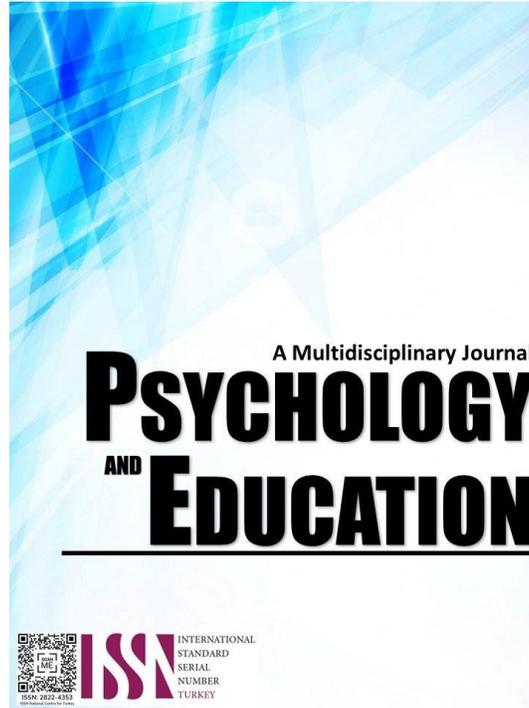


**FACTORS AFFECTING READING LEVEL, COMPREHENSION SKILLS,
AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF INTERMEDIATE PUPILS:
BASIS FOR ENHANCEMENT PLAN**



PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

Volume: 33

Issue 10

Pages: 1176-1189

Document ID: 2025PEMJ3232

DOI: 10.70838/pemj.331007

Manuscript Accepted: 02-28-2025

Factors Affecting Reading Level, Comprehension Skills, and Academic Performance of Intermediate Pupils: Basis for Enhancement Plan

Keren Grace A. Rodriguez*

For affiliations and correspondence, see the last page.

Abstract

This study entitled Factors Affecting Reading Level, Comprehension Skills, and Academic Performance of Intermediate Pupils: Basis for Enhancement Plan aimed to determine the factors that affect the reading and comprehension skills of the ninety-six intermediate pupils and their relationship to the pupils' academic performance. It utilized descriptive research design. Data were collected using Phil-IRI Assessment Tool and a two-part researcher-made survey questionnaire which determined the profile of the respondents on sex, socio-economic status, and nutritional status, and measured the level of factors affecting reading and comprehension skills. Findings revealed that the intermediate pupils were mostly, male, belonged to poor families, and with normal nutritional status. Reading level and comprehension skills of pupils in terms of their profile was instructional. The level of five factors affecting the reading level and comprehension skills of was moderate. The overall academic performance of pupils was high. There is no significant difference in the reading level and comprehension skills of pupils in terms of profile. No significant difference in the factors affecting the reading level and comprehension skills of profile. There is a significant relationship between the reading level and comprehension skills and academic performance of pupils, and no significant relationship between the factors affecting the reading level and comprehension skills and academic performance of intermediate pupils.

Keywords: *reading level, comprehension skills, academic performance, enhancement plan*

Introduction

The ability to read and comprehend is fundamental to learning, promoting critical thinking, and enabling successful communication (Khalilova, 2023). Problems with comprehension arise frequently for readers (Snowling et al., 2020). According to research by Torppa et al. (2020), there are concerning many reports of struggling readers in grades K–3, which suggests that children's reading comprehension has declined recently. The researcher, an elementary school teacher, has firsthand knowledge of the difficulties intermediate students have in developing their reading comprehension and skills. In the triennial Program for International Student Assessment conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Philippines had already received the lowest reading, math, and science scores of all the participating countries, according to a study conducted by Alinsunurin (2021).

Intermediate students' ability to read and comprehend effectively is heavily dependent on several elements, including those related to the teacher and principal, the school's reading program, the student or learner, and the home environment. The student's development of a solid reading foundation can be another important influence. According to Bana (2020), having a reading habit is the habit of consistently reading, developing a mindset, and having the abilities that make reading enjoyable, consistent, and constant. Reading habits are a topic that is frequently discussed, and this will not change since developing good reading habits helps pupils become lifelong readers and provides them with a strong foundation for success in the future. Excellent reading habits are crucial for pupils to succeed academically since research shows a direct correlation between reading habits and academic achievement. Utilizing the elements that help students' reading and comprehension skills grow is essential to their success in the classroom and daily life.

Himashi (2024) emphasized the importance of reading and comprehension skills as influenced by a range of internal and external factors, including teaching strategies and the availability of resources, as well as individual characteristics like language proficiency, cognitive ability, and socioeconomic background.

Elementary teachers in the area were particularly concerned about intermediate students' incapacity to read and comprehend proficiently. This was especially true for students who were transitioning from primary to intermediate school but lacked the necessary reading comprehension and skills to be eligible for the next grade level. Teachers lose a great deal of time and jeopardize the quality of their education when they devote so much of their time to teaching remedial reading rather than moving on to the most important subjects.

It is for the above reason that the researcher has decided to conduct this study, desiring to find out the factors affecting the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils in her school.

