

Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in the Post-Pandemic

Alijah N. Nava

Andres Bonifacio Elementary School – II

B.S. Aquino Drive, Brgy. 4, Bacolod City, Negros Occidental

alijahnicornava@gmail.com

Abstract

The post-pandemic era exacerbated the reading difficulties of learners due to disrupted learning, limited access to resources, and potential gaps in foundational skills. Along this premise, this study analyzed the level of reading difficulties of Grade 4 learners in the post-pandemic. Data needed for the descriptive study was collected from 155 respondents using a self-made 40-item questionnaire that passed the rigorous tests of validity and reliability. Across areas of concern, the level of reading difficulties of Grade 4 learners was found to be moderate. Further, a significant difference was found in respondents' reading difficulties in word decoding, fluency, reading comprehension, and vocabulary when grouped according to parents' educational attainment, family income, and number of siblings. However, no significant difference was found in groupings by fluency and sex. These findings call for technical assistance and workshops for teachers to equip them with techniques and strategies in teaching reading and creating a sustainable reading program that will capacitate and strengthen learners' motivation towards reading, aiming to improve their skills in word decoding, fluency, reading comprehension, and vocabulary.

Keywords: Language education, reading difficulties, word decoding and fluency, reading comprehension and vocabulary, Negros Occidental, Philippines

Bio-notes:

Alijah N. Nava has earned a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education with a specialization in General Education. She is currently advancing her education by pursuing a Master's degree with a focus on Administration and Supervision at STI WNU. In addition to her studies, she serves as a Teacher I at Andres Bonifacio Elementary School – II, Bacolod City, Negros Occidental, Philippines, where she teaches Grade 4 students in EPP and English subjects.

Introduction

Nature of the Problem

Reading is an integral part of every learner's academic life and serves as their basic building block for learning. It is one of the most essential life skills that a person can acquire. If children are not able to master the fundamentals of reading during their primary years, it is unlikely that they will be successful in their higher grades and beyond.

Reading has been a substantial part of the basic education curriculum in the Philippines. Through the years, the quality of education in our country has been put into question due to the poor reading performance of learners, which is further supported by the 2018 PISA results where the Philippines got a significant rate of low performers among all PISA-participating countries and economies. In 2020, the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic brought serious concerns to our educational system. According to Reimer et al. (2021), the pandemic has ultimately affected education in many countries across the globe. As lockdowns were implemented everywhere, schools were deserted. Educational institutions prohibited face-to-face classes, and on-campus activities were stopped for the safety of the population (Filho et al., 2021). The abrupt changes caused by the pandemic were felt by schools, teachers, learners, and even parents. During the outbreak, learners were left without a choice but to be isolated in answering their Self Learning Modules (SLM) and doing their school tasks at home. Their parents and teachers worked hand-in-hand to make learning possible despite the tremendous effect of the pandemic.

Current State of Knowledge

Anderson (2018) proposed that a child's reading ability can be affected by a lot of contributing factors, such as background knowledge, ability, home environment, school experiences, and interest level. However, pure reading performance is most directly linked to a child's success with the five early literacy skills: phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Likewise, reading is not a simple topic. It revolves around five essential components: phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Labastida, 2021). For Ganaden (2022), reading plays a vital role in the development of countries, and it has an impact on the people as well. It is good that schools, specifically in our country – the Philippines, are focusing on improving students' reading skills through designing programs and interventions to be implemented to help students. Such gestures gave teachers hope that students would recover in time. Blanza (2021) stated that the pandemic created gaps between the teachers, students, and the learning delivery process. Though self-learning modules (SLMs) have been adopted as an alternative means to ensure learning continuity, some areas of learning still need to be met by such modalities, one of which is the need for intervention by struggling readers. Sadly, modules do not teach sounds. There must be someone knowledgeable and capable of teaching phonics to a child. In teaching beginning reading, learners need someone alive who can carefully plan and

prepare reading activities. Another thing that intensifies the decreasing reading abilities of learners during this pandemic time is absurdly their learning facilitators. Some parents solely rely on online learning platforms, not even examining if the sounds or words taught are accurately sounded. They are probably too busy working. Some parents do not know how to teach reading at all. In this new normal, most of our children are immersed in video games, social media platforms, or watching television instead of spending their time reading or studying. This might be because children find themselves less pressured or do not even consider their parents as authorities in their academic endeavors (Labastida, 2021).

Theoretical Underpinnings

This study is anchored on Lev Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which states that social interactions can guide children's development and learning ability. He further highlighted the importance of peers, teachers, or mentors in his theory on scaffolding, which is a method of teaching that helps learners learn and gain more insights by working with others with a wider range of skills and knowledge. He believed that educators are the "scaffolding" who will help and guide the learners to increase their skills and knowledge without getting frustrated by the things that are too difficult for them to accomplish. The study is further supported by Taylor's (1983) Family Literacy Theory, which believes that literacy development starts at home with the support of parents and other family members. It stresses the integral role of family involvement in learners' academic achievement. In a more recent study, Pelt (2018) considered family literacy as a type of literacy education that suggests making reading and writing a family activity at home. Parents are their children's first teachers at home, where creating a foundation for learning experiences starts. The stipulated theories were critical in this study for several reasons – (1) provide a thorough understanding of the effects on children's reading development when their parents and teachers guide them versus when they are learning on their own, and (2) impart greater clarity about the role of the family in child's reading development.

Objectives

This study aimed to determine the level of reading difficulties of learners in the post-pandemic. More specifically, it aimed to determine: 1) the level of reading difficulties of grade 4 learners in terms of word decoding, fluency, reading comprehension, and vocabulary; 2) the level of reading difficulties of grade 4 learners when grouped by sex at birth, parents' educational attainment, family income, and number of siblings; and 3) the significant difference, if any, in the level of reading difficulties of Grade 4 learners when grouped according sex at birth, parents' educational attainment, family income, and number of siblings.

Methodology

This section discusses the method of research employed in the study, the research design, the locale of the study, the respondents, the data gathering instrument, the analysis of data, and the data gathering procedure.

Research Design

This study utilized descriptive research design to determine the level of reading difficulties of grade 4 learners in the post-pandemic. Descriptive research design aims to outline the characteristics, trends, frequencies, and categories of a problem or phenomenon. It explores the nature and patterns of the problem, focusing on questions of *what*, *when*, and *where* rather than *why* and *how*. This approach is suitable for understanding the details and existing patterns of a problem (Vijayamohan, 2022; McCombes, 2019).

Study Respondents

This paper included 155 Grade 4 respondents out of a total population of 257. Stratified random sampling was employed, and the Cochran formula was utilized to determine the sample size. The researcher selected the respondents from each section using the lottery technique.

Procedures

Data Collection

The researcher asked permission through a letter request from the Schools Division Superintendent of the Department of Education of the Division of Bacolod City, asking him to allow the researcher to distribute the questionnaire to the target respondents. Upon approval, the researcher set a schedule for the data gathering with a letter of request addressed to the School Principal. The researcher used a self-made questionnaire subjected to validity and reliability testing. Part I focused on the respondents' personal information regarding sex, monthly income, parents' highest educational attainment, and number of siblings. Part II of the questionnaire covered 40 items for Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in the Post-Pandemic, with ten (10) questions for each area - Word Decoding, Fluency, Reading Comprehension, and Vocabulary.

