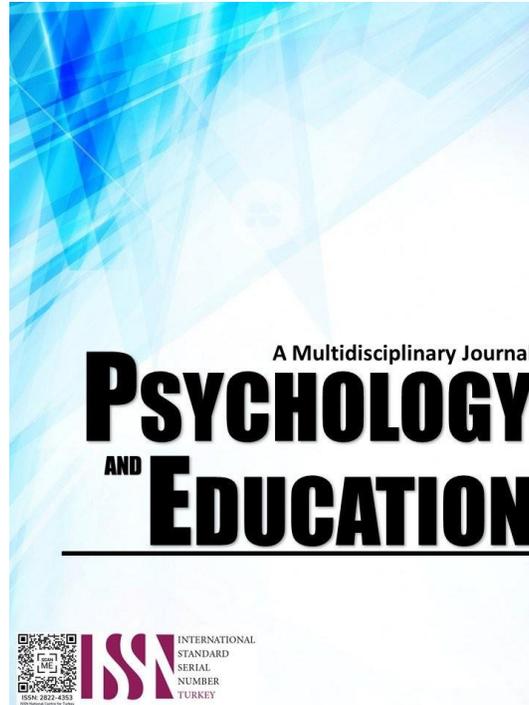


# ENHANCING READING SKILLS AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN GRADE 7 STUDENTS: A HOLISTIC INVESTIGATION



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## Enhancing Reading Skills and Academic Performance in Grade 7 Students: A Holistic Investigation

Maria Brenia I. Mariano\*

For affiliations and correspondence, see the last page.

### Abstract

The study examined the reading skills and academic performance of 65 Grade 7 students of Santa Maria National High School for school year 2022-2023. The quasi-experimental time series method technique was used in collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data. Checklists for the profile and questionnaire for the reading skills of the students were used as data gathering instrument of the study. Frequency and percentage were used in analyzing the profile and level of academic performance, mean and standard deviation for the level of reading skills and to find out the average academic performance, Mann Whitney U test, Kruskal Wallis H test, and Spearman Rank Correlation to find out the relationship between the students' level of reading skills and academic performance. The mean score difference between pretest ( $M=2.17$ ) and posttest ( $M=2.48$ ) was 0.3, indicating developing reading skills. Furthermore, the study also revealed that the academic performance of the students was significantly related to their reading skills level. The results of this study saw the importance of reading as an important factor contributory to a student's academic success. To address this problem, a school-based reading program that would enhance the students reading skills with special focus on the skill of generalizing has been deemed necessary to improve the reading skill level of the students.

**Keywords:** *reading, reading skills, comprehension, academic performance*

### Introduction

Reading is a foundational skill for academic success. As a macro skill, it includes many readings sub-skills that would facilitate comprehension (Ramachandran, 2022). The mastery of these skills leads to the development of reading comprehension, an important skill in English that a student must master. The ability to understand what is read profoundly shapes a student's academic progress in all subject areas.

In the Philippines, the K-12 curriculum put focus on literature, and for a student to be able to understand the concepts presented, he should possess the reading skills needed because in Junior High School (JHS), literary appreciation is highlighted with increasing level of difficulty as he moved up in various grade levels. Grade 7 studies Philippine Literature while Grade 8 dissects Afro-Asian Literature. On the other hand, American Literature is studied in Grade 9 and World Literature in Grade 10. (Department of Education, 2012).

It is appalling to know that there were problems with literacy in the secondary level which was manifested in the January 2016 report of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Records showed that Filipino learners lagged in reading comprehension, thereby placing our country in the bottom rank among participating countries.

In the Philippines, despite a decrease of 3.77% in youth illiteracy in the year 2013 to the year 2015, there were still 349,974 students who cannot both write and read and lacked comprehension skills even in short simple narratives (Knoema.com, 2015). Furthermore, despite the efforts of the Department of Education (DepEd) in launching "Every Child A Reader Program (ECARP) and the declaration of November as National Reading Month to promote reading and literacy among the learners, still, 60.77 percent of the elementary pupils were at the frustration level of reading which was shown in the Phil-IRI results, (Quirino,2021).

