

A Comparative Analysis of Grade 8 Learners' Reading Proficiency Levels: Post-test Performance from the Previous Year and Pre-test Results of the Current School Year

Ismael W. Baog^a, MEd, Riza Marie Q. Largo^b, LPT, Emmalyn Mae L. Danac^c, LPT, Milafe P. Cantilla^d, LPT, Grayford Gordillo^e, LPT, Lirome D. Osiba^f, LPT

^adodonggo16@gmail.com / ^brizamarielargo29@gmail.com / ^cemmalyndanac@gmail.com
^dmilafecantilla_10@gmail.com / ^egordillograyford@gmail.com / ^flirome1998@gmail.com

^aAssociate Professor I, City College of Davao, Davao City, 800, Philippines

^bTeacher II, Megkawayan Elementary School, Malabog District, Davao City, 8000, Philippines

^cTeacher I, Bago Oshiro Elementary School, Tugbok B District, Davao City, 8000, Philippines

^dTeacher I, Federico J. Alferes Elementary School, Occidental District, Digos City, 8002 Philippines

^eTeacher I, Luzon National High School Governor Generoso South District, 8210 Davao Oriental

^fTeacher I, Imelda Elementary School, Tugbok B District, Davao City, 8000, Philippines

Abstract

Reading is essential in acquiring knowledge, expanding vocabulary, and enhancing critical thinking abilities. It serves as a gateway to information and empowers individuals to engage with various forms of literature, opening doors to new worlds, perspectives, and ideas. This study aimed to determine the Reading Proficiency level and significant difference between Post-test Performance from the Previous Year and Pre-test results of the Current School Year of Grade 8 learners. The research employs a quantitative method to obtain a holistic understanding of the reading skills and competencies of Grade 8 learners. Findings revealed that post-reading of Grade 8 students last academic year is at the instructional level. Meanwhile, their pre-reading performance this academic year is also at the instructional level. The study also reveals that there is a significant difference between Post-test Performance from the Previous Year and Pre-test results of the Current School Year of Grade 8 learners. Moreover, learners have not yet reached the independent level. Furthermore, the study recommends that reading coordinators and reading teachers from school should intensify the intervention mechanism to improve reading and comprehension among students. More so, activities stipulated in Phil-IRI should be implemented with commitment among teachers to ensure proficient reading results among learners.

Keywords: Reading Level, Reading Proficiency, Grade 8 Learners, Public Elementary Teachers

1. Introduction

Reading performance of learners is seen to be one of the most important skills a child should master. When the reading ability is poor, there is a high possibility that a learner may have difficulty as they journey with learning. Sadly, despite the emphasis on the importance of reading, teachers in public schools have shared that some learners have reached the secondary level and are still considered poor readers.

A report worldwide exposed that poor reading performance is an international phenomenon. Vazquez-Lopez and Huerta-Manzanilla (2021) found that a significant proportion of students worldwide, approximately 60%, exhibit inadequate proficiency in fundamental reading abilities. Among these, the adolescent demographic exhibits the most significant proportion. As per the data provided by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), most adolescents aged between 12 and 15 years, precisely 61%, have not attained the requisite levels of reading proficiency. This phenomenon persists despite the unprecedented extent of educational coverage and the enrollment of most learners who fail to attain the minimum level of reading proficiency. The deficiency in reading abilities suggests that mere access to education does not necessarily ensure the acquisition of high-quality learning, which is necessary to address the fundamental issue of reading proficiency.

The same problem has become very prominent in the Philippines, Tomas et al. (2021) revealed that the PISA 2018 findings indicate that the reading proficiency of fifteen-year-old students in the Philippines is comparatively lower than that of their counterparts in most of the countries and economies that took part in the assessment. The mean reading score of the nation was recorded at 340 points, which is comparable to the reading score of the Dominican Republic. The Philippines and the Dominican Republic had the lowest scores, as no other country obtained a lower score. The Philippines exhibited a considerable proportion of students who performed at a low level compared to all other countries and economies participating in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). According to the data, a significant majority of Filipino students, precisely 80%, failed to attain the minimum level of proficiency in reading.

The same scenario is experienced by teachers in Davao Oriental at Governor Generoso South District. Most English teachers have observed that Grade seven and Grade eight students are not proficient readers; thus, it affects their performances in subjects like English, Mathematics, and Science. To make the situation worst, advisers of Grade students have been worried since some learners have been accepted at this year's level yet still have problems reading long sentences.