Data Analysis/ Statistical Treatment

Objective 1 employed a descriptive-analytical scheme, utilizing frequency counts and percentages as statistical tools to ascertain the demographic profile of the respondents, including sex, parents' highest educational attainment, monthly income, and number of siblings. Objectives 2 and 3 utilized a descriptive-analytical scheme, employing mean as a statistical tool to assess the level of reading difficulties experienced by grade 4 learners in the post-pandemic, focusing on word decoding, fluency, reading comprehension, and vocabulary. Objective 4 employed a comparative-analytical scheme, utilizing the Mann-Whitney U test as a statistical tool to determine the significant differences in the level of reading difficulties experienced by Grade 4 learners in the post-pandemic when categorized and compared based on the identified variables.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the study, the researcher obtained explicit consent from all participants prior to commencing the study. A concise overview of the study's purpose and details was provided to ensure clarity. Participants were assured that their involvement would not jeopardize their well-being and that their participation was entirely voluntary. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study if they felt uncomfortable providing information. Confidentiality was maintained, and none of the information shared by respondents will be disclosed at any cost.

Results and Discussion

This chapter presents, analyzes, and interprets the data gathered to achieve the study's goals. It followed proper measures for the types of data collected and used to address the problems outlined in the first chapter. Responses from the questionnaire were carefully organized, analyzed, and interpreted using statistical methods in line with the study's objectives.

Table 1

Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Word Decoding

Area		
A. Word Decoding	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a learner, I have difficulty in ...</i>		
1. spelling out words	3.05	Moderate Level
2. reading with speed	2.75	Moderate Level
3. sounding out words	2.45	Low Level
4. chunking out words into syllables	2.32	Low Level
5. recognizing unfamiliar words quickly	3.14	Moderate Level
6. recognizing the letters of the alphabet	1.85	Low Level
7. blending sounds together to make words	2.40	Low Level
8. recognizing new words and remembering them	3.21	Moderate Level
9. reading words, phrases, and sentences in a text	2.99	Moderate Level
10. matching letters and the sounds they represent	2.24	Low Level
Overall Mean	2.64	Moderate Level

Table 1 shows an overall mean of 2.64, interpreted as a moderate. Item number 6 obtained the lowest mean of 1.85, interpreted as low. In contrast, item 8 acquired the highest mean of 3.21, interpreted as moderate. This suggests the importance of strong foundational reading skills for efficient word recognition and retention. This idea is supported by a study that echoes findings from Tomas et al. (2021), revealing that inadequate mastery of key reading components like phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, phonics, word recognition, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension can lead to poor reading abilities. For instance, learners may have difficulty blending sounds due to a lack of familiarity with phoneme combination techniques.

Table 2*Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Fluency*

Area		
B. Fluency	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a learner, I have difficulty in ...</i>		
1. reading silently (using eyes only)	2.36	Low Level
2. finishing a short story in one sitting	2.70	Moderate Level
3. reading with appropriate intonation	3.09	Moderate Level
4. reading like talking and not like a robot	2.69	Moderate Level
5. reading out loud with proper expression	3.06	Moderate Level
6. pronouncing words in a text automatically	3.12	Moderate Level
7. observing correct punctuation while reading	2.97	Moderate Level
8. reading phrase by phrase rather than word by word	2.68	Moderate Level
9. reading at a “just right” pace (not too fast or too slow)	2.53	Moderate Level
10. reading words, phrases, and sentences in a text smoothly and accurately	3.63	High Level
Overall Mean	2.88	Moderate Level

As shown in Table 2, the overall mean was 2.88 and interpreted as moderate. When all items were examined more thoroughly, item number 1 obtained the lowest mean of 2.36, interpreted as low, while item number 10 registered the highest mean of 3.63, interpreted as high. This infers that learners may still need help with their phonological skills, impacting decoding efficiency and hindering automatic word recognition in texts. The study's findings run parallel with Rasinski's (2022) emphasis on automaticity as a critical component of reading fluency. Phonics, which involves accurate word decoding, is pivotal in this process. For comprehensive learning, teaching phonics involves transitioning from individual words to phrases and sentences.

Table 3*Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Reading Comprehension*

Area		
C. Reading Comprehension	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a learner, I have difficulty in ...</i>		
1. connecting ideas in a text	3.32	Moderate Level
2. understanding what is read	3.15	Moderate Level
3. concentrating during reading	3.05	Moderate Level
4. answering questions about a text	3.35	Moderate Level
5. remembering or summarizing what is read	3.42	Moderate Level
6. connecting what is read to prior knowledge	3.38	Moderate Level
7. understanding the essential ideas in a text	3.19	Moderate Level
8. applying the content of a text to personal experiences	3.16	Moderate Level
9. distinguishing significant information from minor details	3.12	Moderate Level
10. understanding the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences	3.38	Moderate Level
Overall Mean	3.25	Moderate Level

Table 3 presents an overall mean score of 3.25, interpreted as a moderate. Item number 3 registered the lowest mean of 3.05, interpreted as a moderate. Item number 5 garnered the highest mean of 3.42, interpreted as high. This draws the inference that learners may encounter challenges in retaining information, which requires both decoding and higher-level cognitive skills, such as comprehension and organizing thoughts. As learners advance academically, the expectation to retain more increases. Estrella's (2022) findings indicate poor comprehension,

often tied to inadequate word recognition, as a significant reading issue. Limited vocabulary can impede accurate decoding, affecting understanding of main ideas, details, summarization, and concluding texts.

Table 4

Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Vocabulary

Area	Mean	Interpretation
D. Vocabulary		
<i>As a learner, I have difficulty in ...</i>		
1. defining words	3.17	Moderate Level
2. expressing my ideas clearly	2.66	Moderate Level
3. communicating well with clarity	2.60	Moderate Level
4. using words in the correct context	3.12	Moderate Level
5. spelling out and pronouncing complex words	3.53	High Level
6. understanding the meaning of words in a text	3.33	Moderate Level
7. choosing the correct words to use in speaking or writing	3.08	Moderate Level
8. understanding unfamiliar words in a sentence, phrase, and text	3.41	Moderate Level
9. getting the meaning of words through word association and classification	2.83	Moderate Level
10. distinguishing denotative meaning from connotative meaning of words	3.18	Moderate Level
Overall Mean	3.09	Moderate Level

Statistics in Table 4 reflect an overall mean score of 3.09, interpreted as a moderate. Item number 3 got the lowest mean of 2.60, which is interpreted as low, while item number 5 attained the highest mean of 3.53, which is interpreted as high. This implies that learners still face phonological skills challenges, which are considered necessary for developing solid word-reading skills. Also, it can be deduced that due to their incomplete mastery of word and syllable manipulation skills may lead to a loss of motivation in reading, leading to poor reading habits and limited vocabulary expansion. As Cicerchia (2022) put it, reading skill acquisition varies among learners, starting with pre-literacy skills like alphabet knowledge and phonemic awareness, followed by phonics instruction.

