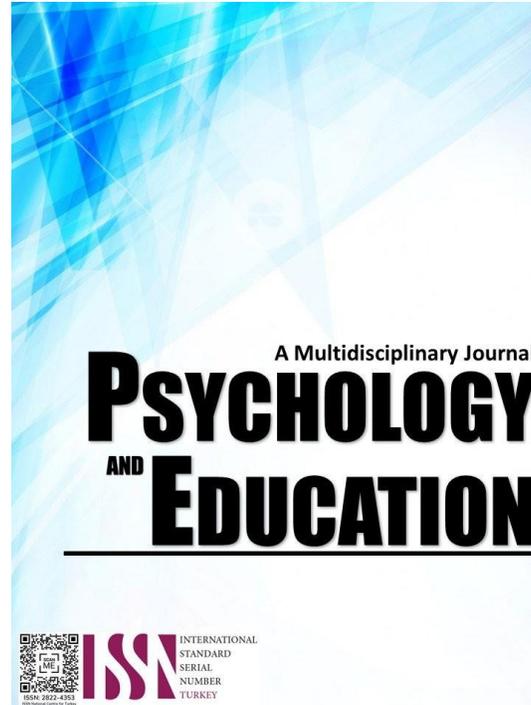


# THE USE OF PROJECT READER IN ENHANCING THE READING ABILITIES OF ELEMENTARY LEARNERS



**PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL**

Volume: 30

Issue 1

Pages: 163-174

Document ID: 2024PEMJ2844

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.14585857

Manuscript Accepted: 12-02-2024

## The Use of Project Reader In Enhancing the Reading Abilities of Elementary Learners

Marees M. Leysa,\* Preciosa D. Villacruel

For affiliations and correspondence, see the last page.

### Abstract

Reading is a cornerstone of the Philippine education system, essential for fostering foundational learning. This quantitative study investigated the effectiveness of Project READER (Reader Enhancement and Development Educational Resources) in improving the reading abilities of Grade 1 learners at Halang Elementary School, Division of Calamba City, who experienced difficulties in reading. Using a causal-comparative design with a quasi-experimental approach, standardized passages from the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) were administered as pre- and post-tests. Pre-test results revealed that learners were at frustration levels in oral reading, word recognition, and reading comprehension. After implementing Project READER, post-test scores indicated significant improvements, transitioning learners to higher levels of reading proficiency. The intervention enhanced oral reading fluency, word decoding, and comprehension, demonstrating its effectiveness in addressing reading challenges. These findings underscore the critical role of evidence-based reading programs like Project READER in bridging literacy gaps and supporting early-grade learners in achieving academic milestones. By fostering substantial progress in reading skills, this study highlights the importance of targeted interventions in creating a robust foundation for lifelong learning and success.

**Keywords:** *literacy, Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), Project READER, reading skills*

### Introduction

Reading serves as the cornerstone of education, playing a pivotal role in shaping students' academic and social success. It is a fundamental skill that transcends disciplines, enabling learners to grasp concepts in mathematics, science, and other subjects, even there are different learning styles (Gonzales & Villacruel, 2024). However, reading proficiency among primary learners remains a persistent challenge in the Philippine educational system. According to Jordan and Tabernilla (2023), many primary learners encounter moderate reading difficulties, requiring additional instructional support to fully comprehend texts. This highlights the pressing need for effective strategies and interventions to bolster students' reading abilities.

The urgency of addressing reading challenges is further underscored by findings from Tomas et al. (2021), who reported that many learners experience frustration due to difficulties in reading comprehension. Factors such as the absence of a reading culture, a lack of parental engagement, and the presence of at-risk students contribute to this issue. Similarly, Abejuela et al. (2023) identified a significant number of struggling readers compared to independent ones. Addressing these challenges necessitates a comprehensive approach involving educators, parents, and the community. Research by Adapon and Mangila (2020) suggests that parental involvement in reading programs significantly enhances students' reading capabilities, emphasizing the value of collaborative efforts in fostering literacy.

