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Reading Comprehension And Academic Performance Of Grade 7 Learners

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Abstract

Reading is a cornerstone of academic success and lifelong learning, providing access to understanding new vocabulary, inferential ideas, and critical knowledge. In this context, this study aimed to determine the reading comprehension and academic performance of grade 7 learners. This study employed a descriptive research design using a self-made test instrument to assess the reading comprehension of 105 grade 7 learners. The results revealed that the reading comprehension of grade 7 learners is at the instructional level in literal understanding, while they are at the frustration level in inferential thinking and critical analysis. A significant difference was found in learners' reading comprehension levels across areas when compared by sex. A significant difference was found in learners' literal reading comprehension based on average family monthly income and distance from home to school. Moreover, a significant difference was found in the learners' academic performance level according to sex and number of siblings. Furthermore, a significant relationship was found between the reading comprehension level and learners' academic performance. This study calls for school heads and reading teachers to work together to implement targeted interventions to address the least mastered skills, particularly for learners at the frustration level.

Keywords: *Reading comprehension, academic performance, grade 7 learners, literal understanding, inferential thinking, critical analysis*

Bio-profile

Girlie Joy S. Galacio is a licensed professional teacher of secondary education major in Filipino. She is finishing her Master of Arts in Education, majoring in Filipino. With a strong commitment to nurturing the minds and values of young learners, she focuses her professional and research interests on the advancement of education and the holistic development of students. Her passion lies in developing innovative and culturally relevant teaching strategies that enhance learners' language proficiency, critical thinking, and appreciation for Filipino heritage.

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Introduction

Rationale

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill crucial for academic success and lifelong learning. This skill is vital in the Philippines' educational system as it helps learners develop their critical thinking and understanding of complex concepts across different subjects. A growing body of research highlights that many Filipino students struggle with reading comprehension, affecting their overall academic performance and intellectual growth (De Guzman & Valdez, 2017). Some students struggle with the sensation of repeating reading without fully grasping its significance, which impacts their academic achievement and intellectual development. The Department of Education (DepEd) has also noted that reading proficiency levels, particularly among elementary and secondary learners, have declined, underscoring the need for immediate and effective interventions (DepEd, 2020).

In this research, based on observations and data, there is an increased number of students struggling with reading comprehension, which may lead to adverse effects on academic performance and further learning difficulties in the long term. In the context of this study, the learners who have transitioned from elementary to secondary education present new academic needs, including more complex texts and subject-specific reading materials. Through classroom observations and interactions with students, the researcher has noted a concerning gap in learning—many students exhibit weak reading comprehension skills, which directly contribute to their low academic performance. Some students have trouble grasping basic concepts in subjects because they cannot fully understand the instructions, questions, or learning materials provided. This issue is not just an isolated case but a widespread concern that requires immediate attention. The inability to comprehend texts effectively leads to poor academic achievement, decreased self-confidence, and lack of motivation to learn. This problem may persist into higher grade levels if left unaddressed, further affecting students' future educational and career opportunities.

Given these observations, this study is necessary to investigate the link between reading comprehension and academic performance among learners. This study aims to provide evidence-based insights into the severity of the issue and propose strategies that educators, parents, and school administrators can implement to enhance students' reading skills. Strengthening reading comprehension early can lead to improved academic performance, better engagement in learning, and overall educational success.

Literature Review

One of the learning capabilities affecting the students' development is reading comprehension, in which they struggle to understand constructive sentences, words, and meanings. Reading is transmitting messages through the written words in a text. Reading allows language learners to explore topics they love and stories that engage them to imagine things relevant to life. Reading comprehension requires a thorough cognitive process. The process entails readers recognizing and interpreting the content of written material with a profound level

of understanding (Kong, 2019; Zhang, 2018). Reading comprehension has a deeper coverage that is also proposed by several types of research, such as the three levels of reading: literal understanding, inferential thinking, and critical analysis or evaluative comprehension.

Literal understanding in reading comprehension involves grasping the explicit content presented in a text. According to Elleman (2017), literal comprehension is the foundation for higher-order thinking skills, as it requires readers to recognize and recall factual information directly stated in the material. The most important things the learners must have in comprehension are background knowledge of the words and the spoken language, recognizing the sounds, and connecting them into meanings. This ability, although it is the simplest and the basic level of comprehension, allows learners who develop literal understanding to have comprehension skills like identifying the words and skimming and scanning to find more information efficiently that helps them to catch up on lessons in the classroom easily. This stage is critical for learners in Grade 7 as they are no longer just learning how to read, but they are now reading to learn. Nurjanah and Putri (2023) revealed that students with excellent mastery of literal understanding and comprehension worked well on interpretive, critical, and creative levels. On the other hand, the students with poor mastery of literal understanding and comprehension did not have excellent results on interpretive, critical, and creative levels. It also revealed that literal understanding and comprehension are important in building students' comprehension before they continue to the following levels.