Additionally, as emphasized in an article by Lasisi (2022), good spelling is essential to effective written communication. Thus, individuals who struggle with spelling may face challenges in writing essays, letters, or summaries. Poor reading culture is a contributing factor to poor spelling, as individuals lack regular exposure to a wide range of words.

Table 5

Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Word Decoding According to Sex

Categories	Mean	Male Interpretation	Mean	Female Interpretation
A. Word Decoding				
<i>As a learner, I have difficulty in ...</i>				
1. spelling out words	3.16	Moderate Level	2.95	Moderate Level
2. reading with speed	3.03	Moderate Level	2.51	Moderate Level
3. sounding out words	2.61	Moderate Level	2.31	Low Level
4. chunking out words into syllables	2.54	Moderate Level	2.12	Low Level
5. recognizing unfamiliar words quickly	3.27	Moderate Level	3.02	Moderate Level
6. recognizing the letters of the alphabet	2.12	Low Level	1.60	Low Level
7. blending sounds together to make words	2.43	Low Level	2.37	Low Level
8. recognizing new words and remembering them	3.26	Moderate Level	3.17	Moderate Level

9. reading words, phrases, and sentences in a text	3.15	Moderate Level	2.85	Moderate Level
10. matching letters and the sounds they represent	2.43	Low Level	2.06	Low Level
Overall Mean	2.80	Moderate Level	2.50	Moderate Level

Table 5 plots an overall mean of 2.80 for males, interpreted as moderate, and 2.50 for females, interpreted as low. Item number 6 attained the lowest mean of 2.12 for males, interpreted as low, and 1.60 for females, interpreted as very low. Item number 5 got the highest mean score of 3.27 for males, interpreted as a moderate. On the other hand, item number 8 obtained the highest mean score of 3.17 for females, which was interpreted as moderate. This indicates that male learners need to further enhance their word decoding skills, primarily its foundation - the letter-sound relationships. Likewise, female learners must work on decoding strategies such as blending and segmenting words to help them recognize and recall new words. If decoding is not mastered, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension may suffer for both sexes. The findings are supported by Anderson's (2018) view that a child's reading ability can be affected by various contributing factors such as background knowledge, ability, home environment, school experiences, and interest level. However, success in reading primarily depends on mastering early literacy skills like phonemic awareness, the alphabetic principle, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Table 6*Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Fluency According to Sex*

Categories	Male		Female	
B. Fluency	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a learner, I have difficulty in ...</i>				
1. reading silently (using eyes only)	2.61	Moderate Level	2.14	Low Level
2. finishing a short story in one sitting	2.92	Moderate Level	2.51	Moderate Level
3. reading with appropriate intonation	3.20	Moderate Level	2.99	Moderate Level
4. reading like talking and not like a robot	2.74	Moderate Level	2.64	Moderate Level
5. reading out loud with proper expression	3.14	Moderate Level	2.99	Moderate Level
6. pronouncing words in a text automatically	3.24	Moderate Level	3.00	Moderate Level
7. observing correct punctuation while reading	2.80	Moderate Level	3.14	Moderate Level
8. reading phrase by phrase rather than word by word	2.68	Moderate Level	2.68	Moderate Level
9. reading at a "just right" pace (not too fast or too slow)	2.51	Moderate Level	2.54	Moderate Level
10. reading words, phrases, and sentences in a text smoothly and accurately	3.78	High Level	3.48	Moderate Level
Overall Mean	2.96	Moderate Level	2.81	Moderate Level

Table 6 discloses the overall mean of 2.96 for males, interpreted as moderate, while that of females at 2.81, also interpreted as moderate. Male learners gained the lowest mean score of 2.51, interpreted as low in item 9. Conversely, female learners achieved the lowest mean score of 2.14, interpreted as low in item 1. Item number 10 registered the highest mean of 3.78, interpreted as a high for males, and 3.48, interpreted as a moderate for females. This suggests that developing a habit of reading would be advantageous for learners, especially males, while females should continue enhancing their reading skills to improve fluency. Initially, all learners may stumble over words at first, but consistent practice can lead to fluency. Research by Van Dijk (2018) found that factors like sex and English skills affect oral reading fluency (ORF), with females generally outperforming males. Similarly, Lepper et al. (2021) found that females tend

to have higher reading motivation and read more for pleasure, leading to better reading skills than males.

Table 7

Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Reading Comprehension According to Sex

Categories	Male		Female	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
C. Reading Comprehension				
<i>As a learner, I have difficulty in ...</i>				
1. connecting ideas in a text	3.64	High Level	3.04	Moderate Level
2. understanding what is read	3.42	Moderate Level	2.91	Moderate Level
3. concentrating during reading	3.09	Moderate Level	3.00	Moderate Level
4. answering questions about a text	3.51	High Level	3.20	Moderate Level
5. remembering or summarizing what is read	3.61	High Level	3.25	Moderate Level
6. connecting what is read to prior knowledge	3.46	Moderate Level	3.31	Moderate Level
7. understanding the essential ideas in a text	3.26	Moderate Level	3.12	Moderate Level
8. applying the content of a text to personal experiences	3.32	Moderate Level	3.01	Moderate Level
9. distinguishing significant information from minor details	3.26	Moderate Level	3.00	Moderate Level
10. understanding the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences	3.54	High Level	3.23	Moderate Level
Overall Mean	3.41	Moderate Level	3.11	Moderate Level

As presented in Table 7, the overall mean score of 3.41 for males was high, and 3.11 for females was interpreted as moderate. Item number 3 earned the lowest mean score of 3.09, interpreted as a moderate for males. In contrast, female learners scored the lowest mean of 2.91, interpreted as moderate in item 2. Item number 1 gathered the highest mean score of 3.64, interpreted as a high for males. For females, item 5 got the highest mean score of 3.25, interpreted as moderate. This shows that both sexes face reading comprehension issues. Males struggle to connect ideas, while females have trouble remembering and summarizing details. Developing comprehension skills is a gradual process requiring mastery of basic and advanced aspects. The study suggests males focus more on understanding content rather than just recognizing words, and females concentrate on grasping details. The prolonged absence of in-person classes and teacher guidance during the pandemic may have hindered the full development of comprehension skills in grade 4 learners, as indicated by Mazariegos (2022). This lack of comprehension affects all areas of learning and makes independent study difficult for learners who haven't fully developed this skill.