To institutionalize efforts in improving reading proficiency, the Department of Education (DepEd) issued Memorandum No. 173, s. 2019, mandating schools to implement reading programs aimed at ensuring that every child becomes a proficient reader. Despite these initiatives, national assessments reveal that significant gaps persist, with many learners failing to meet grade-level reading standards. Santos and De Vera (2020) emphasized the efficacy of the Marungko Approach in teaching reading to Grade 1 learners, while Silva et al. (2023) highlighted the benefits of reading aloud as a strategy to improve reading proficiency. These findings underscore the importance of employing diverse and evidence-based methods to address the varying needs of learners.

In line with DepEd Order No. 14, s. 2018, the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) serves as a diagnostic tool to assess learners' reading abilities. This evaluation framework aligns with the goals of the Every Child A Reader Program (ECARP), enabling educators to tailor interventions based on students' individual needs. Recent policy initiatives, such as DepEd Order No. 001, s. 2024, introduced "Catch-Up Fridays" to reinforce learning and address knowledge gaps, further emphasizing the government's commitment to improving literacy outcomes.

Beyond policy interventions, community engagement plays a crucial role in fostering a culture of reading. Mirasol and Topacio (2021) observed that while parents recognize the value of reading for their children's development, limited access to reading materials and financial constraints often hinder their involvement. Programs such as those evaluated by Abeberese et al. (2021), which provided age-appropriate reading materials during a 31-day read-a-thon, demonstrated positive effects on students' reading abilities, both during and after the program. These findings highlight the potential of community-based initiatives to complement formal educational efforts.

Despite these advancements, significant challenges remain. Tomas et al. (2021) identified low satisfaction levels among students in their reading abilities, attributing this to an absence of a reading culture and insufficient comprehension skills. To address these issues, contextualized reading curricula and literacy programs must be developed, as suggested by Roomy and Alhawsawi (2019). Ensuring

students' active engagement with reading materials is essential to fostering sustained interest and improving comprehension skills.

The importance of cultivating a growth mindset among learners, as highlighted by Bernardo (2021), further underscores the need for holistic interventions. A growth mindset, characterized by the belief that intelligence can be developed through effort, has been shown to positively impact students' academic performance. Integrating this perspective into reading programs can motivate learners to persist in overcoming challenges.

However, the systemic nature of reading difficulties requires a broader approach. According to Lang-Ay and Sannadan (2021), educational systems that fail to consider the cultural and linguistic contexts of learners often struggle to achieve desired outcomes. This is particularly relevant in multilingual settings like the Philippines, where language barriers can exacerbate reading challenges.

Reading comprehension lies at the heart of effective learning, serving as a vital skill for students to navigate academic and real-world challenges. Beyond decoding words, reading involves processing information, synthesizing ideas, and drawing meaningful conclusions. Thus, fostering both reading fluency and comprehension is essential to preparing learners for lifelong learning.

The Department of Education's initiatives, such as the Hamon: Bawat Bata Bumabasa (3B's Initiative) and Project DREAM, emphasize the importance of ensuring that no learner is left behind. These programs aim to enhance reading proficiency through targeted interventions and collaborative efforts among educators, parents, and stakeholders. Halang Elementary School's Project READER (Reader Enhancement and Development Educational Resources) aligns with these initiatives by focusing on improving the reading abilities of Grade 1 learners through innovative strategies and activities.

Despite these efforts, national assessments, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), reveal alarming statistics. The Philippines ranked among the lowest in reading proficiency, with 80% of students failing to meet the minimum standard (Schleicher, 2018, as cited by Post, 2020). This underscores the need for systemic reforms to address gaps in reading instruction and curriculum design. Furthermore, the National Report of the Philippines (2019) identified poor performance in reading as a significant barrier to students' success in other subjects, such as science and mathematics.

To bridge these gaps, Project READER incorporates evidence-based practices and diagnostic tools, such as the Phil-IRI, to assess and address learners' reading needs. The program also draws on insights from research, such as the findings of Cubillas and Ventura (2019), who advocated for effective reading intervention strategies to combat recurring problems in comprehension. By leveraging these resources, Halang Elementary School seeks to empower learners to achieve their full potential.

