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An Assessment of Reading Comprehension Difficulties and Reading Level of Grade 7 Learners in Cagayan De Oro City Division

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ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension is essential for academic achievement and everyday life; however, many learners, particularly young students, experience difficulties understanding written texts. This study examined the reading comprehension difficulties and reading levels of 250 Grade 7 students from five public secondary schools in West 2 District, Cagayan de Oro City, during School Year 2024–2025. Specifically, it assessed difficulties in vocabulary, spelling, identifying the main idea, concentration, and reading motivation, as well as their relationship with students' reading levels. Using a descriptive-correlational research design and stratified sampling, data were gathered through a validated questionnaire and selected passages from the PHIL-IRI assessment tool. Mean, standard deviation, and Pearson correlation were utilized for data analysis. Findings revealed that concentration was the most challenging aspect of reading, while identifying the main idea had the lowest difficulty. Most students demonstrated independent reading levels across all passages, indicating their ability to comprehend texts with minimal assistance. Furthermore, a significant relationship was established between reading difficulties and reading levels, particularly in concentration. The study concluded that improving students' concentration and comprehension skills is essential. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to implement appropriate reading interventions and strategies that strengthen concentration and address the needs of learners experiencing frustration-level reading difficulties.

Keywords: reading comprehension difficulties, vocabulary, spelling, finding the main idea, concentration, motivation, reading level

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Reading comprehension is an important skill that students use, not only in school but also in everyday life. It helps them understand information, think carefully, solve problems, and continue learning. However, many students, especially young learners, struggle to understand what they read. These challenges may arise from several factors, including language-related difficulties, cognitive factors, and instructional strategies. Identifying difficulties early is needed because it allows teachers and families to provide the right support before students lose interest or confidence. With appropriate, timely intervention, learners can improve their reading skills, stay engaged in learning, and become more confident readers.

In the Philippines, reading comprehension is still a major problem. Many Filipino students struggle to understand and use information from texts, which affects their performance in school and in other areas of learning. According to the results of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2023, the Philippines ranked 77th out of 81 participating countries, with reading being one of the areas where

Filipino students performed poorly. These results highlight the need for stronger support to help learners, particularly those in public schools, develop their reading skills.

In line with the Department of Education's (DepEd) Memorandum No. 001, s. 2024, which introduced Catch-Up Fridays, public elementary and secondary schools were encouraged to devote Fridays to activities such as the Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) program. The initiative aims to improve basic reading skills and help learners overcome learning gaps that may affect their progress. Schools "play an important role" in developing learners into capable, responsible readers who can use their skills in school, work, and daily life according to (DepEd, 2019).

One of the tools used to support reading assessment is The Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), this aligns with Every Child a Reader Program (ECARP). It provides teachers with useful information about learners' reading abilities and current reading levels. Through this assessment, teachers can determine which reading skills need further attention and provide appropriate activities based on learners' needs. In this way, Phil-IRI supports a more learner-centered approach to reading instruction by helping teachers understand where their students are and what kind of support they require.

Furthermore, during the PHIL-IRI assessment for the 2024-2025 school year using the GST (pre-test), only 25.71% of 2088 Grade 7 students of West 2 District who had been assessed scored 28-40; these learners are categorized as Grade Ready, who will not undergo the next level of test. However, there were 30.51% of students who belonged to 3 levels down. Meaning these students will undergo the oral reading using the Grade 4 passages. Similarly, 43.79% of the students were classified as two grade levels below their expected reading level. Meaning they will undergo the oral reading using the Grade 5 passages from Phil-IRI. From the result, it was notable that about 75% of learners from West 2 District needing support in term of reading comprehension.

Nur, Tsuraya, and Saadah (2022) highlighted the importance of academic track strands and learning modalities in relation to students' reading comprehension abilities. Similarly, Mabborang and Balero (2023) emphasized the importance of providing appropriate support to help students develop their reading comprehension skills.

Learners' performance in the subject is shaped by their ability to comprehend texts, acquire and apply vocabulary, spell terms correctly, and identify main ideas. Since Araling Panlipunan lessons involve reading historical narratives, passages, concepts, and terminologies that demand comprehension, these skills are crucial. Considering the reading comprehension status in West 2 District and in the country, the researcher was motivated to investigate the underlying root causes behind students' reading comprehension difficulties, particularly in vocabulary, spelling, identifying main ideas, concentration, and reading motivation, as these directly affect learners' engagement and overall comprehension.

Literature and Related Studies

This chapter pulls together the key books, articles, and studies that actually matter for what it is trying to explore. It includes the learner's reading comprehension difficulties, such as vocabulary, spelling, finding the main idea, concentration, and reading motivation. Furthermore, it also provides learner's reading levels based on PHIL-IRI.

Reading Comprehension Difficulties

Reading comprehension difficulties involve challenges in understanding written text, often due to issues such as limited vocabulary, difficulty with spelling, finding the main idea, low concentration, and a lack of reading motivation.

Vocabulary

According to Dong et al. (2020), vocabulary knowledge not only determines progress in text comprehension through the identification of facial semantic meaning but also suggests that the coordinated development of vocabulary knowledge, grammatical knowledge, and inference will lead to better performance in complexity comprehension tasks.

There is a strong positive relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading success, with a richer vocabulary positively impacting the time spent on word recognition and focus during reading. Word-teaching methods also contribute to word recognition and fluent reading. For instance, during reading activities, the teacher observed that students improved their accuracy in reading previously unknown or misread words after explicitly practicing them, which in turn positively influenced their responses to comprehension questions (Gedik and Akyol, 2022).

Researchers have further demonstrated the challenges involved in learning new meanings of conceptually rich words that students may partially understand. Their study explores the overall structure of vocabulary knowledge by examining the relationships and acquisition order of various word knowledge components. Furthermore, González-Fernández and Schmitt (2020) show us something interesting. Vocabulary knowledge is not a bunch of separate skills but it is all interconnected. Their analysis suggests that recognition comes first, and recall follows, in a fairly predictable order.