Research Questions

The main purpose of this study was to determine the factors affecting reading level, comprehension skills, and academic performance of intermediate pupils in San Juan Elementary School, in District II, District of Pontevedra for the school year 2022-2023. Specifically, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of intermediate pupils in terms of:
 - 1.1. sex
 - 1.2. socio-economic status, and
 - 1.3. nutritional status?
2. What are the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils according to their profile?
3. What is the level of factors affecting the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils in terms of:
 - 3.1. pupil factors
 - 3.2. teacher factors
 - 3.3. principal factors
 - 3.4. school reading activity factors, and
 - 3.5. home factors?
4. What is the level of academic performance of intermediate pupils according to their grade level and when taken as a whole?
5. Is there a significant difference in the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils when grouped according to their profile?
6. Is there a significant difference in the factors affecting the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils when grouped according to their profile?
7. Is there a significant relationship between the reading level and comprehension skills of pupils and their academic performance?
8. Is there a significant relationship between the level of factors in reading and comprehension skills of pupils and their academic performance?
9. Based on the findings of the study, what enhancement plan may be prepared?

Methodology

Research Design

In order to ascertain the factors affecting reading level and comprehension skills and their relation to the academic performance of intermediate pupils, this study adopted the descriptive-correlational research design. When the goal of the research is to discover traits, frequencies, trends, and classifications, descriptive research is the best option. When little is known about the subject or issue, it is helpful. Also, it accurately represents a population, circumstance, or phenomena by merely observing and measuring the variables (McCombes, 2019).

Respondents

The subject and respondents of this study were the 96 Grades IV, V, and VI pupils of San Juan Elementary School, in District II, District of Pontevedra for school year 2022-2023.

The population of the study was composed of the ninety-six total number of intermediate pupils. Since this number was manageable, the researcher decided to utilize the whole population, and therefore, considered all of the pupils as respondents of the study.

Table 1 presents the number of pupils considered as respondents of the study.

Table 1. *Distribution of Participants per Grade Level*

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
IV	19	17	36
V	22	14	36
VI	13	11	24
Total	54	42	96

Instrument

This study used two research instruments. First, it considered the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) Assessment Tool to determine the reading level and comprehension skills of the intermediate pupils. The graded passages in the Phil-IRI are an informal reading inventory that are used to assess each student's proficiency in oral reading, silent reading, and listening comprehension. It is an evaluation instrument used in classrooms to gauge and characterize students' reading proficiency in both Filipino and English.

The other instrument was a standardized questionnaire organized into two parts, adopted from the study of Manaois (2019) on the Factors Affecting the Reading Comprehension and Performance of Grade VI Pupils.

Part I determined the profile of pupils on sex, economic status, and nutritional status.

On sex, the respondents were classified as male or female. On economic status, the respondents are categorized according to poor, middle and rich. On nutritional status, the pupils were categorized as wasted, normal, overweight, and obese.

Part II determined the factors affecting reading and comprehension skills of pupils in terms of pupil factor, teacher factor, principal



factor, school reading activity factor, and home factor. Each of these factors contain five items to be answered by the respondents.

Procedure

Before the conduct of the study, permission was obtained from the Office of the Public Schools District Supervisor (see Appendix B). Upon approval, a copy of the approved communication was forwarded to the principals and teachers to communicate the purpose, date and the mechanics of the survey to be conducted.

The researcher personally administered the survey to the pupil-respondents who, before answering the questionnaires, received an orientation as to what the survey was all about and what their responses would mean to the accomplishments of the purposes of the researcher in conducting the study. They were given instructions on how they would answer the questionnaires and were assured of the complete confidentiality of their responses. After the survey, the researcher retrieved the questionnaires and began recording the data for presentation, analysis, and interpretation.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from the survey were treated statistically using the following tools for their analysis:

For statement of the problem 1, on the profile of intermediate pupils, which includes information on their sex, socio-economic status, and nutritional status, frequency distribution and percentage was used.

For statement of the problem 2, on the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils according to their profile, the mean was used.

For statement of the problem 3, on the level of factors affecting the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils in terms of pupil factors, teacher factors, principal factors, school reading activity factors, and home factors, the mean was used.

For statement of the problem 4, on the academic performance of intermediate pupils according to their grade level and when taken as a whole, the general average grades of the pupils were used.

For statement of the problem 5, on the significant difference in the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils when grouped according to their profile, Kruskal-Wallis, and Mann-Whitney Tests were used.

For statement of the problem 6, on the significant difference in the factors affecting the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils when grouped according to their profile, Kruskal-Wallis was used.

For Problem 7, on the significant relationship between the reading level and comprehension skills of pupils and their academic performance, Gamma Coefficient was used.

For statement of the problem 8, on the proposed intervention after the findings of the study were finalized, a matrix would be prepared.

Ethical Considerations

Results and Discussion

This section presents the data gathered and their analysis and interpretation after they have been subjected to statistical treatment.

Profile of Respondents

Table 2 below presents the frequency and percent distribution of the pupil respondents in terms of their profile in sex, socio-economic status, and nutritional status.

Table 2. Frequency and Percent Distribution of Respondents in terms of Profile

<i>Profile</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Sex	Male	54	56.30
	Female	42	43.80
	Total	96	100.00
Socio-Economic Status	Middle Income	12	12.50
	Low Income	31	32.30
	Poor	53	55.20
	Total	96	100.00
Nutritional Status	Wasted	16	16.70
	Normal	78	81.30
	Overweight	2	2.10
	Total	96	100.00

Table 2 reveals that in terms of sex, out of ninety-six respondents, 54 or 56.30 percent are male and 42 or 43.80 percent are female. The figure implies that there are more boys in the intermediate level than girls, although the gap in number may not be exceedingly far from each other.