The need for targeted interventions is further highlighted by the school's recent report, which identified 62 non-readers and 53 struggling readers among its Grade 1 enrollees. These findings underscore the urgency of implementing comprehensive reading programs to support at-risk learners. Through Project READER, the school aims to foster a culture of literacy and provide learners with the tools they need to succeed academically and socially.

This study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of Project READER in improving the reading abilities of Grade 1 learners at Halang Elementary School. By comparing the reading performance of learners before and after the implementation of the program, the research aims to identify the specific benefits and challenges associated with this intervention. Ultimately, the study seeks to contribute to the development of evidence-based practices that can inform future literacy initiatives.

Through this study, the researcher hopes to address the recurring challenges in reading comprehension and proficiency, providing insights that can guide the design and implementation of reading programs in similar contexts. By fostering a deeper understanding of the factors influencing reading success, this research aims to support the broader goal of achieving quality basic education for all learners.

## Research Questions

This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of Project READER (Reader Enhancement and Development Educational Resources) as an intervention to enhance the reading abilities of elementary learners, specifically Grade 1 students. The study sought to address the following research questions.

1. What are the pretest scores of Grade 1 learners per passage prior to the implementation of Project READER in terms of:
  - 1.1. oral reading;
  - 1.2. word reading; and
  - 1.3. reading comprehension?
2. What are the posttest scores of Grade 1 learners per passage after the implementation of Project READER in terms of:
  - 2.1. oral reading;
  - 2.2. word reading; and
  - 2.3. reading comprehension?
3. Is there a significant mean difference between the pretest and posttest scores of learners after the implementation of Project READER?
4. What recommendations can be proposed to further enhance the implementation of Project READER?

## Methodology

This study utilized a causal-comparative research design with a quasi-experimental approach to evaluate the effectiveness of Project READER (Reader Enhancement and Development Educational Resources) in enhancing the reading abilities of Grade 1 learners. The quasi-experimental design was chosen because it aimed to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between the independent variable (Project READER intervention) and the dependent variable (reading performance). According to Thomas et al. (2020), the experimental design is ideal for studies seeking to determine the impact of specific interventions on learner outcomes. In this case, pretest and posttest data were collected to measure the learners' performance before and after implementing Project READER.

A quasi-experimental research design was deemed appropriate because it accommodates naturally occurring groups rather than random assignment, which is often challenging in educational settings. As noted by Eliopoulos et al. (2004, as cited by Barnes, 2019), quasi-experimental designs are flexible and suitable for real-world scenarios, such as evaluating the efficacy of educational interventions. This study, conducted in a natural classroom environment, employed a single-group pretest-posttest design. Learners in the experimental group participated in Project READER, with pretest and posttest scores analyzed to determine any significant mean differences in reading abilities.

The study was conducted in a public elementary school in Calamba, Laguna, during the 2023–2024 academic year. The research population consisted of Grade 1 learners, totaling 189 students across five sections. Among these learners, 62 were identified as nonreaders and 53 as struggling readers in Filipino, based on recent school reports. The study focused on this population to assess whether the intervention could address reading challenges effectively.

This study utilized complete enumeration, wherein the entire population of Grade 1 learners served as respondents. This approach was appropriate given the manageable size of the population and the need for comprehensive data. Complete enumeration allowed for a thorough assessment of the intervention's impact across the entire Grade 1 cohort, ensuring reliable and inclusive results.

The primary tool used in this study was Project READER, a reading enhancement program tailored for Grade 1 learners. To assess the learners' reading abilities, the researcher utilized standardized passages from the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), including four stories: *Laro Tayo*, *Ano ang Nasa Mesa?*, *Ang Papaya at Kamote*, and *Sa Sapa*.

The reading assessment included components from the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), which measured various aspects of reading skills, such as orientation to print, letter name knowledge, letter sound knowledge, first sound awareness, first word recognition, oral passage reading, reading comprehension, and listening and dictation. The pretest and posttest materials were validated by a master teacher and Filipino language specialists to ensure reliability and appropriateness. Validation procedures included aligning the materials with DepEd standards and conducting expert reviews.

