
READING PERFORMANCE LEVEL AND FACTORS AFFECTING COMPREHENSION ABILITIES OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: A BASIS FOR COMPETENCY-BASED READING INTERVENTION PROGRAM

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Abstract

This study determined the reading performance levels and factors affecting reading comprehension among Grade 10 students at Echague National High School during the school year 2024-2025, with the aim of designing a competency-based reading intervention program. Using a convergent mixed-parallel design, the researchers utilized the Phil-IRI, surveys, and structured interviews with 195 students selected through stratified sampling. Data were analyzed using frequency counts, weighted means, and Pearson's r.

The findings revealed that the students' reading performance was at an instructional level, with linguistic knowledge, teacher support, family background, and environmental factors affecting comprehension. However, students' perceptions generally did not appear to influence their reading comprehension. A significant and negative relationship was found between reading performance levels and the effects of stress, anxiety, and reading material difficulty. Based on these results, a reading intervention program was designed to improve reading performance and address stress and anxiety, as well as ensure that reading materials align with students' interests and abilities.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is an essential skill that forms the foundation of a learner's academic and personal development. It serves as a gateway to acquiring knowledge and refining other

critical abilities such as writing, speaking, and listening. Through reading, learners engage with a wide range of materials, enabling them to comprehend and apply information effectively (Chavangklang & Suppasetsee, 2018). Consequently, the ability to read with comprehension is vital for learners to excel in various aspects of their education. To achieve this, students must continuously enhance their reading skills, which in turn supports their broader learning goals.

Comprehension, a core component of reading, is pivotal to academic success. Research indicates that children's comprehension skills are closely tied to their academic performance across disciplines. According to Cimmiyotti (2013), reading is a critical skill at all levels of education because it facilitates learning in all subjects, ultimately leading to better academic achievement. When students understand what they read, they are better equipped to process, retain, and apply information, reinforcing their learning outcomes.

In the Philippines, reading comprehension has been a persistent challenge for educators and policymakers. Even with the efforts of the government to improve literacy rates, students still have difficulty in reading comprehension, vocabulary building, and critical thinking. The data from Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) are presented to illustrate the gravity of this problem. In reading comprehension, the country fared the worst in the PISA 2018 ranking out of 79 nations included in the study, wherein boys and girls scored weakly. Even though this result was slightly improved the next time, the 2022 results still reflected the Philippines in the lower ranks of 81 participating nations concerning reading literacy, mathematics, and science. These results indicate pervasive student deficiencies in reading, and these are both internal and external causes of such. These include linguistic knowledge, perception of students on English materials, family and teacher influence, and their environment.

Given the importance of reading comprehension in academic outcomes, the present study aims to address these limitations by establishing a competency-based reading intervention program for secondary-level students. The internal factors considered include learners' linguistic knowledge and self-perception, along with the influence of their families, teachers, and surrounding environment. The overall design adopts a targeted, evidence-based approach to enhance reading comprehension skills, supporting the successful academic progression of the learners.

Moreover, this study seeks to answer the following questions: (1) What is the current reading performance level of Grade 10 students at Echague National High School in terms of word reading and reading performance levels? (2) What internal and external factors affect the respondents' reading comprehension? (3) Is there any relationship between reading performance levels and the factors affecting comprehension abilities? (4) What competency-based reading intervention program can be designed based on the study's findings? These research questions underscore the study's focus on addressing the multidimensional nature of reading comprehension challenges.

Previous studies on reading comprehension have primarily focused on elementary students, such as those in Grade 3 (Paguyan & Taoc, 2022), Grade 6 (Cadiong, 2019; Estremera & Estremera, 2018), and multi-grade elementary pupils (Torres, 2019). However, limited research exists on secondary students, particularly those in Grade 10, which this study addresses. Additionally, most research has not combined factors like linguistic knowledge,

student perceptions, teacher and family influences, and environmental context into a single framework. While some studies (e.g., Estremera & Estremera, 2018; Torres, 2019) explored specific factors, they lacked a holistic approach. International studies, such as Taladngoen et al. (2020), focused on college students and did not examine the relationship between comprehension factors and performance levels. Employing a mixed-method research design, incorporating interviews and surveys, will provide insights into students' perceptions and responses regarding comprehension factors.