In terms of socio-economic status, 53 or 55.20 percent of the pupils' families belong to the poor group, followed by 31 or 32.30 percent who belong to low-income families, and 12 or 12.50 percent who considered their families as middle-income earners.

The aforementioned result validates the findings of the National Economic Development Authority's (NEDA) 2022 study, which said that more Filipinos are impoverished today than they were in 2018, based on the most recent official data made available by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). Citing data from its Family Income and Expenditure Survey, the PSA said that 19.99 million people in the nation are below the poverty line. This amounts to 18.1% of the total population. There were 17.67 million impoverished Filipinos in 2018. Meanwhile, 1.01 million more people were classified as "food-poor." 3.71 million Filipinos lack a work, or a 7.8% unemployment rate, according to the PSA (NEDA, 2022).

The PSA study was conducted in 2021, and some experts believe that its poverty criterion is unreasonable, which means that the poverty condition may be worse. According to the Philippine government, a person who belongs to a family of five only has to make \$1.41 per day, converted into US dollars, in order to subsist and cover their daily food needs (NEDA, 2022).

With the unprecedented loss of jobs and livelihoods in the last two years, the survey conducted by the private polling firm Social Weather Station (SWS) is thought to be more accurate than the PSA report, as it revealed a higher percentage of Filipinos who rated themselves as poor and "borderline poor." The number of poor families was estimated to be around 48% of the population. It is undeniable that poverty has increased notwithstanding skepticism over the PSA model's dependability (NEDA, 2022).

Meanwhile, on the nutritional status of pupils, 78 or 81.30 percent were evaluated to have a normal status, 16 or 16.70 percent with wasted status, and 2 or 2.10 percent as overweight.

The large number of students who were evaluated as having normal status can be attributed to the implementation of health-related and nutrition-related programs, which are only practical in schools. The primary government-subsidized program, which has a specific mandate and set of implementation guidelines, is the school-based feeding program, which distributes food among other pre-identified programs in schools as required by DepEd Order No. 031 s. 2021 is the deadline for completing the Department of Education's annual plan, the Philippine Plan of Action, which includes the feeding and vegetable gardening program.

The impact of eating habits on schoolchildren's nutrition is displayed in the above table. Following 16 and 15 (30.80 and 28.80) who have good and very good eating habits, are 21 respondents (40.40%) who have decent eating habits. Compared to picky and healthy eaters, school-age children are less likely to enjoy eating nutrient-dense meals. The learners in this study are in an active period and are more focused on their activities than on what they are eating, which leads them to consume unhealthy food (Nesrienne G. Buyco et al., 2021). As a result, the data from this study is not new to the literature. Children at school have certain food preferences and prefer to spend their free time doing things like watching TV and playing sports with friends (Pantea Stoian, Anca; Andronache, et al., 2018).

Reading Level and Comprehension Skills of Intermediate Pupils

Table 3 that follows presents the data on reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils categorized according to their profile in sex, socio-economic status and nutritional status.

Table 3. *Reading Level and Comprehension Skills of Intermediate Pupils in Terms of their Profile*

<i>Profile</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Sex	Male	54	9.63	Instructional
	Female	42	15.38	Independent
Socio-Economic Status	Middle Income	12	13.58	Instructional
	Low Income	31	12.19	Instructional
	Poor	53	11.79	Instructional
Nutritional Status	Wasted	16	12.19	Instructional
	Normal	78	12.13	Instructional
	Overweight	2	12.50	Instructional
Overall Mean		96	12.15	Instructional

As shown in Table 3, the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils in terms of sex indicate that the female pupils obtained a mean score of 15.38 gaining an independent level which is much higher than the male pupils who obtained a mean score of 9.63 and received an instructional level. This implies that girls are better readers than boys and some factors may be attributed to it.

The above finding conforms to the study of Mahbubul and Saifur (2021) who professed that girls read more proficiently than boys do. They discovered that although women read more books than men, there was little variation in the genres of books that were read. Ullah and Ullah (2019) proved that academically, girls perform better than boys throughout the world. However, Arifin et al. (2018) contend

that socialization plays a significant role in determining disparities in boys' and girls' school behavior and performance. In other words, since socialization influences these factors, it is important to examine factors like students' choice of reading materials, curiosity, social connections among students, access to a different text, and the reading environment when examining factors that could increase reading habits. In many educational institutions, lower reading proficiency in boys has become a serious concern. Overall reading performance will improve with the gender gap closed.

PISA results from 2018 and 2022 showed that, in every PISA nation, girls outperform boys in reading. The average gender disparity in OECD nations is 39 score points or more than half a competency level. The OECD nation of Chile and its associate nations, Peru and Colombia, have the smallest gender gaps, whereas the largest gaps are observed in Albania, Bulgaria, and Lithuania. These differences are more than twice as large. The Nordic region, which includes Finland, the top-scoring OECD nation, and several other high-performing nations, like New Zealand, exhibit notable gender disparities. In Finland, girls score nearly one competence level higher than boys, with boys scoring one-fifth of a proficiency level above the OECD average. Boys fare better than girls in Korea and its partner economies, Hong Kong, China, and Shanghai, China, all high-scoring nations with gender gaps near the average; they score between 24 and 43 points higher than the OECD average for both genders. (PISA, 2018).