The researcher secured approval from the President of Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng San Pablo and the Graduate School Dean to conduct the study. Formal permission was also obtained from the Division Superintendent and the principal of Halang Elementary School. Following the approval process, the researcher conducted an orientation for school administrators, teachers, and parents to explain the study's objectives, significance, and processes.

The study began with a pretest administered to all Grade 1 learners identified as nonreaders or struggling readers. The pretest evaluated their oral reading, word reading, and reading comprehension skills using Phil-IRI materials. Afterward, Project READER was implemented over a set period. The program included guided reading sessions, interactive activities, and tailored lessons designed to address specific reading challenges.

Throughout the intervention, the researcher maintained detailed lesson logs to record instructional activities, learner progress, and observations. At the end of the intervention period, a posttest was administered using the same Phil-IRI passages to measure improvements in reading abilities. The collected pretest and posttest data were then logged, organized, and analyzed.

Data analysis involved descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to evaluate the effectiveness of Project READER. The mean and standard deviation were used to describe the learners' reading performance during the pretest and posttest. The mean provided a centralized measure of the learners' performance, while the standard deviation assessed the variability or dispersion of scores. Percentages were also used to express proportions and distributions in the data. To determine whether there was a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores, a paired-sample t-test was conducted. This statistical test assessed whether the mean difference observed in the learners' reading performance could be attributed to the intervention.

The study adhered to ethical standards to ensure the safety and well-being of the learners. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from the parents or guardians of the learners. The researcher also sought the cooperation of school administrators and Grade 1 teachers, ensuring transparency and inclusivity throughout the process.

To protect the learners' psychological well-being, the researcher avoided comparisons or activities that could cause undue stress or harm their self-esteem. Instead, the intervention focused on positive reinforcement and encouragement to foster a love for reading. Special attention was given to learners with diverse backgrounds or learning difficulties, ensuring they received adequate support and resources. This approach promoted equity and upheld the ethical responsibility to nurture each child's potential compassionately and

inclusively.

## Results and Discussion

Table 1. *Mean Pre-test Scores in Oral Reading*

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Verbal Interpretation</i>
Passage 1	85	Frustration
Passage 2	83	Frustration
Passage 3	85	Frustration
Passage 4	84	Frustration
Overall	84	Frustration

The findings presented in Table 1 reveal a notable level of frustration among learners when assessed in oral reading during the pretest phase, with an overall mean score of 84, categorized as "Frustration." Among the specific passages, Passages 1 and 3 attained the highest mean score of 85, while Passage 2 recorded the lowest mean score of 83, all of which are consistently interpreted as "Frustration." These results suggest that oral reading remains a significant challenge for Grade 1 learners at this stage, requiring targeted interventions to address their literacy development.

The consistent classification of "Frustration" across all passages underscores a potential commonality in the learners' reading challenges. Passage 1, written in the form of a short rhyming poem, appeared particularly difficult for learners. This can be attributed to the developmental nature of early literacy skills, where phonemic awareness—the ability to identify and manipulate sounds within words—is still emerging. As noted by Robinson et al. (2019), younger learners, particularly those in early elementary grades, benefit more from oral reading than silent reading due to the engagement of auditory and verbal processing skills. However, these benefits are contingent on their ability to accurately decode and comprehend the text, which remains a significant hurdle for struggling readers.

The phonetic structure of Passage 1 may have contributed to the frustration level. Short rhyming poems often rely on patterns of similar sounds, which can pose difficulties for learners still mastering phonemic distinctions. For example, consonant sounds like "N" and "M" or "M" and "T" may be confused due to their acoustic similarity. This phonemic overlap can lead to decoding errors, disrupting fluency and comprehension. Additionally, rhyming passages often require learners to anticipate or infer the next word based on rhyme patterns, a skill that developing readers may find overwhelming.

In comparison, Passage 2, which scored the lowest mean (83), may have presented unique challenges such as unfamiliar vocabulary or complex sentence structures. These factors could impede learners' ability to decode and comprehend the text. This aligns with the assertion by Robinson et al. (2019) that reading modality—whether oral or silent—and time significantly influence comprehension. Early elementary students, like those in this study, often experience greater success in comprehension when reading aloud, as the process engages multiple sensory modalities. However, the results indicate that this advantage does not entirely mitigate their frustration, especially when confronted with text complexity or unfamiliar phonetic patterns.