Making inferences is a skill that a learner needs to achieve in their early years in school. According to De Jesus (2016), making inferences is formulating hypotheses or conceived ideas expressed in the text. This skill helps students come up with sensible conclusions based on facts or evidence. Inferences are opinions about what is most likely to be true. We produce them after a thorough examination of all relevant data. This skill focuses on teaching students how to use contextual information (both written and visual) to determine what they believe is true (Dolba et al., 2022). Developing inferential skills is crucial for academic success because it supports critical thinking and enables the learner to engage with content or the material they have read, particularly in academics such as literature, science, and history (Pressley and Afflerbach, 2018). However, inferential thinking also presents notable challenges. Students often struggle with inferential comprehension because it requires integrating multiple skills, such as vocabulary knowledge, reasoning, and familiarity with various contexts or experiences. Learners may misunderstand information or make wrong inferences without adequate prior knowledge or assistance, which can cause frustration and reduce their confidence in reading skills. Amorganda (2024) revealed that learners' frustration rating stems from poor comprehension, inferencing, and concluding a given reading material.

Meanwhile, one of the higher-order thinking skills, critical analysis, is indeed expected among the learners of the 21st century. To read critically, they need the ability and the deliberate inclination to think critically about and analyze and evaluate information sources or deal with it as a thinker (Fenandez & Padilla, 2024). In critical analysis, pupils must study, evaluate, and judge material. The writer employs language that can direct readers' understanding based on the data offered, the writer's perspective, intent, and honesty. It discusses examining and evaluating

language quality using specific standards. The most significant level is the creative level, which works with readers' involvement in the material to rethink the ideas. Critical reading encourages students to think more deeply and actively to understand reading material. It broadens one's mind and enhances one's thought process (Tan, 2023). Suacillo et al. (2016) describe critical reading as examining the evidence or arguments presented, checking out any influences on the evidence or arguments, checking out the limitations of study design or focus, examining the interpretations made, and deciding to what extent the reader is prepared to accept the authors' arguments, opinions, or conclusions. Huber and Kuncel (2020) revealed that a lack of exposure to diverse text types and insufficient background knowledge further hinder their ability to engage with texts critically. To strengthen children's critical thinking abilities, teachers and parents may apply reflective questioning, encourage dialogue about current events, and foster a home environment that values curiosity and evidence-based reasoning.

Furthermore, academic performance is the knowledge gained, which is assessed by marks from a teacher and educational goals set by students and teachers to be achieved over a specific period. These goals are measured by continuous assessment or examination results (Leander & Fabella, 2020). Espia and Cortezan (2022) discovered that the greater the learners' reading comprehension, the better the students' academic achievement. Belleza (2019) found that improving reading comprehension strategies would enhance students' academic success and prepare them for future learning tasks. Likewise, Adora et al. (2024) found that students who showed better comprehension became more independent readers who managed to understand instructions effectively and attained higher academic results.

Theoretical Underpinning

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill that significantly influences academic performance. Understanding how students process, interpret, and analyze texts can provide insights into their learning capabilities. This study is grounded in two key theories: the Schema Theory and the Cognitive Load Theory, which explain how prior knowledge and cognitive processing affect reading comprehension and academic success. The Schema Theory, proposed by Bartlett (1932) and later expanded by Anderson (1977), suggests that individuals comprehend new information by relating it to their existing knowledge structures or schemas. The word schema is an organized structure of experience and knowledge, allowing a person to interpret and understand information. People store this knowledge for long-term memory and future use.

In the context of reading comprehension, students interpret texts based on their prior experiences, vocabulary, and conceptual understanding. A well-developed schema enables students to process information efficiently, aiding in literal and inferential comprehension. In a classroom setting, learners can easily relate new information to what they already understand when they read a story about a rainforest, including its climate, the animals that live there, and the types of plants that grow there. They can easily relate the new information to what they already understand. The connection between words makes it easier for them to comprehend the material as they infer meanings, predict what might happen next, and create together different ideas. Conversely, students with no background knowledge about the rainforest may find it

challenging to grasp the main ideas, which can lead to difficulties in engaging with the text and may affect their academic performance.

