

Determinants of English Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Performance among Struggling Grade 7 and Grade 8 Students in Panan-awan Integrated School

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Abstract

This study examined the determinants of English reading comprehension and vocabulary performance among struggling Grade 7 and Grade 8 students in Panan-awan Integrated School. Anchored on Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), and Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), the study investigated the combined influence of learner-related and school-related factors on literacy outcomes. Specifically, it explored reading motivation, study habits, language exposure, teaching strategies, availability of reading materials, and classroom learning environment. The study employed a quantitative descriptive–correlational research design. Data were gathered from 30 purposively selected struggling Grade 7 and Grade 8 students using a researcher-made structured questionnaire validated through expert review. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, and weighted mean, were used to describe respondent characteristics and determinant levels, while Pearson Product–Moment Correlation Coefficient determined relationships among variables at the 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed high levels of reading motivation and positive study habits among respondents, while language exposure was moderate. Instructional practices and classroom learning conditions generally supported vocabulary development, although access to reading materials remained limited. Statistical analysis showed a significant moderate positive relationship ($r = 0.58$) between the identified determinants and English reading comprehension and vocabulary performance. Among the determinants, reading motivation emerged as the strongest predictor of literacy outcomes. The study concluded that learner engagement, effective study behaviors, and increased language exposure collectively contribute to improved reading comprehension and vocabulary performance. It recommended differentiated reading activities, expanded language exposure opportunities, improved access to reading resources, and sustained learner-centered instructional practices to strengthen literacy development. This study aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Quality Education by supporting equitable literacy development and strengthening foundational learning outcomes. It also relates to SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities through efforts to address literacy disparities among struggling learners. The sustainability impact of the study lies in supporting educational and institutional sustainability through evidence-based literacy interventions, improved instructional planning, and strengthened school practices that promote long-term learner development.

Keywords: Classroom Learning Environment; English Reading Comprehension; Language Exposure; Reading Motivation; Reading Materials; Study Habits; Teaching Strategies; Vocabulary Performance

1. Introduction

English literacy remains a foundational competency in the 21st century, enabling learners to function effectively in increasingly interconnected and knowledge-driven societies. Reading comprehension and vocabulary development support higher-order thinking, academic achievement, and communication competence. Despite their importance, learning poverty and persistent literacy gaps continue to affect educational systems globally and nationally. This study examines the determinants of English reading comprehension and vocabulary performance among struggling Grade 7 and 8 students in Panan-awan Integrated School by investigating learner-related and school-related factors that influence literacy outcomes.

1.1 Background of the Study on the Determinants of English Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Performance Among Struggling Grade 7 and 8 Students

Reading comprehension and vocabulary development are essential dimensions of literacy that enable learners to process information, think critically, and succeed academically (Snow, 2020; Nation, 2022). However, many education systems continue to experience learning poverty, where children fail to read and understand age-appropriate texts (World Bank, 2022). International assessments reveal continuing concerns regarding reading achievement. Findings from recent reading assessments indicate that many learners do not meet minimum proficiency standards (OECD, 2023). Reading performance is influenced by factors such as socioeconomic conditions, language exposure, instructional quality, and learner motivation (García & Cain, 2022; Mullis et al., 2023). In the Philippines, reading literacy remains a major educational concern.

International assessment results continue to show low reading proficiency among Filipino learners (Department of Education [DepEd], 2022; OECD, 2023). Existing literature attributes these outcomes to limited vocabulary knowledge, insufficient reading exposure, instructional challenges, and socio-cultural influences (Bernardo, 2021; Tupas & Martin, 2020). Despite interventions such as national reading programs and contextualized instruction, many junior high school learners continue to struggle with comprehension and vocabulary development, affecting overall academic performance (DepEd, 2023; David & Ballado, 2021). These challenges are evident among struggling Grade 7 and 8 students in Panan-awan Integrated School, emphasizing the need to identify determinants influencing literacy performance.