Gender differences are most stark when comparing the proportion of boys and girls who perform at the lowest reading proficiency levels. In 18 countries that score below the OECD average, boys perform below the baseline Level 2, on average, while girls perform below that level, on average, in only 5 countries. But the extent of underperformance among boys is a crucial issue nearly everywhere. On average in OECD countries, only one in eight girls, but one in four boys, fails to reach Level 2. In some countries, the great majority of underperformers are boys. In Finland, only 3% of girls but 13% of boys do not attain Level 2, while in the partner country Latvia, 9% of girls and 27% of boys do not attain that level (PISA, 2018).

The socioeconomic position of the student families was found to be reflected in the mean score of 13.58 for middle-class families and 12.19 and 11.79 for low-income and poor families, respectively. All of the students nevertheless achieved instructional level reading and comprehension abilities despite the different mean scores. Pupils residing in impoverished socioeconomic environments encounter numerous challenges that impede their academic progress. Language obstacles, a lack of resources and support, as well as mental and physical stress, can all contribute to these challenges. Approximately 10–15% of kids have trouble learning to read accurately and fluently at the word level. Beach (2021) talked about how rising second and third-graders from low-income homes who read below grade level fared in reading after receiving 42 hours of reading training over the summer.

According to Williams (2019), educational institutions should design projects and programs that specifically give low-income families the chance to obtain resources and increase their understanding of how to use the school system to suit their children's needs and enhance their learning. It was shown that there are some connections between social level and literacy. Because literacy may affect SES as well as SES can influence literacy, many persons with lower socioeconomic statuses have lower levels of literacy (Rea, 2020). Born into a family with low literacy levels increases the chances of being poor yourself, just as individuals who are poor themselves are more likely to stay poor (Rea, 2020).

In terms of nutritional status, out of 96 respondents, the 78 pupils who were assessed with normal nutritional status received a mean score of 12.13, while the 16 pupils measured with wasted status gained a mean score of 12.19, and the 2 with overweight status obtained 12.50. With different mean scores, however, all pupils were rated instructional in their reading level and comprehension skills.

As a whole, the reading level and comprehension skills of 96 pupil-respondents in terms of their profile in sex, socio-economic status, and nutritional status were instructional as specified by the overall mean score of 12.15.

Factors Affecting the Reading Level and Comprehension Skills of Pupils

Table 4 presents the factors affecting the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils.

Table 4. *Factors Affecting the Reading Level and Comprehension Skills of Pupils*

<i>Factors Affecting the Reading Level and Comprehension Skills</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Pupil Factors	96	2.16	Moderate
Teacher Factors	96	2.74	High
School Principal Factors	96	2.64	High
School Activity Factors	96	2.31	Moderate
Home Factors	96	2.14	Moderate

As revealed in Table 4, of the five factors affecting the reading level and comprehension skills of the intermediate pupils, teacher factors obtained the highest mean score of 2.74 followed by the principal factors with a mean score of 2.64. With these scores, both factors received a high rating which implies that the teachers and principals may have been considered by the respondents as very significant reasons for their obtaining a high level of reading and comprehension skills.

On the other hand, the school activity, pupil, and home factors each received mean scores of 2.31, 2.16, and 2.14 respectively resulting in the attainment of moderate levels of reading and comprehension skills.

The result of this study is closely similar to the statement of Castles et al. (2018) that the methods that teachers use to teach reading are beneficial to the growth of their pupils' comprehension abilities and reading proficiency. Regarding its pedagogical methods and theoretical foundations, reading teaching is one of the most hotly debated subjects in education (Castles et al., 2018; Hoffman et al., 2020; Shanahan, 2020). Over the past 50 years, Australian academics, policymakers, the media, and classroom practices have all been touched by the "reading wars," which are common in other English-speaking nations (Buckingham & Meeks, 2019).

In contrast, the study of Torres (2019), asserts that the strategy of the teacher did not affect the reading comprehension of the learners. In addition, the study of Valencia (2006), got the same result that the teacher factor has no significant effect on the learners' reading skills.

Regarding the role that school principals play in helping students improve their reading skills, it is important to note that students' current reading levels require targeted attention to provide them with timely and adaptable reading activities that will help them become better readers. Merto (2018) states that to improve the reading program's implementation, school administrators, supervisors of education programs, and other education specialists are thought to be required to provide technical support monitoring and assessment. Schools are encouraged to enhance the learning environment by focusing on reading teaching and assisting teachers in helping students become more literate.

By providing a conducive teaching-learning environment and culture, the principal can have an impact on students' performance. Leading teachers in facilitating the teaching-learning process is the responsibility of the school head (Fullan 2018). They have important duties to play in carrying out the reading programs. Thus, a contributing aspect to the effectiveness of the reading programs is the degree of their commitment and engagement in its implementation.