Spelling

The central issue, therefore, is not whether spelling is important, but which teaching approaches are most effective in developing students' spelling skills. Da Costa and Arias (2021), in their review of multiple studies, emphasized the value of engaging word-study activities that incorporate game-like elements, suggesting that such approaches can contribute to improved spelling performance. In contrast, Gritz (2020) found that students who relied primarily on memorizing weekly word lists often struggled to retain the words over time and apply them correctly in their writing. These findings highlight the importance of moving beyond rote memorization toward meaningful and engaging spelling instruction. Furthermore, fostering a positive mindset can help students persevere through spelling challenges, as self-belief encourages them to view mistakes as opportunities for learning. Explicitly teaching a specific spelling rule each week can also help students understand how and when to apply these rules, thereby strengthening their spelling skills and promoting the transfer of learning to written tasks.

The study by Kim and Petscher (2023) found that spelling played a crucial role in accurately identifying students with word reading difficulties in kindergarten and Grade 1. In contrast, vocabulary did not provide additional accuracy in identifying reading difficulties beyond what was already captured by word reading and spelling. These findings underscore the importance of integrating spelling instruction alongside word reading as a crucial factor in the early identification of reading difficulties, beginning as early as kindergarten. While vocabulary may not have had an immediate impact, it is likely to become more influential in later stages of reading development.

Ramsdell and Bowers (2024) emphasized that American Speech-Language-Hearing Association recognizes the prevention, identification, assessment, and intervention of reading and writing difficulties as part of the school-based speech-language pathologists' role. For SLPs in school settings, it is typical to work with students who face challenges in reading and spelling. Importantly, difficulties with spelling often serve as an early indicator of dyslexia, and these initial spelling mistakes can help identify students who could benefit from early intervention.

Finding the Main Idea

Fuqaha and Wartim (2023) stated that English language learners face two distinct challenges when trying

to identify the main idea of a text. Firstly, there is variability in the main idea itself, requiring learners to navigate through diverse perspectives and interpretations. In addition, learners may find it difficult to identify the topic sentence, especially when the main idea is not directly stated in the text. Their study points to the difficulties experienced by English language learners in recognizing and understanding the main ideas presented in different texts. It also suggests that sufficient vocabulary knowledge, effective reading strategies, and a good understanding of the text's theme can help learners deal with these challenges more successfully.

In study of Ramadhianti and Somba (2023), they found that students experienced difficulties in several aspects of reading comprehension. These included distinguishing the main idea from supporting details, identifying the main idea across paragraphs, and understanding topics related to other cultures. Students also had difficulty relating the topic to their prior knowledge, understanding unfamiliar vocabulary, and making inferences from the text. These findings suggest the need to use appropriate reading strategies that address these specific difficulties and help students develop better comprehension skills.

Isaqjon (2022) suggested that having students create their own questions while reading can be an effective way to improve reading comprehension. This strategy encourages learners to become more actively involved in the text and to think carefully about the information they encounter. As they formulate questions, students can connect ideas, identify important concepts, and determine the main ideas of the passage. The strategy may also help them develop their ability to summarize information, leading to a deeper understanding of the text and a more active reading experience.

Concentration

The study by Spjeldnæs and Karlsen (2024) shows how digital media can support a calmer and more focused reading experience. Compared with the constant distractions often associated with social media and smartphones, tablets can provide a more purposeful way of engaging with texts. They give readers easier access to books while still allowing them to experience the concentration and reflection commonly associated with printed materials. In this way, tablets offer the convenience of digital technology without completely losing the depth of traditional reading.

The study also found that readers adjust the way they read depending on their situation. Experienced readers, for example, choose different titles, formats, and reading environments based on what works best for them at a particular time. Digital formats, especially audiobooks, are often used for lighter reading because they allow readers to listen while doing other activities. At the same time, committed readers develop personal strategies to protect their reading time and avoid distractions. The participants also noted that e-books and audiobooks have changed how and when they engage with literature, providing greater flexibility and creating new ways of experiencing written works.

Additionally, Gheewalla, McClelland, and Furnham (2021) examined how white noise and siren sounds affect reading comprehension. Their findings showed that siren noise had the strongest negative effect on students' performance compared with completing a cognitively demanding task in silence. White noise also reduced the efficiency of text comprehension when compared with silent conditions. However, the study found no significant difference between introverted and extroverted participants in their responses to the different auditory conditions.

Similarly, Nur, Mukhlash, Hidayat and Suska (2024) identified two major groups of difficulties experienced by students when reading academic texts in digital environments. The first involves technology-related concerns, such as low interest in reading, eye strain, unstable internet connections, difficulty maintaining concentration, and information overload. The second group involves academic

reading challenges, particularly unfamiliar vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and topics that students may not be familiar with. Overall, the findings indicate that digital reading can be challenging for students, both because of technological factors and the demands of understanding academic content.

Mendoza and Cruz (2024) found that silent reading had a positive effect on students' reading comprehension and was the reading method most preferred by the respondents. During the discussions, English teachers explained that they preferred silent reading because it allowed students to understand stories more clearly, remember new words, and stay focused in a quiet and comfortable setting. Based on these findings, the researchers suggested that teachers include sustained silent reading in classroom activities through approaches such as Silent Reading Activities (SRA), Reading Laboratory, the Four-Pronged Approach, and scheduled Drop Everything and Read sessions. These strategies were intended to respond to the reading preferences and needs of Generation Alpha learners while supporting the continued development of their comprehension skills.

Reading Motivation

Maglunob and Tabernal (2023) found that including home visits in an intensified remedial reading program may help address learners' reading difficulties. The approach can encourage children to read more often, strengthen their reading comprehension, and provide additional support for learners who struggle with reading. This intervention will be a collaborative effort between the school and target community partners. Additionally, encouraging parents to stock their homes with reading materials and actively engage in their children's reading activities can further support their reading development.

The findings of Bakkaloglu and Pilten (2022) emphasized the importance of encouraging students to endorse mastery goals rather than performance-approach goals. Researchers determined that a 'moderate' positive relationship exists between the students' reading motivations and their reading comprehension self-efficacy perceptions. The results reveal that the reading theater technique had a positive effect on the reading comprehension skills and reading motivation of the students in the experimental group. Similarly, Aktas (2023) found that the students expressed positive opinions about the reading theater. Based on these results, the researchers suggest employing the reading theater technique to enhance the reading motivation of Turkish language learners and improve their reading comprehension skills.