Table 8

Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Vocabulary According to Sex

Categories	Male		Female	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
D. Vocabulary				
<i>As a learner, I have difficulty in ...</i>				
1. defining words	3.35	Moderate Level	3.01	Moderate Level
2. expressing my ideas clearly	2.76	Moderate Level	2.57	Moderate Level
3. communicating well with clarity	2.61	Moderate Level	2.59	Moderate Level
4. using words in the correct context	3.28	Moderate Level	2.96	Moderate Level
5. spelling out and pronouncing complex words	3.59	High Level	3.47	Moderate Level
6. understanding the meaning of words in a text	3.55	High Level	3.12	Moderate Level
7. choosing the correct words to use in speaking or writing	3.22	Moderate Level	2.96	Moderate Level
8. understanding unfamiliar words in a sentence, phrase, and text	3.46	Moderate Level	3.36	Moderate Level
9. getting the meaning of words through word association and classification	2.92	Moderate Level	2.74	Moderate Level

10. distinguishing denotative meaning from connotative meaning of words	3.26	Moderate Level	3.11	Moderate Level
Overall Mean	3.20	Moderate Level	2.99	Moderate Level

Table 8 exhibits an overall mean of 3.20 for males and 2.99 for females; both are interpreted as moderate. The lowest mean of 2.61 for males in item number 3 is interpreted as moderate. The lowest mean for females in item 2 which is interpreted as moderate. Item number 5 earned the highest mean of 3.59 for males, interpreted as high, and 3.47 for females, interpreted as moderate. This suggested that both sexes are experiencing similar problems in vocabulary, with males needing to concentrate on enhancing their spelling and pronunciation skills. Accurate spelling and pronunciation are crucial for effective communication, as highlighted by Kobilova (2022). Confidence in spelling enhances overall learning confidence and improves reading ability, enabling learners to understand more complex texts. Correct pronunciation is essential for avoiding misunderstandings in communication.

Table 9

Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Word Decoding According to Parent's Educational Attainment

Categories	Lower		Higher	
A. Word Decoding	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a learner, I have difficulty in ...</i>				
1. spelling out words	3.25	Moderate Level	2.60	Moderate Level
2. reading with speed	2.96	Moderate Level	2.29	Low Level
3. sounding out words	2.60	Moderate Level	2.13	Low Level
4. chunking out words into syllables	2.40	Low Level	2.15	Low Level
5. recognizing unfamiliar words quickly	3.31	Moderate Level	2.77	Moderate Level
6. recognizing the letters of the alphabet	2.02	Low Level	1.48	Very Low Level
7. blending sounds together to make words	2.55	Moderate Level	2.06	Low Level
8. recognizing new words and remembering them	3.34	Moderate Level	2.94	Moderate Level
9. reading words, phrases, and sentences in a text	3.17	Moderate Level	2.60	Moderate Level
10. matching letters and the sounds they represent	2.34	Low Level	2.02	Low Level
Overall Mean	2.79	Moderate Level	2.30	Low Level

Table 9 displays the overall mean score of 2.79, interpreted as moderate for the lower category, and 2.30 for the higher category, interpreted as low. Both the lower and higher categories got the lowest mean score in item number 6, 2.02 for the lower category, interpreted as low, and 1.48 for the higher category, interpreted as very low. Item number 8 earned the highest mean for both lower and higher categories, 3.34 for the lower category, while the higher category gathered 2.94, both interpreted as moderate. This implies that learners, regardless of their parents' educational attainment, struggle with recognizing and remembering new words, often due to their proficiency in pre-reading skills like understanding sound-letter relationships. The data indicates that learners with highly educated parents tend to perform better academically. Both parents and teachers play a vital role in fostering children's reading development, particularly by reinforcing awareness of sound-letter relationships at home. Research by Tolentino and Sajonia (2023) highlights the importance of supportive school and home environments in promoting academic success. When students receive academic guidance from

teachers and reinforcement from parents and family members at home, they comprehend their lessons more effectively.

Table 10

Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Fluency According to Parent's Educational Attainment

Categories	Lower		Higher	
B. Fluency	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a learner, I have difficulty in ...</i>				
1. reading silently (using eyes only)	2.54	Moderate Level	1.96	Low Level
2. finishing a short story in one sitting	2.85	Moderate Level	2.38	Low Level
3. reading with appropriate intonation	3.17	Moderate Level	2.92	Moderate Level
4. reading like talking and not like a robot	2.86	Moderate Level	2.31	Low Level
5. reading out loud with proper expression	3.12	Moderate Level	2.92	Moderate Level
6. pronouncing words in a text automatically	3.33	Moderate Level	2.65	Moderate Level
7. observing correct punctuation while reading	3.09	Moderate Level	2.71	Moderate Level
8. reading phrase by phrase rather than word by word	2.81	Moderate Level	2.38	Low Level
9. reading at a "just right" pace (not too fast or too slow)	2.62	Moderate Level	2.33	Low Level
10. reading words, phrases, and sentences in a text smoothly and accurately	3.72	High Level	3.42	Moderate Level
Overall Mean	3.01	Moderate Level	2.60	Moderate Level

Data in Table 10 registers an overall mean of 3.01 for the lower category, interpreted as moderate, and 2.60 for the higher category, interpreted as low. Item number 1 garnered the lowest mean for both categories, 2.54 for the lower category, while the higher category got 1.96, which were both interpreted as low. Item number 10 recorded the highest mean score for lower and higher categories, 3.72 for lower and 3.42 for higher, both interpreted as high. This infers that regardless of their parents' educational background, learners' reading fluency continues to improve, emphasizing its importance in comprehension. Fluent reading is a skill that requires habitual practice, and parents play a significant role in supporting their children's fluency development. Learners with highly educated parents may have an advantage due to more effective parental assistance. However, those with less educated parents may face challenges in fluency development. The results of the study agreed with Dong et al.'s (2020) idea that highly educated parents are more involved in their children's reading development.

Table 11

Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Reading Comprehension According to Parents' Highest Educational Attainment

Categories	Lower		Higher	
C. Reading Comprehension	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a learner, I have difficulty in ...</i>				
1. connecting ideas in a text	3.46	Moderate Level	3.02	Moderate Level
2. understanding what is read	3.31	Moderate Level	2.81	Moderate Level
3. concentrating during reading	3.12	Moderate Level	2.88	Moderate Level
4. answering questions about a text	3.53	High Level	2.94	Moderate Level
5. remembering or summarizing what is read	3.60	High Level	3.02	Moderate Level
6. connecting what is read to prior knowledge	3.54	High Level	3.02	Moderate Level
7. understanding the essential ideas in a text	3.32	Moderate Level	2.90	Moderate Level
8. applying the content of a text to personal experiences	3.23	Moderate Level	3.00	Moderate Level

9. distinguishing significant information from minor details	3.31	Moderate Level	2.71	Moderate Level
10. understanding the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences	3.58	High Level	2.94	Moderate Level
Overall Mean	3.40	Moderate Level	2.92	Moderate Level

As shown in Table 11, the overall mean was 3.40 for the lower category, whereas the higher category scored 2.92, both interpreted as moderate. The lowest mean for the lower category is in item number 3, earned 3.12, interpreted as a moderate. The lowest mean for the higher category is in item 9, which got 2.71, which is also interpreted as moderate. For the highest mean, the lower category attained 3.60, interpreted as a high in item number 5. In contrast, item number 1, item number 5, and item number 6 registered the same highest mean score of 3.02, interpreted as moderate for the higher category. Results concluded that learners from all backgrounds face challenges in reading comprehension, but those with lower-educated parents struggle more. Remote learning during the pandemic required parents to teach at home, posing difficulties, especially for those with limited teaching knowledge. Parents' educational attainment significantly influences children's progress, with higher-educated parents better able to support and monitor their children. Conversely, lower-educated parents may need more knowledge to provide effective support. The study's findings are further supported by Torres (2019), who stressed the importance of home-related factors in students' reading comprehension, highlighting how parents' educational background affects their ability to assist children, particularly in reading. Additionally, parents' occupation and family size impact children's access to nutritious food, influenced by family income covering daily needs.