The Cognitive Load Theory, developed by Sweller (1988), refers to the amount of information the working memory can process at any given time. The cognitive load was categorized into three types: intrinsic, extraneous, and germane. The intrinsic load is the inherent difficulty associated with the content. Managing the intrinsic load is by breaking concepts and complex tasks into smaller and simpler steps. Extraneous load is how the material or information is presented. In this, teachers must give clear instructions and well-organized notes and avoid distraction or overloading slides or text and images. The germane load is the effort used to create meaningful and long-term knowledge of the learners and how the teacher will facilitate the learning. In education, the cognitive load theory helps to avoid overloading learners with more than they can effectively process into schemas for long-term memory storage and future recall. Any situation where students experience overwhelming cognitive requirements resulting from word recognition challenges along with decoding problems and unknown vocabulary fails to support either comprehension or academic success. Students who experience excessive cognitive overload will lose their ability to perform academic tasks related to text analysis, synthesis, and critical evaluation. If cognitive overload persists, it can lead to frustration, disengagement, and poor academic performance.

The two theoretical perspectives establish a framework that helps to understand how prior knowledge, cognitive processing, and information overload influence reading comprehension and academic performance among Grade 7 learners. Recognizing the factors can help educators design instructional strategies that support the learners' schema, such as pre-reading discussions and background knowledge-building activities, and reduce cognitive load, like breaking texts into manageable chunks and scaffolding complex concepts. Effective strategies ultimately enhance students' reading proficiency and overall academic success.

Objectives

This paper aimed to determine the levels of reading comprehension and academic performance of grade 7 learners. Specifically, the study sought to find out 1) the level of reading comprehension across three key areas in literal understanding, inferential thinking, and critical analysis, 2) the level of academic performance of grade 7 learners, 3) if there is a significant difference in the level of reading comprehension and academic performance according to profile variables, and 4) if there is a significant relationship between the levels of reading comprehension and academic performance of Grade 7 learners.

Methodology

This portion presents a discussion of the research methodology used, the subjects and respondents of the study, the research instruments used, the validity and reliability of the instruments, the procedure for data gathering, and the statistical tools and procedures for data analysis.

Research Design

This study employed the descriptive research design to determine the level of reading comprehension and academic performance of grade 7 learners. According to Shrutika Sirisilla (2023), descriptive research design is a powerful tool scientists and researchers use to gather information about a particular group or phenomenon. This type of research provides a detailed and accurate picture of the characteristics and behaviors of a particular population or subject. By observing and collecting data on a given topic, descriptive research helps researchers gain a deeper understanding of a specific issue and provides valuable insights that can inform future studies.

Study Respondents

The respondents of the study were the 105 grade 7 learners. The researcher used purposive sampling. A purposive sample is a non-probability sample that is selected based on population characteristics and the study's objective (Crossman, 2020). This method involves identifying and including individuals or groups that can provide rich, detailed, and meaningful data. This necessitates a well-documented and transparent selection process to ensure the credibility and relevance of the data collected.

Instrument

The study used researcher-made questionnaires to gather the data. Part 1 focused on the Personal Information, which includes the sex, average family monthly income, parent's highest educational attainment, distance from home to school, number of siblings, and a general average of the respondents' academic performance. Part 2 of the instrument is a test questionnaire divided into three areas, with 10 items each: literal understanding, inferential thinking, and critical analysis. Each part of the questionnaire required the participants to read each item's passage carefully based on their prior knowledge and understanding and choose the correct answer from the given choices. The research instrument was subjected to validity (4.89 excellent) and reliability (0.726 good).

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher asks permission through written communication from the Schools Division Superintendent of the Department of Education of the Division of Negros Oriental and the principal of the junior high school, requesting to allow the researcher to conduct and distribute the questionnaires to the respondents. As soon as the official permission was approved and granted, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and asked for consent from the parents or guardians of respondents and a letter of assent form stating that learners were willing to join the study. The data gathered from the respondents was tallied and tabulated using

statistical tools. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) is utilized to process and analyze the collected data results.