Kuhn et al. (2022) stated that readers who have a positive attitude toward reading tend to be more motivated to read, which, in turn, fosters more positive emotions. They also found that motivation for digital reading can help reduce negative feelings, physical and psychological discomfort, as well as challenges related to reading effort, concentration, and immersion. In other words, when students have a positive attitude toward digital texts and are intrinsically motivated to read them, their digital reading habits improve, leading to a greater sense of success in their academic learning.

Kambara and Lin (2023), found a consistent pattern in which their immediate environments, or microsystems, strongly influenced the reading motivation of both American and Japanese students. They suggested that cultural variations could explain the differences in reading motivation observed between the two groups. Additionally, the study highlighted several effective strategies for motivating students to read.

However, Zhu, Yao, Chan, and Zhu (2024) reported that reading motivation had a much stronger effect on the reading performance of students whose parents were in the balanced involvement group compared to those with parents in the enthusiastic involvement group. Interestingly, the researchers did not find the same relationship between students and their parents in the mixed-involvement group. The findings

emphasize the role of parental involvement in children's reading development and show how motivation may be connected to reading performance.

The review of related literature also helped shape the direction of the present study. Examining previous studies provided the researcher with a clearer understanding of the different challenges learners face in reading comprehension. These included limited vocabulary, difficulties in decoding words, and weaknesses in critical thinking. The literature also revealed recurring concerns that may affect learners' ability to develop effective reading comprehension skills. These findings helped the researcher narrow the focus of the study, identify areas that needed further examination, and relate the research to the issues commonly observed in reading comprehension.

Learner's Reading Level

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a congressionally mandated assessment administered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) under the U.S. Department of Education, reported a decline in reading performance among fourth-grade students in 2022. Only 33% of fourth-graders performed at or above the NAEP Proficient level, which was two percentage points lower than the 2019 result. Meanwhile, 63% reached or surpassed the basic level, representing a four-percentage-point decrease from 2019. However, this figure was similar to the level recorded in 1992. In contrast, 37% of students performed below the basic level, an increase of four percentage points from 2019, although the difference from 1992 was not statistically significant. At the Advanced level, 9% of students reached this benchmark in 2022, the same percentage recorded in 2019 and higher than the figure reported in 1992. NAEP uses three achievement levels, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced to describe what students are expected to know and demonstrate in reading. Students who perform at or above the Proficient level are considered to have demonstrated strong academic performance and the ability to handle challenging content. However, the NAEP Proficient level should not be interpreted as equivalent to grade-level proficiency used in state or district assessments. Since these achievement levels are considered experimental measures by experts, the results should be interpreted with appropriate caution.

Dorado and Medina (2022) reported that the Department of Education's reading program, HAMON: Bawat Bata Bumabasa (3Bs Initiative), can help address reading difficulties among Filipino learners. The program was found to improve students' reading skills, particularly in word recognition and comprehension. Its effectiveness was influenced by several factors, including the type of reading intervention provided and the knowledge and skills of the teacher serving as the reading coordinator. Parent involvement was also identified as an important part of the program, particularly during the period of the pandemic when learning support extended beyond the classroom.

According to Duque and Fortes (2023) primary learners could perform syllable blending with relative ease but had greater difficulty with onset-rime deletion, especially when consonant blends were involved. The researchers associated these difficulties with limited phonological experiences during distance learning. They recommended providing teachers with specialized training, strengthening reading intervention programs, and ensuring that appropriate instructional resources are available to support early reading development. In a similar study, Gediki and Akyoli (2022) found that using word repetition as a corrective technique helped reduce a fourth-grade learner's reading errors from 32 to only 6 errors in a grade-level text.

Tomas et al. (2021) identified several factors that can hinder learners' reading development, including limited vocabulary, weak comprehension, low motivation, and inadequate support at home and in school. Their findings point to the value of structured reading programs that address these areas while providing

learners with a supportive environment for reading. After 31 class hours of intervention, the learner in their study showed considerable improvement, including progress equivalent to one grade level, increased motivation and confidence, and a greater ability to recognize and correct reading errors independently.

Theoretical Framework

Scarborough introduced the Reading Rope Framework in 2005, which provides a useful basis for understanding the different skills involved in successful reading. The framework presents reading proficiency as a rope made up of two major strands: word recognition and language comprehension. Although these strands represent different sets of skills, they work together as readers recognize words, process the text, and construct meaning.

The word recognition strand refers to the skills needed to identify words accurately and with increasing speed. As these skills become more automatic, learners can recognize words without using too much mental effort. This allows them to give greater attention to understanding what they are reading rather than focusing mainly on decoding individual words.

The language comprehension strand focuses on making sense of what is read. It involves several areas, including vocabulary, knowledge of sentence structure, and background knowledge. These skills help learners understand the meaning of a text, interpret its ideas, and relate new information to what they already know.

Scarborough's framework suggests that both strands need to develop together for learners to become effective readers. As reading skills improve, the different components become more connected and automatic, supporting greater fluency and comprehension. However, weaknesses in either strand can affect the reading process. For example, learners who struggle to decode words may use much of their mental effort on word recognition, leaving less attention for comprehension. In the same way, limited vocabulary or insufficient background knowledge may make a text difficult to understand even when the learner can decode the words accurately.

The framework emphasizes the need for balanced reading instruction that develops both word recognition and language comprehension. Reading programs should therefore provide activities that strengthen phonological awareness, decoding, and sight word recognition while also helping learners develop their vocabulary, understanding of grammar, and familiarity with different types of texts. Addressing both strands can give learners a stronger foundation for fluent and meaningful reading.

This model provides an important foundation for the present study because it identifies the skills that contribute to proficient reading. Focusing on word recognition and language comprehension allows the researcher to examine the specific areas in which learners experience difficulties and how these difficulties may affect their reading proficiency and comprehension.