Table 12

Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Vocabulary According to Parents' Highest Educational Attainment

Categories	Lower		Higher	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
D. Vocabulary				
<i>As a learner, I have difficulty in ...</i>				
1. defining words	3.35	Moderate Level	2.79	Moderate Level
2. expressing my ideas clearly	2.79	Moderate Level	2.38	Low Level
3. communicating well with clarity	2.74	Moderate Level	2.29	Low Level
4. using words in the correct context	3.32	Moderate Level	2.67	Moderate Level
5. spelling out and pronouncing complex words	3.77	High Level	3.00	Moderate Level
6. understanding the meaning of words in a text	3.50	High Level	2.96	Moderate Level
7. choosing the correct words to use in speaking or writing	3.25	Moderate Level	2.71	Moderate Level
8. understanding unfamiliar words in a sentence, phrase, and text	3.57	High Level	3.04	Moderate Level
9. getting the meaning of words through word association and classification	2.96	Moderate Level	2.52	Moderate Level
10. distinguishing denotative meaning from connotative meaning of words	3.29	Moderate Level	2.94	Moderate Level
Overall Mean	3.25	Moderate Level	2.73	Moderate Level

Statistics in Table 12 shows the overall mean of 3.25 for the lower category and 2.73 for the higher category, both interpreted as moderate. Both categories attained the lowest mean score in item number 3, with 2.74 for lower, interpreted as moderate, and 2.29 for higher, interpreted as low. Item number 5 gained the highest mean of 3.77, interpreted as a high for the lower category, while item number 8 got the highest mean of 3.04, interpreted as a moderate for the higher category. This projected that learners, disregarding their parents' highest educational attainment, encounter vocabulary issues, with those parents who have lower education levels struggling more, especially with spelling and pronunciation. Addressing these issues is crucial to

prevent a lack of confidence and poor academic performance. Besides teacher intervention, parents also play a vital role in enhancing their children's vocabulary skills by understanding and employing effective strategies. Gobena (2018) justified these findings by stating that educated families can support their children's academic success through effective supervision, guidance, and counseling, while families with lower education levels may struggle to contribute due to difficulties in understanding concepts and decision-making.

Table 13

Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Word Decoding According to Monthly income

Categories		Lower		Higher	
A. Word Decoding		Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a learner, I have difficulty in ...</i>					
1. spelling out words	3.33	Moderate Level	2.65	Moderate Level	
2. reading with speed	3.03	Moderate Level	2.35	Low Level	
3. sounding out words	2.72	Moderate Level	2.06	Low Level	
4. chunking out words into syllables	2.60	Moderate Level	1.92	Low Level	
5. recognizing unfamiliar words quickly	3.49	Moderate Level	2.63	Moderate Level	
6. recognizing the letters of the alphabet	2.10	Low Level	1.49	Low Level	
7. blending sounds together to make words	2.58	Moderate Level	2.14	Low Level	
8. recognizing new words and remembering them	3.53	High Level	2.75	Moderate Level	
9. reading words, phrases, and sentences in a text	3.28	Moderate Level	2.57	Moderate Level	
10. matching letters and the sounds they represent	2.51	Moderate Level	1.84	Low Level	
Overall Mean		2.92	Moderate Level	2.24	Low Level

Table 13 reveals the overall mean of 2.92, interpreted as a moderate for the lower category, and 2.24, interpreted as a low for the higher category. Item number 6 received the lowest mean score for both categories, 2.10 for the lower category, interpreted as low, and 1.49 for the higher category as very low. The highest mean score for both the lower and higher categories is in item number 8. The lower category got 3.53, interpreted as a high, while 2.75 for the higher category, interpreted as a moderate. This revealed that learners from low-income families struggle more with recognizing and remembering new words compared to those from higher-income families. This may be because parents with lower incomes often have less time to support their children's reading, often working long hours to make ends meet, leaving little time to monitor their children's progress. This goes along with the ideas of Francisco et al. (2023) underscore the challenges parents face in balancing household responsibilities with helping their children with homework. This struggle is compounded for parents with fixed schedules, whether working from home or offices, leaving little time for supervision of their children's studies.

Table 14

Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Fluency According to Monthly Income

Categories		Lower		Higher	
B. Fluency		Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a learner, I have difficulty in ...</i>					
1. reading silently (using eyes only)	2.61	Moderate Level	2.00	Low Level	
2. finishing a short story in one sitting	2.99	Moderate Level	2.29	Low Level	
3. reading with appropriate intonation	3.23	Moderate Level	2.89	Moderate Level	
4. reading like talking and not like a robot	2.90	Moderate Level	2.38	Low Level	

5. reading out loud with proper expression	3.32	Moderate Level	2.68	Moderate Level
6. pronouncing words in a text automatically	3.40	Moderate Level	2.70	Moderate Level
7. observing correct punctuation while reading	3.07	Moderate Level	2.84	Moderate Level
8. reading phrase by phrase rather than word by word	2.90	Moderate Level	2.35	Low Level
9. reading at a “just right” pace (not too fast or too slow)	2.71	Moderate Level	2.27	Low Level
10. reading words, phrases, and sentences in a text smoothly and accurately	3.82	High Level	3.35	Moderate Level
Overall Mean	3.09	Moderate Level	2.57	Moderate Level

Data in Table 14 presents the overall mean score of 3.09 for the lower-income category, interpreted as moderate, while the higher category obtained 2.57, interpreted as low. The lowest mean score for both categories is in item number 1, which scored 2.61 for the lower-income category, interpreted as moderate, and 2.00 for the higher-income category, interpreted as low. Item number 10 gained the highest mean score from both categories, 3.82 for the lower, interpreted as high, and 3.35 for the higher, interpreted as moderate. This indicated that learners, from all income backgrounds encountered challenges with reading fluency, particularly in smoothly and accurately reading words, phrases, and sentences. However, those from lower-income households faced more difficulties than those from higher-income households. Limited budgets in low-income families make it challenging for learners to afford materials and resources to support reading at home. These findings concurred with Lucas et al. (2021) revealed that low socio-economic status is directly linked to limited access to ICT at home, affecting students' engagement in learning. This lack of resources may affect Filipino students' motivation, including their goals, value for schooling, sense of purpose, and belief in growth mindset, ultimately impacting their reading and academic performance.

