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Reading Comprehension Ability Vis-a-Vis Demographics, Reading Materials, and Time Spent in Reading

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ABSTRACT

Academic progress depends on understanding, analyzing, and applying the information gathered through reading. The lack of strong reading comprehension skills definitely affects a students' success in school. Yet, various variables may improve or hamper the development of these skills. The focus of this paper is to investigate the reading comprehension ability of Grade VI Pupils of Tomas Oppus Central School and finds out the possible variables associated with this ability. The methodology used is descriptive-correlational design. The authors describe the correlation between the demographics, time spent in reading and number of reading materials with their reading comprehension skills. Findings reveal that gender, time spent in reading, and availability of reading materials at home are significantly related to two higher levels of comprehension: interpretive and applied while the lowest level of comprehension is significantly related to age and family income.

Keywords: Applied levels of comprehension, interpretive, literal, reading comprehension.

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1.0 Introduction

The mother of all study skills, which is integral part of success, is reading comprehension. Al-Khateeb and Idrees (2010) stress that reading comprehension is the real core for the reading process; a big process which all other processes are centered including the complex skills and strategies (Kolic-Vehovec & Bajsanski, 2006) so that people would function well in today's society.

Moreover, Ozemir (2010) stresses that reading comprehension skill is critically needed in the educational success of all individuals. Without the adequacy of this skill, individuals can hardly survive in this globally competitive world.

Moreover, Alm (1981) points out that ineffective educational practices (i.e., teaching methods/strategies) contribute to children's difficulty in learning to read and write. More recently, appropriate

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teaching approaches are strongly used to enhance reading comprehension. Some national reports conclude that there are unidentified strategies and methods which are more influential and useful in teaching reading comprehension to children.

Some studies denote that there is a need for children to learn explicitly the phonic knowledge (letter-to-sound correspondences) for them to decode and spell unfamiliar words (Mason, 2009). According to Simmons et al. (2007), there is a window of opportunity to teach young children these decoding skills, using well-focused and intensive instruction.

Literacy, as an integral part of the society, provides great opportunities for education, employment, social-adjustment, and entertainment (Mason, 2009). However, there is a sizable portion of society that has led researchers to theorize about the causalities of reading disabilities. Stanovich (1986) reckons that physiological factors, hereditary factors, emotional factors, socio-cultural factors, educational factors, cognitive factors, language factors, and reading history are sources of reading disabilities.

On the other hand, Davis-Kean (2005) discovers that family socio-economic status specifically parents' education and income positively correlated with the children's academic achievement. Expectations for children's educational attainment were directly related to the parents' educational degree (Davis-Kean 2005) and circuitously reflected children's success (Okagaki & Frensch, 1978).

As regards to home resources, Murnane, Maynard, and Ohls (1981) emphasize the importance of these resources in determining children's cognitive skill levels. Geske and Ozola (2008) points out that students' reading literacy is significantly affected by the collaboration of parents and pupils in visiting library or a bookstore. Furthermore, the results of their study affirm that students who read different stories, poetry, parts of fiction books or plays at least once a week contributed much in reading literacy.

Nowadays, students are exposed to different ideas and an array of perspectives from mass media and printed sources. As a nation, everyone takes pleasure in a high literacy rate. Sad to say that not all Filipinos are good readers who can derive meaning from written materials, analyze, and apply that meaning. Hence, readers who only read facts and cannot comprehend can never be called a reader. Thus, to see if the Grade-VI pupils are 'readers', their reading comprehension level are tested using a standardized reading material and these results are then correlated to their demographic profile.

One of the Department of Education's thrusts recently is to primarily develop the English reading comprehension skills of the Filipino students and promote the love of reading. In support to the ten-point education agenda of the Aquino Administration and the promotion of Every Child a Reader Program (ECARP), the DepEd has instigated different reading programs to promote the love for reading; to foster a reading culture among pupils; to devote certain amount for readers in any written materials; and to enhance completely the reading ability of the students. Among these programs are the National Reading Month, Read-a-thon, Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) Project, and Shared Reading Project (Kaklase ko, Sagot Ko).