Problems with word recognition, such as weak phonological awareness and difficulty decoding words, may interfere with learners' ability to read effectively. At the same time, language comprehension difficulties, including limited vocabulary and insufficient background knowledge, can make it harder for learners to understand what they read. Guided by Scarborough's model, this study examines these difficulties and recognizes the need for instruction that addresses both areas. Strengthening decoding skills while developing vocabulary and providing engaging and meaningful reading materials may help learners overcome some of the challenges they encounter in reading.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents the relationship between the different reading comprehension difficulties and the reading levels of the learners. The researcher measured each independent variable quantitatively and determined

the learners' reading levels using the scoring guidelines of the PHIL-IRI.

The present study on reading comprehension difficulties was anchored on the work of Herrera, Rayton, Limos-Galay, and Lazaro (2024). Their study identified five areas that may contribute to reading difficulties: vocabulary, spelling, identifying the main idea, concentration, and reading motivation. The results showed that spelling was a very high area of difficulty, while vocabulary, concentration, and reading motivation were rated as high. Identifying the main idea, on the other hand, was considered a moderate difficulty among the students.

The study further showed that learners with lower reading scores often struggled to identify main ideas and make inferences, both of which are important for understanding a text. Difficulties in maintaining concentration, particularly when lessons are not engaging or when learners experience anxiety, may also affect their comprehension and interest in reading. Motivation was another important factor, as uninteresting reading materials can make it harder for students to stay focused and understand the text. To help address this concern, the researchers suggested using reading materials that reflect learners' interests and connect with their everyday experiences.

Reading comprehension difficulties may also be related to weaknesses in oral language development during the early years or inadequate spelling instruction. Since previous studies have shown a strong connection between spelling and reading, improving learners' spelling skills may also support their reading development. This connection is important not only in academic tasks but also in everyday communication, which highlights the need to include spelling instruction in reading programs.

Learners who have little interest in reading may also experience difficulty understanding lengthy sentences and identifying the main idea of a text. Previous research points to the value of using interesting and appropriate reading materials while strengthening basic skills such as vocabulary and word decoding. Teachers may therefore consider strategies that match learners' interests and are appropriate to their reading abilities.

The Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) is also used by educators to assess learners' reading performance and classify them as Independent, Instructional, or Frustration readers. Following the Phil-IRI guidelines, a learner's comprehension level for each passage is determined based on the percentage of correct answers. This is calculated by dividing the number of correct responses by the total number of questions and multiplying the result by 100. A score of 80–100% is classified as Independent, 59–79% as Instructional, and 58% or below as Frustration.

For this study, the researcher assumed that the respondents were able to read but experienced varying degrees of difficulty in understanding what they read. It was also assumed that Grade 7 learners may encounter problems related to vocabulary, spelling, identifying the main idea, concentration, and reading motivation, which may influence their reading levels. The researcher further assumed that the research instruments were reliable and appropriate for gathering information about the learners' reading experiences. The findings of the study are expected to provide useful information for teachers and other education stakeholders in developing appropriate interventions that respond to learners' reading needs.

The conceptual framework presents Reading Comprehension Difficulties as Variable 1 (V1) and Learners' Reading Level as Variable 2 (V2). Reading Comprehension Difficulties consists of five areas: vocabulary, spelling, identifying the main idea, concentration, and reading motivation. These areas represent the common difficulties that learners may experience when trying to understand and interpret what they read. Learner's Reading Level (V2) is the outcome of the study. It is measured using the Phil-IRI, which classifies learners as Independent, Instructional, or Frustration readers. The framework shows that V1 is

the factor being studied, while V2 is the result or reading level being measured.

Statement of the Problem

This study attempted to determine the level of reading comprehension difficulties and the reading level of learners in West II District, Cagayan de Oro City, during the School Year 2024-2025. It specifically answered the following questions:

1. What is the respondents' level of reading comprehension difficulties in the areas of: vocabulary, spelling, finding the main idea, concentration and reading motivation?
2. What is the respondent's level on reading in terms of Independent, Instructional, and Frustration using the PHIL-IRI passages?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the respondents' reading comprehension difficulties and their reading level?

Scope and Limitations

This study focused on reading comprehension difficulties and learners' reading levels based on PHIL-IRI at West 2 District, Division of Cagayan de Oro City, for the School Year 2024-2025. The researcher randomly selected only 250 Grade 7 learners from the schools as participants in the study regardless of their reading level. The independent variables were limited only to the learner's reading comprehension difficulties such as vocabulary, spelling, identifying the main idea, concentration, and reading motivation. The dependent variables were also limited to selected 5 passages from PHIL- IRI [illegible] following its scoring system.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed the descriptive correlation method to investigate the relationship between two or more variables without altering or controlling them. This method helped identify patterns, trends, or connections in a specific situation and indicates whether the variables are related and the strength of that relationship. By using this approach, researchers collected detailed information, identified meaningful relationships between variables, and utilized the results to inform future research or make informed decisions, all while maintaining a study's relevance to real-life conditions. This study gathered data using Phil-IRI passages to determine the reading level in terms of independent, instructional, and frustration. Furthermore, this approach described the level of respondents' reading comprehension difficulties, including vocabulary, spelling, finding the main idea, concentration, and reading motivation. Lastly, this study examined the significant relationship of the variables.

Study Setting

This study was conducted in five large public secondary schools of the West II District, Cagayan de Oro City Division. The participating schools include Bulua National High School, PN Roa Sr. National High School, Canito-an National High School, Iponan National High School, and Pagatpat National High School. These schools used the same curriculum and utilized Phil-IRI Assessment Tool to measure the reading capability of their students.

Cagayan de Oro City, where the five schools included in the study are located, lies along the north-central coast of Mindanao beside Macajalar Bay. It is bordered by Bukidnon and Lanao del Norte to the south, Opol to the west, and Tagoloan to the east. The city has experienced considerable growth over the years and has become an important center for education, healthcare, commerce, and other services in Northern Mindanao.

Despite its continued development, the city faces social and economic concerns, including employment difficulties, rising living costs, and unequal access to resources. At the same time, its growth has been supported by its agricultural and forest resources, mineral deposits, tourist attractions, waterways, transportation networks, and other infrastructure. Cagayan de Oro also serves as a center for healthcare, education, and research. It's generally typhoon-free location and stable peace and order further contribute to its development. The city is also known for outdoor recreational activities, particularly kayaking and white-water rafting.