Table 15

Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Reading Comprehension According to Monthly Income

Categories		Lower		Higher
C. Reading Comprehension	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a learner, I have difficulty in ...</i>				
1. connecting ideas in a text	3.51	High Level	3.05	Moderate Level
2. understanding what is read	3.39	Moderate Level	2.81	Moderate Level
3. concentrating during reading	3.17	Moderate Level	2.86	Moderate Level
4. answering questions about a text	3.60	High Level	2.98	Moderate Level
5. remembering or summarizing what is read	3.62	High Level	3.13	Moderate Level
6. connecting what is read to prior knowledge	3.57	High Level	3.11	Moderate Level
7. understanding the important ideas in a text	3.33	Moderate Level	2.98	Moderate Level
8. applying the content of a text to personal experiences	3.29	Moderate Level	2.97	Moderate Level
9. distinguishing significant information from minor details	3.30	Moderate Level	2.86	Moderate Level
10. understanding the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences	3.64	High Level	3.00	Moderate Level
Overall Mean	3.44	Moderate Level	2.97	Moderate Level

Statistics in Table 15 reflects the overall mean score of 3.44 for the lower-income category, interpreted as high, and 2.97 for the higher category, interpreted as moderate. Item number 3 got the lowest mean of 3.17, interpreted as a moderate for the lower-income category, whereas the higher category obtained the lowest mean of 2.81, interpreted as a moderate in item number 2. Item number 10 scored the highest mean score of 3.64, which was interpreted as high for the lower category. On the other hand, item number 5 gathered the highest mean score of 3.13, interpreted as a moderate for the higher category. This denoted that understanding what

you read is crucial for learners. If children struggle to comprehend and remember what they read, it can lead to confusion and misunderstanding. Parents play a key role in helping their children improve their reading skills at home. However, some learners, especially those from low-income families, may lack the necessary guidance. These parents often work long hours and have chores, leaving little time to help with reading. As Labastida (2021) put it, during the pandemic, learning facilitators, including parents, may inadvertently contribute to declining reading abilities. Some parents rely solely on online platforms without ensuring accuracy, while others lack knowledge of how to teach reading. In this new normal, children may spend more time on entertainment media than on reading or studying, potentially due to reduced pressure or a perception of their parents as less authoritative in academic endeavors.

Table 16*Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Vocabulary According to Monthly Income*

Categories	Lower		Higher	
D. Vocabulary	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a learner, I have difficulty in ...</i>				
1. defining words	3.33	Moderate Level	2.95	Moderate Level
2. expressing my ideas clearly	2.82	Moderate Level	2.43	Low Level
3. communicating well with clarity	2.82	Moderate Level	2.29	Low Level
4. using words in the correct context	3.23	Moderate Level	2.95	Moderate Level
5. spelling out and pronouncing complex words	3.80	High Level	3.13	Moderate Level
6. understanding the meaning of words in a text	3.60	High Level	2.94	Moderate Level
7. choosing the correct words to use in speaking or writing	3.22	Moderate Level	2.89	Moderate Level
8. understanding unfamiliar words in a sentence, phrase, and text	3.57	High Level	3.17	Moderate Level
9. getting the meaning of words through word association and classification	2.97	Moderate Level	2.62	Moderate Level
10. distinguishing denotative meaning from connotative meaning of words	3.29	Moderate Level	3.02	Moderate Level
Overall Mean	3.26	Moderate Level	2.84	Moderate Level

Table 16 reveals a lower overall mean of 3.26, interpreted as moderate, and higher with 2.84, also interpreted as moderate. The lowest mean of 2.82 in the lower-income category is item 2 and item 3, both interpreted as moderate. The higher category's lowest mean of 2.29 is item number 3, interpreted as a low. The highest mean for the lower-income category is item 5, with 3.80 interpreted as high. The higher category recorded the highest mean of 3.17 in item number 8 interpreted as a moderate. This meant that learners still needed help with their vocabulary skills, notably in spelling and pronunciation and understanding unfamiliar words in sentences, phrases, and texts. Learning vocabulary takes time and should happen both at school and at home, with access to diverse reading materials being beneficial. However, learners from low-income families may struggle to afford such resources. Cekiso et al. (2022) supported these findings with their assertion that socio-economic status of the parents can affect learners' reading performance due to factors like lack of formal education, unemployment, or limited income, affecting their ability to support their children's reading development.

Table 17

Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Word Decoding According to Number of Siblings

Categories	Few		Many	
A. Word Decoding	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a learner, I have difficulty in ...</i>				
1. spelling out words	2.63	Moderate Level	3.42	Moderate Level
2. reading with speed	2.57	Moderate Level	2.92	Moderate Level
3. sounding out words	2.00	Low Level	2.84	Moderate Level
4. chunking out words into syllables	2.04	Low Level	2.57	Moderate Level
5. recognizing unfamiliar words quickly	2.82	Moderate Level	3.42	Moderate Level
6. recognizing the letters of the alphabet	1.50	Low Level	2.16	Low Level
7. blending sounds together to make words	2.17	Low Level	2.60	Moderate Level
8. recognizing new words and remembering them	3.00	Moderate Level	3.40	Moderate Level
9. reading words, phrases, and sentences in a text	2.72	Moderate Level	3.23	Moderate Level
10. matching letters and the sounds they represent	1.88	Low Level	2.55	Moderate Level
Overall Mean	2.33	Low Level	2.91	Moderate Level

Figures in Table 17 plot an overall mean score of 2.33, interpreted as a low level for the category few, and 2.91 for the category many, interpreted as moderate. Item number 6 recorded the lowest mean score for both categories, 1.50 for the few, interpreted as very low, and 2.16 for the lower, interpreted as low. The highest mean score of 3.00 for the category few is in item number 8, interpreted as moderate. The highest mean of 3.42 for the category many is in item number 1 and item number 5, both interpreted as high. This signified that learners with more siblings tend to struggle more with word decoding skills compared to those with fewer siblings, potentially due to less individual attention from parents. Family size could contribute to this issue, as parents may have limited time and attention to support each child's reading development in larger families. The findings of this study can be tied up to the thoughts of Jabbar et al. (2021); parents' beliefs and values about reading influence the opportunities and resources they provide to their children, fostering reading habits. Practices like reading aloud, storytelling, book sharing, parental reading role modeling, and having a variety of reading materials at home all contribute to developing children's reading habits.