Important findings of school reading activities have been found in several research. For example, based on Shah, A. (2022), a variety of group and individual reading techniques, such as think-aloud exercises, silent reading, and group reading, assist slow readers with meeting expectations and picking up tips from other readers. He thought that giving pupils appropriate reading instruction inspires them to read and gives them a clear understanding of the material. Among the reading exercises used were story mapping and extrinsic reading, which help students feel more confident and help them accurately order the events. Additionally, skimming aids pupils in learning key details about the subject (Shah, 2022).

The ability to decode words can be seen as limited in reading instruction since it requires a finite understanding of phoneme-grapheme correspondences. According to Castles et al., children can decipher the majority of words in their language with just a minimal amount of knowledge about the relationship between graphemes and phonemes. Children can then access the meanings of those words using this sound-based representation, given that they have a sufficient vocabulary (Castles et al., 2018). Pupils can become very proficient in a limited skill, such as decoding, which creates chances for skill development in the unconstrained comprehension domain (C. E. Snow & Matthews, 2018). Meanwhile, the learners' reading comprehension is greatly impacted by characteristics relating to their homes. The responders who had parents who had only completed elementary school put this to the test. A strong educational foundation makes it simpler for parents to guide and support their kids through their scholastic challenges, particularly in reading. Similar to a parent's work and multiple siblings, a family can consume nutrient-dense food as long as their money meets their needs (Torres, 2018).

From the perspective of the student, students who want to get better at reading and comprehending what they read have a personal responsibility to assist them in becoming competent readers. If kids want to become self-sufficient, proficient readers, they must put in a lot of work to take reading seriously. According to Torres (2018), students' comprehension of what they read at home and in school is negatively impacted. A child's exposure to reading materials will greatly influence their interest in and habit of reading. Students' reading comprehension abilities were hampered by learner-related characteristics such as prior knowledge, comprehension, and low motivation. Furthermore, according to the schema theory, prior knowledge is crucial to learners' comprehension (Torres, 2018).

Level of Academic Performance of Intermediate Pupils

Table 5 below presents the level of academic performance of the intermediate pupils according to their grade levels and as a whole.

Table 5. Level of Academic Performance of Intermediate Pupils

<i>Grade Level</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Grade IV	36	90.64	Outstanding
Grade V	36	91.22	Outstanding
Grade VI	24	91.83	Outstanding
As a Whole	96	91.16	Outstanding

Table 5 shows that in measuring the academic performance of intermediate pupils, grade six received the highest mean score of 91.83, followed by grade four with 90.64 and grade five gaining 91.22. With the different mean scores, however, the pupils in each of the grade levels received an outstanding performance. As a whole, with an overall mean score of 91.16, the academic performance of the intermediate pupils is outstanding. This implies that the reading level of the pupils may have contributed substantially to their understanding and mastery of the lessons, hence, the outstanding performance.

The fact that the overall academic performance of the pupils is outstanding presupposes that they have competitive reading and

comprehension skills. To add support to this, Auld (2019) highlighted that the students who engage in independent reading exhibit enhanced reading comprehension, verbal fluency, and general knowledge compared to their non-reading counterparts. They experience improvements in their reading abilities and achieve higher scores on academic assessments across various subjects. This suggests that engaging in reading activities promotes critical thinking skills and enhances reading comprehension abilities among students, which in turn proves advantageous across all academic subjects.

In addition, according to Compe (2018), the pupils who strive to increase their reading comprehension improve their academic performance. This suggests that the pupils' reading comprehension affects their academic success. When a student's reading comprehension declines, their academic performance also decreases; similarly, when a student's reading comprehension improves, their academic performance also increases. When a student's reading comprehension improves, it means they are becoming more proficient in understanding and extracting meaning from texts. With enhanced comprehension skills, they are better equipped to grasp the nuances of language usage, vocabulary, grammar, and writing conventions. Their academic performance in their subjects tends to increase because they can engage more deeply with the subject matter, demonstrate a stronger command of language, and produce higher-quality written work.

Differences in the Reading Level and Comprehension Skills of Intermediate Pupils in Terms of Sex

Table 6 below presents the difference in the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils in terms of sex.

Table 6. *Difference in the Reading Level and Comprehension Skills of Intermediate Pupils In terms of Sex*

<i>Sex</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean Rank</i>
Male	54	30.30
Female	42	71.90
Total	96	

Computed Value (U):151.00

p-value:<0.001

Decision:Reject Ho

Interpretation:No significant at 0.05 level of significance

Using the Mann-Whitney U Test, the table reveals the computed value is 151.00. Comparing the p-value of <0.001, it shows that it is less than the 0.05 significance level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This means there is no significant difference in the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils in terms of sex.

The finding implies that sex is not a determinant in the reading level and comprehension skills of the pupils. In other words, gaining the skills to read and comprehend is a product of the sincere efforts of the pupils reinforced by effective pedagogical approach and school and family support.

However, according to OECD (2019a), many researchers have highlighted the gender differences in domains such as mathematics, science, and reading. Particular attention has been given to gender differences in reading ability, which have been the topic of much research. Reading skills are fundamental nowadays, both in and out-of-school contexts, for both personal and professional development. Reading does not include only reading fluency, but also comprehension and construction of meaning and mental representation from a text. The Program for International Students Assessment (PISA) considers reading literacy as the competencies that allow a student to work with the written text to fulfil a specific goal. In order to achieve a specific goal and to develop knowledge, a student has to understand, use, assess, reflect and engage with texts (OECD, 2019a).