Research Respondents

The respondents were 250 Grade 7 learners selected from five public secondary schools in West 2 District, Cagayan de Oro City. The sample was allocated proportionately across the participating schools based on their respective Grade 7 populations. They were chosen as the target population, as the researcher believed this grade level is most suitable for the study's objectives. All students had an equal opportunity to be selected and voluntarily participated in both the survey questionnaire and the PHIL-IRI assessment.

Sampling Procedure

To facilitate the sampling procedure, the researcher applied Slovin's Formula to the population of 2,237, using a 6% margin of error. Stratified random sampling was then employed by dividing the sample size by the population to determine the appropriate number of respondents from each school.

The reading coordinator, authorized by the school head of each institution, randomly selected learners to participate in the study. The selection process was carried out during the conduct of the research.

Research Instrument

The instrument used a questionnaire in 2 sets. Set 1 inquired about the learner's reading comprehension difficulties, including vocabulary, spelling, identifying the main idea, concentration, and reading motivation. The researchers based this study on the research instrument developed by Herrera, Limos-Galay, and Lazaro (2024) in their work, Learning Domains Affecting the Reading Comprehension of Grade 10 Students in Magsaysay, Occidental Mindoro.

On the other hand, Set 2 is an assessment tool evaluated the reading levels of Grade 7 respondents. Includes passages from PHIL-IRI tailored for Grade 7 students, such as Rocks from Outer Space, Diving, Beetles, The Brain, and Just How Fast. Each passage included eight questions. These passages are useful for checking reading comprehension because they present a range of interesting topics. They test how well readers understand facts, learn unfamiliar words, and use thinking skills like making inferences and identifying cause-and-effect relationships. Their variety keeps readers interested and helps measure understanding across different types of information. This adapted instrument provides all the necessary information and data for the study.

Validation and Reliability of Instrument

The questionnaire underwent a series of validations with experts whose qualifications are doctors of education. The researcher was given a validation instrument from the graduate school to be used for validating the items of the questionnaire. The identified validators were given such instrument. The instrument was retrieved by the researcher after a week then referred to another expert for consolidation of the results.

From the consolidated results, some items or indicators were changed, corrected or restated aligned to what is needed to be measured both in the independent and dependent variables. Other items remain as is which passed already as to the correct statement and grammar. Certificate of Content Validity of questionnaire was executed by the expert certifying that have reviewed, analyzed and evaluated the content

of the researcher-made questionnaire for the validity of the thesis entitled “Reading Comprehension Difficulties and Reading Level of Learners in the Division of Cagayan de Oro City." It is recommended that the validated instrument will undergo pilot testing.

The instrument was piloted to the thirty (30) students of the West 2 District, Division of Cagayan de Oro City who are not included as respondents. These actions were conducted to guarantee the accuracy and concision of all the information acquired in relation to the study's data collection phase.

The outcome of the pilot study was analyzed using Cronbach's alpha with an overall result ranging from 0.964 to 0.966 which means valid and reliable. The value interpretation of the results placed them in the “Excellent” suggesting that the instrument’s reliability was strong. Cronbach alpha was a technique for evaluating reliability that involves comparing the total variance to the shared variance, or covariance, among the items that comprise an instrument.

Statistical Treatment of Data

After collecting and recording the data that were gathered in the study, the researcher utilized the following statistical tools:

The first research problem is to determine the respondents’ level of reading comprehension difficulties in the areas of vocabulary, spelling, finding the main idea, concentration, and reading motivation, while the second aimed to identify their reading level in terms of Independent, Instructional, and Frustration, as measured using the Phil-IRI passages. Both problems were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The third problem examined whether there was a significant relationship between the respondents’ reading comprehension difficulties and their reading level, using Pearson’s Correlation r to determine the significance of the relationship among learners in the Division of Cagayan de Oro City.

Ethical Considerations

This study was scholarly and purely intended to be instructional. It adhered to the research guidelines set by the Graduate School at Cagayan de Oro College, PHINMA-Education Network. Initially, the researcher secured a permit to conduct the study and obtained the necessary authorization from the concerned school authorities. Participants were provided with a questionnaire and an informed consent form, which ensured that the purpose and nature of the study were clearly communicated to all participants. The researcher guaranteed that all responses would remain strictly confidential and emphasized the participants' right to decline involvement in the study. To ensure complete anonymity, the questionnaire included participants' names as optional. The researcher adhered to the American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines to appropriately credit referenced research studies. Furthermore, all sources and studies cited in this research were duly acknowledged. The study was conducted solely to benefit the education sector and ensured that no harm was caused to anyone participating.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part presents the result and discussion of reading comprehension difficulties and reading level of learners in the Division Cagayan de Oro City. The data are presented in tabular form following the problems stated earlier.

Problem 1. What is the respondent’s level of reading comprehension difficulties in the areas of vocabulary, spelling, finding the main idea, concentration and reading motivation?

Table 1
Summary Distribution of the Respondent's Level of Reading Comprehension Difficulties

Variable	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Vocabulary	3.36	0.84	Moderate
Spelling	3.35	0.84	Moderate
Finding the Main Idea	3.28	0.83	Moderate
Concentration	3.48	0.87	High
Reading Motivation	3.42	0.87	High
Overall	**3.38**	**0.85**	**Moderate**

Legend: 4.20–5.00 Always / Very High 1.80–2.59 Rarely / Low
3.40–4.19 Often / High 1.00–1.79 Never / Very Low
2.60–3.39 Sometimes / Moderate

Table 1 presents the summary the respondents' level of reading comprehension difficulties. The table includes five key variables: vocabulary, spelling, finding the main idea, concentration, and reading motivation. The overall mean of **3.38 (SD = 0.85)** was interpreted as **Moderate**. This indicates that the respondents experience some difficulties in the different areas of reading comprehension, although these difficulties are not severe or consistently experienced. In other words, reading problems occur at certain times and may depend on the situation or the type of reading task. With appropriate teaching strategies and support, these difficulties can be addressed and gradually reduced.

The moderate result also reflects the different experiences of the learners. Some students had difficulty understanding unfamiliar words, while others struggled more with maintaining their attention or identifying important information in a text. During the observation, it was noticeable that these difficulties could affect one another. For example, students who had trouble understanding words were more likely to lose interest or attention, while those who had difficulty concentrating also found it harder to recognize and remember unfamiliar vocabulary. This suggests that reading comprehension difficulties are connected rather than occurring as separate problems.