The study findings, along with the successful completion of such studies, would greatly benefit students, educators, parents, the Department of Education, curriculum developers, school reading coordinators, and professionals in applied linguistics and vocational English education. These findings can provide valuable insights, offering guidance and support for designing effective competency-based reading interventions. Such interventions aim to address reading comprehension challenges among students, particularly in the English language, and to further enhance their reading comprehension skills.

METHODS

Research Design

The study used a convergent mixed-parallel design, collecting quantitative data via the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) test to assess student reading levels and qualitative data through structured interviews to explore factors affecting comprehension. Data sets were analyzed separately and integrated for interpretation. Furthermore, the ADDIE model—Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation—was used to develop a competency-based reading intervention program aimed at addressing students' comprehension difficulties. In this study, the researchers only utilized the “analysis phase to development” phase of the said model.

Respondents and Locale of the Study

The sample population of the study comprised 195 Grade 10 pupils from Echague National High School for the school year 2024-2025. These participants were sampled using Cochran's formula, which ensured the sample size was appropriate, and stratified sampling, which divided the participants proportionally across sections to ensure fair representation.

Research Instrument

The instruments used include the Phil-IRI assessment test, which focuses on oral reading to classify students into independent, instructional, and frustration reading levels. Additionally, a survey questionnaire was adapted from validated studies to measure internal factors, such as linguistic knowledge and perceptions, and external factors, including family, teacher, and environment, using a 4-point Likert scale. Structured interviews were also conducted with 30 selected students to gather deeper insights into the factors affecting comprehension.

Data Gathering Procedure and Analysis

Data gathering was carried out with rigorous ethical considerations, including obtaining informed consent and ensuring the confidentiality of the information collected from respondents. The procedure involved administering the Phil-IRI oral reading test, distributing a survey questionnaire, and concluding with a one-on-one structured interview.

In data analysis, descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores, were employed. Pearson's *r* was used in examining the relationships between reading performance levels and comprehension factors and providing insights into their correlation and impact.

Ethical Considerations

For ethical considerations, the researchers assured the target participants of the study about the privacy and protection of the information they shared. Here are the following ethical considerations employed by the researchers: Firstly, informed consent was obtained from participants prior to their response to the survey questionnaires and participation in interview sessions. Secondly, the privacy of individuals was respected, ensuring that no harm or risk came to the participants as a result of the study. Lastly, all information and data gathered were treated with the utmost confidentiality, ensuring that participants' identities and responses remain secure and private.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Current Reading Performance Level of Grade 10 students at Echague National High School

In this research, most of the respondents fall under the instructional level in word reading, reading comprehension, and reading performance. This can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Reading performance level of the respondents in terms of word reading level and reading comprehension level

Levels	Word Reading Level (n=195)		Reading Comprehension Level (n=195)		Reading Performance Level (n=195)	
	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
Frustration	21	10.77	63	32.31	57	29.23
Instructional	106	54.36	67	34.36	106	54.36
Independent	68	34.87	65	33.33	32	16.41
Average Level	Instructional		Instructional		Instructional	

Word Reading Level

The table shows that 21 or 10.77% of the respondents fall under the frustration level, indicating that they can read words in the text with at least 89% accuracy. On the other hand, the table also shows that 68 or 34.87% of the students belonged to the independent level. This indicates that they can read words accurately by 97-100%. Meanwhile, the most prominent

level under word reading is instructional, composed of 106 or 54.36% of the respondents. Students under this level reached 90-96% of word reading fluency.

Word reading level categorizes the fluency of the students to recognize words in the text accurately. Based on the findings of this study, most students fall under the instructional level. According to Gunning (2002), these students recognized at least 1 out of 10 words that were challenging to pronounce, committing fewer miscues compared to those students who fell under the frustration level. Although described as learners with adequate knowledge and who make fewer mistakes, these students had not yet met the criteria to be at the independent level. This suggests that they still need guidance to improve their fluency.

Reading Comprehension Level

In terms of reading comprehension level, 63 or 32.31% of students fall under the frustration level, indicating that they only understand the text by at least 58%. On the other hand, the table also shows that 65 or 33.33% of students are at the independent level. This means that these students could understand the text by 80-100%. Among all the levels, it was found that the majority, with 67 or 34.36% of the students, fall under the instructional level. This means that they can comprehend the text by 59-79%.