Data Analysis and Statistical Treatment

Objective No. 1 used the descriptive analytical scheme and weighted mean to determine the reading comprehension level in terms of literal understanding, inferential thinking, and critical analysis. Objective No. 2 also used the descriptive analytical scheme and weighted mean to determine the level of academic performance of Grade 7 learners. Objective No. 3 used the comparative analytical scheme and t-test to determine the significant difference in reading comprehension levels and academic performance based on variable groupings. Objective No. 4 used the relational analytical scheme and Pearson r to determine the significant relationship between the levels of reading comprehension and academic performance of the same Grade 7 learners.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher prioritized the respondents' voluntary participation, informed consent, risk of harm, confidentiality, and anonymity to prevent human rights violations during the research process. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the respondents could withdraw without consequences. We informed them about the study's academic purpose. Only the researcher(s) had access to the data, ensuring confidentiality. Moreover, during the study, the researcher strictly observed the governing guidelines and policies of the Data Privacy Act of 2012 to ensure security measures are in place to protect personal and sensitive information. To ensure the security of the collected data, the researcher can guarantee that the participants' identifying information will not be made available to anyone who is not directly involved in the study. After the completion of the study and analysis of results, all data will be securely deleted to prevent any unauthorized access. The study upheld the ethical principles of respect for individuals, beneficence, and justice throughout the research process.

Results and Discussions

In this section, the data gathered were further treated, presented, analyzed, and interpreted to focus on the study's specific objectives.

Table 1
Level of Reading Comprehension According to Literal Understanding, Inferential Thinking, and Critical Analysis

Areas	Mean	Interpretation
Literal Understanding	57.52	Instructional Level

Inferential Thinking	48.19	Frustration Level
Critical Analysis	45.43	Frustration Level

Table 1 reveals the result on the level of reading comprehension of learners in literal understanding, inferential thinking, and critical analysis.

In literal understanding, the learners obtained a mean score of 57.52, which was interpreted as instructional level. The result implies that most learners, to some level, can understand and comprehend what they read, and learners with good vocabulary contribute to this capability; however, they still need guidance and instructional support from teachers to deepen their comprehension skills. It suggests that reading teachers continue providing them with reading materials suitable for their needs and grade level and then move to more complex reading texts and those that cater to their areas of interest. These can provide avenues for the learners to grow from being instructional readers to becoming independent ones. The result aligns with that of Nurjanah and Putri (2023), revealing that students with excellent mastery of literal understanding and comprehension worked well on interpretive, critical, and creative levels. On the other hand, the students with poor mastery of literal understanding and comprehension did not have excellent results on interpretive, critical, and creative levels. It also revealed that literal understanding and comprehension are important in building students' comprehension before they continue to the following levels.

In inferential thinking, the learners obtained a mean score of 48.19, which was interpreted as a frustration level. The result implies that the learners find reading materials difficult because they cannot think inferentially. This difficulty in inferential thinking suggests that additional support and targeted instruction may be necessary to enhance their comprehension skills. By addressing these challenges, educators can help learners become more proficient in interpreting and analyzing texts effectively. The finding relates to Amorganda's (2024), revealing that learners' frustration rating stems from poor comprehension, inferencing, and concluding a given reading material.

Moreover, in critical analysis, the learners obtained a mean score of 45.43, which is interpreted as a frustration level. The finding implies that the learners find it challenging to analyze the reading materials critically and cannot successfully respond to the questions asked of them after the passage or selection has been read. Lack of exposure to diverse text types and insufficient background knowledge further hinder their ability to engage with texts critically. This difficulty may stem from ineffective reading strategies or insufficient practice analyzing texts. Thus, teachers need to implement targeted interventions to enhance critical thinking skills and improve overall comprehension among learners. The finding aligns with that of Huber and Kuncel (2020), wherein lack of exposure to diverse text types and insufficient background knowledge further hinder their ability to engage with texts critically. To strengthen children's critical thinking abilities, teachers and parents may apply reflective questioning, encourage dialogue about current events, and foster a home environment that values curiosity and evidence-based reasoning.

Table 2
Level of Reading Comprehension of Grade 7 Learners According to Literal Understanding, Inferential Thinking, and Critical Analysis When Grouped According to Sex

Areas	Male		Female	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
Literal Understanding	50.86	Instructional	65.74	Instructional
Inferential Thinking	43.97	Frustration	53.40	Instructional
Critical Analysis	39.83	Frustration	52.34	Instructional

Table 2 reveals the results on the level of reading comprehension of grade 7 learners in literal understanding, inferential thinking, and critical analysis when grouped according to sex. Analyzing the results, it is evident that there is a significant difference in the mean results; the female group got higher mean scores interpreted as instructional level, while the male group received lower mean scores interpreted as frustration level only in the areas of inferential thinking and critical analysis.