In Santa Maria National High School where the researcher is teaching during this study, 80% of the Grade 7 students ranked lowest, categorized as frustration in the 2022 Brigada Pabasa using the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI).

The above-mentioned situation greatly affected the school's annual academic performance since one of the gauges of a performing school is the National Achievement Test (NAT) results. This type of test has most areas that rely heavily on reading and reading skills are crucial for success in such standardized assessments.

Hence, the researcher was enticed to determine the reading skills that STAMANAHIS students need to enhance so that they could be able to pass standardized tests like NAT with flying colors thereby boosting the school's level of performance to pave the way to the realization of the SDG Number 4.

### Research Questions

This purpose of the study is to know the relationship between the reading skills and the academic performance of the grade 7 students of Santa Maria High School of Concepcion Norte, Santa Maria, Romblon for the school year 2022-2023. A reading remediation module will be created using the results of the study as basis. Precisely, it aimed to give answers to these questions:

1. What is the profile of the students in terms of age, sex, parents' highest educational attainment, monthly family income, different reading materials available at home, reading materials for general reference, weighted average of previous grade level, preferred learning modality during the pandemic, and the use of Mother Tongue?
2. What was the students' level of reading skills in terms of understanding the words, finding facts and details, finding the main idea, making inferences, figuring out the sequence, finding cause and effect, generalizing, identifying mood/tone, identifying theme, identifying characterization, distinguishing fact from fiction, and finding bias or propaganda?
3. What was the student's academic performance level when grouped as outstanding, very satisfactory, satisfactory, fairly satisfactory, and did not meet expectations?
4. Was there a significant difference in the students' level of reading skills when grouped according to their profile variables?
5. Was there a significant difference in the students' level of academic performance when grouped according to their profile variables?
6. Was there a significant relationship between the students' reading skills and their academic performance?
7. What reading remediation module can be designed from the results of the study?

## Literature Review

### *Reading Skills and Academic Performance*

Reading plays critical role as a foundational skill across various learning domains, as articulated by Ramachandran (2022). This assertion is supported by the works of Maxom (2009), Morrow (2003), and Nuhan (2014), who collectively emphasized that reading is one of the four essential components of language acquisition. Mastery of reading is posited to significantly enhance competencies in listening, speaking, and writing, aligning with the objectives outlined in the Department of Education (DepEd) curriculum.

Empirical evidences further substantiate the correlation between reading skills and academic performance. For instance, Cadiz-Gabejan (2021) conducted a study revealing that students with advanced reading skills consistently achieved higher academic outcomes compared to their peers with average reading abilities. Similarly, Taha (2021) explored the impact of reading skills in a remote area of the United Arab Emirates, finding that students who excelled in reading were better equipped to comprehend questions and communicate effectively, thereby enhancing their overall academic engagement. This perspective is echoed by Issa et al. (2020), who argue that proficient reading skills have a profound influence on students' academic success.

The collective findings from these studies highlight the necessity of fostering strong reading abilities as a means to improve educational outcomes and facilitate effective communication in academic settings.

In summary, the literature presents a compelling case for the prioritization of reading skills within educational frameworks, as they are integral to the development of comprehensive language proficiency and academic achievement.

## Methodology

### Participants

The participants for this qualitative study are 65 Grade 7 students who are selected through stratified simple random sampling. They were in their fourth grade when the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the schools to shut down. With the Modular Print Learning Modality implemented in the schools in the municipality of Santa Maria, learning was disrupted and resulted to the decline in the reading skills of the students. This problem was carried over when they reached Junior High School. The researcher believed that to address this decline, the least mastered skills in reading should be identified in order to design an appropriate intervention regarding the problem.

The sample size was identified using the Parel et. al's formula in David (2005) as follows:

$$n = \frac{NZ^2(p(1-p))}{Nd^2}$$

### Instrument

A researcher – constructed questionnaires validated by experts served as a data gathering instrument for this study. Its objective to give answer to the first two questions in the study.

The first part gathered data on the students' profile in terms of age, sex, parents' highest educational attainment, monthly family income, number of different reading materials available at home, reading materials for general reference, preferred learning modality during the pandemic, use of mother tongue, and weighted average of previous grade level.