Multiple studies have been undertaken in educational research to enhance learners' reading abilities in primary education. Notably, specific published journals have presented evidence supporting the efficacy of teacher-designed interventions in improving the reading performance of struggling readers. However, there is a gap in the local research landscape regarding exploring pre-test and post-test scores, specifically among Grade 8 learners in Governor Generoso South District, where inadequate data exists, necessitating this study's timely and urgent need.

2. Statement of the Problem

This study seeks to determine the Reading Proficiency level and significant difference between Post-test Performance from the Previous Year and Pre-test results of the Current School Year of Grade 8 learners. More specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the reading proficiency level of Grade 8 learners during their post-test in the previous school year?
2. What is the reading proficiency level of Grade 8 learners during their pre-test in the current year?
3. Is there a significant difference between the reading proficiency levels of Grade 8 learners from their post-test performance from the previous year and pre-test results of the current school year?

2.1 Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the reading proficiency level of Grade 8 learners from their post-test performance from the previous year and pre-test results of the current school year.

3. Review of Related Literature

Reading extensively improves the affective aspects of reading, such as attitude, motivation, and interest. Learners become motivated to read due to the great input they receive from the self-selected books they choose to read. When students are given sufficient leisure to read for pleasure, they become more imaginative and analytical. Nkomo (2021) describes a 20-week responsive extensive reading program (ERP) involving Grade 7 students at two secondary institutions in the Eastern Cape. The reading program aims to develop excellent reading habits, increase vocabulary and structure knowledge, and foster a love of reading. Reading for enjoyment can promote positive attitudes and boost self-assurance. They incorporated the ER component into her reading intervention program to enhance first-year university students' reading proficiency in the Academic Literacy and Academic Reading modules. The research indicates that ER affects the learner's affective and cognitive reading levels and reading speed. Data collected through a post-intervention questionnaire, learners' reading records, and observations illuminated intriguing findings demonstrating the ERP's positive impact on students. The researchers concluded that participation in the ERP resulted in the learners' acquiring new knowledge (cognitive benefits), experiencing a change in their attitude toward reading (affective benefits), and assuming responsibility for their reading (social benefits).

According to Sadiku (2015), as one of the basic skills required in the classroom, reading plays a significant role in a child's learning process as it is the most prominent language skill. Helarde (2021) claims it is the mother of all study skills. However, despite a long-standing awareness of reading comprehension as an integral component of the learning process, it remains a critical concern for the schools in Philippine education. Reading provides readers with new learnings and vast knowledge that will benefit their academic journey. Reading is a prerequisite in all learning areas (Tomas et al., 2021).

Targeted Reading Intervention (Vernon-Feagans et al., 2010) borrows heavily from Reading Recovery. Targeted Reading Intervention (TRI) lessons and assessment practices are structured like Reading Recovery lessons and assessment procedures. A standardized assessment package is used to evaluate the student's strengths and areas of weakness before and after the intervention. A highly structured and consistent daily, 15-minute, one-to-one lesson series follows. The format of the TRI lessons is quite similar to Reading Recovery in that both begin with a re-read of a known book for fluency, then word work is used to teach phonics, followed by a new book taught to the student with support provided as needed. It suggests that using webcam technology with classroom teachers in Grade 8 learners, the Targeted Reading Intervention can significantly help struggling readers progress more quickly in all primary word reading and comprehension skills over one year.

Leveled Literacy Intervention is another program that follows a similar direct instruction structure to Reading Recovery. Ransford-Kaldon et al. (2011) detailed a study on the effectiveness of the Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI). LLI is a small group literacy intervention program for struggling kindergarten learners. In the study, students were assessed using a series of standardized tests prior to beginning the program and post-intervention. LLI is a highly structured program that follows a specific sequence of activities during each daily, scripted 30-minute lesson. Like Reading Recovery and Targeted Reading Intervention, LLI emphasizes direct instruction of phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary expansion. The findings of this evaluation indicate that LLI combined with regular classroom instruction can positively impact learner literacy achievement to a greater degree than classroom instruction alone for K-2 learners who are struggling with reading and writing. ELL and special education students can also benefit from the LLI program, some with strong, educationally significant effects. Powerful effects were found on the LLI Benchmarks across all grade levels for students who received LLI.