This reading performance is a measurement of the readers' overall productivity in terms of how well the readers are able to understand the text. This term is used to evaluate how well a reader can absorb and interpret meaning, turn letters into words, put them together into phrases and sentences, and integrate new information with previously learned material. Among all the levels, it was found that the majority of the students fall under the instructional level. This means that they can comprehend the text by 59-79%. This level is described as an "appropriate level of challenge" where tasks are just right. Students perceived it as neither too hard nor too easy. This means that the students can improve their reading comprehension level through guidance from their teachers or peers.

Reading Performance Level

In terms of reading performance level, 32 or 16.41% of students are under the frustration level. Meanwhile, 57 or 29.23% of the respondents are categorized as independent, indicating that they are the most fluent in word recognition and have the highest ability in comprehension compared to those learners under frustration and instructional level. On the other hand, the reading performance level of the participants mostly falls under the category of instructional level, which is equivalent to 106 or 54.36% of the respondents. This suggests that while most respondents can decode and read words accurately and comprehend texts, they still require guidance to become fully proficient in reading and understanding texts.

Reading performance refers to the measurement of readers' overall reading performance, encompassing word reading fluency and reading comprehension. Based on the findings of this study, the majority of the children can accurately decode and read words, as well as comprehend the text or reading materials they are reading, but still need guidance or assistance to become proficient in reading and comprehending a text. According to Scammaca et al. (2016), many students make progress through targeted support in both word reading and comprehension strategies. However, Scammaca et al. (2016) also stated that more efforts should be made to help students attain full independence in reading. Their study

highlights the significance of delivering word-level difficulties and comprehension issues simultaneously to ensure improvement beyond the instructional level.

Internal Factors Affecting Reading Comprehension

Table 2 shows that the respondents generally disagreed on the effect of these internal factors on decoding, interpreting, and understanding written texts, with a grand mean of 2.48. The weighted mean for participants' linguistic knowledge is 2.53, indicating a moderate agreement on its influence on reading comprehension. On the other hand, the table also reveals that the respondents did not view their perception of reading as having a role in their reading comprehension, which received a weighted mean of 2.43. The table also shows that the respondents agreed that they felt bored when reading English reading materials, which received the highest mean of 2.87.

Table 2. Internal factors affecting the reading comprehension of the respondents

No.	Internal Factors	Mean	Qualitative Description
Participants' Linguistic Knowledge			
1	When you do not know the meaning of vocabulary or expressions in the reading, you do not comprehend the content of the reading.	2.46	Disagree
2	When you do not understand the grammatical structures of sentences in the reading, you do not comprehend the content of the reading.	2.55	Agree
3	When you have little or no knowledge related to the reading content, you do not comprehend the main idea of the reading.	2.58	Agree
Weighted Mean		2.53	Agree
Learner's Perception			
4	You always feel bored when you have to read English writing materials.	2.87	Agree
5	When you are sick, you are distracted from reading.	2.20	Disagree
6	When you feel stressed or anxious, you cannot concentrate on reading.	2.11	Disagree
7	When you feel that the reading materials are too difficult, you want to give up reading.	2.78	Agree
8	When you have personal problems, you lose concentration on reading.	2.20	Disagree
Weighted Mean		2.43	Disagree
Grand Mean		2.48	Disagree

Internal factors, defined as traits or circumstances originating within an individual, influence reading comprehension by shaping behavior, attitudes, and performance. This study emphasizes linguistic knowledge and student perception, revealing mixed findings. Respondents in this study generally disagreed on the influence of internal factors on decoding

and understanding texts. However, they recognized the role of linguistic skills, such as grammar and vocabulary, in comprehension, aligning with studies by Hamid et al. (2020), which underscores the positive impact of linguistic knowledge.

Interview responses echoed these findings. For instance, Student Participant 12 highlighted that familiarity with grammatical structures and vocabulary facilitated deeper comprehension.

When I have knowledge about the grammatical structure, it makes it easier to understand what I am reading. Moreover, if I have the ability to recognize words, I can also understand what I'm reading more deeply because I know the words I am reading and I gain more knowledge and understand what I am reading better because I am already familiar with it, and it makes it easier for me to comprehend (Student Participant 12).