The second part identified their reading skills based on the classification of Bernardo in terms of the following: understanding the words; finding facts and details; finding main ideas; figuring out the sequence; finding cause and effect; making inferences; generalizing; identifying mood/tone; identifying theme; identifying characterization; distinguishing fact from fiction; and finding bias or propaganda. Five questions were prepared for every skill which will be answerable by following the instructions for every section.

The data on the academic performance was taken from the form 138 (SF 9) of the students of their previous grade level.

## Procedure

Prior to the conduct of the study, the researcher secured a permit from the Schools Division Superintendent of SDO Romblon for the conduct of a pilot test and actual study. Then, the researcher asked for the permission of the school principal of STAMANAHIS because the study would involve the Grade 7 students of the school. After this, a pilot test was conducted among 30 grade 7 students in order to make sure that the instruments for the study are reliable and valid.

Next, the administration of the Pre-Test was done on January 16, 2023. Here, the students were given instructions on how to answer the sixty-item test in reading skills. A time limit of one-hour was given to the examinees for them to have an ample time reading and answering the test. After this, the papers were collected and checked.

Then, intervention was given. The twelve reading skills were taught to students and emphasis was given to the skills with low scores based from the pretest results. This lasted for 14 weeks.

Post test was administered on April 21, 2023, using the same set of questions under a one-hour time limit. The collection of questionnaires was done by the researcher to ensure a hundred percentage retrieval. The respondents' attendance was checked for the purpose of tracking down learners who were not able to take the test during the testing date.

## Ethical Considerations

This section described the ethical considerations the researcher employed in data collection.

Upon informing the parent-respondents of the objectives, and acquiring their consent in participating in the study, significant limitations of the study was discussed to ensure transparency of the study. It was also clarified to the student and parent/guardian respondents that no compensation, monetary or in-kind would be given for their participation.

The researcher acquired all the necessary permissions under the Department of Education to use data from the schools' data records. Privacy and confidentiality were highly exercised.

## Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings, interpretation, and analysis of the data gathered. The presentation of results was in tabular and textual form. Discussion, analysis, and interpretation were in accordance with the information sought for and stated in the statement of the problem.

### Profile of the Students

The findings of the study are presented in Matrices generated from the thematic analysis.

Table 1 shows that in terms of the students' profile it was found out that majority of the students were 13 years old and above and the mean age was 12.58. Most of the students were females. The parents' highest educational attainment was college level with mean years of 11.56 or second-year college. The students' monthly family income was below poverty threshold. Textbooks ranked as the highest as to quantity of different reading materials available at home. Language topped the list in terms of the reading materials for general reference. Majority of the students were very satisfactory based on their weighted average of previous grade level. If given the chance to choose the learning modality during the pandemic, respondents opted for blended learning than modular print which was the school's learning modality. The students were comfortable in using mother tongue when communicating with friends and teachers in the school.

Table 1. *Profile of the Students*

<i>Profile</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Age		
12 years old and below	27	42
13 years old and above	38	59
Mean Age = 12.58		
Sex		
Male	27	42
Female	38	58
Parent's Educational Attainment		
Elementary	15	23
Secondary	14	22
College	30	46
Masters	6	9
Mean years = 11.56 or Second Year College		
Monthly Family Income		
Below Poverty Threshold (P6,000 and below)	30	46



Poverty Threshold (P6,001 – P12,000)	20	31
Average Income (P12,001 and above)	15	23
Mean Family Income = P8,308.08		
Different Reading Materials Available at Home		
Atlas	12	19
Magazines	10	15
Manuals/Brochures	8	12
Textbooks	30	46
Academic Journals	5	8
Reading Materials for General Reference		
General Works	4	6
Philosophy	3	5
Religion	3	5
Social Science	4	6
Language	18	28
Pure Science	12	19
Applied Science	2	3
Fine Arts	9	14
Literature	5	8
History	5	8
Weighted Average of Previous Grade Level		
Fairly Satisfactory	1	2
Satisfactory	17	26
Very Satisfactory	28	43
Outstanding	19	29
Preferred Learning Modality During the Pandemic		
Modular Print	24	37
Online	5	8
Blended	36	55
Use of Mother Tongue		
Classroom Interaction	25	39
Communicating with Teachers/Friends	40	61
Total	65	100