The study conducted by Schalich (2015) investigated the effects of small-group instruction that employed specific reading comprehension strategies on the reading achievement of students. The comparison was made by analyzing the Measures of Academic Progress (MAPs) assessments administered in September 2014 and February 2015. According to the literature,

small group instruction is necessary to observe improvements in reading comprehension strategies and phonemic awareness. Explicit teaching of grammar is also required. Additionally, teachers must understand their learners' backgrounds and utilize this knowledge to motivate and encourage their learning. The present undertaking constitutes an action research project conducted by a teacher. Quantitative data was collected and analyzed both before and after the test. The findings revealed that nearly half of the learners who provided explicit small-group instruction in reading comprehension demonstrated superior performance on the reading segment of the February 2015 statewide MAPs assessment.

The study by Wanzek et al. (2017) indicates that the amount of information available regarding effective reading interventions for upper elementary-grade students with reading difficulties is comparatively less than that for early elementary-grade students. The researchers analyzed the impact of a reading intervention that consisted of multiple components on students who experienced challenges with reading comprehension. The researchers utilized a pre-test and post-test comparative analysis. The researchers analyzed the intervention's impact on the learners' latent word reading, latent vocabulary, and latent reading comprehension. Furthermore, an investigation was conducted to determine if these impacts varied among pupils with different reading or English language proficiency degrees. The study results revealed that the treatment exhibited a significant advantage over the comparison group regarding reading comprehension (effect size = 0.38). However, no significant differences were observed between the two groups concerning word reading or vocabulary. The initial word reading scores of the students moderated the effect. The impact on reading comprehension was comparable between students who are proficient in English and those who are not.

Seawright (2017) conducted a study to assess the effects of the Hot Summer, Cool Books (HSCB) summer reading program on third-grade students in a South Carolina school district characterized by high poverty and rural settings. The present investigation centered on the effects of an intervention on students' reading proficiency and their inclination to engage in reading activities. The survey component of the Motivation to Read Profile Survey, as conducted by Gambrell et al. in 1996, investigated the HSCB Program's influence on students' reading motivation. The present study utilized the reading scores from the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment administered by the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) to investigate the HSCB intervention's influence on the learners' reading proficiency. The study employed purposeful sampling as the method for selecting the sample. The study's findings demonstrate the impact of the HSCB on students' reading motivation and academic achievement.

The Voyager program, a scientifically based commercial reading program like LLI, was used in the Spencer (2011) study. Voyager is a daily 40-minute, small-group intervention program. The program also follows a scripted direct instruction model emphasizing phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Spencer's article introduced me to the rise of commercially produced, scripted, and sequenced direct instruction models: the American Reading First policy of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The multi-billion dollar Reading First policy states that every child should read at or above state requirements by the end of grade 3 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). American schools received funding to provide scientifically based literacy programming to students to help reach the goal of grade-level achievement. The policy indicates that five pillars of literacy – phonemic awareness, comprehension, fluency, phonics, and vocabulary – are required to provide an adequate reading instruction program. According to Spencer, the United States government conducted its studies and found that the five pillars are essential components that have spurred a surge in the direct instruction model of literacy programming.

Studies indicated that one-to-one or small-group, direct instruction intervention positively affects all aspects of literacy development for struggling readers. Basic word reading and comprehension skills increased (Vernon-Feagans et al., 2010); letter naming and fluency improved (Ransford-Kaldon et al., 2011); and vocabulary understanding and usage improved (Spencer, 2011). Implementing a direct instruction intervention program such as Reading Recovery, TRI, LLI, or Voyager would support many struggling readers. Given the results provided by the studies, I will continue to use the skills and strategies taught in Reading Recovery and LLI. I will also recommend that other schools invest in LLI as an intervention alternative to Reading Recovery.

Jones and Brown (2011) detailed a study examining children's reading engagement and comprehension as they read books. The participants were 22 grade 3 students whom their teacher determined to be reading at grade level. Study data were obtained through enjoyment surveys and comprehension scores. The results indicated that most students did not prefer reading e-books or traditional print book format, but rather that the critical factor of reading satisfaction was having a wide selection of books from which to choose. That does not mean that teachers should not use e-books, but that they can be used in addition to a print book library to increase book and format choice and thus contribute to student engagement in reading. "Reading motivation and engagement are enhanced when students have a choice in reading material" (Jones & Brown, 2011, p.16).