More literature show that there are many different and usually very complex causes for the difference in the reading comprehension skills exhibited by the primary grade pupils. These identified factors are beyond school influence. The income level and parents' educational attainment, which correlates with the academic achievements of students and other many factors greatly, affect students' learning achievements at school (Goodwin, 2000). The findings of the different studies also prove that there is a close coherence between the meaning of education to parents and the students' learning achievements (Balster-Liontos, 1992).

This study gears towards a unified focus into strengthening the implementation of the different reading programs of the school in order to achieve educational excellence. In the present paper, the following questions are addressed: Is there a relationship between the pupils' demographics and their reading

comprehension skills? Does more time spent in reading guarantee better comprehension? Does owning more reading materials promote higher-order reading skill?

2.0 Theoretical and conceptual framework of the study

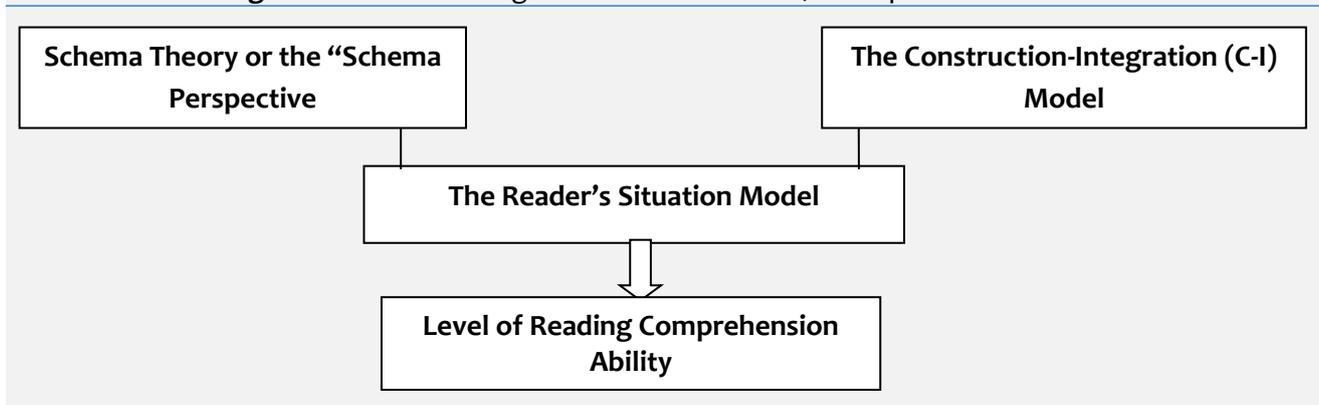
This study anchors on two complementary ideas: the reader's situation model (Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983) and the construction-integration (C-I) model (Kintsch, 1988). The first concerns with an enriched level of comprehension beyond the literal meaning of a text and the latter focuses on the cognitive dynamics of text comprehension. The subsequent model assumes that reader's cognitive architecture or limited memory and cognitive procedures or the retrieval operations, as well as text devices, overlapped and supported comprehension.

Schema theory or the "schema perspective" assumes that the meaning does not lie solely in the print itself, but interacts with the cognitive structure of schemata already present in the reader's mind. These schemata represent the framework for understanding new information.

Schemata, according to Rumelhart (1980) and Ortony (1975), constitute concepts that are stored in memory. The concepts are remembered through the identification of those existing events that significantly relate to other concepts already kept. Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) construct two types of schemata: content schemata and formal schemata. The first type of schemata refers to the background knowledge that guides every reader to comprehend and recall the subject matter (Carrell, et al., 2000). The second type of schemata describes the reader's expectations about how different textual information fits together and in what order they will retrieve.

Meaning, the successful interpretation of the reader on a written text is greatly affected by the reader's stored knowledge, educational background, culture, and beliefs. All these are essential factors which contribute to discourse comprehension.