Difference in the Reading Level and Comprehension Skills of Intermediate Pupils in Terms of Socio-Economic Status

Table 7 that follows presents the difference in the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils in terms of socio-economic status.

Table 7. *Difference in the Reading Level and Comprehension Skills of Intermediate Pupils In terms of Socio-Economic Status*

<i>Socio-Economic Status</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean Rank</i>
Middle Income	12	56.58
Low Income	31	49.18
Poor	53	46.27
Total	96	

Computed Value (H):1.38

p-value:0.502

Decision:Accept Ho

Interpretation:Not significant at 0.05 level of significance

Using the Kruskal-Wallis H Test, the table reveals the computed value is 1.38. Comparing the p-value of 0.502, it shows that it is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This means there is no significant difference in the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils in terms of socio-economic status.

The finding indicates that despite the low economic status of the families of the respondents, the pupils are still able to improve their

reading and comprehension skills. This, however, contradicts to the statement of Guo, et al (2018) who asserted that students from poor families may fail to develop their reading competence because of the social economic status of their families. Pupils residing in impoverished socioeconomic environments encounter numerous challenges that impede their academic progress specifically their reading and comprehension skills.

To address the concerns, Williams (2019), recommended that educational institutions should design projects and programs that specifically give low-income families the chance to increase their knowledge and abilities for navigating the educational system and obtaining resources to support their children's learning. Twenty percent of students in a typical classroom will learn to read with additional supports and direct instruction, Forty percent will learn to read with direct instruction, fifteen percent will need significant support through explicit, systematic instruction, and twenty percent will learn to read with no instruction at all (Pollard, 2019).

Difference in the Reading Level Comprehension Skills of Intermediate Pupils in terms of Nutritional Status

Table 8 shows the difference in the reading level comprehension skills of intermediate pupils in terms of nutritional status.

Table 8. *Differences in the Reading Level and Comprehension Skills of Intermediate Pupils In terms of Nutritional Status*

<i>Nutritional Status</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean Rank</i>
Wasted	16	48.88
Normal	78	48.38
Overweight	2	50.25
Total	96	

Computed Value (H):0.01

p-value:0.994

Decision: Accept Ho

Interpretation: Not significant at 0.05 level of significance

Using the Kruskal-Wallis H Test, the table reveals the computed value is 0.01. Comparing the p-value of 0.994, it shows that it is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This means there is no significant difference in the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils in terms of nutritional status.

The above result specifies that despite the excellent nutritional status of the majority of the intermediate pupils, their reading level and comprehension skills are not attributed to it. However, this finding contradicts the idea of Versona (2019) who pointed out that an individual's ability to think clearly and retain their memories is mostly dependent on their nutrition. Children need to eat a healthy diet to optimize and improve their learning. However, to succeed in learning, one must have the skill of reading comprehension. For students to grasp concepts in a variety of academic areas, reading comprehension acts as a bridge. Implementing proactive measures in schools now to give kids the best chance of meeting grade-level competency requirements across the K–12 curriculum (Versola, 2019).

Difference in the Factors Affecting the Reading Level and Comprehension Skills According to Sex

Table 9 that follows presents the difference in the factors affecting the reading level and comprehension skills according to sex

Table 9. *Difference in the Factors Affecting the Reading Level and Comprehension Skills According to Sex*

<i>Sex</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean Rank</i>
Male	54	49.40
Female	42	47.35
Total	96	

Computed Value: 1085.5

p-value: .719

Decision: Accept Ho

Interpretation: Not significant at 0.05 level of significance

Using the Kruskal-Wallis H Test, the table reveals the computed value is 11085.5 Comparing the p-value of 0.719, it shows that it is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This means there is no significant difference in the factors affecting the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils according to sex.

However, according to the reports of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2019), generally, girls outperform boys in reading. Moreover, there is research showing that there are gender differences in general school achievement in university students (Tulbure & Gavilă, 2019), indicating that these differences between boys and girls in school performance increase along with students' age. There is also further research indicating the same results as those revealed in the PISA reports (Reilly, Neumann & Andrews, 2019; Many studies show that reading differences in boys and girls are statistically significant, although there seems to be a general agreement among researchers that these differences have insignificant practical value. Otherwise, it looks like the differences in reading between boys and girls are quite small to be taken into consideration in practice. If most studies indicate that these differences have insignificant practical applications in the educational field, why continue with the research in this direction? Although there may be a small number of studies that show a significant empirical difference in reading between boys and girls, these should be considered for several reasons. First, these studies may facilitate our understanding of how students learn and may also allow

us to develop educational programs to improve students' performance, generating valuable knowledge about educational inequalities (OECD, 2019).

Difference in the Factors Affecting the Reading Level and Comprehension Skills According to Socio-Economic Status

Table 10 below shows the difference in the factors affecting the reading level and comprehension skills according to socioeconomic status.