Prior knowledge was also perceived by respondents as an important factor affecting their reading abilities. In an interview response, Student Participant 11 stated the role of being familiar with the material and his ability to understand it: "When reading, I understand the materials better because I have the background information that helps me further comprehend what I'm reading." This response aligns with the study of Albashtawi et al. (2016), suggesting that the infusion of background and linguistic knowledge makes comprehension successful.

External Factors Affecting Reading Comprehension

Table 3. External factors affecting the reading comprehension of the respondents

No.	External Factors	Mean	Qualitative Description
Teacher Influence			
9	The introduction of reading lessons by the teacher is intriguing, so you feel attracted to read.	3.12	Agree
10	When the teacher introduces reading content that you feel you can apply gained knowledge in the future, you are eager to read and pay more attention	3.28	Strongly Agree
11	Reading activities that are outdated make you feel uninterested and lose concentration on reading.	2.59	Agree
12	The teacher has interesting reading teaching techniques that attract your interest in reading	3.21	Agree
Weighted Mean		3.05	Agree
Family Influence			
13	Family members have encouraged you to read in English since you were young.	3.09	Agree
14	Your parents are strict and always demand you read in English regularly.	2.30	Disagree
15	Family members are aware of the importance of English reading, so they always provide English writing books at home.	2.82	Agree
16	Your parents pay attention to your English learning and especially your grades in English reading related subjects.	2.77	Agree

		Weighted Mean	2.75	Agree
Environment				
17	When you read in a place that is too hot or too cold, you cannot concentrate on the reading.		2.83	Agree
18	When there are interrupting or loud noises when you are reading, you lose concentration on reading.		3.18	Agree
19	Insufficient light in the place where you are reading causes poor visibility of the reading texts, so you cannot concentrate on the reading		2.95	Agree
		Weighted Mean	2.99	Agree
		Grand Mean	2.93	Agree

Table 3 revealed that the respondents generally agreed on the influence of various external factors such as content and techniques employed by their teacher, the support they received from their families, and a conducive environment in their reading comprehension, with a grand mean of 2.93. It also revealed that the students generally agreed that teachers play an important role in enhancing their engagement with reading materials, which received a weighted mean of 3.05. On the other hand, family influence received a weighted mean of 2.75, indicating that the student-participants recognize the role of family support in shaping their performance in reading. Lastly, it also revealed that the respondents generally agreed that their learning environment affects their reading development, as indicated by a weighted mean of 2.99.

Specifically, the participants identified the influence of their teachers, such as instructional techniques and engaging content, in improving their reading abilities. Harmer (2007) explicates the role of teachers' efforts, such as effective teaching techniques, in improving comprehension. This can be seen in a response of one participant perceiving topics like racism and ageism as relevant, which increased his willingness to read.

Our teacher discussed bandwagon, racism, and ageism. In ageism, we learned that we shouldn't belittle older people or say their bodies are weak because of their age. If the teachers introduced an interesting topic that I can really relate to real life, this will caught an eager to read it more. (Student Participant 12)

Family support was also recognized as pivotal. Respondents described how early encouragement, provision of reading resources, and active parental involvement shaped their reading habits. Student Participant 17 shared that parents provided books and taught vocabulary, fostering a positive attitude toward reading. This aligns with Cheung and Pomerantz (2011), who emphasized the impact of parental engagement on academic outcomes, "My parents teach me to write to become familiar with words, and they teach me by letting me read different books."

The environment emerged as another important factor. Students reported that quiet, well-lit, and comfortable settings facilitated better focus and comprehension, while noisy environments hindered their ability to concentrate. For instance, Student Participant 18 stated, "Your brain will be confused, and you won't understand what you are reading." This is in line with the study of Dennis (2008) on the negative influence of distractions on learning.