Guthrie and Wigfield (2020) emphasized the importance of reading motivation in reading achievement and noted that addressing motivational concerns can contribute to better comprehension. Similarly, Ruan et al. (2020) explained that vocabulary and spelling difficulties may be improved through targeted instruction focusing on word recognition and phonemic awareness. However, according to Famoso et al. (2025), that teacher's experience, stakeholders' involvement and gender perspectives had significant impacts in which it is necessary to address by school administrator to enhance reading comprehension.

Among the five variables, **Concentration** obtained the highest mean of **3.48 (SD = 0.87)**, which was interpreted as **High**. This indicates that maintaining attention while reading is the most common difficulty experienced by the respondents. The result suggests that many learners find it difficult to sustain their focus throughout a reading activity. The standard deviation of 0.87 also indicates that the responses were relatively close to one another, suggesting that difficulty in concentration was experienced by a considerable number of respondents.

Several factors may contribute to this difficulty. Distractions from gadgets, tiredness, lack of interest in the reading material, and the general learning environment may affect students' ability to remain focused. Teachers can help address this concern by reducing unnecessary distractions, providing short breaks when appropriate, and creating a quiet and organized space for reading. Although the results are based on the

respondents' self-reports and may not fully capture every learner's actual reading behavior, they point to concentration as an area that deserves particular attention in improving reading performance.

Based on the researcher's observation, some learners appeared to have difficulty concentrating because of factors beyond the classroom. Some may not have had enough sleep, while others may have been affected by concerns at home or may have come to school without having eaten properly. These situations can make it harder for students to stay attentive during reading activities. A supportive and well-organized classroom can therefore make a difference. Limiting distractions and establishing clear expectations for gadget use may help learners give more attention to the task and process information more effectively.

Support at home is also important. Parents may encourage their children to establish a regular reading schedule and provide a quiet place where they can read without unnecessary interruptions. Harris and Cunningham (2021) noted that calm and organized reading spaces can help learners maintain concentration. Lee and Wang (2020) also found that activities that actively involve students, such as discussions, interactive reading, and the use of multimedia, can help sustain their attention. Mindfulness and other concentration exercises may likewise be useful in developing students' ability to focus during reading tasks. Pérez et al. (2024) highlighted the importance of attention, memory, and inference in reading comprehension. Their findings suggest that some difficulties in understanding a text may be related to a lack of attention during reading rather than simply to limited reading ability.

In contrast, **finding the main idea** had the lowest mean of **3.28 (SD = 0.83),** interpreted as **Moderate**. This indicates that identifying the central idea of a passage is a difficulty for some respondents, but it is not as common as their difficulty with concentration. Finding the main idea is an important part of comprehension because it helps learners connect details, remember important information, and understand what the text is mainly about. When students fail to identify the central idea, their understanding of the passage may become incomplete or disconnected. The moderate result therefore suggests that this skill still needs attention even though it is not the most serious reading concern among the respondents.

The researcher's observation also points to the need for direct instruction in identifying the main idea. Learners may benefit from guided reading, carefully planned questions, and activities that allow them to work with different kinds of texts. Teachers can also help students distinguish between the main idea and supporting details by asking them to summarize a passage or explain its most important message in their own words. Strengthening this skill can support not only performance in reading-related activities but also learners' ability to analyze and organize information in other subject areas.

Schroeder (2020) found that explicit instruction in identifying the main idea, including the use of summarization, questioning, and recognition of supporting details, can improve reading comprehension. Smith et al. (2021) similarly emphasized active reading practices such as annotation and discussion of important points as ways to help learners develop this skill. Kasim et al. (2020) reported that vocabulary was the most difficult reading sub-skill in their study, while identifying the main idea, along with understanding details and making inferences, fell within the second level of difficulty. This suggests that although finding the main idea may not always be the most difficult reading skill, it can still present a meaningful challenge to learners and should be included in reading intervention efforts.

Problem 2. What is the respondent's level on reading based on PHIL-IRI?

Table 2 Distribution of Respondent's Level of Reading based on comprehension (PHIL-IRI)

Level on Reading	Passages				
	A	B	C	D	E

Comprehension	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**
Independent 80 – 100 %	138	55.2	181	72.4	145	58	136	54.4	178	71.2
Instructional 59 – 79 %	86	34.4	59	23.6	81	32.4	82	32.8	56	22.4
Frustration 58 and below	26	10.4	10	4	24	9.6	32	12.8	26	6.4
Total	**250**	**100**	**250**	**100**	**250**	**100**	**250**	**100**	**250**	**100**
Mean	**77.9**		**78.84**		**78.04**		**76.89**		**78.87**	
Standard Deviation	**0.83**		**0.86**		**0.87**		**0.84**		**0.83**	

Table 2 presents the distribution of the respondents' reading levels based on their comprehension scores in the PHIL-IRI. The mean scores for the five passages ranged from 76.89 to 78.84, showing only a small difference in the respondents' performance across the texts. Passage B obtained the highest mean score of 78.84, followed by Passage E with 78.37, Passage C with 78.04, and Passage A with 77.90. Passage D had the lowest mean score at 76.89.

Despite these differences, none of the passages reached the 80% score required for the Independent Reading Level. On average, the respondents were therefore within the upper range of the Instructional Level. This means that they could understand much of what they read but still needed some teacher guidance, especially when dealing with unfamiliar words, ideas, or more demanding parts of a text.

The relatively higher score in Passage B may suggest that the passage was easier for the learners to understand or that its topic was more familiar to them. In comparison, the lower result for Passage D may indicate that its vocabulary, ideas, or overall content was more difficult. However, these interpretations should be considered carefully since the mean scores alone cannot determine the exact reason for the differences in performance.

The small variation among the passage means, together with the relatively low standard deviations, also suggests that the respondents had generally similar levels of reading comprehension. This provides a useful basis for planning classroom instruction because the learners may benefit from common reading activities while still receiving additional support based on their individual needs. Since most of the respondents were close to the Independent Level, appropriate reading interventions may help they progress from the Instructional Level toward greater reading independence.