Table 10. *Difference in the Factors Affecting the Reading Level and Comprehension Skills According to Socio-Economic Status*

<i>Socio-Economic Status</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean Rank</i>
Middle Income	12	40.04
Low Income	31	52.71
Poor	53	47.95

Computed Value: 1.85
p-value: 0.396
Decision: Accept Ho
Interpretation: Not significant at 0.05 level of significance

Using the Kruskal-Wallis H Test, the table reveals the computed value is 1.85. Comparing the p-value of 0.396, it shows that it is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This means there is no significant difference in the factors affecting the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils in terms of socio-economic status.

According to Rea (2020), those who are born into low-literate families are more likely to have low literacy levels themselves, just as those who are born into poverty have a greater chance of staying in poverty (Rea, 2020). This makes sense because parents who are uncomfortable with literature would engage with it less than more literate parents. In a similar vein, since these parents probably lack the confidence to teach their kids to read and write, the kids' literacy level will suffer because they will not have a solid home literacy foundation. Since many specialized occupations need great literacy, someone looking for a higher-paying job may find that their low literacy level puts them at a disadvantage. Many might contend that the child's school district is exclusively in charge of fostering literacy, but this presumes that the child's family resides in a community with an excellent education system. A person from a low socioeconomic background is likely to grow up in a school with less money than their middle-class or upper-class counterparts, which results in a less supportive learning environment (Rea, 2020).

Difference in the Factors Affecting the Reading Level and Comprehension Skills According to Nutritional Status

Table 11 below presents the difference in the factors affecting the reading level and comprehension skills according to nutritional status

Table 11. *Difference in the Factors Affecting the Reading Level and Comprehension Skills According to Nutritional Status*

<i>Nutritional Status</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean Rank</i>
Wasted	16	49.25
Normal	78	48.21
Overweight	2	54.00
Total	96	

Computed Value: 0.10
p-value: 0.952
Decision: Accept Ho
Interpretation: Not significant at 0.05 level of significance

Using the Kruskal-Wallis H Test, the table reveals the computed value is .10. Comparing the p-value of 0.952, it shows that it is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This means there is no significant difference in the factors affecting the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils in terms of nutritional status.

Because academic and non-academic factors have equal influence over a child, academic achievement and proper nutrition and wellbeing are related. Akeron, A. (2019) discovered a link between children's academic performance and healthy nutrition. Children's food and nutrition have an impact on their academic achievement, according to a study by the author. Eating habits and obesity also have an impact on college students' academic performance. BMI predicts a student's academic success. When they are well, students perform well academically. Students projected higher grades with improved nutrition. According to Magulod et al., the results validate that BMI predicts academic achievement. Healthy eating practices therefore indicate academic success. This indicates that children who eat healthily can achieve academic success since the nutrients in their food will fuel their bodies, increasing their energy levels and giving them more cellular nourishment to process the information they are learning.

Relationship Between the Reading Level and Comprehension Skills of Intermediate Pupils and Academic Performance

Table 12 presents the relationship between the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils and academic performance.

Using the Gamma Coefficient, the table indicates the computed value is 0.94. Comparing the p-value of <0.001, it shows that it is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means there is a significant relationship between the

reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils and their academic performance.

Table 12. *Relationship Between the Reading Level and Comprehension Skills of Intermediate Pupils and Academic Performance*

Reading Level and Comprehension Skills	Level of Academic Performance					Total
	Outstanding	Very Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Fairly Satisfactory	Did not meet Expectations	
Independent	6	32	4	0	0	42
Instructional Frustration	27	9	0	0	0	36
Total	51	41	4	0	0	96

Computed value G: 0.94

p-value: <0.001

Decision: Reject Ho

Interpretation: Significant at 0.05 level of significance

Additional evidence for this comes from a study by Dima Hijazi (2018), which found that variations in students' reading comprehension skills were responsible for a statistically significant difference in accomplishment among the students. As per the study's findings, there was a statistically noteworthy distinction between the reading comprehension and achievement levels of the children. Additionally, the study shows a significant relationship between students' reading comprehension and academic performance, highlighting the need for students to use a variety of reading comprehension strategies to comprehend texts effectively. A strong correlation has also been found between reading comprehension and English achievement.

Furthermore, reading comprehension is a key component of success in English, according to Bayazit and Ozdemir's (2019) research, and mastering it will help you become a more proficient English speaker. The research offers significant perspectives on the significance of reading comprehension for attaining academic triumph in the English language. The aforementioned study provides insightful information by emphasizing the role that reading comprehension plays in attaining academic success, particularly in the area of English. Understanding the value of reading comprehension in English, students can make it a top priority to improve their language skills and achieve academic success in the subject.

Relationship Between the Level of Factors of Reading Level and Comprehension Skills of Pupils and Academic Performance

Table 13 presents the relationship between the level of factors of reading level and comprehension skills of pupils and academic performance.

Table 13. *Relationship Between the Level of Factors of Reading Level and Comprehension Skills of Pupils and Academic Performance*

Level of Factors of Reading and Comprehension Skills	Level of Academic Performance					Total
	Outstanding	Very Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Fairly Satisfactory	Did not meet Expectations	
High	37	25	3	0	0	65
Moderate	14	16	1	0	0	31
Low	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	51	41	4	0	0	96

Computed value G: .196

p-value: .334

Decision: Accept Ho

Interpretation: Significant at 0.05 level of significance

Using the Gamma Coefficient, the table indicates the computed value is 0.196. Comparing the p-value of .334, it shows that it is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This means there is a significant relationship between the factors affecting the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils and their academic performance.