Figure 1: Schematic Diagram of the Theoretical/Conceptual Framework



3.0 Research design and methods

The study uses a descriptive-correlational design to determine the relationships of variables involved. The dependent variables are used for the level of reading comprehension ability while the independent variables are utilized to obtain the profile of the respondents. The respondents' comprehension level is extracted from their answers on the questionnaire and their oral answers from the Phil-IRI selections.

The collection of data is done for twelve successive days where all grade six pupils were requested to reveal their profile in Part I of the questionnaire. Also, the reading test is conducted every 12:30 to 1:00 in the afternoon, which is the schedule for remediation. Every student is asked to read the pre-determined selection for the particular grade level from the Phil-IRI book prescribed by Department of Education. After reading, they are requested to answer orally the questions that follow after the

passage. Their responses are recorded simultaneously to have a basis for labeling the level of comprehension pre-determined by DepEd.

Four essential statistical tools are used to present the gathered data, like the percentage, mean, point-biserial correlation test, and Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient.

4.0 Results and discussion

A. Demographic profile of the respondents

Age	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
10	2	2	4
11	9	16	25
12	1	2	3
Total	12	20	32

Table 1 presents the respondents' age. As presented, most of them are 11 years old. Across the world, in any educational institutions, the nomenclature for all school grades specifically the sixth grade is usually 11–12 or even 13 years of age. Thus, such age is just appropriate for Grade VI under the country's Basic Education Curriculum. Moreover, it can also be seen that there are slightly more females than males in this grade level.

Age	Gender		Average
	Male	Female	
10	22.5	27.5	25
11	24	40.69	34.68
12	30	32.5	31.67
Average	24.25	38.55	33.19

Table 2 indicates that girls spend more time in reading than boys. These data mean a difference in interests and priorities among children of different genders. Boys, therefore, would require more effort on the part of the teacher to motivate into reading.

A result of the recent study, by [Center on Education Policy \(2010\)](#), forecast that girls are reading better than boys. Moreover, it stresses out that boys, by ten percentage points, are lagging behind girls on any standardized reading tests in all 50 states of United States.

An article by [Richardson \(2012\)](#) discloses that there is apparently a reading gap between boys and girls in England, and there is no official strategy to address this issue. [Clark and Douglas \(2011\)](#) indicate that evidence in some research studies reveal that 58 percent of girls enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot in comparison to 43 percent of boys.

Age	Gender		Average
	Male	Female	
10	5.5	17.5	11.5
11	26.78	28.81	28.08
12	5	7.5	6.67
Average	21.42	25.55	24

As revealed in Table 3, girls have more reading materials available at home. This result indicates the tendency of parents of girls to be more likely to provide reading materials to their daughters than those who have sons. This is due to the idea that boys tend to be more interested in physical activities like playing rather than the less physical activities such as reading. Hence, parents opt to buy toys for their sons instead of buying books and other reading materials.

Millard, in Smith and Wilhelm, 2002, forecasts that great attention is given to find appropriate books that appeal to boys by being more “masculine”. This kind of strategy, however, has brought on stereotyping and behavior reinforcement that students may not benefit. Teachers should urge students to read different reading materials to enhance their comprehension regardless of the topics or books (Bowen, 2010). Pirie (2002) affirms that there is a need for quality resources to conjugate boys with appropriate reading materials they want to read (in Bowen, 2010).

Smith and Wilhelm (2002, as cited in Bowen, 2010) also discover that allowing students’ preferences in choosing their reading text increases the types of text read and has urged boy’s motivation to reading. Nevertheless, teachers are cautioned to sustain an equal distinction of books from one’s preferences and books required in school so that these can boost students’ interest in reading. Males’ interests not only transcend the stereotypes but also are “surprisingly rich and varied”.