Table 18

Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Fluency According to Number of Siblings

Categories	Few		Many	
B. Fluency	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a learner, I have difficulty in ...</i>				
1. reading silently (using eyes only)	2.10	Low Level	2.59	Moderate Level
2. finishing a short story in one sitting	2.67	Moderate Level	2.73	Moderate Level
3. reading with appropriate intonation	2.88	Moderate Level	3.28	Moderate Level
4. reading like talking and not like a robot	2.39	Low Level	2.95	Moderate Level
5. reading out loud with proper expression	2.81	Moderate Level	3.28	Moderate Level
6. pronouncing words in a text automatically	2.67	Moderate Level	3.51	High Level
7. observing correct punctuation while reading	2.92	Moderate Level	3.02	Moderate Level
8. reading phrase by phrase rather than word by word	2.56	Moderate Level	2.78	Moderate Level
9. reading at a "just right" pace (not too fast or too slow)	2.39	Low Level	2.65	Moderate Level
10. reading words, phrases, and sentences in a text smoothly and accurately	3.43	Moderate Level	3.80	High Level
Overall Mean	2.68	Moderate Level	3.06	Moderate Level

Table 18 displays an overall mean of 2.68 for the category few and 3.06 for the category many, both interpreted as moderate. Both categories got the lowest mean in item number 1, 2.10 for the category few and 2.59 for the category many, both interpreted as low. Item number 10 recorded the highest mean for both categories; the category few attained 3.43, interpreted as a high, while 3.80 for category many interpreted as high. This draws the inference that most learners with many siblings struggle more with reading fluency compared to those with fewer siblings. Reading fluency encompasses skills that contribute to comprehension, can be developed early with proper guidance and access to diverse reading materials. However, not all learners have these opportunities, particularly those from large families. Parents may find it challenging to support multiple children simultaneously, leading to the sharing of materials and resources among siblings. While helpful, this may not address each child's needs. Kapur's (2018) findings support this, identifying large family sizes as a negative factor impacting students' academic performance. With three or more children, parents face difficulties in meeting individual needs, especially if they work full-time jobs. Limited income combined with more children makes it difficult for parents to give each child enough attention and resources.

Table 19

Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Reading Comprehension According to Number of Siblings

Categories	Few		Many	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
C. Reading Comprehension				
<i>As a learner, I have difficulty in ...</i>				
1. connecting ideas in a text	3.15	Moderate Level	3.47	Moderate Level
2. understanding what is read	2.83	Moderate Level	3.43	Moderate Level
3. concentrating during reading	2.92	Moderate Level	3.16	Moderate Level
4. answering questions about a text	3.14	Moderate Level	3.53	High Level
5. remembering or summarizing what is read	3.42	Moderate Level	3.42	Moderate Level
6. connecting what is read to prior knowledge	3.28	Moderate Level	3.47	Moderate Level
7. understanding the important ideas in a text	3.07	Moderate Level	3.29	Moderate Level
8. applying the content of a text to personal experiences	3.01	Moderate Level	3.29	Moderate Level
9. distinguishing significant information from minor details	2.96	Moderate Level	3.27	Moderate Level
10. understanding the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences	3.17	Moderate Level	3.57	High Level
Overall Mean	3.09	Moderate Level	3.39	Moderate Level

As presented in Table 19, the overall means score of 3.09 for the category few and 3.39 for the category many, both interpreted as moderate. The item that earned the lowest mean in the category few is item number 2 which got 2.83, interpreted as a moderate. In contrast, the category many scored the lowest mean of 3.16 in item number 3 interpreted as a moderate. Item number 5 obtained the highest mean of 3.42 for the category few, interpreted as high. In the category, many registered the highest mean of 3.57, interpreted as high in item number 10. Findings imply that learners still struggle to comprehend what they read, indicating that their reading comprehension skills need further development. Poor comprehension can lead to difficulties retaining information and understanding details in texts, essential for academic success. Guided reading is an effective strategy for improving comprehension, but it may be challenging for parents with multiple children, especially at different grade levels, requiring significant effort, patience, resources, and time. These findings align with the ideas of Kapur (2018) highlight the importance of resources and a supportive home environment for children to

succeed academically. Creating a conducive learning environment at home, with effective communication and conflict minimization among siblings, is essential. Parents should ensure all children have access to necessary resources like books and technology to support their learning.

Table 20

Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Vocabulary According to Number of Siblings

Categories	Few		Many	
D. Vocabulary	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a learner, I have difficulty in ...</i>				
1. defining words	3.00	Moderate Level	3.33	Moderate Level
2. expressing my ideas clearly	2.42	Low Level	2.87	Moderate Level
3. communicating well with clarity	2.42	Low Level	2.76	Moderate Level
4. using words in the correct context	2.97	Moderate Level	3.24	Moderate Level
5. spelling out and pronouncing complex words	3.24	Moderate Level	3.78	High Level
6. understanding the meaning of words in a text	3.13	Moderate Level	3.51	High Level
7. choosing the correct words to use in speaking or writing	2.99	Moderate Level	3.17	Moderate Level
8. understanding unfamiliar words in a sentence, phrase, and text	3.25	Moderate Level	3.54	High Level
9. getting the meaning of words through word association and classification	2.67	Moderate Level	2.96	Moderate Level
10. distinguishing denotative meaning from connotative meaning of words	3.14	Moderate Level	3.22	Moderate Level
Overall Mean	2.92	Moderate Level	3.24	Moderate Level

Data in Table 20 reveals an overall mean score of 2.92 for the category few and 3.24 for the category many, both interpreted as moderate. The category few scored the lowest mean score of 2.42 in item number 2 and item number 3, both interpreted as low, while the category many registered the lowest mean of 2.76 in item number 3, interpreted as moderate level. Item number 8 obtained the highest mean of 3.25, interpreted as moderate, for the category few. The highest mean of 3.78, interpreted as high, is in item 5 for the category many. Figures indicate that learners, regardless of their sibling size, experienced difficulties with vocabulary, but those with many siblings face even more difficulty than those with few siblings. The size of a family or the number of siblings can contribute to this difficulty because parents must divide their time and attention among multiple children, often focusing more on the younger ones. This can make it challenging for parents to properly address each child's learning needs. Olagundoye and Adebile (2019) vindicated the study's results with their findings that families with 3 or more children were at risk of insufficient care in terms of providing essential learning materials and appropriate guidance needed for student's learning.

Table 21

Difference in the Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Word Decoding when Grouped and according to the Aforementioned Variables

Variable	Category	N	Mean Rank	Mann Whitney U	p-value	Sig. level	Interpretation
Sex	Male	74	87.67	2281.500	0.010	0.05	Significant
	Female	81	69.17				
	Lower	107	87.00				

Parent's Educational Attainment	Higher	48	57.93			
Family Income	Lower	92	94.11	1416.000	0.000	Significant
	Higher	63	54.48			
Number of Siblings	Few	72	59.43	1651.000	0.000	Significant
	Many	83	94.11			

Table 21 summarizes the results on the difference in the level of reading difficulties of grade 4 learners in the area word decoding when grouped and compared according to sex, Parent's Educational Attainment, Family Income and number of siblings with the computed p-values of 0.010, 0.000, 0.000, and 0.000, which are less than the level of significance of 0.05. Accordingly, the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the level of difficulty of grade 4 learners in word decoding when grouped and compared according to variables is rejected. Various factors like sex, parental education, income, and family size can affect a learner's ability to decode words, a fundamental reading skill. Statistics highlight the significant influence of these variables on decoding skills. This concurred with the analysis of Wilsenach & Makaure (2018) showing gender differences in reading performance, with girls often outperforming boys. Parental education and occupation impact family income, affecting parental involvement in education (Ren et al., 2021). Higher-educated parents prioritize education and invest more in their children's academic development. Conversely, lower-income families may have lower educational expectations due to limited resources. Sibling size also affects educational attainment, with larger families potentially limiting resources for each child's education (Feng, 2020).