Table 2 shows the level of reading skills of the students based on the mean score of the pretest and post-test. The reading skill finding facts and details was in proficiency level while three (3) reading skills were classified approaching proficiency. These were finding main idea, finding cause and effect, and distinguishing fact from opinion. On the other hand, majority of the reading skills fall under developing level, these were understanding the, finding main idea, making inferences, figuring out the sequence, generalizing, identifying mood/tone, identifying theme, identifying characterization, and finding bias or propaganda.

When taken as a whole, the overall reading skill of the students was at the developing level both in pretest (mean=2.17) and posttest (mean=2.48); with a mean difference of 0.31. It was noted that there was a negligible increase in the overall reading skills.

Based on this level, it suggested that the students’ reading skill was very basic or foundational. From the Department of Education (DepEd’s) standard of reading level, they could be categorized under developing reading which was good for the lower elementary level. Since they were already in junior high school, their reading skill could have affected their academic performance since reading materials in high school already required a higher level of reading skills. Thus, it could be concluded that students had difficulty coping with the academic demands of their current grade level and is manifested in their academic performance.

In the Table, the reading skill of identifying characterization has an SD of 1.39 in the posttest. This suggests that the students have varied levels of understanding on the said skill. Further, it could be gleaned that the other reading skills have low standard deviation which suggests that the scores are clustered closely around the mean, indicating consistency in performance. This information can help educators identify which skills may require more targeted instruction or support in order for them to tailor interventions that would meet the diverse needs of students.

Table 2. Reading Skills of the Students

	Pre-Test				Post Test				Mean Difference
	Mean Score	Rank	SD	Verbal Int.	Mean Score	Rank	SD	Verbal Int.	
Understanding the Words	1.73	9	1.17	D	2.44	5	1.25	D	0.71
Finding Facts and Details	3.81	1	1.17	P	3.86	1	1.08	P	0.05
Finding Main Idea	2.52	4	1.21	AP	2.69	4	1.07	AP	0.17
Making Inferences	1.75	8	1.23	D	2.07	10	1.16	D	0.32
Figuring Out the Sequence	2.13	5	1.08	D	2.35	6	1.11	D	0.22
Finding Cause and Effect	3.03	2	1.39	AP	3.09	2	1.23	AP	0.06



Generalizing	1.63	10	1.09	D	2.03	11	1.08	D	0.40
Identifying Mood/Tone	1.86	7	1.14	D	2.16	8	1.06	D	0.30
Identifying Theme	2.00	6	1.22	D	2.32	7	1.10	D	0.32
Identifying Characterization	1.10	12	1.32	B	1.63	12	1.39	D	0.53
Distinguishing Fact from Fiction	2.95	3	1.29	AP	2.95	3	1.30	AP	0.00
Finding Bias or Propaganda	1.58	11	0.99	D	2.15	9	1.18	D	0.57
Overall Reading Skill	2.17			D	2.48			D	0.31

Legend: 0.00–1.25, Beginning (B); 1.26–2.50, Developing (D); 2.51–3.75, Approaching Proficiency (AP); 3.76–5.00, Proficiency (P).

Table 3 presents that the highest percentage of the students had a very satisfactory level of academic performance while the others performed outstandingly and satisfactorily. The even lower SD in this category (86.82) indicates that students are performing closely around the mean. This suggests a strong and consistent level of reading skills and academic performance among these students. The proximity of their grades may reflect effective teaching strategies or a solid grasp of the material, which can be encouraging for educators and indicate that these students are likely to succeed in future academic endeavors.

Table 3. Level of Academic Performance of the Students

	f	%	Mean Grade	SD
Grand Mean			86.74	
Satisfactory (80 – 84)	18	27.69	82.11	1.81
Very Satisfactory (85-89)	28	43.08	86.82	1.33
Outstanding (90 – 100)	19	29.23	91.00	1.24
Total	65	100		

Table 4 exhibits the correlation between students' reading skills, particularly generalizing, and their academic performance. It reports a weak correlation ( $r = .394, p = .001$ ) between generalizing skills and academic outcomes, indicating that proficiency in higher-order thinking is essential for academic success in a literature-based K to 12 curricula.