The findings also highlight the importance of considering developmental stages when designing reading materials and assessments. Robinson et al. (2019) emphasized that reading comprehension interacts strongly with the developmental stage and reading modality. In early elementary grades, learners' oral reading skills are closely tied to their cognitive and linguistic development. Factors such as working memory, phonological processing, and attention span can significantly influence their ability to read fluently and comprehend text. The observed frustration levels may thus reflect a mismatch between the learners' current developmental capabilities and the demands of the reading passages.

To address these challenges, educators should adopt a differentiated approach to literacy instruction. For instance, incorporating explicit phonics instruction and phonemic awareness activities can help learners develop the skills needed to distinguish similar sounds and decode words accurately. Additionally, the selection of reading materials should consider the learners' developmental stage, prioritizing texts with controlled vocabulary, repetitive patterns, and simple sentence structures to build confidence and fluency.

The findings also call for further investigation into the specific factors contributing to the learners' frustration. Variables such as prior exposure to reading, home literacy environment, and instructional strategies employed in the classroom could all play a role in shaping their reading abilities. Moreover, implementing interventions like guided reading or paired reading, where learners receive scaffolded support, may help alleviate frustration and foster positive reading experiences.

Table 2. *Mean Pre-test Scores in Word Reading*

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Verbal Interpretation</i>
Passage 1	66	Frustration
Passage 2	65	Frustration
Passage 3	53	Frustration
Passage 4	55	Frustration
Overall	60	Frustration

The results in Table 2 highlight a significant level of frustration among learners in word reading, as evidenced by the overall pre-test mean score of 60, categorized as "Frustration." Passage 1 recorded the highest mean score of 66, while Passage 3 received the lowest

mean of 53, both interpreted within the same frustration category. These findings suggest that word reading remains a persistent challenge for learners, indicating the need for tailored instructional approaches to address their specific difficulties.

The pronounced frustration levels, particularly in Passage 3, may be attributed to various factors, including the learners' limited background knowledge and familiarity with certain words. For example, terms such as "papaya" and "kamote" may have posed difficulties due to unfamiliarity or lack of exposure in everyday contexts. This aligns with findings by Pratt (2020), who emphasized the role of self-monitoring in reading proficiency. Skilled readers rely on a combination of meaning, structure, and visual cues to correct errors, while less proficient readers struggle to use these strategies effectively. The inability to recognize or connect unfamiliar words with prior knowledge may have exacerbated the learners' frustration.

Furthermore, the results resonate with Sabatini et al. (2019), who observed that reading accuracy and speed are critical markers of comprehension. Learners with lower prosody and higher word-reading error rates often struggle with word recognition, which significantly hampers their reading fluency and comprehension. In this study, the low mean scores, particularly in Passage 3 and Passage 4, suggest that the learners experienced notable difficulties in decoding and pronouncing words, likely contributing to their inability to grasp the passages effectively.

Phonological skills, as emphasized by Milankov et al. (2021), play a crucial role in early reading development. However, phonological awareness tasks such as phoneme segmentation and syllable merging may not always strongly correlate with early reading success. In the context of this study, the learners' limited phonological skills could have impeded their ability to decode unfamiliar words, further compounding their challenges in reading fluency and comprehension. The relationship between reading proficiency and phonological awareness underscores the need for targeted interventions that address foundational skills, particularly for learners struggling with transparent orthographies.

The learners' performance also highlights the importance of integrating background knowledge and prior experiences into reading instruction. Students often rely on their existing knowledge base to make sense of unfamiliar texts, bridging the gap between new content and familiar concepts. In this study, the lack of connection to prior knowledge, especially for passages containing culturally or contextually specific terms, may have contributed to the lower mean scores in word reading. This aligns with research emphasizing the need for instructional materials that are both relatable and accessible to young readers.