The researcher also observed that the nature of the reading passage appeared to influence learners' engagement. Students tended to participate more actively when the topic was familiar, interesting, or connected to their experiences. This observation suggests that the choice of reading materials matters. Texts that are appropriate to learners' reading abilities while also being relevant and interesting may help sustain their attention and encourage more frequent reading.

Agustin, Manalo, and Trinidad (2021) reported that targeted reading programs in Philippine elementary

schools contributed to improvements in learners' reading comprehension. Their findings showed that regular exposure to contextualized and leveled reading materials helped learners develop greater reading independence. Flores and de la Peña (2020) likewise found that learners who read independently tend to demonstrate better academic performance and stronger motivation toward learning. In addition, Caparos and Napil (2024) found that students with positive reading attitudes were to develop more in motivation and perform better academically in Filipino. Moreover, they mentioned that right reading materials, positive reading attitudes, and opportunities in independent reading were necessary in improving learners' overall reading development.

The lowest frequency was found in the Frustration Level for Passage B, where only 10 learners or 4% were classified under this category. This indicates that only a small number of respondents experienced serious difficulty understanding the passage, even with assistance. Learners at the Frustration Level generally encounter reading materials that are beyond their present level of ability, which may result in poor comprehension and reduced engagement.

Although the small number of learners in this category is encouraging, these students should not be overlooked. Persistent difficulty without appropriate support may cause them to lose confidence and develop a negative attitude toward reading. Regular assessment can help teachers identify learners who require more focused assistance and provide instruction suited to their specific reading needs. Small-group activities, guided reading, and carefully selected texts may be useful in helping these learners improve.

Cruz and Sebastian (2022) found that struggling readers in the early grades can make progress when they receive individualized interventions that combine phonics-based and meaning-based approaches. Reyes and Dumlao (2023) also stressed that early identification and appropriate remediation is important in preventing learning gaps from becoming wider, especially in multilingual classrooms where learners experiencing both language and comprehension difficulties. Similarly, Proctor et al. (2020) emphasized that early intervention and targeted small-group instruction can provide struggling readers with the support they need to build stronger foundational skills.

Overall, the results show that most respondents were functioning at the upper Instructional Level, with only a small proportion falling under the Frustration Level. The findings suggest that the learners are generally capable of understanding the texts but still need continued guidance to reach the Independent Level. Providing appropriately leveled, engaging, and varied reading materials, together with regular assessment and targeted support for struggling readers, may help improve their reading comprehension and move them toward greater independence.

Problem 3. Is there a significant relationship between the respondents' reading comprehension difficulties and their reading level?

Table 3
Result of the Test on Relationship between the Respondent's Reading Comprehension Difficulties and their Reading Level

Legend S-Significant NS- Not Significant

Reading Comprehension Difficulties	**Reading Level**			
	Independent r-value	Instructional r-value	Frustration r-value	**Overall** **r-value**

	p-value	p-value	p-value	**p-value**
Vocabulary	0.60 0.02 S	0.70 0.05 S	0.70 0.03 S	0.67 0.04 S
Spelling	0.50 0.02 S	0.90 0.05 S	0.51 0.04 S	0.64 0.04 S
Finding the Main Idea	0.51 0.03 S	0.60 0.03 S	0.60 0.04 S	**0.57** 0.04 S
Concentration	0.80 0.05 S	0.80 0.04 S	0.90 0.04 S	**0.83** 0.05 S
Reading Motivation	0.60 0.04 S	0.70 0.04 S	0.70 0.04 S	0.68 0.04 Significant

Table 3 presents the statistical results on the relationship between learners' reading comprehension difficulties and their reading levels in the Division of Cagayan de Oro City. The findings show that all five indicators—vocabulary, spelling, identifying the main idea, concentration, and reading motivation—have significant relationships with learners' reading levels. The correlation coefficients ranged from 0.57 to 0.83, while all p-values were below 0.05, indicating that the relationships were statistically significant. This suggests that difficulties in these areas are associated with differences in learners' reading performance. Based on these findings, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between reading comprehension difficulties and reading level is rejected. The results point to the importance of addressing learners' specific reading difficulties rather than treating reading problems as a single concern.

Vocabulary had a significant relationship with reading level, with an overall r-value of 0.67 and a p-value of 0.04. This indicates that learners' vocabulary knowledge is closely associated with their reading performance. Students who understand a wider range of words are generally better able to follow the meaning of a passage, identify important details, and understand its main idea. In contrast, learners with limited vocabulary may spend more effort figuring out individual words, making it harder for them to understand the text as a whole.

Based on the researcher's observation, vocabulary should be given regular attention during reading instruction. Reading activities should not focus solely on answering comprehension questions after a passage. Teachers may also introduce unfamiliar words before or during reading and provide opportunities for learners to use these words in different contexts. Checking learners' vocabulary can also help teachers determine whether unfamiliar words are contributing to their reading difficulties.

Hu et al. (2022) realized that vocabulary knowledge has both direct and indirect effects on reading comprehension, even when grammar skills are taken into account. This supports the idea that vocabulary remains an important part of learners' ability to understand texts. Stewart et al. (2024) further reported

that a deeper understanding of word meanings is a stronger indicator of reading ability. This means that simply recognizing a word may not be enough; learners also need to understand how the word is used and what it means in context. Khan et al. (2020) likewise identified that insufficient vocabulary as one of the major factors which contribute to reading difficulties of learners.

Spelling also showed a significant relationship with reading level, with an overall r-value of 0.64 and a p-value of 0.04. The result suggests that learners who demonstrate better spelling skills also tend to have better reading performance. On the other hand, difficulty spelling words may be associated with problems in recognizing and processing words while reading. Since spelling and reading both involve knowledge of letters, sounds, and word patterns, weakness in one area may affect performance in the other.

From the researcher's point of view, reading instruction should therefore include activities that develop spelling alongside comprehension. Regular spelling practice, word-building exercises, phonics activities, and exposure to commonly used and unfamiliar words may help learners become more familiar with word patterns. Strengthening these skills may also make word recognition easier and allow learners to focus more on understanding what they read. They should also include regular and clear spelling activities. Improving spelling can also improve reading because it helps students connect letters with sounds. It is also important to identify spelling problems early because they may signal future reading difficulties.