Table 22

Difference in the Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Fluency when Grouped according to the Aforementioned Variables

Variable	Category	N	Mean Rank	Mann Whitney U	p-value	Sig. level	Interpretation
Sex	Male	74	85.01	2478.500	0.063	0.05	Not Significant
	Female	81	71.60				
Parent's Educational Attainment	Lower	107	86.58	1649.500	0.000		Significant
	Higher	48	58.86				
Family Income	Lower	92	91.23	1681.000	0.000		Significant
	Higher	63	58.68				
Number of Siblings	Few	72	64.98	2050.500	0.001		Significant
	Many	83	89.30				

Figures in table 22 plot the difference in the level of reading difficulties of grade 4 learners in the area fluency when grouped and compared according to Parent's Educational Attainment, Family Income and number of siblings got the computed p-values of 0.000, 0.000, and 0.001, which are less than the level of significance of 0.05. Thus, the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the level of difficulty of grade 4 learners in fluency when grouped and compared according to variables is rejected. However, when learners are grouped according to sex, the computed p-value of 0.063 is greater than the level of significance of 0.05, which

points to a not significant difference in the level of reading difficulties of grade four learners in fluency when grouped and compared according to sex. Hence, the null hypothesis stating there is no significant difference in the level of difficulty of grade four learners in fluency when grouped and compared according to sex is accepted. The socio-economic status of learners, including their parents' education, family income, and number of siblings, affects their reading fluency. Parental involvement in reading at home is essential but challenging for low-income families due to resource limitations and time constraints. Having many siblings may also hinder reading progress due to shared resources. Sex does not significantly impact reading fluency, as both sexes develop reading skills differently. Family background, parental education, and socio-economic status shape children's reading habits and development. Parent-child reading activities and access to diverse reading materials are vital for language fluency. This goes along with the findings of Vlachos & Papadimitriou (2015), Ho and Lau (2018) and Jabbar et al. (2021), emphasizing parental influence on reading habits and the importance of diverse reading materials in enhancing children's language skills.

Table 23

Difference in the Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Reading Comprehension when Grouped according to the Aforementioned Variables

Variable	Category	N	Mean Rank	Mann Whitney U	p-value	Sig. level	Interpretation
Sex	Male	74	90.35	2083.000	0.001	0.05	Significant
	Female	81	66.72				
Parent's Educational Attainment	Lower	107	88.02	1495.500	0.000		Significant
	Higher	48	55.66				
Family Income	Lower	92	90.83	1717.500	0.000		Significant
	Higher	63	59.26				
Number of Siblings	Few	72	69.35	2365.000	0.025		Significant
	Many	83	85.51				

Statistics in table 23 reveal the data of the difference in the level of reading difficulties of grade 4 learners in the area reading comprehension when grouped and compared according to sex, Parent's Educational Attainment, Family Income and number of siblings with the computed p-values of 0.001, 0.000, 0.000, and 0.025, which are less than the level of significance of 0.05. Thus, the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the level of difficulty of grade 4 learners in reading comprehension when grouped and compared according to variables is rejected. There's a significant difference in learners' reading comprehension influenced by factors like sex, parental education, income, and family size. These factors can either enhance or hinder comprehension skills. Developing reading comprehension is challenging, particularly for parents with limited teaching knowledge. Higher-educated parents provide better guidance, while lower-income parents may lack time due to work and household duties. Guided reading by teachers and parents helps improve comprehension, though it poses challenges for those with multiple children or children at different grade levels. Sex doesn't determine reading ability; both sexes have unique habits. However, mastering basic skills is essential for good comprehension. Higher

parental education and income generally lead to better reading skills, while family size can impact individual support due to parental time constraints. The findings go against Pagal et al.'s (2017) findings, suggesting no significant difference in reading comprehension between male and female learners. Sex doesn't dictate reading proficiency; both sexes have unique habits, but comprehension isn't guaranteed without mastering basic skills. Sex doesn't dictate reading proficiency; both sexes have unique habits, but comprehension isn't guaranteed without mastering basic skills. Parental education and income affect reading ability. Higher parental education and income generally lead to better reading skills, while lower levels have the opposite effect. Family size also plays a role; smaller families tend to give more attention to their children's schooling, which can aid in comprehension development. Conversely, larger families may struggle to provide individual support due to parents' time being occupied with work to support the family (Ragma and Molina, 2017).

Table 24

Difference in the Level of Reading Difficulties of Grade 4 Learners in Vocabulary when Grouped according to the Aforementioned Variables

Variable	Category	N	Mean Rank	Mann Whitney U	p-value	Sig. level	Interpretation
Sex	Male	74	85.94	2409.500	0.035	0.05	Significant
	Female	81	70.75				
Parent's Educational Attainment	Lower	107	88.77	1416.000	0.000		Significant
	Higher	48	54.00				
Family Income	Lower	92	90.36	1761.000	0.000		Significant
	Higher	63	59.95				
Number of Siblings	Few	72	66.64	2170.000	0.003		Significant
	Many	83	87.86				

Table 24 summarizes the results of the difference in the reading difficulties of Grade 4 learners in vocabulary when grouped according to four variable groupings repeatedly mentioned in this paper. The computed p-values of 0.035, 0.000, 0.000, and 0.003 for sex at birth, parents' educational attainment, family income, and number of siblings were found to be less than 0.05, resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis. This result indicates a significant connection between learners' vocabulary and several factors: sex, parents' education, family income, and number of siblings. Challenges in these areas can hinder vocabulary development and communication skills. Both sexes face similar vocabulary difficulties, but males may benefit from focusing on spelling and pronunciation. Besides a teacher's guidance, parents play a crucial role in enhancing vocabulary through effective strategies at home and school. Access to diverse reading materials at home can aid vocabulary growth, though affordability may be a factor. Larger families may struggle to provide individual attention, impacting vocabulary development. The results of the study agree with the findings of Hirnstein et al. (2022), showing that females slightly outperform males in remembering words. Sex differences in language learning exist, with males focusing on practical methods and females engaging in a wider range of language

skills. Family background significantly affects vocabulary, with children from educated, higher-income families outperforming those from less-educated, lower-income families. Family size also impacts academic performance, with larger families often facing challenges due to limited parental support and financial constraints, delaying language development (Children's Bureau, 2019; Azumah et al., 2017).

Conclusion

The study found that the respondents faced moderate challenges in word decoding, fluency, reading comprehension, and vocabulary. Implying that learners may struggle with certain aspects of reading, such as decoding words, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, or a combination of these. More so, there were significant differences in reading difficulties based on certain factors, but not for fluency and sex. This suggests that learners might need specific help and strategies to improve their reading, but they can still make progress with the right support. The study calls for the need for teachers' training and workshops to provide techniques and strategies for teaching reading effectively. This would help create sustainable reading programs that boost learners' motivation and improve their skills in word decoding, fluency, reading comprehension, and vocabulary.

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