Table 3. Mean Pre-test Scores in Reading Comprehension

	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Passage 1	38	Frustration
Passage 2	38	Frustration
Passage 3	25	Frustration
Passage 4	25	Frustration
Overall	32	Frustration

The data presented in Table 3 revealed significant frustration levels among learners in reading comprehension during pretesting, with an overall mean score of 32 interpreted as "Frustration." Passages 3 and 4 recorded the lowest mean scores of 25, while Passages 1 and 2 achieved the highest scores of 38, both remaining within the frustration category. These results indicate a persistent struggle in understanding written texts, further reflecting the challenges learners face in achieving reading fluency and comprehension at this developmental stage.

The findings align with Torppa et al. (2019), who noted that poor readers often exhibit low reading motivation and school enjoyment, which can adversely affect their performance. The frustration experienced by learners in this study might similarly stem from low motivation and fatigue, factors known to hinder reading comprehension. This highlights the interplay between affective factors and academic performance, suggesting that enhancing reading motivation could contribute to improved comprehension outcomes.

Moreover, the study corroborates the observations of Tan (2016), as cited in Balitar et al. (2024), regarding prevalent reading difficulties among young learners in the Philippines, including challenges in phonemic awareness, decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension. Such difficulties are consistent with the learners' struggles in this study, particularly in decoding words and understanding text passages. These findings suggest a need for focused interventions to build foundational reading skills.

Vaughn et al. (2019) further highlighted differences in reading comprehension between English learners (ELs) and non-ELs with significant reading challenges, attributing these disparities to variations in word reading and listening comprehension. The results of this study similarly suggest that learners struggling with oral reading and word identification also face difficulties in attributing meaning to text, which impedes comprehension.

The frustration levels observed imply that the learners' inability to accurately pronounce words and their limited schema or prior knowledge hindered their ability to make meaningful connections between the text and its context. First-grade students, in particular, appeared overly focused on word pronunciation, neglecting the importance of synthesizing information for comprehension. This fixation on decoding individual words rather than understanding the material as a whole further contributed to their declining comprehension skills.

Table 4. Mean Post-test Scores in Oral Reading

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Verbal Interpretation</i>
Passage 1	92	Independent
Passage 2	92	Independent
Passage 3	92	Independent
Passage 4	92	Independent
Overall	92	Independent

The data in Table 4 highlights a marked improvement in oral reading proficiency among learners during post-testing, with an overall mean score of 92, categorized as "Independent." Notably, all indicators across Passages 1, 2, 3, and 4 achieved the same mean score of 92, reflecting consistent progress. This signifies that learners successfully transitioned from earlier frustration levels to an independent reading proficiency, demonstrating substantial development in their oral reading skills.

These findings align with the study of Canuto et al. (2024), which emphasizes the effectiveness of instructional strategies such as using Big Books and repeated reading to enhance elementary learners' English reading achievements. Big Books and repeated reading offer a practical and engaging approach, allowing learners to internalize language patterns, improve fluency, and build confidence in oral reading. By integrating these strategies, educators can scaffold reading instruction in a way that meets diverse learner needs while promoting reading independence.

The observed improvement also underscores the effectiveness of the intervention material, Project READER, implemented during the study. Learners who engaged with this material demonstrated significant gains in oral reading proficiency. The structured and paced approach of the intervention allowed learners to gradually transition from frustration to independence by focusing on skill reinforcement and practice. By enabling learners to master fundamental reading skills in a supportive environment, Project READER successfully addressed key barriers to oral reading development.

Moreover, the slower, learner-centered phase of the intervention appeared instrumental in fostering sustained improvement. By emphasizing individualized progression, the material encouraged learners to practice consistently, refine their pronunciation, and develop the confidence necessary to read independently. The transition from frustration to independence reflects not only skill acquisition but also an increase in reading motivation and self-efficacy.