Recent studies also support the strong connection between spelling and reading. Kim et al. (2024) uncovered a strong relationship between word reading and spelling, especially among young learners. Mimeau (2025) found that learning the spelling of new words in Grade 3 helped improve word reading and reading comprehension in Grade 4. Choi et al. (2020) also found that children's reading comprehension had a significant effect on their spelling ability.

The difficulty in **finding the main idea** also showed a significant relationship with **reading level (r = 0.57, p = 0.04)** as lowest among the variables. The results showed that students experienced minimal difficulties with this variable. However, it is crucial to note that some students struggle to identify the main idea of a passage. This finding is an important concern that educators and other individuals involved in reading instruction need to address. Although the difficulty may not appear severe for all learners, it can still affect how well they understand and process a text.

Based on the researcher's observation, most participants were able to identify the main idea of a passage, but some still had difficulty determining what the text was mainly about. This skill is important because the main idea provides a framework for understanding the rest of the passage. When learners cannot identify it, they may have difficulty organizing information, summarizing what they have read, remembering important details, and connecting one part of the text to another. Although the relationship found in the study was not as strong as some of the other variables, it still shows that difficulty in identifying the main idea is related to learners' reading comprehension. Providing support before these difficulties become more persistent may help prevent further problems in reading.

This finding is consistent with Inharjanto et al. (2020), who found that teaching learners how to identify the main idea can improve reading comprehension and encourage greater motivation to read. When students are able to determine the central message of a text, they may find it easier to understand and appreciate what they are reading. Butterfuss et al. (2024) likewise reported that identifying the main idea, particularly in informational texts, can be difficult for many readers. Their study also pointed out that the way teachers present and ask questions about the main idea can influence students' reading performance. Peng et al. (2024) further found that simply teaching several reading strategies does not always lead to better comprehension. Their findings suggest that combining instruction on the main idea, text structure,

and retelling can be more effective, especially when learners have sufficient background knowledge about the topic.

Among the variables, concentration showed a strong relationship with reading level, with an r-value of 0.83 and a p-value of 0.05. This indicates that learners who experience greater difficulty maintaining their concentration while reading are more likely to experience problems with their reading performance. When attention is easily interrupted, learners may lose track of ideas, reread sections of the text several times, and take longer to complete a reading task. These problems may become more noticeable when the passage is lengthy or contains unfamiliar vocabulary.

The researcher also observed that external distractions, background noise, and lack of interest in a topic could interfere with learners' reading. Some students had difficulty maintaining their attention when the classroom environment was noisy or when the material did not immediately capture their interest. Providing a more organized learning environment and reducing unnecessary distractions may help learners focus better. Teachers can also use activities that encourage active participation so that students remain involved while reading.

Lavandier et al. (2022) observed that increased background noise can negatively affect reading comprehension. Their study showed that learners tended to understand less and read more slowly when exposed to louder noise, with reading speed improving as the noise decreased. This supports the observation that the learning environment can influence how effectively students process written information. Spjeldnæs and Karlsen (2024), however, noted that digital media such as tablets may provide a calmer and more meaningful experience than the constant stimulation associated with social media and smartphones. On the other hand, Laila et al. (2024) identified challenges associated with reading academic texts on screens, especially in difficulties involving the use of technology and the understanding of complex academic content. Their findings show that digital devices can support reading in some situations, but their effectiveness depends on how they are used and on the nature of the reading material.

Reading motivation also showed a significant relationship with reading level, with an overall r-value of 0.68 and a p-value of 0.04. This indicates that learners who are more motivated to read tend to demonstrate better reading performance. Interest and willingness to engage with reading materials can influence how much effort students put into understanding a text. For this reason, reading programs should not focus solely on technical reading skills. They should also provide opportunities for learners to read materials that match their interests and experiences and create a classroom environment where reading is viewed as a meaningful and enjoyable activity.

From the researcher's perspective, improving reading ability involves more than teaching students how to decode words or answer comprehension questions. Learners also need encouragement to develop confidence and a positive attitude toward reading. Addressing low motivation at an early stage may help prevent learners from avoiding reading activities and falling further behind. A balanced reading program should therefore work on both the skills needed for comprehension and the willingness to engage with texts.

Several studies support the connection between reading motivation and reading achievement. Toste et al. (2020) found a moderate relationship between reading motivation and reading achievement among K–12 learners, suggesting that motivation is an important factor in reading development. Jéldrez et al. (2025) also reported differences in reading motivation among students with varying reading difficulties. However, Moneba and Lovitos (2024) noted that greater motivation or interest showing better reading comprehension.

Conclusions

The study concluded that the respondents experienced difficulties in reading comprehension, particularly in vocabulary, spelling, finding the main idea, concentration, and reading motivation. Moreover, they frequently struggled to maintain concentration during reading for extended periods. This often led to a loss of focus and interrupted their understanding of the text, make it challenging to identify important details, and hinder their ability to connect ideas presented in different parts of a passage. Despite these challenges, the respondents were still able to comprehend what they read, showing that they could understand texts to some extent despite experiencing difficulties in specific aspects of reading.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn from the study, the following are hereby recommended:

1. Teachers are encouraged to use shorter and more interesting reading materials, apply interactive strategies, teach simple focus techniques (e.g., note-taking and breaking texts), provide support for unfamiliar words, organize learning environment, and make use of visual aids to improve attention. Learners, with the support of teachers and parents/guardians, should practice regular reading at home in a distraction-free space to gradually build better focus and comprehension skills.
2. Teachers are encouraged to provide differentiated instruction by giving more challenging texts to independent readers and guided reading activities for those at instructional and frustration levels. Teachers are also encouraged to conduct regular reading interventions, such as small-group tutoring and remedial sessions, to improve learners' skills while parents/guardians are encouraged regular reading practice at home. Learners are also encouraged to practice reading daily and seek help when they have difficulty understanding texts.
3. Teachers focus on strengthening vocabulary and spelling through regular practice activities, and teach simple strategies for identifying the main idea. Teachers should also include activities that improve concentration and make reading more interesting to increase motivation.

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