The finding implies that female grade 7 learners have better reading comprehension skills than male learners, particularly in inferential thinking and critical analysis. This information indicates that female learners exhibit more inferential and critical thinking skills than males. The result suggests that gender should be kept as a constant factor in reading activities. Teachers need to promote activities that will encourage males and females to improve their attitudes toward reading without distractions whatsoever. The result aligns with that of Agabon (2021), which revealed that female learners obtained higher ratings on reading comprehension skills than males. Likewise, Penner's (2018) study reported that while girls generally outperformed boys in reading, the gender gap could be attributed more to external factors like peer influence and teaching methods than innate abilities.

Table 3
Level of Reading Comprehension of Grade 7 Learners According to Literal Understanding, Inferential Thinking, and Critical Analysis When Grouped According to Average Family Monthly Income

Areas	Lower		Higher	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
Literal Understanding	50.00	Instructional	62.74	Instructional
Inferential Thinking	45.58	Frustration	50.00	Instructional
Critical Analysis	41.40	Frustration	48.23	Frustration

Table 3 divulges the results on the level of reading comprehension of grade 7 learners in literal understanding, inferential thinking, and critical analysis when grouped according to average family monthly income. The table shows a big difference in the means obtained by learners from higher average family income groups across areas than learners from lower average family incomes.

The result implies that the learners' reading comprehension may vary concerning their socio-economic backgrounds, as those learners with financial stability may have better reading resources and support from family than their counterpart groups. The finding underscores the importance of recognizing and valuing the diverse experiences and strengths of learners from different socio-economic backgrounds in educational settings. By fostering an inclusive environment that acknowledges these differences, teachers can tailor their approaches to meet the varied needs of all learners. Additionally, implementing targeted interventions and providing equitable access to resources can help bridge the gap, ensuring that every learner has the opportunity to thrive regardless of their economic circumstances. The finding supports that of Tuell (2021), revealing that there are notable disadvantages tied to students living in a low socioeconomic background, such as little, if any, support at home and a lack of available resources. Likewise, Villados (2020) revealed that the reading abilities of learners from higher-income families performed better than their counterparts.

Table 4

Level of Reading Comprehension of Grade 7 Learners According to Literal Understanding, Inferential Thinking, and Critical Analysis When Grouped According to Parents' Highest Educational Attainment

Areas	Lower		Higher	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
Literal Understanding	54.07	Instructional	58.72	Instructional
Inferential Thinking	45.19	Frustration	49.23	Frustration
Critical Analysis	45.56	Frustration	45.38	Frustration

Table 4 discloses the results on the level of reading comprehension of grade 7 learners in literal understanding, inferential thinking, and critical analysis when grouped according to parents' highest educational attainment. Examining the scores, the learners whose parents had higher educational attainment obtained a slight difference in means compared to those whose parents had lower educational attainment.

The finding implies that learners with parents having better educational backgrounds were ahead in reading comprehension skills compared to their counterpart learners. This is because parents with better educational backgrounds can provide instructional support for their children. This support enhances their children's literacy skills and fosters a more profound understanding of complex texts. As a result, students may develop a more robust foundation for

lifelong learning and critical engagement with diverse materials. Tuohma et al. (2018) conducted a study that supports this result, demonstrating that parental levels of education positively predict children's reading comprehension.

Table 5

Level of Reading Comprehension of Grade 7 Learners According to Literal Understanding, Inferential Thinking, and Critical Analysis When Grouped According to Distance From Home to School

Areas	Nearer		Farther	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
Literal Understanding	52.39	Instructional	61.53	Instructional
Inferential Thinking	45.65	Frustration	50.17	Instructional
Critical Analysis	42.17	Frustration	47.97	Frustration

Table 5 unveils the results on the level of reading comprehension of grade 7 learners in literal understanding, inferential thinking, and critical analysis when grouped according to distance from home to school. Investigating the table, learners who lived farther from school obtained higher mean scores in all areas than learners who lived near school. Furthermore, a pattern seems evident as the scores decrease as measured by literal understanding, inferential thinking, and critical analysis of reading comprehension.

The findings imply that learners who lived near school have lower reading comprehension skills than learners who lived farther from school. This is because those who live farther from school have to spend longer hours traveling to school; thus, they spend their time wisely in school learning to read. The finding suggests that it is important to consider learners' geographical location in conducting school reading activities. This is because long walking distances pose psychological, physical, and health hazards to the learners. The learners suffer from fatigue and poor concentration in class after spending long hours on the road trying to get there and home again. The finding relates to that of Taiwo (2019), which revealed that walking long distances to and from school daily hurts students' performance, as it could promote absenteeism and fatigue, leading to a lack of concentration and interest in reading and school activities.

