independent reading.

Problem 3. Is there a significant relationship between the respondents' reading comprehension difficulties and their reading level?

Table 3

Result of the Test on Relationship between the Respondent's Reading Comprehension Difficulties and their Reading Level

Reading Comprehension Difficulties	Reading Level			
	Independent	Instructional	Frustration	Overall
	r-value p-value	r-value p-value	r-value p-value	r-value p-value
Vocabulary	0.60 0.02 S	0.70 0.05 S	0.70 0.03 S	0.67 0.04 S
Spelling	0.50 0.02 S	0.90 0.05 S	0.51 0.04 S	0.64 0.04 S
Finding the Main Idea	0.51 0.03 S	0.60 0.03 S	0.60 0.04 S	0.57 0.04 S
Concentration	0.80 0.05 S	0.80 0.04 S	0.90 0.04 S	0.83 0.05 S
Reading Motivation	0.60 0.04 S	0.70 0.04 S	0.70 0.04 S	0.68 0.04 Significant

Table 3 presents the significant relationships between learners' reading comprehension difficulties and their reading levels, with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.57 to 0.83 and reported p values below or equal to 0.05. The findings indicate that vocabulary, spelling, identifying the main idea, concentration, and reading motivation are associated with learners' reading performance, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Concentration showed the strongest relationship with reading level ($r = 0.83$, $p = 0.05$), highlighting the importance of maintaining attention during reading activities. Reading motivation ($r = 0.68$, $p = 0.04$) and vocabulary ($r = 0.67$, $p = 0.04$) also showed significant relationships, suggesting that learners' willingness to read and understanding of word meanings are important to comprehension. Spelling was significantly related to reading level ($r = 0.64$, $p = 0.04$), indicating the importance of strengthening word recognition, letter and sound relationships, and spelling patterns. Identifying the main idea had the weakest relationship ($r = 0.57$, $p = 0.04$), but it remains an important comprehension skill that

helps learners organize information, recognize central messages, and understand supporting details. Overall, the findings emphasize the need for comprehensive reading interventions that develop vocabulary, spelling, attention, main idea identification, and reading motivation through explicit instruction, engaging materials, supportive learning environments, and appropriate classroom activities. These strategies may help address learners' individual difficulties and improve their reading comprehension and overall reading performance.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The study concluded that the respondents experienced difficulties in reading comprehension, particularly in vocabulary, spelling, finding the main idea, concentration, and reading motivation. Moreover, they frequently struggled to maintain concentration during reading for extended periods. This often led to a loss of focus and interrupted their understanding of the text, making it challenging to identify important details, and hinder their ability to connect ideas presented in different parts of a passage. Despite these challenges, the respondents were still able to comprehend what they read, showing that they could understand texts to some extent despite experiencing difficulties in specific aspects of reading.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn from the study, the following are hereby recommended:

1. Teachers are encouraged to use shorter and more interesting reading materials, apply interactive strategies, teach simple focus techniques (e.g., note-taking and breaking texts), provide support for unfamiliar words, organize learning environment, and make use of visual aids to improve attention. Learners, with the support of teachers and parents/guardians, should practice regular reading at home in a distraction-free space to gradually build better focus and comprehension skills.
2. Teachers are encouraged to provide differentiated instruction by giving more challenging texts to independent readers and guided reading activities for those at instructional and frustration levels. Teachers are also encouraged to conduct regular reading interventions, such as small-group tutoring and remedial sessions, to improve learners' skills while parents/guardians are encouraged regular reading practice at home. Learners are also encouraged to practice reading daily and seek help when they have difficulty understanding texts.
3. Teachers focus on strengthening vocabulary and spelling through regular practice activities, and teach simple strategies for identifying the main idea. Teachers should also include activities that improve concentration and make reading more interesting to increase motivation.

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