

Determinants of Reading Comprehension Difficulties of Grade 6 Learners in English at Saduc Central Elementary School

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ABSTRACT: This study aimed to investigate the determinants contributing to reading comprehension difficulties among Grade 6 learners in English at Saduc Central Elementary School during the academic year 2023-2024. The research focused on identifying the profile of the respondents, including age, sex, parents' educational attainment, and parents' occupation. Additionally, it examined the determinants affecting reading comprehension difficulties in English, such as vocabulary knowledge, reading fluency, home environment, and social environment. A mixed methods approach was used, involving a structured questionnaire and follow-up interviews. The study involved 62 participants, through census sampling, with 32 males and 30 females. The findings indicated a diverse age range, primarily including 12, 13, and 14 years old. The distribution of sex was fairly even, with a slight majority of males. Most parents had achieved at least a college degree, and some had post-graduate degrees. Mothers typically had housekeeping occupations, while fathers were mainly in business-related jobs. Although learners actively engaged in vocabulary-building activities, they faced challenges in understanding English words. Reading fluency presented difficulties, yet learners displayed the ability to read silently with proper phrasing. The study emphasized the importance of a positive home environment with attributes like good lighting, family support, and conducive reading spaces. The influence of peers who enjoyed reading was also noted to positively impact learners. The implications recommend tailored instruction based on age and sex, increased parental involvement, vocabulary enhancement strategies, and interventions to improve reading fluency to address grade 6 learners' difficulties effectively. Enhancing the social environment with book discussions and shared reading experiences can further boost learner engagement and motivation. These insights aim to assist educators and policymakers and guide instructional practices and interventions for the academic year 2023-2024.

KEYWORDS: reading comprehension difficulties, determinants, English subject

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension lies at the heart of academic success and daily functioning. It transcends basic decoding, demanding that learners grasp and apply meaning from written text. In the Philippine education system, concerns about declining literacy rates, particularly in Mindanao and BARMM regions, have placed renewed emphasis on addressing the gap. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 revealed the Philippines scored lowest in reading comprehension out of 79 participating countries—a sobering indication of systemic challenges in literacy instruction.

Learners today may possess fluency in word recognition but struggle with comprehension—a disconnect that threatens long-term learning. At Saduc Central Elementary School in Marawi City, these concerns converge amid a backdrop of cultural diversity, educational disparities, and evolving curricula. This study investigates key determinants of comprehension difficulty among Grade 6 learners, with the goal of identifying evidence-based solutions that support educational equity and excellence.

RELATED LITERATURE

Reading comprehension is an intricate process requiring learners to extract meaning from text beyond surface-level decoding. Scholars such as Woolley (2011) and Estremera and Estremera (2018) emphasize that while decoding is a mechanical skill, comprehension is cognitive and strategic, requiring deep engagement with language structures and prior knowledge. In the Philippine educational context, national literacy initiatives underscore the urgency of building foundational reading skills early.

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The Department of Education's "Every Child a Reader Program" and the "No Read, No Pass" policy reinforce efforts to establish literacy benchmarks before secondary education (DepEd Orders No. 014, s. 2018; No. 45, s. 2002).

Literature identifies several interconnected factors as primary determinants of reading comprehension challenges. Vocabulary knowledge ranks as one of the most critical, serving as the gateway to understanding and contextual reasoning. Students with limited vocabulary struggle to interpret unfamiliar terms and may misinterpret textual meaning (Moghadam et al., 2012; Chou, 2011). Studies such as those by Ricketts et al. (2007) and Sidek et al. (2015) confirm that vocabulary breadth correlates strongly with reading proficiency.

Fluency—defined as reading with speed, accuracy, and proper expression—is another key contributor (Rojas, 2022; Catts & Kamhi, 2017). Fluent readers are able to decode effortlessly, freeing cognitive resources to focus on comprehension. Conversely, poor fluency creates a bottleneck, as readers expend energy on decoding, leaving little for meaningmaking. Mule (2014) posits that improving fluency not only strengthens decoding but enhances comprehension across content areas.

Beyond individual skills, the home and social environments shape learners' reading behavior. Rohimah (2021), Cunningham (2009), and Guthrie (2008) argue that family engagement—checking assignments, providing resources, and encouraging reading—is crucial to literacy development. Similarly, Barnett & Casper (2001) highlight the role of peers in building reading motivation. Students who observe classmates engaging with books tend to mirror that behavior, fostering collective enthusiasm and discussion around reading experiences.

Together, these studies frame a multifactorial understanding of reading comprehension difficulties, pointing to vocabulary, fluency, and environmental support as pillars of literacy success.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To examine the determinants of reading comprehension difficulties among Grade 6 learners, this study employed a mixed methods research design. Quantitative data were gathered through a researcher-made survey questionnaire, while qualitative insights were collected via follow-up interviews. This dual approach ensured both statistical rigor and contextual depth.