Jesson and Limbrick (2014) found that students who receive Reading Recovery intervention continue to be at risk and require monitoring by teachers to ensure that their skills continue to be at par with their peers. A school focus on literacy, home-school connections, communication, high levels of literacy expectations for all students, and collective responsibility by all staff are all necessary for Reading Recovery students to sustain their reading skills post-intervention.

Although the selection process and the number of students who can receive Reading Recovery support in a school each year are small, the program itself is compelling. Every student may not be successfully discontinued (graduated) from the program after 20 weeks and might need to be referred to other resources for additional support. Even so, those students are still farther ahead than they would have been if they had received only classroom instruction. Reading Recovery instruction is not prescribed or follows a specific lesson sequence. Teachers are trained and receive ongoing training to identify areas in reading where individual students require support. One drawback of Reading Recovery is that there are specific books from which a teacher must choose. There is a variety, but the books are not engaging for some students, which impeded their reading

development. Because Reading Recovery teachers are highly trained, teachers who are fortunate enough also to be trained have unique skills that they bring to the classroom to support all struggling readers.

4. Research Design and Methodology

4. 1. Population/Respondents

The respondents of this study were 50 Grade 8 students of one of the public secondary schools in the Division of Davao Oriental, Region XI, Philippines. The research respondents were identified using simple random sampling. According to Cherry (2021), simple random sampling is a subset of individuals randomly selected by researchers to represent an entire group. The goal is to get a sample of people representative of the larger population. This is helpful because it can ensure the scientific process of selecting respondents.

4. 2. Data Collection Procedure

The researchers requested approval from the School Administrator to retrieve the post-test results of Grade 8 learners of the previous year and the pretest results in the current School year. Upon approval, the researchers personally asked the Reading Coordinator for the results of the Reading Performance of the Grade 8 learners. After retrieving the results, the researchers began encoding and analyzing the data in the Microsoft Excel Office application.

4. 3. Data Gathering Instrument

The researchers used the Reading Performance results of the Grade 8 learners provided by the Reading Coordinator of the school. The reading performances of respondents were evaluated using the 2018 Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) Data Collection Manual. The Evaluation consisted of word reading. In word reading, scores were categorized as independent (97 to 100 percent), instructional (90 to 96 percent), and frustration (89 percent and below).

4.4. Ethical considerations

Research Ethics provides guidelines for the proper conduct of a study to protect the dignity of subjects and the publication of information in the research. The researchers followed specific ethical guidelines while conducting this study. The researchers made sure that the elements of ethical considerations, such as but not limited to Social Values, Privacy, and Confidentiality of information, have been complied with.

5. Result and Discussion

5. 1 Post-Reading Performance of Grade 8 learners of the previous year

Presented in Table 1 is the level of post-reading evaluation last school year of the 50 students in one of the schools in the Division of Davao Oriental.

Table 1. Level of Post-Reading Performance of Grade 8 Learners of the Last School Year

	Mean	SD	Descriptive Level
Post-Reading Performance	93.54	4.01	Instructional

Based on the Phil-IRI scale, the learners are categorized into four levels: Non-reader, frustrated, instructional, and independent. Learners under the frustration reading level tend to withdraw from reading by refusing it. The instructional reading level is the level at which a child needs the support of the teacher, parent, or tutor. This is the level where learners are introduced to new vocabulary and is where the most significant progress in reading occurs. A learner's instructional reading level means the highest level at which the learner has scored $\geq 90\%$ accuracy and $\geq 60\%$ comprehension. If the learner is fast and his comprehension level is instructional, they are instructional.

It shows that the post-reading level of 50 grade 8 learners during the previous grade level obtained a mean value is 93.54, which means instructional reading level. The Standard Deviation (SD=4.01) of the Post-Reading Evaluation Last School Year was high, indicating that data are more spread out. The term instructional level refers to the meeting point between a learner's ability to perform academic tasks and curriculum expectations (Gravois & Gickling, 2008). To determine a learner's instructional level in reading, each learner can be presented with passages or other reading material, asked to read them for 1 minute, and dividing the number of words read correctly by the number of total words (i.e., Words Read Correctly / [Words Read Correctly + Errors]; Burns & Parker, 2014). If a student reads 93% to 97% of the words correctly, then they are reading at an instructional level in which the passages are not too difficult nor too easy; reading less than 93% of the words correctly represents a frustration level, and reading more than 97% of the words correctly represents an independent level (Glickling & Thompson, 1985).