Table 4: Estimated Family Monthly Income (in Pesos) (No. of Families)

Mother’s Educational Attainment	Highest	Father’s Highest Educational Attainment				Average
		Elementary Graduate	High School Level	High School Graduate	College Level	
Elementary Graduate		3,000.00 (1)				3,000.00 (1)
High School Level		1,500.00 (1)				1,500.00 (1)
High School Graduate		8,000.00 (2)	8,214.29 (7)			8,166.67 (9)
College Level			5,000.00 (1)	1,500.00 (1)	5,000.00 (2)	4,125.00 (4)
College Graduate					18,588.24 (17)	18,588.24 (17)
Average		5,125.00 (4)	7,812.50 (8)	1,500.00 (1)	17,157.90 (19)	12, 828.13 (32)

As presented in the table, out of the 32 respondents, 20 have both parents being able to (at least) study in college. These data show how education is becoming more and more important to Filipinos.

Table 4 also shows that parents with higher educational qualifications tend to earn more than those with lower educational attainment. This finding shows how the world of work is becoming more competitive. Skills should be accompanied with a corresponding diploma or certificate to gain an edge over other applicants. It is just sad to note that despite the efforts, monthly family income still average below P15,000.00.

Alokan, Osakinle, and Onijingin, (2013) believe that the quality of home environment is considered essential in determining the personality and achievement of every learner. There are two factors that affect learning: nature and nurture. The first determines the level of intelligence and the inherited abilities of the children while the latter facilitates to maximize these innate abilities. According to Skinner (2002, as cited in Alokan et al., 2013), nurture includes the peer groups, the environment, school, and especially the home to which the learner belongs. The home has far reaching influence on the child. The learner’s home environment strongly influences achievement at school. Its variables

could be manipulated to enhance students' academic performance. The level of parents' educational attainment could affect the educational feat of the children.

Based on the report of *European Union Monitoring Report (2013)*, students with literate parents perform averagely in mathematics, science, and reading, than those with parents who have basic education only. A family with educated parents helps in the facilitation of the academic activities of the children. Such parents know the essentiality of getting educational materials for their children. They may go through their children's exercise books after school, or even employ a private teacher to teach them after school. They may also have a library at home, stocked with novels, encyclopedia, and other educational books and educational audio-visual tapes that would facilitate reading comprehension ability. All these materials contribute to a better educational achievement of the children. On the other hand, there is a need for a close supervision for those who come from illiterate family because their academic performance is significantly affected (*Alokan, Osakinle, and Onijingin, 2013*).

A professor and Head of Economics at the University of Leicester, De Fraja, believe that socio-economic profile of a family greatly influence the student's academic achievement as well as the school's effort. The same article stresses that, parents from a more advantaged environment exert much effort, and this positively influences the educational attainment of their children. Additionally, the parents' background also increases the school's effort, which increases the school's performance. Parents who belong to the middle class are more vocal in demanding that the school works hard. This fact is the reasons why schools work harder (*University of Leicester, 2015*).

B. Grade VI pupils' reading comprehension ability

The results of Phil-IRI of the Grade VI pupils indicate that they have generally poor achievements in the interpretive and applied levels of comprehension, averaging less than 0.75 where the highest possible score is 2, as presented in Table 5. However, attainment in the literal level was better, averaging 2.25 where the highest possible score is 3. It goes to show that our Grade VI pupils' comprehension ability is still in the first and lowest level. They can understand only the literal aspects of what they read and still not able to comprehend the implied messages lying within the material. They also fail to empathize with the author and consequently not able to apply the ideas in other situations.

Table 5: Comprehension Levels

Age	Literal			Interpretive			Applied		
	Male	Female	Average	Male	Female	Average	Male	Female	Average
10	1.5	1.5	1.5	0	0.5	0.25	0	0	0
11	2	2.5	2.32	0.33	1.06	0.80	0.33	1.06	0.80
12	2	3	2.67	0	1	0.50	0	0.5	0.33
Average	1.92	2.45	2.25	0.25	1	0.72	0.25	0.90	0.66

In all three levels, the males get considerably lower scores than females. This finding confirms that females are more into reading than males. The females' extensive exposure to reading materials and longer time spent in reading could have made them better in comprehension than boys. Although a significant difference is not established, this strengthens the contention that boys need more help than females with regard to reading ability.