The study was conducted at Saduc Central Elementary School, a government-funded institution in Marawi City recognized for its academic performance. All Grade 6 students enrolled during the school year 2023–2024 were included using census sampling, resulting in 62 respondents—32 males and 30 females. This complete enumeration provided a full picture of the learner population, allowing for more reliable interpretation.

The survey instrument consisted of two parts: demographic profiling (age, sex, parents' educational attainment, and occupation) and indicators of reading comprehension difficulties. The latter section assessed vocabulary knowledge, reading fluency, home environment, and social influences using a 3-point Likert scale: 1 for disagreement, 2 for neutrality, and 3 for agreement. Follow-up interviews captured personal reflections on reading experiences, pronunciation challenges, and vocabulary struggles. These conversations enriched the quantitative data, grounding statistical trends in real learner voices.

Prior to data collection, formal permission was secured from the Department of Education Marawi Division and the school principal. Respondents were briefed thoroughly, and interviews were recorded to maintain accuracy. Data analysis involved frequency and percentage computations for demographic variables, and mode analysis for identifying common response patterns. This methodology provided a robust framework for evaluating both objective and subjective dimensions of reading comprehension challenges.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal nuanced insights into the profile and reading comprehension challenges of Grade 6 learners at Saduc Central Elementary School. The data were drawn from survey responses and enriched through qualitative interviews, providing both empirical and experiential depth.

Respondent Profile. The learners represented a diverse age distribution, with most aged 12 to 14—an important developmental window for transitioning into more complex reading demands. A nearly balanced gender ratio ensures the validity of insights across sexes. Parental background data indicated high educational attainment: 64.52% of mothers and 48.39% of fathers held college degrees, with substantial postgraduate representation. Occupational data revealed mothers primarily serving as housekeepers and fathers as businessmen, a demographic mix suggesting varied socioeconomic influences on educational support systems.

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Table 1. Responses on Vocabulary Knowledge

Indicators	Responses (n=62)			Qualitative	
	1	2	3	Mode	Description
1. I find it easy to understand most English words.	31	9	22	1	Disagree
2. I actively engage in activities or games to improve <u>my</u> vocabulary.	14	7	41	3	Agree
3. I review and practice the English words I have learned.	7	3	52	3	Agree
4. I enjoy reading English books or articles to expand <u>my</u> vocabulary.	9	6	47	3	Agree
5. I use a dictionary to look up the meaning of unfamiliar English words.	6	7	49	3	Agree
6. I struggle to remember new English words after a short period of time.	21	7	35	3	Agree
7. I find it difficult to use new English words in sentences.	21	9	32	3	Agree
Mean Mode				2.71	Agree

*Legend: 1.00 – 1.66 = Disagree * 1.67 – 2.33 = neutral * 2.34 – 3.00 = Agree*

Vocabulary Knowledge. Findings show that learners actively participate in vocabularyexpanding activities, including the use of dictionaries and reading English materials. However, a significant portion struggles with understanding and using unfamiliar words in context. The average modal score was 2.71 (agree), suggesting engagement with vocabulary development but persistent limitations in applying vocabulary for deeper comprehension. These results echo the conclusions of Moghadam et al. (2012), Chou (2011), and Nurjanah (2018), who argue that comprehension is tightly linked to vocabulary breadth and mastery.

Table 2. Responses on Reading Fluency

Indicators	Responses (n=62)			Mode	Qualitative Description
	1	2	3		
1. I can read English texts fluently and smoothly.	29	9	24	1	Disagree
2. I can understand the meaning of the text while reading	34	13	15	1	Disagree
3. I can read silently without the need to sound out every word.	20	3	39	3	Agree
4. I can maintain focus and concentration while reading	35	8	19	1	Disagree
5. I can read and understand English texts needing without to translate.	30	11	21	1	Disagree
6. I can read with appropriate phrasing or grouping words together naturally.	14	16	32	3	Agree
7. I can read with appropriate phrasing or grouping words together naturally.	38	6	18	1	Disagree
Mean Mode			1.57		Disagree

*Legend: 1.00 – 1.66 = Disagree * 1.67 – 2.33 = neutral * 2.34 – 3.00 = Agree*

Reading Fluency. Data revealed a modal score of 1.57 (disagree), indicating prevalent challenges in reading fluency. Learners reported difficulties in sustaining focus, decoding accurately, and reading with natural intonation. Many relied on translation into their native language (Meranaw) and showed hesitation in pronunciation. Despite some positive signs— like silent reading and phrasing capabilities—fluency remains a barrier. This aligns with findings by Rojas (2022) and Catts & Kamhi (2017), who emphasize that without fluent decoding, comprehension falters. Interviews deepened this understanding, with learners sharing personal struggles in reading aloud and making meaning from English texts.