Relationship between Reading Performance Level and the Factors Affecting the Reading Comprehension of the Respondents

In this research, stress, anxiety, and difficulty with reading materials are the significant factors influencing performance in reading. Other factors, both internal and external, were found to have no significant relationship with students' reading performance. This can be seen in the following table:

Table 4. Relationship between reading performance level and the internal factors affecting the reading comprehension of the respondents

No.	Internal Factors	r-value	p-value
Participant's Linguistic Knowledge			
1	When you do not know the meaning of vocabulary or expressions in the reading, you do not comprehend the content of the reading.	0.02	0.76
2	When you do not understand the grammatical structures of sentences in the reading, you do not comprehend the content of the reading.	0.04	0.60
3	When you have little or no knowledge related to the reading content, you do not comprehend the main idea of the reading.	-0.03	0.69
Participant's Perception			
4	You always feel bored when you have to read English-writing materials.	-0.02	0.75
5	When you are sick, you are distracted from reading.	0.05	0.45
6	When you feel stressed or anxious, you cannot concentrate on reading.	-0.14*	0.05
7	When you feel that the reading materials are too difficult, you want to give up reading.	-0.14*	0.05
8	When you have personal problems, you lose concentration on reading.	-0.07	0.35

Table 4 revealed that there is no significant relationship between linguistic knowledge and reading comprehension, with r-values from -0.03 to 0.04 and p-value > 0.05. This suggests that respondents can comprehend texts regardless of their knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical structures, or background knowledge. This finding aligns with the idea that comprehension may rely more heavily on cognitive and emotional factors rather than purely linguistic knowledge. However, stress, anxiety, and difficulty with materials ($r = -0.14$, $p = 0.05$) negatively impact reading comprehension. This indicates that these emotional and psychological factors reduce focus and hinder effective comprehension.

Under internal factors, linguistic knowledge, such as vocabulary, grammar, and background knowledge, showed no significant relationship with reading performance in this study. Student Participant 10 stated, "Sometimes, when I don't understand something. I search for the word's meaning to better understand the whole text." This shows that respondents demonstrated comprehension regardless of their linguistic skills. This contrasts with studies by Ma et al. (2022) and Zheng (2023), which found strong correlations between linguistic knowledge and comprehension. Background knowledge was similarly shown to enhance understanding in prior research.

Moreover, the study identified that stress and anxiety emerged as major barriers to comprehension. Respondents indicated that emotional distractions reduced their ability to

focus, leading to poorer performance. For example, Student Participant 1 stated, "When I'm anxious or thinking about something, I can't understand what I'm reading because my problems are on my mind." This aligns with Eysenck et al. (2007), who found that anxiety disrupts cognitive processing and memory. Conversely, moderate anxiety can enhance focus and engagement, as suggested by Wu (2011), emphasizing that the intensity of emotional states shapes their effects.

In addition, perceptions of reading materials also played a critical role. Respondents found difficult or unfamiliar texts demotivating, leading to reduced comprehension. This aligns with Satriani (2018), who highlighted that overly complex texts hinder engagement. Conversely, familiarity with vocabulary and content increased interest and understanding, with participants expressing greater enthusiasm for texts that aligned with their background knowledge. Student Participant 14 stated, "If the words are familiar, it's easier to understand, and I become more interested."

Table 5. Relationship between reading performance level and the external factors affecting the reading comprehension of the respondents

No.	External Factors	r-value	p-value
Teacher Influence			
9	The introduction of reading lessons by the teacher is intriguing, so you feel attracted to read.	0.08	0.28
10	When the teacher introduces reading content that you feel you can apply gained knowledge in the future, you are eager to read and pay more attention	-0.11	0.14
11	Outdated reading activities make you feel uninterested and lose concentration on reading.	-0.09	0.20
12	The teacher has interesting reading teaching techniques that attract your interest in reading	-0.07	0.33
Family Influence			
13	Family members have encouraged you to read in English since you were young	-0.03	0.72
14	Your parents are strict and always demand that you read in English regularly.	-0.04	0.53
15	Family members are aware of the importance of English reading, so they always provide English writing books at home.	0.05	0.47
16	Your parents pay attention to your English learning and especially your grades in English reading related subjects.	0.09	0.22
Environment			
17	When you read in a place that is too hot or too cold, you cannot concentrate on the reading.	0.09	0.23
18	When there are interrupting or loud noises when you are reading, you lose concentration on reading.	0.09	0.21
19	Insufficient light in the place where you are reading causes poor visibility of the reading texts, so you cannot concentrate on the reading	0.08	0.25

Table 5 showed that there is no significant relationship between teacher influence and reading comprehension, with r -values ranging from -0.11 to 0.08 and p -value > 0.05 . Respondents suggested that comprehension is more influenced by the topic's relevance and their interest rather than teaching methods or materials. Family influence also showed no significant relationship with reading comprehension, with the (r -values from -0.04 to 0.09, p -value > 0.05). Respondents emphasized self-motivation over family support as a driving factor in their reading performance. Lastly, no significant relationship was also found between environmental factors and reading comprehension, with r -values ranging from 0.08 to 0.09 and p -value > 0.05 . Respondents noted that they have adapted to unfavorable environmental conditions such as noise, poor lighting, and extreme temperatures, minimizing their impact on reading performance.