The same study is conducted by *Tizon (2012)* at Kinangay Sur Elementary School. The result of her study reveals that largely, the reading comprehension of Grade VI was average. The majority of these children has the average literal comprehension ability; while, their level of thinking is poor as revealed in their lowest creative ability, lower interpretative, and evaluative skills. Thus, their reading ability or comprehension must be enhanced.

This result implies that most of our students these past few years are ill-equipped and have not fully developed their reading comprehension ability.

This result apparently is disclosed in the findings of this study. Thus, the present plight demands an adequate education in an individual, more so if individual lives in a democratic society where success or failure conditions how he uses his intellect.

C. Correlation analysis of Grade VI pupils' demographic profile and reading comprehension ability

The results of correlation analysis point out that gender has a significant relationship with the respondents' interpretive and applied comprehension levels, however, there is no sufficient evidence to suggest that it is significantly related to literal comprehension (Table 6). Gender, therefore, has no bearing on literal comprehension. Both boys and girls can digest the literal meaning of what they read. However, girls tend to be better at the higher levels of comprehension: interpretive and applied. This result is apparently caused by their longer exposure to reading than boys.

Profile Variables		Comprehension Levels		
		Literal	Interpretive	Applied
Gender	Point-Biserial Correlation	.327	.454(**)	.370(*)
	p-value	.068	.009	.037
Age	Correlation Coefficient	.362(*)	.164	.199
	p-value	.042	.369	.275
Father's Educational Attainment	Correlation Coefficient	.007	.141	.302
	p-value	.970	.442	.093
Mother's Educational Attainment	Correlation Coefficient	-.005	.096	.283
	p-value	.979	.601	.116
Family Income	Correlation Coefficient	.391(*)	.448(*)	.329
	p-value	.027	.010	.066
No. of Minutes Spent Reading	Correlation Coefficient	.505(**)	.565(**)	.454(**)
	p-value	.003	.001	.009
No. of Reading Materials Available	Correlation Coefficient	.330	.429(*)	.363(*)
	p-value	.065	.014	.041

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Age has a significant relationship to literal comprehension as revealed in the study: older children tend to understand better the literal meaning of what they read. However, no significant relationship is found between age and the higher levels of comprehension; interpretive and applied. Being older is not an assurance that a pupil is able to dig deeper into the meaning of what he reads.

The data further show that parents' educational qualification and their children's comprehension ability has no significant relationship. Educated parents can improve their children's comprehension ability, however they are more occupied with their respective works that they fail to do so. They may think that providing their children with reading materials is already enough and reading to their children is a waste of their precious time. This truth explains why family income is found significantly related to literal and interpretive levels of comprehension but not to the applied level.

All three levels of comprehension are found to be significantly related to the length of time spent by the pupils in reading. This fact strengthens the contention that exposure to reading develops higher thinking ability. The more time a child reads, the better he is able to connect with the author, and the better he can apply the ideas he got in real life situations.

Additionally, availability of reading materials at home is found significantly related to interpretive and applied comprehension levels. The more reading materials are available, the more they can be exposed

to reading, and the more they develop their reading ability. There is no significant relationship between the availability of reading materials and literal comprehension. This is the result probably because literal level of thinking can easily be enhanced even if the pupil has not been exposed to a much reading materials.

5.0 Conclusion

In the light of the preceding findings, the best way to develop the comprehension ability is to expose children to reading in terms of both time and reading materials. The mind needs exercises in the process of digesting ideas and digging deeper into the meaning of things that it gets from reading. Constant reading sessions in school coupled with reading time with parents will definitely increase the reading comprehension skills of the pupils. Moreover, reading to them at an early age and asking thought-provoking questions after every reading session would very much likely increase their comprehension ability.

With the significant relationship between the higher-order comprehension ability of the pupils and the availability of reading materials, it is therefore safe to say that our schools need to strengthen the implementation of the 'mini-library' in every classroom and the creation of a school library hub equipped with updated and different reading materials suited to the prescribed grade level abilities of the pupils. Production of contextualized reading materials ought to be prioritized in the school to better provide the students with literatures at par with their content and understanding. These activities that expose our pupils into more reading materials can boost their interest in reading and enhance their reading comprehension abilities.

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