1.2 Themes and Insights from Related Literature on Learner-Related and School-Related Determinants of English Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Performance

The reviewed literature consistently shows that literacy outcomes result from the interaction of learner-related and instructional determinants. Reading motivation is strongly associated with comprehension and achievement. Motivated learners demonstrate deeper engagement, stronger persistence, and improved literacy outcomes (Guthrie et al., 2020; Schiefele & Schaffner, 2021; Toste et al., 2020; Bernardo, 2020; Danganan & Balagtas, 2021). Study habits also influence literacy development. Effective study routines, self-regulated learning, and disciplined academic behaviors contribute to stronger comprehension and vocabulary acquisition (Dent and Koenka, 2020; Credé et al., 2020; Broadbent & Poon, 2021; Maligalig et al., 2020; Adriano & Franco, 2021). Language exposure strengthens vocabulary growth and comprehension through repeated interaction with meaningful language contexts (Nation, 2022; Webb and Nation, 2020; Zhang & Zhang, 2021; Martin, 2021; Vizconde, 2020; PIDS, 2021). Instructional determinants—including explicit teaching strategies, contextualized instruction, classroom interaction, and learner-centered approaches—support vocabulary and reading improvement (Kim et al., 2021; Beck and McKeown, 2021; Silverman et al., 2020; Salazar, 2020; Ocampo & Luz, 2021; SEAMEO, 2020). Access to reading materials and supportive classroom environments further enhance literacy outcomes (Krashen, 2020; Mol & Bus, 2021; OECD, 2021; World Bank, 2022; Abadiano, 2021; UNICEF, 2021; Hamre and Pianta, 2020; Wang and Degol, 2021; Torres & De Guzman, 2021). Studies consistently indicate that these determinants interact rather than operate independently in influencing reading comprehension and vocabulary performance (Quinn et al., 2020; Oakhill et al., 2020; Elleman & Oslund, 2021; Santos & Reyes, 2022; Cruz et al., 2021; Asian Development Bank, 2021).

1.3 Local, National, and Global Context of Literacy Development Among Struggling Junior High School Learners

Globally, educational systems continue to address reading proficiency gaps and literacy inequality, particularly among vulnerable learners (World Bank, 2022; OECD, 2023). Nationally, the Philippine education system has implemented literacy initiatives to improve reading outcomes; however, persistent gaps remain among secondary learners due to disparities in motivation, exposure, instructional conditions, and resource availability (Department of Education [DepEd], 2022; Department of Education [DepEd], 2023). Locally, Panan-awan Integrated School represents a context where literacy challenges remain evident among struggling learners despite existing interventions. The school's educational setting highlights the importance of examining determinants within a specific community and institutional environment to support targeted interventions.

1.4 Theoretical and Conceptual Basis of English Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Performance Determinants

This study is anchored on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan (1985), Social Cognitive Theory by Albert Bandura (1986), and Krashen's Input Hypothesis (Second Language Acquisition Theory) by Stephen Krashen (1985). Self-Determination Theory explains that learners who experience autonomy, competence, and meaningful engagement demonstrate stronger motivation and sustained academic participation. Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes reciprocal interactions among personal behavior, environmental influences, and learning experiences. Krashen's Input Hypothesis proposes that language acquisition occurs through meaningful exposure to comprehensible input beyond learners' current proficiency level. The study adopts an Input–Process–Output framework where learner profile, learner-related determinants, and instructional determinants serve as inputs; data collection and analysis represent the process; and literacy outcomes and intervention recommendations serve as outputs.

1.5 Research Gaps and Rationale for Examining Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Performance Among Struggling Grade 7 and 8 Students in Panan-awan Integrated School

Existing literature confirms that reading motivation, study habits, language exposure, teaching strategies, reading materials, and classroom environment influence literacy outcomes. However, previous studies commonly examined these variables independently or emphasized either learner-related or instructional determinants. There remains limited context-specific evidence integrating both learner-related and school-related determinants among struggling junior high school learners in public secondary schools. Additionally, limited attention has been given to understanding how these determinants simultaneously influence both reading comprehension and vocabulary performance. This study addresses these gaps by examining the combined influence of motivation, study habits, language exposure, teaching strategies, availability of reading materials, and classroom learning environment among struggling Grade 7 and 8 students in Panan-awan Integrated School.