This data entails that external factors like teacher influence showed no significant effect on reading performance. Respondents noted that their interest in the topic was a stronger determinant of engagement than teaching strategies or activities. McDaniel et al. (2000) support this, finding that the topic interest deepens text processing. Similarly, family support had minimal influence, with respondents relying more on self-motivation. Student Participant 6 stated, "No one encourages me; it's more self-motivation." This contrasts with Jeynes (2015), who found parental involvement beneficial, suggesting that family dynamics vary significantly.

Lastly, environmental factors like noise, lighting, or temperature also had little impact on performance, as respondents adapted to suboptimal conditions. According to student participant 19, he said that he is unbothered since he was used to a hot environment and loud noises. This is supported by studies that found that students accustomed to poor environments could maintain focus, though Amin (2020) emphasizes that conducive settings, such as well-lit and quiet spaces, still promote better comprehension.

In conclusion, internal factors like anxiety, stress, and perceptions have a stronger influence on reading performance than external factors. Addressing emotional barriers and ensuring accessible, engaging reading materials are critical to improving reading comprehension. While external factors are less significant, optimizing teaching practices, family support, and environments can provide additional support for learners.

Competency-Based Reading Intervention Program

In this research, major reading problems were identified. This includes the most common miscues the students commit, namely omission and mispronunciation. The students are also struggling to comprehend text at the levels of inferential and evaluative. These can be seen in the following figures:

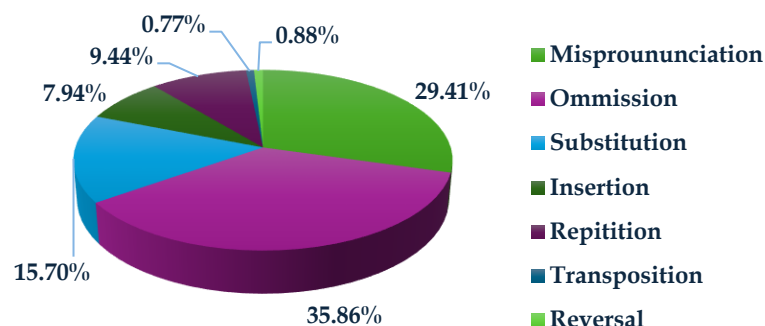


Figure 1. Percentage of miscues of the respondents

Figure 1 shows the percentage of miscues of the respondents after orally reading the text given by the researchers to each respondent. These miscues include omission, mispronunciation, substitution, repetition, insertion, reversal, and transposition, which are adopted from the guidelines of the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI). Based on the data, omission is the most common mistake committed by the respondents while reading the text, which is equivalent to 35.86%, indicating that they tend to miss a letter, word, or phrase while reading. Aside from omission, there is also a high percentage of respondents (29.41%) who tend to make mistakes in uttering words.

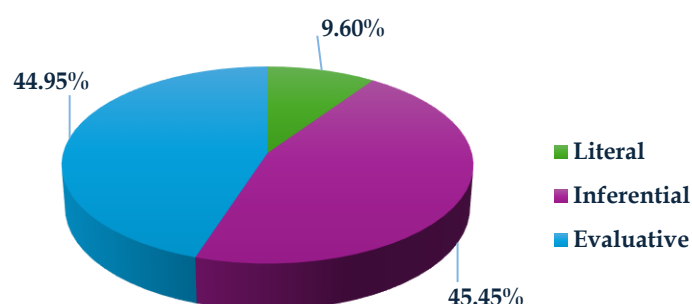


Figure 2. Percentage of comprehension scores of the respondents in each reading

Comprehension Level

Figure 2 shows the percentage of comprehension scores of the respondents in each reading comprehension level, namely literal, inferential, and evaluative. Based on the data, the respondents received the lowest score in inferential questions, which is equivalent to 45.45%. Aside from the inferential level, the respondents of this study also have lower scores under the evaluative comprehension level, which is equivalent to 44.95% indicating that they are struggling in critically assessing and analyzing the content of the text, which includes their ability to determine the purpose, value, and implications of the text.