Table 6

Level of Reading Comprehension of Grade 7 Learners According to Literal Understanding, Inferential Thinking, and Critical Analysis When Grouped According to Number of Siblings

Areas	Few		Many	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
Literal Understanding	61.11	Instructional	55.65	Instructional

Inferential Thinking	53.61	Instructional	45.36	Frustration
Critical Analysis	49.44	Frustration	43.33	Frustration

Table 6 unveils the result on the level of reading comprehension of grade 7 learners in literal understanding, inferential thinking, and critical analysis when grouped according to the number of siblings. Scanning the table, learners with few siblings obtained higher mean scores in all three areas. In addition, inferential thinking has an obvious, significant difference in the mean results; learners with few siblings got 53.61, or instructional level, while those with many siblings got 45.36, or frustration level only.

The result implies that learners with few siblings have better reading comprehension skills in inferential thinking than learners with many siblings. The presence of multiple siblings may affect the development of specific reading skills, such as inferential thinking, possibly due to fewer opportunities for social interaction and collaborative learning. The study suggests that increased interactions within larger families may enhance children's reading comprehension abilities, as sibling relationships may play a significant role in shaping various aspects of literacy. The result relates to that of Chung et al. (2019): adolescent learners that get together with siblings and dialogue with family members obtain the best results in reading comprehension. In addition, Oliveira et al. (2016) found that learners with strong connections with their family members tend to present the best results in reading comprehension.

Table 7

Level of Learner's Academic Performance When Grouped According to Profile Variables

Variable	**Categories**	**Mean**	**Interpretation**
Sex	Male	81.52	Satisfactory
	Female	85.11	Very Satisfactory
Average Family Monthly Income	Lower	82.30	Satisfactory
	Higher	83.70	Satisfactory
Parents' Highest Educational Attainment	Lower	82.07	Satisfactory
	Higher	83.49	Satisfactory
Distance From Home to School	Nearer	82.52	Satisfactory
	Farther	83.59	Satisfactory
Number of Siblings	Few	84.56	Very Satisfactory
	Many	82.38	Satisfactory

Table 7 presents learners' academic performance when grouped according to sex, average family monthly income, parents' highest educational attainment, distance from home to school, and the number of siblings. As presented in the table, the female with few siblings obtained a very satisfactory level, while the rest of the groups obtained a satisfactory level only.

The result implies that females with few siblings perform better than the rest of the group categories. Female learners were goal-oriented in performing learning tasks to earn high grades. On the other hand, learners with few siblings received better reading resources, resulting in easier completion of the learning tasks. This advantage may contribute to their increased motivation and, ultimately, higher achievement levels. Additionally, the supportive environment provided by having fewer siblings could enhance their focus and dedication to academic success. The result relates to that of Lazaro and Mascuñana (2022), revealing that females rated significantly higher than males in these learning behavior domains. In other words, female learners, compared to males, manifest a greater motivation in completing activities, interest in learning the target language, and flexibility and adaptability in performing tasks in school and at home.

Table 8

Difference in the Level of Reading Comprehension of Grade 7 learners According to Literal Understanding When Grouped according to Profile Variables

Variable	Category	N	Mean	*t*-value	*p*-value	*Sig. level*	Interpretation
Sex	Male	58	50.86	-3.620	0.000		Significant
	Female	47	65.74				
Average Family Monthly Income	Lower	43	50.00	-3.007	0.003		Significant
	Higher	62	62.74				
Parents' Highest Educational Attainment	Lower	27	54.07	-1.001	0.322	0.05	Not Significant
	Higher	78	58.72				
Distance From Home to School	Nearer	46	52.39	-2.102	0.038		Significant
	Farther	59	61.53				
Number of Siblings	Few	36	61.11	1.276	0.205		Not Significant
	Many	69	55.65				

Table 8 presents the inferential statistics on the difference in the reading comprehension of grade 7 learners in literal understanding when grouped and compared according to variables. The computed p-values for variables parents' highest educational attainment and number of siblings are 0.332 and 0.205, respectively, which are all greater than the 0.05 significance level

and thus interpreted as insignificant. However, for variables sex, average family monthly income, and distance from home to school, the computed p-values are 0.000, 0.003, and 0.038, respectively, which are all less than the 0.05 significance level and thus interpreted as significant.