1.6 Alignment of the Study with Relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for Literacy and Quality Education

This study aligns with SDG 4 – Quality Education by promoting equitable access to literacy development and strengthening foundational learning outcomes among struggling learners. It also supports SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities and SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth by addressing literacy disparities and supporting long-term educational advancement.

1.7 Importance of the Study to Multidisciplinary Sustainability Through Literacy Development and Educational Improvement

This study contributes to educational sustainability by strengthening literacy systems and improving long-term learning outcomes. It supports socio-economic sustainability through improved academic competencies and contributes to community and institutional sustainability by informing school planning, instructional improvement, resource allocation, and literacy intervention programs.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive–correlational research design to determine the determinants of English reading comprehension and vocabulary performance among struggling Grade 7 and Grade 8 students in Panan-awan Integrated School. The descriptive component focused on describing the respondents' demographic profile in terms of age, sex, and grade level and determining the level of learner-related determinants affecting reading comprehension, including reading motivation, study habits, and language exposure. It also examined instructional and school-related determinants affecting vocabulary performance, specifically teaching strategies, availability of reading materials, and classroom learning environment. The correlational component determined whether significant relationships existed between the identified determinants and students' English reading comprehension and vocabulary performance through statistical analysis using Pearson product–moment correlation. According to John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell (2018)¹, quantitative descriptive and correlational research designs are appropriate for describing existing conditions and examining naturally occurring relationships among variables. Donald Ary et al. (2019)² likewise emphasized that correlational designs are suitable in educational research for determining associations among variables and understanding factors related to student outcomes. This design enabled the objective collection and analysis of quantitative data necessary to describe learning conditions and determine relationships among identified variables to support evidence-based educational interventions.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Panan-awan Integrated School. The school served as the research setting for examining the determinants influencing English reading comprehension and vocabulary performance among struggling Grade 7 and Grade 8 students within an actual educational environment.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents consisted of 30 struggling Grade 7 and Grade 8 students enrolled at Panan-awan Integrated School during the conduct of the study. These students were identified as struggling readers and were selected to provide direct insights into reading comprehension and vocabulary challenges. The respondents included male and female learners of varying ages, allowing representation of the target population and facilitating examination of literacy-related learning conditions.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study used purposive sampling to select respondents. This technique involved intentionally choosing participants based on characteristics aligned with the objectives of the study. Only students identified as experiencing difficulties in reading comprehension and vocabulary were included. All 30 qualified respondents participated in the study and completed the survey instruments, resulting in a 100% retrieval rate. This ensured complete data collection and strengthened the reliability of the findings.

2.5 Research Instrument

Data were collected using a researcher-made structured survey questionnaire developed from the objectives of the study and related literature on reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and language learning. The instrument consisted of three sections. The first section gathered demographic information including age, sex, and grade level. The second section measured learner-related determinants affecting English reading comprehension, namely reading motivation, study habits, and language exposure. The third section assessed instructional and school-related determinants affecting vocabulary performance, including teaching strategies, availability of reading materials, and classroom learning environment. Responses were measured using a four-point Likert scale with corresponding interpretations ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Prior to administration, the instrument underwent expert validation to ensure clarity, appropriateness, and alignment with the objectives of the study. Recommendations from validators were incorporated to improve the instrument and support consistency and objectivity in generating quantitative data.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data gathering followed a systematic procedure to ensure validity, reliability, and proper research conduct. The process began with the preparation and approval of the research proposal, including refinement of the title, statement of the problem, research design, respondents, sampling plan, and supporting literature. After approval, the researcher developed and validated the survey instrument through expert review and revision. Permission to conduct the study was formally requested through a letter submitted to the Schools Division Superintendent of Masbate Province and subsequently endorsed to the school administration of Panan-awan Integrated School. Upon approval, the researcher personally administered the validated questionnaires to the selected respondents. Instructions were clearly explained and adequate time was provided for completion. All completed questionnaires were retrieved immediately after administration. The collected responses were encoded, organized, and prepared for statistical analysis with assistance from an expert statistician. Findings were interpreted and integrated into the final manuscript.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools. Frequency count and percentage distribution were used to describe the demographic profile of the respondents. Weighted mean was utilized to determine the level of learner-related determinants affecting English reading comprehension and instructional and school-related determinants affecting English vocabulary performance. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson r) was employed to determine the significant relationship between the identified determinants and students' English reading comprehension and vocabulary performance. All analyses were conducted at the 0.05 level of significance. The interpretation of correlation coefficients was used to determine the strength and direction of relationships among variables.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Profile and Determinants of English Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Performance