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Table 3. Responses on Home Environment

Indicators	Responses (n=62)			Mode	Qualitative Description
	1	2	3		
1. My home has good lighting that enables me to read comfortably.	14	45	3	3	Agree
2. My family members encourage me to read independently.	14	9	39	3	Agree
3. My family members always check if I have reading assignments.	14	5	43	3	Agree
4. My family members are patient and understanding when I struggle to comprehend English texts.	13	9	40	3	Agree
5. My family members are available and approachable when I need assistance with my English assignments.	10	12	40	3	Agree
6. My family members help me with difficult words when I read at home.	13	7	42	3	Agree
7. My home provides a quiet and comfortable place for me to read.	18	7	37	3	Agree
Mean Mode			3.00		Agree

Legend: 1.00 – 1.66 = Disagree * 1.67 – 2.33 = neutral * 2.34 – 3.00 = Agree

Home Environment. Respondents expressed strong agreement (modal score: 3.00) across all indicators of home support. Most confirmed access to quiet, well-lit reading spaces and consistent parental encouragement. Family members were described as present, patient, and proactive in assisting with assignments and reading tasks. These findings reinforce Cunningham’s (2009) assertion that a nurturing home atmosphere can directly improve reading outcomes and motivation.

Table 4. Responses on Social Environment

Indicators	Responses (n=62)			Mode	Qualitative Description
	1	2	3		
1. I have friends or peers who enjoy reading.	23	3	36	3	Agree
2. I have conversations with others about the books we have read.	14	5	43	3	Agree
3. I feel supported and encouraged by my friends to read.	11	8	43	3	Agree
4. I feel motivated to read when I see others around me reading.	7	10	45	3	Agree
5. I have friends or peers who share their reading experiences with me.	11	7	44	3	Agree
6. I feel motivated to read more because of the reading habits of my friends and classmates.	8	13	41	3	Agree
7. I feel distracted or discouraged from reading when <u>my</u> friends or classmates are not interested.	20	9	33	3	Agree
Mean Mode			3.00		Agree

Legend: 1.00 – 1.66 = Disagree * 1.67 – 2.33 = neutral * 2.34 – 3.00 = Agree

Social Environment. The data likewise reflect positive peer influence. Learners stated that classmates’ reading habits motivated them, and conversations around books were common. Modal responses again averaged 3.00 (agree), suggesting strong social engagement. Yet some acknowledged that when peers lacked interest in reading, their own motivation dipped. This underscores Guthrie’s (2008) and Rohimah’s (2021) view that peer culture plays an essential role in shaping attitudes toward reading.

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In synthesis, the results demonstrate that while learners benefit from supportive environments and actively participate in vocabulary-building efforts, they still face considerable obstacles in fluency and comprehension. The literature supports these challenges as multi-layered, requiring targeted intervention in decoding skills, vocabulary instruction, and reading engagement strategies.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study illuminated the complex web of factors contributing to reading comprehension difficulties among Grade 6 learners at Saduc Central Elementary School. By examining learner profiles and dissecting the impact of vocabulary knowledge, reading fluency, home environment, and social dynamics, the research revealed a nuanced portrait of both strengths and struggles within the classroom. Although learners actively engaged in vocabulary development and benefitted from positive home and peer support, persistent difficulties in fluency and contextual application underscored significant barriers to comprehension.

The implications are multifaceted. Age diversity among learners calls for differentiated instruction attuned to cognitive stages, while gender equity must remain central to literacy strategies. High parental education levels offer a valuable resource that schools can harness through active engagement and partnership in literacy efforts. Diverse occupational backgrounds among parents remind educators to tailor outreach and interventions with cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. Addressing vocabulary and fluency challenges demands evidence-based teaching practices—explicit instruction, repeated reading, and scaffolded oral language tasks—to strengthen decoding and meaning-making.

Additionally, the positive influence of home and social environments should be leveraged further. Classrooms that foster shared reading experiences, peer discussions, and student-led book clubs can multiply engagement. Creating seamless connections between home and school not only boosts motivation but sustains literacy beyond the classroom.

Based on the findings of the study, a holistic set of recommendations is proposed to address reading comprehension difficulties. Learners should engage in regular English reading, leverage digital vocabulary tools, and seek support through tutoring when needed. Teachers are encouraged to prioritize explicit instruction in vocabulary and fluency while using differentiated strategies to meet diverse learner needs. Parents play a vital role in fostering a literacy-rich home environment and collaborating with educators to support independent reading. School administrators should invest in teacher training, enhance reading resources, and strengthen home-school partnerships. Policymakers are advised to formulate data-driven literacy policies, channel resources to underserved areas, and integrate reading comprehension into systemic reforms. Future researchers are urged to build on this study through longitudinal investigations and exploration of additional cognitive and social factors across varying contexts.

In conclusion, improving reading comprehension is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor—it requires coordinated, evidence-based action across classrooms, homes, and institutions. This study contributes a meaningful chapter in that effort, offering both diagnostic clarity and actionable strategies for empowering young readers.

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