The finding implies that learners' literal understanding varies by sex, average family monthly income, and the distance from home to school. The study suggests that the sex, average family income, and number of siblings influence the learner's literal understanding. This is because the female learners were more academic goal-oriented. On the other hand, learners from higher family-income categories and those with fewer siblings were provided with better reading resources. On the contrary, those learners from lower family income categories have basic needs that are not being met, thus not allowing the learners to physically and mentally be able to perform reading activities in school. These barriers can lead to a significant gap in literacy development, ultimately affecting their academic and reading performance and future opportunities. Consequently, targeted interventions and support systems are essential to bridge this divide and foster a more equitable learning environment for all learners. The result aligns with that of Agabon (2021), which revealed female learners obtained higher ratings on reading comprehension skills than males. Li et al. (2023) revealed that family economic status had both direct and indirect effects on reading development. Moreover, Olagundoye and Adebile (2019) concluded that large family size no doubt negatively influences students' performance in English.

Table 9

Difference in the Level of Reading Comprehension of Grade 7 learners According to Inferential Thinking When Grouped according to Profile Variables

Variable	**Category**	**N**	**Mean**	***t*-value**	***p*-value**	***Sig. level***	**Interpretation**
Sex	Male	58	43.97	-2.123	0.036	0.05	Significant
	Female	47	53.40				
Average Family Monthly Income	Lower	43	45.58	-1.015	0.313		Not Significant
	Higher	62	50.00				
Parents' Highest Educational Attainment	Lower	27	45.19	-0.872	0.387		Not Significant
	Higher	78	49.23				
Distance From Home to School	Nearer	46	45.65	-1.032	0.304		Not Significant

	Farther	59	50.17				
Number of Siblings	Few	36	53.61	1.777	0.080		Not Significant
	Many	69	45.36				

Table 9 exhibits the inferential statistics on the difference in the reading comprehension of grade 7 learners in inferential thinking when grouped and compared according to variables. The computed p-values for variables like average family monthly income, parents' highest educational attainment, distance from home to school, and number of siblings are 0.131, 0.387, 0.304, and 0.080, respectively, which are all greater than the 0.05 level of significance and thus interpreted as not significant. However, for variable sex, the computed p-value is 0.036, less than the 0.05 significance level and thus interpreted as significant.

The result implies that learners' inferential thinking differs when compared by their sex. Female learners preferred print reading, digital reading, and multiformat use; they spent more time on leisure reading and read fiction and magazines more often than male learners. This divergence in reading preferences suggests that educational strategies should be tailored to address the unique interests and habits of each gender. Such tailored approaches could enhance engagement and comprehension skills in both groups, ultimately improving overall literacy outcomes. Penner's (2018) study reported that while girls generally outperformed boys in reading, the gender gap could be attributed more to external factors like peer influence and teaching methods than innate abilities.

Table 10

Difference in the Level of Reading Comprehension of Grade 7 learners According to Critical Analysis When Grouped according to Profile Variables

Variable	**Category**	**N**	**Mean**	***t*-value**	***p*-value**	***Sig. level***	**Interpretation**
Sex	Male	58	39.83	-3.075	0.003		Significant
	Female	47	52.34				
Average Family Monthly Income	Lower	43	41.40	-1.589	0.116	0.05	Not Significant
	Higher	62	48.23				

Parents' Highest Educational Attainment	Lower	27	45.56	0.038	0.970	Not Significant
	Higher	78	45.38			
Distance From Home to School	Nearer	46	42.17	-1.379	0.171	Not Significant
	Farther	59	47.97			
Number of Siblings	Few	36	49.44	1.347	0.182	Not Significant
	Many	69	43.33			

Table 10 shows the inferential statistics on the difference in the reading comprehension of grade 7 learners in critical analysis when grouped and compared according to variables. The computed p-values for variables average family monthly income, parents' highest educational attainment, distance from home to school, and number of siblings are 0.116, 0.970, 0.171, and 0.182, respectively, which are all greater than the 0.05 level of significance and thus interpreted as not significant. However, for variable sex, the computed p-value is 0.036, less than the 0.05 significance level and thus interpreted as significant.

The result implies that learners' reading comprehension and critical thinking differ according to sex. This is because female learners have more complex thoughts than male learners. Female learners tend to be more interested in finding the best solution before judging a particular issue. This evidence suggests that female learners may engage in deeper analysis and consideration of various perspectives, leading to enhanced critical thinking skills. Consequently, this difference in cognitive approach could impact their reading comprehension abilities in a significant way. The finding contradicts that of Infante (2023), claiming reading comprehension abilities create a positive effect that enhances problem-solving and critical thinking capabilities in all students, regardless of their characteristics.