3.1.1 Demographic Profile of Struggling Grade 7 and Grade 8 Students

The respondents consisted of 30 students. Most were 13 years old (43.33%), followed by 14-year-old students (30.00%) and 12-year-old students (26.67%), with no respondents aged 15 years and above. Female students comprised 53.33% of the respondents, while males represented 46.67%. Grade level distribution was equal, with 50.00% from Grade 7 and 50.00% from Grade 8. These findings indicate a balanced distribution of respondents across sex and grade level and reflect the expected age range of junior high school learners. Such representation supports a broader understanding of literacy-related experiences among struggling students.

3.1.2 Reading Motivation as a Learner-Related Determinant of English Reading Comprehension

The findings showed a high level of reading motivation among students, with an overall weighted mean of 3.49 interpreted as Strongly Agree. Students most strongly agreed that they continue reading English texts even when difficult, followed by interest in improving reading skills. Teacher encouragement received the lowest, although still strongly positive, response. These results indicate that motivation plays an important role in sustaining engagement and persistence in reading activities. Students who value reading and continue despite challenges demonstrate stronger readiness to improve comprehension skills. This finding is supported by Li and Gan (2022)¹, who found that reading motivation significantly predicts students' reading comprehension and literacy development.

3.1.3 Study Habits as a Learner-Related Determinant of English Reading Comprehension

Students generally demonstrated positive study habits with an overall weighted mean of 3.37 interpreted as Strongly Agree. Reviewing reading activities before assessments received the highest responses, followed by completing assignments and understanding unfamiliar words. Spending time studying at home received the lowest agreement. The findings suggest that consistent academic routines support comprehension and vocabulary development. Active engagement in reviewing and independent reading practices contributes to stronger learning outcomes. This result supports Panday and Napil (2024)², who emphasized that study skills and reading habits significantly influence language learning and comprehension.

3.1.4 Language Exposure as a Learner-Related Determinant of English Reading Comprehension

Language exposure obtained an overall weighted mean of 2.96 interpreted as Agree, indicating moderate exposure to English. Students reported strongest exposure through English movies, shows, and videos, while speaking English during class activities received the lowest response. These findings suggest that students interact with English more frequently through media than through direct communication. Expanding opportunities for language use may strengthen literacy performance and language familiarity. This finding is supported by the International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (2024)³, which found that frequent engagement with reading and language activities improves comprehension and familiarity with language structures.

3.2 Instructional and School-Related Determinants Affecting English Vocabulary Performance

3.2.1 Teaching Strategies Supporting Vocabulary Development

Teaching strategies received an overall weighted mean of 3.47 interpreted as Strongly Agree. Students rated teacher encouragement to ask questions highest, followed by support in understanding new English words and activities that improve comprehension. These findings indicate that instructional support positively influences vocabulary acquisition and learner participation. Effective classroom practices create opportunities for deeper understanding and engagement with English learning. This finding is supported by Nguyen (2022)⁴, who emphasized that questioning, guided instruction, and interactive teaching significantly improve comprehension and student engagement.