Table 5. *Mean Post-test Scores in Word Reading*

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Verbal Interpretation</i>
Passage 1	91	Independent
Passage 2	89	Independent
Passage 3	91	Independent
Passage 4	98	Independent
Overall	92	Independent

The data presented in Table 5 demonstrates a significant improvement in word reading proficiency among learners during post-testing, with an overall mean score of 92 classified as "Independent." Notably, Passage 4 achieved the highest mean score of 98, while Passage 2 recorded the lowest mean score of 89, yet still within the "Independent" category. These results indicate consistent progress across all passages, reflecting learners' enhanced ability to read words accurately and fluently.

Roque et al. (2023) highlight the critical role of reading in vocabulary development, noting that limited reading habits negatively impact vocabulary expansion. A strong vocabulary base is essential for comprehension, as learners need to decode, understand, and make sense of the words they encounter. This underscores the importance of consistent reading practice in fostering linguistic growth and literacy.

Furthermore, the use of phonics-based instruction supports the relationship between sounds and letters, teaching students how to decode words effectively by blending phonemes and graphemes. This method aids learners in understanding word structure, enabling them to spell and read with greater accuracy and fluency. The improvement in post-test scores reflects the success of integrating such strategies into reading exercises, allowing learners to build foundational skills for long-term literacy development.

The observed transition from frustration to independence among learners is attributable to the intervention material. The structured exercises in the material provided opportunities for repeated practice, which honed decoding skills, improved pronunciation, and fostered appropriate pacing. Emphasis on punctuation awareness, such as pauses and stops, contributed to better oral reading fluency. These elements collectively reduced the cognitive load during reading, enabling learners to focus on comprehension rather than struggling with word recognition.

The data in Table 6 demonstrates an instructional level of reading comprehension among learners during post-testing, with an overall mean score of 82. Passages 2 and 4 achieved the highest mean score of 88, classified as "Independent," while Passages 1 and 3 recorded the lowest mean score of 75, interpreted as "Instructional." These results indicate that while progress has been made, learners' comprehension levels still vary across different passages, reflecting a need for continued instructional support.

Table 6. *Mean Post-test Scores in Reading Comprehension*

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Verbal Interpretation</i>
Passage 1	75	Instructional
Passage 2	88	Independent
Passage 3	75	Instructional
Passage 4	88	Independent
Overall	82	Instructional

The data in Table 2.3 demonstrates an instructional level of reading comprehension among learners during post-testing, with an overall mean score of 82. Passages 2 and 4 achieved the highest mean score of 88, classified as "Independent," while Passages 1 and 3 recorded the lowest mean score of 75, interpreted as "Instructional." These results indicate that while progress has been made, learners' comprehension levels still vary across different passages, reflecting a need for continued instructional support.

Reading is a gateway to acquiring knowledge and exploring the world, as highlighted by Omidire and Morgan (2023). Reading fluency not only enhances academic achievement across subjects but also fosters cognitive development and student engagement. Gao (2022) further emphasizes that reading is a thinking process, integral to learning, as it enlightens students' minds and facilitates the acquisition of new ideas. These observations align with the findings of the study, which underscore the importance of strengthening comprehension skills to enable learners to grasp complex texts effectively.

The socioeconomic background of learners also plays a significant role in their literacy development. As described by Omidire and Morgan (2023), children from low-income families often enter school with lower literacy levels due to limited access to books. This disparity can hinder their ability to comprehend texts, as reading proficiency is closely linked to exposure to diverse written materials.

Intervention programs, such as Project READER, have proven to be pivotal in addressing comprehension challenges. According to Higuerra et al. (2022), carefully designed reading programs are essential in helping students transition from frustration to instructional or independent reading levels. As learners improve their oral and word reading, their comprehension also advances, enabling them to navigate complex content more effectively.

However, comprehension difficulties often stem from the complexity and density of textbooks, which may include technical terms, charts, graphs, and specialized language (Mekuria et al., 2024). Teachers play a crucial role in mitigating these challenges by selecting appropriate strategies, materials, and instructional methods that align with students' needs. By fostering motivation and engagement, educators can empower learners to tackle progressively challenging texts and enhance their overall comprehension skills.