Table 11

Difference in the Level of Learners' Academic Performance When Grouped according to Profile Variables

Variable	**Category**	**N**	**Mean**	***t*-value**	***p*-value**	***Sig. level***	**Interpretation**
Sex	Male	58	81.52	-4.557	0.000	0.05	Significant
	Female	47	85.11				

Average Family Monthly Income	Lower	43	82.30	-1.592	0.115	Not Significant
	Higher	62	83.69			
Parents' Highest Educational Attainment	Lower	27	82.07	-1.494	0.142	Not Significant
	Higher	78	83.49			
Distance From Home to School	Nearer	46	82.52	-1.241	0.218	Not Significant
	Farther	59	83.59			
Number of Siblings	Few	36	84.56	2.540	0.013	Significant
	Many	69	82.38			

Table 11 summarizes the comparative statistics on the learners' academic performance level when grouped and compared according to sex, average family monthly income, parents' highest educational attainment, distance from home to school, and number of siblings. For the variables average family monthly income, parents' highest educational attainment, and distance from school, the computed p-values are 0.115, 0.142, and 0.218, respectively, greater than the 0.05 significance level. Based on the results, it was interpreted as not significant. However, for variable sex and number of siblings, the computed p-values are 0.000 and 0.013, respectively, less than the 0.05 significance level; thus, they are interpreted as significant.

The result implies that learners' sex and number of siblings are predictors that influence learners' performance in school. Goal-oriented female learners usually possess positive feelings regarding their school experiences; they possess the traits of discipline, diligence, and resourcefulness; are avid readers; and tend to devote less time to recreation and leisure activities. On the other hand, learners from a family with fewer siblings received higher educational support from parents than those learners with many siblings. The fewer siblings in the family, the higher the parent's ability to invest resources in any particular child; the larger the sibling size, the fewer resources are used for one child's education, resulting in a lower output of schooling. The result is supported by Gumasing (2021), revealing female students perceive a higher level of academic effort than male students. At the same time, Kugler and Kumar (2017) concluded that sibling size significantly negatively impacts children's education.

Table 12

Relationship Between the Level of Reading Comprehension of Grade 7 Learners and Their Level of Academic Performance

Variables	N	*r*	p-value	Level of Significance	Interpretation
Level of Reading Comprehension	105				
		.737	.000	0.05	Significant
Level of Academic Performance	105				

As presented in Table 12, the computed *r* was 0.737 with a *p*-value of 0.000, less than the 0.05 significance level; thus, it is interpreted as significant. The finding implies that reading comprehension positively influences the learners' academic performance level. When the learners perform better in reading comprehension tests and target a better level of reading comprehension skills, they achieve better and more desirable academic performance. The evidence suggests that improving reading comprehension skills can enhance overall academic success for grade 7 learners. Consequently, teachers may focus on strategies to develop these skills to boost students' academic outcomes. The finding is supported by Espia and Cortezan (2022), who discovered that the greater the learners' reading comprehension, the better the students' academic achievement. Belleza (2019) found that improving reading comprehension strategies would enhance students' academic success and prepare them for future learning tasks. Likewise, Adora et al. (2024) found that students who showed better comprehension became more independent readers who managed to understand instructions effectively and attained higher academic results.

Conclusion

The demographic variables of the learners provide varied evidence of their reading comprehension levels. The learners are good at understanding basic facts and details from what they read, but they struggle with deeper thinking, evaluating information critically, and analyzing or judging what they read. Males from lower-income families with parents with low educational attainment reside near the school, and many sibling learners possess low comprehension skills; thus, there is a need for targeted support programs and resources to enhance comprehension skills regardless of learners' demographic background. Females with few siblings performed better academically than other groups, highlighting that targeted interventions and support systems are essential to bridge this divide and foster a more equitable learning environment for all learners. Gender consistently influences comprehension abilities, highlighting the need for equal support opportunities for both male and female learners. Further, good reading comprehension is a positive significant predictor of learners' academic performance. This study calls for school heads and reading teachers to work together to implement targeted interventions to address the least mastered skills, particularly for learners at the frustration level.

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Authorship Contributions Statement

Galacio conceived the presented idea.
Tepacia guided and assisted her in refining the research methodology, instrument, and data-gathering procedure. Tepacia also supervised the findings of this work. All authors discussed the results and contributed to the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

We maintain that none of the authors of this paper have a financial obligation or personal relationship with any person(s) or organizations that could inappropriately influence/bias the content of the paper. We do not receive funding from any person(s) or organization to carry out this research. Given this, we specifically state that “No Competing interests are at stake and there are No Conflict of Interest” with any person(s) or organizations that could inappropriately influence/bias the content of the paper.

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