3.2.2 Availability of Reading Materials Supporting Vocabulary Development

The availability of reading materials obtained an overall weighted mean of 2.69 interpreted as Agree. Students acknowledged that available materials support vocabulary growth but expressed disagreement regarding adequate access to reading resources and classroom materials. These findings suggest that while existing materials contribute to learning, limitations in accessibility may restrict opportunities for vocabulary expansion and comprehension improvement. This result is supported by Balantekin (2025)⁵, who emphasized that access to varied reading materials improves motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and reading performance.

3.2.3 Classroom Learning Environment and Vocabulary Performance

The classroom learning environment received an overall weighted mean of 3.09 interpreted as Agree. Students reported that the classroom supports concentration and creates a comfortable reading environment, although some hesitation during participation remained. These findings indicate that supportive classroom conditions enhance engagement and facilitate literacy development. Creating a more encouraging and participatory environment may further improve reading confidence and vocabulary growth. This finding is supported by Zhihua and Ramakrishnan (2024)⁶, who found that supportive classroom environments positively influence reading motivation and comprehension.

3.3 Relationship Between Determinants and English Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Performance

The analysis revealed a computed r-value of 0.58, indicating a moderate positive linear relationship between identified determinants and English reading comprehension and vocabulary performance. Since the computed value exceeded the critical value of ± 0.3610 at the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis was rejected, confirming a statistically significant relationship. The findings indicate that increased reading motivation, stronger study habits, and greater language exposure are associated with improved reading comprehension and vocabulary performance. These results emphasize the importance of strengthening learner engagement and literacy-related behaviors. This finding is supported by Taboada Barber et al. (2021)⁷, which found that motivation and engagement significantly influence reading comprehension and academic achievement.

3.4 Significant Predictors of English Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Performance

Among the identified determinants, reading motivation emerged as the strongest predictor with a weighted mean of 3.49, followed by study habits at 3.37 and language exposure at 2.96. The overall weighted mean of 3.27 suggests that these variables collectively influence literacy outcomes. These findings imply that motivated learners who maintain effective study behaviors and experience greater English exposure are more likely to achieve stronger reading comprehension and vocabulary performance. Reading motivation emerged as the most influential determinant. This finding is supported by Kim and Pilcher (2021)⁸, who identified reading motivation and engagement as strong predictors of reading achievement and literacy development.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concluded that the respondents represented a typical and balanced junior high school population of struggling readers, with most being 13 years old, a slightly higher proportion of female students, and equal representation from Grades 7 and 8. Learners demonstrated high reading motivation and positive study habits, while language exposure remained moderate. Instructional practices and classroom learning conditions generally supported reading and vocabulary development; however, limited access to reading materials remained a concern. The findings further established a statistically significant moderate positive relationship between reading motivation, study habits, language exposure, and English reading comprehension and vocabulary performance. Among these determinants, reading motivation emerged as the strongest predictor, indicating that learner engagement, study practices, and opportunities for language use collectively contribute to improved literacy outcomes.

Based on the findings, teachers may design differentiated reading activities that consider learners' age, grade level, and sex to support varied learning needs. Schools may strengthen students' English language exposure through literacy-related activities and increase the accessibility of appropriate reading materials to support vocabulary and comprehension development. Teachers may continue implementing learner-centered practices that promote reading motivation and

effective study habits, while intervention efforts may prioritize strengthening motivation together with study habits and language exposure to improve students' English reading comprehension and vocabulary performance. This study was limited to 30 struggling Grade 7 and Grade 8 students enrolled at Panan-awan Integrated School and focused only on selected learner-related determinants and instructional or school-related factors affecting English reading comprehension and vocabulary performance. The findings reflect the conditions and experiences of the respondents within the study setting and period and may not be fully generalized to other schools or learner populations with different educational contexts and characteristics.

Compliance with ethical standards

This study was conducted following a systematic research process that included proposal preparation, instrument validation, formal permission to conduct the study, administration of questionnaires, and statistical analysis of collected responses. Permission to conduct the study was formally requested and secured through the Schools Division Superintendent of Masbate Province and the administration of Panan-awan Integrated School. Data collection was limited to the identified respondents and carried out in accordance with the approved research procedures.

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