*Table 7. Test of Difference between the Pre-test and Post-test Scores*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Verbal Interpretation</i>
Oral Reading	381.0	<0.001	Significant
Word Reading	0.0	<0.001	Significant
Reading Comprehension	46.0	<0.001	Significant

The results presented in Table 3 reveal significant improvements in students' reading abilities after the intervention, with marked differences between their pre-test and post-test scores across three key areas: oral reading, word reading, and reading comprehension. For oral reading, the test statistic was  $W = 381.0$ , with a  $p$ -value of  $<0.001$ . Similarly, word reading showed a  $W$  value of  $0.0$  and a  $p$ -value of  $<0.001$ , while reading comprehension had a  $W$  value of  $46.0$ , also with a  $p$ -value of  $<0.001$ . The consistently low  $p$ -values across all areas indicate that the differences observed between the pre-test and post-test scores are statistically significant, supporting the effectiveness of the intervention material, Project READER, in enhancing students' reading performance.

The intervention proved effective in addressing the difficulties faced by beginning readers, helping them move past their frustration with reading. By allowing students to practice decoding and reading skills at their own pace and according to their individual needs, Project READER facilitated an approach that was more personalized than traditional teacher-directed methods. This approach enabled students to take ownership of their learning and gradually build their reading skills in a supportive, non-pressured environment. As a result, students made significant progress in both their word reading and comprehension skills.

Supporting the effectiveness of such interventions, Wanzek et al. (2017), as cited by Dietrichson et al. (2021), found that students who received targeted reading remediation showed greater improvement in reading comprehension compared to those who did not participate in the intervention. Notably, the intervention was most effective for students with higher initial word reading scores, suggesting that early, tailored intervention can help bridge gaps in reading proficiency.

Additionally, the importance of education in fostering individual growth and societal progress is underscored by Pocaan (2022). While global enrollment rates, especially for girls, have risen over the past decade (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics, 2021), the challenge remains that many children still fail to meet minimum proficiency standards in reading and math (United Nations, 2021). These findings reinforce the need for effective, targeted educational interventions that address the specific needs of struggling readers, ensuring equitable literacy development and helping students achieve their full potential.

## Conclusions

The findings of this study suggest that many learners struggle to connect their prior knowledge with the text they are reading, primarily due to limited exposure to vocabulary and real-world experiences. While they may understand individual words, the inability to integrate their knowledge with the text leads to frustration and hinders reading progress. Teachers in public schools face challenges in providing suitable materials and strategies to accommodate the diverse reading levels of students, as many struggling readers read below their grade level. However, learners who participated in the Project READER intervention showed significant improvements, particularly in comprehension. The intervention helped students enhance their word decoding techniques, pronunciation, and reading fluency, effectively addressing the difficulties faced by beginning readers. Furthermore, the study highlighted the limitations of traditional textbooks, which often focus on information density at the expense of readability. Overall, Project READER proved to be an effective tool in improving literacy skills and overcoming the challenges faced by struggling readers.

In light of the study's conclusions, it is recommended that students focus on practicing word decoding and phonemic awareness to improve oral reading skills and pronunciation accuracy. Engaging in activities that connect real-life experiences with literature can significantly enhance comprehension and support reading progress. Parents should encourage a love for reading by providing a variety of reading materials at home, catering to their child's interests and reading level, while also helping them relate personal experiences to the text. Teachers are encouraged to offer differentiated instruction and materials that address the varying reading levels in the classroom, with an emphasis on contextual understanding and accurate pronunciation to improve overall reading comprehension. Schools should prioritize investments in resources and professional development for teachers to effectively implement literacy intervention programs. Collaboration with parents and community organizations is essential to strengthen reading initiatives both inside and outside the classroom. Additionally, schools should regularly assess and adapt curricula and reading materials to ensure accessibility for all students. Future research should investigate the long-term impact of interventions like Project READER on students' academic performance and reading development, and further studies could track the progress of students receiving early literacy interventions. Finally, Project READER could be extended to assist parents with reading difficulties, with schools creating opportunities for parents to engage in reading programs and support literacy development at home.

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### **Affiliations and Corresponding Information**

**Marees M. Leysa**

Halang Elementary School

Department of Education – Philippines

**Preciosa D. Villacruel**

Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng San Pablo – Philippines