Auld (2019) provided evidence to bolster the aforementioned conclusions, stating that kids who read independently demonstrate improved verbal fluency, reading comprehension, and general knowledge in comparison to their non-reading peers. They see gains in their reading comprehension and receive better grades on scholastic tests in a variety of topics. According to Compe (2018), the majority of students struggled with reading comprehension and had to work on improving their academic English ability. This suggests that reading activities promote critical thinking skills and enhance reading comprehension abilities among students, which in turn proves advantageous across all academic subjects. This shows that children's academic progress in English is influenced by their reading comprehension skills.

Academic achievement in English falls as a student's reading comprehension deteriorates; academic achievement in English rises when a student's reading comprehension grows. This demonstrates that when a student's reading comprehension increases, it indicates that they are getting better at comprehending and deriving meaning from texts. Their improved comprehension abilities enable them to comprehend the subtleties of terminology, syntax, writing standards, and English language usage. Their ability to interact more deeply with the material, exhibit a greater command of the language, and generate written work of a higher caliber all tends to improve their academic achievement in English.

Similar to this, getting readers involved in collaborative inquiry through a discussion-based reading model effectively stimulates students' cognitive abilities as they reflect and consider issues raised by a complicated text. It has been suggested that reading engagement serves as a precursor to kids becoming more attentive, which in turn leads to great reading comprehension ability. A balance of interest, self-regulation, motivation, reading attitude, and interaction with text should be included in evaluating readers' engagement because the context of engagement is in keeping readers cognitively and behaviorally active (Roomy & Alhawsawi, 2019).

Conclusions

Based on the above findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

On the profile of the respondents, most of the intermediate pupils were male, belonged to poor families, and with normal nutritional status.

The reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils in terms of their profile on sex, socio-economic status and nutritional status was instructional.

The level of five factors affecting the reading level and comprehension skills of the intermediate pupils was moderate.

The overall academic performance of intermediate pupils was high.

There is no significant difference in the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils in terms of their sex, socio-economic status and nutritional status.

Factors affecting the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils do not vary in terms of their sex, socio-economic status and nutritional status.

The reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils are significantly related to their academic performance.

The factors affecting the reading level and comprehension skills of intermediate pupils are significantly related to their academic performance.

Based on the above conclusions, the following actions are recommended:

The superintendent can invest in professional development for teachers on efficient reading instruction strategies in order to raise kids' reading proficiency and comprehension abilities. This can involve using techniques like guided reading and reciprocal teaching, as well as receiving training on how to differentiate instruction to meet the requirements of students with varying learning styles. Another way to maximise efficiency is to make the most of the division's well-stocked library, which has a wealth of reading resources.

Principals can offer training on evidence-based reading instruction techniques like vocabulary development, phonics instruction, and comprehension tactics. They can stimulate reading by setting up school reading activities, encouraging a literacy-focused curriculum, providing well-stocked libraries and comfortable reading nooks, and motivating pupils to interact with books. In order to improve reading outcomes, principals can also assist teachers in providing varied instruction to meet the diverse needs of their students. They can also support teachers in utilising small group instruction, one-on-one interventions for struggling readers, and digital resources for personalised learning.

Teachers can think about efficient methods for teaching reading. Firstly, a balanced literacy approach should be put into place, which combines chances for meaningful reading practice with explicit instruction in basic skills like vocabulary and phonics. These could include guided reading, in which pupils read aloud in small groups at their instructional level under the guidance of the teacher, and reciprocal teaching. They can also make the most of giving advanced readers enrichment activities and specialised support for struggling readers by utilising a range of reading materials at various reading levels. Teachers must also regularly test students' reading skills in order to monitor their progress and make necessary adjustments to their curriculum.

Parents can foster literacy development at home by making reading a daily habit by reading aloud to their children to expose them to new vocabulary, sentence structures, storytelling techniques, and encourage discussions about the book to enhance comprehension. They can set aside dedicated time each day for reading and establish a consistent reading routine to reinforce the importance of literacy in the child's life. Parents can also let their children seed them reading for pleasure, whether it is a book, magazine, or newspaper because modelling a positive attitude towards reading can inspire them to do the same.

Pupils ought to make reading a daily habit by setting aside time to read and choose books that interest them and vary their reading materials to explore different genres and topics. They need to establish reading goals for themselves, such as reading a certain number of books in a month or improving their reading speed. Setting targets can help motivate them to stay consistent in their reading practice. They can also practice active reading strategies like summarizing what read, asking questions about the text, and making connections to their own experiences. These strategies can improve their understanding of the material.

Future researchers may consider designing interventions or programs to enhance reading skills, conduct thorough literature reviews to understand the most effective strategies and interventions that have been successful in improving reading levels and comprehension.

They can collaborate with educators to understand the challenges faced in improving reading skills and to co-create evidence-based interventions that can be implemented in educational settings. They can also explore the use of technology, such as educational apps and digital platforms, to enhance reading skills among students. Studying the effectiveness of technology-based interventions can provide valuable insights into innovative approaches to improving reading comprehension.

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Affiliations and Corresponding Information

Keren Grace A. Rodriguez
San Juan Elementary School
Department of Education – Philippines