Competency-Based Reading Intervention Program

These major reading problems guide the researchers in designing a competency-based reading intervention program that aims to address these specific problems affecting their reading performance. This program is entitled, "Project EXPOSE: Enhancing eXposure for Optimal Student Engagement".

The Competency-Based Reading Intervention Program, "**Project EXPOSE**" (**Enhancing eXposure for Optimal Student Engagement**), is designed to address significant reading challenges among Grade 10 students at Echague National High School. Based on the findings, the students face difficulties with oral reading miscues such as omission and mispronunciation, which impair comprehension. These results align with studies by Mufidah and Islam (2022) and Gedik and Akyol (2022), emphasizing the detrimental effects of poor word recognition on comprehension. Additionally, students scored low in inferential and evaluative comprehension, mirroring issues identified in research by Kang and Shin (2019) and Calderón-Ibáñez & Quijano-Peñuela (2010). Factors such as insufficient instruction in inferencing strategies and

limited critical thinking practice contribute to these difficulties, underscoring the need for targeted interventions.

Project EXPOSE is an eight-week program with two sessions per week designed to address these challenges. The program incorporates modules focusing on four critical areas: reducing mispronunciation and omission errors and improving inferential and evaluative comprehension. Chapters 1 and 2 address pronunciation difficulties through structured activities such as syllable chunking, tongue twisters, and gradual reading exercises. These methods help students identify and articulate words correctly, reducing mistakes that disrupt reading flow. The activities provide consistent practice with challenging word structures, helping students build confidence and improve oral reading accuracy.

To improve inferential comprehension, Chapter 3 includes activities like textual analysis, character exploration, and reflective group discussions. These exercises encourage students to move beyond the surface meanings by interpreting implicit messages and drawing connections between text clues and prior knowledge. Reflective discussions further refine reasoning skills, allowing students to articulate and defend their interpretations. This focus on inferencing strategies directly addresses gaps in comprehension identified in studies by Davoudi (2005). Meanwhile, Chapter 4 is dedicated to evaluative comprehension and using critical analysis tasks such as distinguishing facts from opinions, scenario-based evaluations, and collaborative discussions. These activities equip students to assess text credibility, identify author intent, and critique arguments effectively, fostering critical thinking and decision-making skills.

Reading Coordinators and English teachers will implement the program collaboratively, ensuring alignment with curricular goals. Sessions are designed to be engaging and repetitive, promoting long-term retention and skill mastery. By targeting specific reading challenges, Project EXPOSE aims to improve students' overall reading proficiency, enabling them to navigate academic and real-world texts with greater competence. Grounded in research and best practices, this competency-based approach provides a structured and impactful solution to enhance literacy skills and address the prevalent reading difficulties among students. Through consistent engagement and practice, the program fosters not only better readers but also critical thinkers equipped for future academic and personal success.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORKS

Grade 10 students are at the instructional reading level, and improvement in reading performance requires efficient guidance. A reading intervention program targeting word recognition and higher-order comprehension is thus necessary to bring students up to an independent reading level. The analysis reveals that among the internal factors, only linguistic knowledge significantly enhances comprehension, indicating the importance of vocabulary-building and grammar exercises in reading instruction. External factors, including teacher influence on student interest, family support for reading enthusiasm, and a suitable environment, positively affect comprehension. Therefore, cooperation between teachers and families should be ensured, and good schools should have well-illuminated, free-from-disturbance, and quiet reading rooms. Besides, participants' perceptions of anxiety and text difficulty were negatively correlated with comprehension. Schools and teachers need to establish anxiety-free learning conditions and provide students with tools to cope with difficult texts, such as gradual scaffolding and guided reading. The fact that miscues occurred very frequently, and omissions and mispronunciations were among them, as well as the low scores in inferential and evaluative questions, makes corrective action necessary. This emphasizes the

need for a competency-based reading intervention program that addresses both decoding skills and critical thinking to enable students to engage with texts more effectively.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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