5. 2 Pre-Reading Performance of the Grade 8 learners in the current school year

Presented in Table 2 is the level of pre-reading evaluation of the current school year of the 50 students in one of the schools in the Division of Davao Oriental.

Table 2. Level of Pre-Reading Performance of Grade 8 Learners of the Current School Year

	Mean	SD	Descriptive Level
Pre-Reading Performance	96.18	3.37	Instructional

It shows that the pre-reading level of 50 grade 8 students during this grade level obtained the mean value is 96.18, which means instructional reading level. The Standard Deviation (SD=3.37) of the Pre-Reading Evaluation for the current school year is considered high, indicating that data are more spread out.

It suggests that a teacher must provide varied techniques and strategies for intervention to cope with the lacking skill of the learners. According to Jesson & Limbrick (2014), learners who receive Reading Recovery intervention continue to be at risk and require monitoring by teachers to ensure that their skills continue to be at par with their peers.

5.3 Difference between the Pre-test of the current school year and the Post-test of the previous year of Grade 8 learners with their Reading Proficiency Level

Presented in Table 3 is the significant difference between the reading level of Grade 8 students from post-evaluation last school year to pre-evaluation this current school year of the 50 students in one of the schools in the Division of Davao Oriental.

A paired sample t-test was conducted to compare the reading performance of Grade 8 learners basing the data on their pre-reading performance while they are on their Grade 7 level and their post-reading performance based on this school year's level, which is in Grade 8. The findings revealed a significant difference in the pre-reading performance, having a mean score and standard deviation of (M= 93.54, SD=1.09). In contrast, the post-reading performance has a mean score and standard deviation of (M=96.8, SD= 3.07), $t(49) = -5.37$, $p < .005$ (two-tailed). The mean increase in the reading performances was 0.57, with a 95% confidence level interval ranging from 1.68 to 2.01. Thus, the null hypothesis set for the study is neglected.

Table 3. Significant Difference between the Reading Proficiency Level of Grade 8 Learners from Post-Evaluation Last School Year to Pre-Evaluation this Current School Year

					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper			
Pre-reading	1.09								
		0.57	1.712	.313	1.68	2.01	- 5.37	49	.000
Post-reading	3.07								

The results agree with the study of Rustamova (2023) which stated that performance improves as learners mature and are more exposed to reading activities. Also, as commended by Ardhian et al. (2020) reading performance gets better when the child is enrolled in a higher level if teachers can diagnose the reading problems experienced by the learner and the teacher will make interventions coming from the data generated relating to the matters in reading and comprehension where the child has difficulty. Lastly, the findings corroborated with Anwar (2020) who concurred that good teaching practice and more reading time and activities help learners improve their reading performance as they age.

6. Conclusions

The following conclusions are generated based on the quantitative findings of the study.

- The Post-test reading performance of Grade 8 learners in the previous year is at the instructional level.
- The Pre-test reading performance of Grade 8 learners in the current school is at the instructional level. This implies that, in general, learners can only read when being guided.
- Since the decision regarding the null hypothesis concluded that it should be rejected, thus the post-reading performance in the previous year and pre-reading performance in the current school of Grade 8 learners are significant. Thus, it can be implied that there was a significant difference even though low positive in their reading performance as they transitioned from Grade 7 to 8. Even though both performances are descriptively interpreted at the instructional level, it can be observed that they have improved in the matters regarding word recognition and reading comprehension of learners in English and Filipino.

7. Recommendation

The following recommendations are presented based on the findings and conclusions for future research:

- To ensure that learners varied learning requirements are met, instructional efforts and development of learning materials for reading and comprehension must be responsive to their age range, gender, and other characteristics.

Interventions can be used to promote learners' reading habits and encourage parents to allocate extra reading materials available to their children at home, despite economic constraints. Parents must also be trained to reinforce their children's exposure to various learning-enhancing media.

- Instructional efforts and learning material preparation must center on correcting students' common reading errors, such as mispronunciation and omission.
- Instructional efforts and learning material preparation must center on correcting students' apparent weaknesses in coping with all levels of comprehension. Teachers, in collaboration with their department heads and school principals, must examine the required reading materials to ensure the selection of texts that are more fascinating and relevant to learners, allowing them to enjoy comprehending their reading materials.
- Teachers who work with struggling readers in 8th grade will be advised to use the developed learning material as supplementary material for remedial reading to improve their performance in word recognition and reading comprehension.

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