Bloom (1956) asserts that evaluative thinking requires a foundational understanding of factual information, which encompasses knowledge acquisition and critical analysis. The findings suggest that students' academic performance reflects their ability to generalize effectively. Vygotsky (1978) posits that social interaction is crucial for cognitive development, facilitating the adjustment of perceptions necessary for active learning and improved academic performance. Active learning is one of the higher-order thinking skills

Additionally, post-test results indicate a moderate correlation ( $r = .421, p = .000$ ) between generalizing skills and academic performance, while inference skills ( $r = .256, p = .39$ ) and bias/propaganda recognition ( $r = .277, p = .026$ ) show weaker relationships. Overall, the data supports the hypothesis that enhanced reading skills correlate with better academic performance, underscoring the importance of reading comprehension and critical thinking in educational achievement

Table 4. Relationship between the Students' Reading Skills and their Academic Performance

	Pre-test			Post-test		
	Spearman Correlation	Strength of Correlation	sig	Spearman Correlation	Strength of Correlation	sig
Understanding the Words	.179	Very Weak	.154	.203	Weak	.104
Finding Facts and Details	.178	Very Weak	.156	.193	Very Weak	.123
Finding Main Idea	-.034	Very Weak	.789	.093	Very Weak	.464
Making Inferences	.104	Very Weak	.410	.256	Weak	.039*
Figuring Out the Sequence	.153	Very Weak	.224	.197	Weak	.116
Finding Cause and Effect	.207	Weak	.098	.200	Weak	.110
Generalizing	.394	Weak	.001*	.421	Moderate	.000*
Identifying Mood/Tone	.210	Weak	.094	.233	Weak	.062
Identifying Theme	.207	Weak	.098	.208	Weak	.096
Identifying Characterization	-.082	Very Weak	.514	.119	Very Weak	.346
Distinguishing Fact from Fiction	-.050	Very Weak	.691	.102	Weak	.417
Finding Bias or Propaganda	.130	Very Weak	.302	.277	Weak	.026*

\*Significant at 0.05

There was a significant relationship between the students' reading skills and their academic performance in generalizing, as shown in both pretest and posttest results. Further, a significant relationship was also found in making inferences, and identifying bias and propaganda in the posttest. Students should be given activities that will help improve their reading skills as it was paramount to academic success. By helping students develop strong reading skills, the likelihood of higher academic performance is significantly increased.

The integrated analysis of quantitative findings illuminates the complex interplay between parental engagement, access to reading resources, and students' reading skills. The study advocates for tailored interventions that address both quantitative data on the reading skills and qualitative insights from teachers and students. By fostering a supportive learning environment that nurtures literacy

development and academic success, educators can empower students to excel academically.

## Conclusions

Reading is a cornerstone in understanding all learning areas. This foundational skill not only impacts academic achievement but also plays a crucial role in preparing students in the modern workforce. Our findings highlight that students often face challenges with comprehension due to vocabulary issues, which affected their overall academic performance. Results show that students with higher vocabulary scores performed better in the posttest.

A strong literacy foundation enables students to engage with complex texts, participate in discussions, and complete assignments effectively. To help students thrive in this aspect, teachers are encouraged to implement targeted strategies like differentiated instruction and engaging reading comprehension activities to support reading development.

While reading impacts academic success, there is no denying that it fosters critical thinking skills. When students read and analyze texts, they learn to evaluate information, make connections, and develop arguments. These skills are crucial not only in academic settings but also in everyday life and the workforce, where problem-solving and critical analysis are highly valued.

In summary, literacy is not just a skill but a critical component of education that supports lifelong learning. It enhances academic achievement, fosters critical thinking, provides access to information, and empowers individuals to navigate their personal and professional lives effectively. As such, promoting literacy should be a priority in educational systems to ensure that all learners are prepared for the challenges of the future.

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### **Affiliations and Corresponding Information**

**Maria Brenia I. Mariano**  
Santa Maria National High School  
Department Of Education – Philippines