

Reading Comprehension Difficulties among Junior High School Students in Talipao National High School – Pantao

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ABSTRACT. This study investigated the reading comprehension difficulties among junior high school students at Talipao National High School – Pantao. Specifically, it examined the extent of these difficulties in relation to academic performance, motivation, and engagement, as well as the relationship between key variables. A descriptive–exploratory research design was employed using a quantitative approach. The study involved 100 junior high school students selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, standard deviation, t-test, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson product-moment correlation. The findings revealed that students experience noticeable reading comprehension difficulties, particularly in understanding complex texts, which significantly affect their academic performance. These difficulties also influence students’ motivation and engagement, leading to feelings of anxiety, discouragement, and reduced participation in learning activities. Furthermore, a moderate positive relationship was found between academic performance and motivation and engagement. The study concludes that reading comprehension difficulties are a multifaceted issue affecting both cognitive and affective aspects of learning. Addressing these challenges requires targeted instructional strategies, enhanced support systems, and improved access to reading resources to promote better comprehension and academic success.

KEYWORDS: *reading comprehension difficulties, academic performance, student motivation, student engagement, junior high school*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is widely recognized as a fundamental skill that underpins academic success and lifelong learning. It goes beyond decoding written symbols and involves the active construction of meaning through interaction between the reader and the text. According to Hudson (2007), comprehension is a complex cognitive process that requires the integration of linguistic knowledge, prior experiences, and metacognitive strategies. More recent discussions on literacy

development continue to support this view, emphasizing that effective comprehension occurs when readers actively engage with texts, connect new information with existing knowledge, and monitor their understanding throughout the reading process (Scholastic, 2023).

From a cognitive perspective, Walter Kintsch (2005) explained reading comprehension through the Construction–Integration Model, which describes comprehension as a two-phase process involving the construction of meaning from textual information and the integration of that information into a coherent mental representation. Contemporary research continues to affirm this framework, highlighting that comprehension difficulties often arise when learners fail to connect textual content with their background knowledge or when cognitive processes such as inference-making and memory integration are weak (Hoover, 2024). These theoretical perspectives suggest that reading comprehension is not a passive activity but a dynamic and cognitively demanding process.

Despite its importance, reading comprehension remains a significant challenge in many educational systems, including the Philippines. Results from international assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) have consistently shown that Filipino learners perform below global proficiency levels in reading. Similarly, national assessments such as the National Achievement Test (NAT) continue to reveal persistent difficulties among students in understanding and interpreting texts. In response, the Department of Education has implemented programs such as “Every Child a Reader” to improve literacy outcomes. However, these efforts have not fully addressed the ongoing challenges, indicating the need for more targeted and context-specific interventions.

At the local level, Talipao National High School – Pantao reflects similar concerns. Teachers have observed that many junior high school students struggle with key comprehension skills, including identifying main ideas, making inferences, and drawing conclusions from texts. These difficulties negatively affect students’ academic performance across various subject areas, particularly those that require critical reading and analysis. Factors such as limited vocabulary, low reading motivation, insufficient reading strategies, and inadequate exposure to reading materials further contribute to these challenges.

Given these conditions, it becomes essential to examine the specific nature and extent of reading comprehension difficulties among students within this context. While existing studies provide general insights into reading problems, there is a need for localized evidence that captures the actual experiences of learners in Talipao National High School – Pantao. Understanding these difficulties in relation to academic performance and student motivation and engagement can provide a more comprehensive view of the problem.

Therefore, this study aims to assess the reading comprehension difficulties among junior high school students in Talipao National High School – Pantao. Specifically, it seeks to determine the level of these difficulties and analyze their relationship with academic performance and student motivation and engagement. The findings of this study are expected to provide empirical evidence that can guide the development of targeted interventions and instructional strategies to improve students’ reading comprehension and overall academic achievement.

2. METHODS

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a descriptive–exploratory research design using a quantitative approach. The descriptive component was utilized to determine the level of reading comprehension difficulties experienced by junior high school students, while the exploratory aspect examined how these difficulties relate to academic performance, motivation, and engagement. This type of design allows the researcher to describe existing conditions and explore relationships among variables without manipulating them. As explained by Mark Saunders et al. (2019), descriptive–exploratory research is appropriate when the objective is to understand what is happening and why it occurs within a natural setting.

2.2. Research Locale

The study was conducted at Talipao National High School – Annex (Pantao) located in the municipality of Talipao, province of Sulu, Philippines, during the School Year 2025–2026. The research site was selected due to its diverse student population and the observed challenges in reading comprehension, which may influence students’ academic performance. The school setting provided an appropriate context for examining the relationship between reading comprehension difficulties and students’ academic outcomes, motivation, and engagement.

2.3. Participants of the Study

The respondents consisted of 100 junior high school students from Talipao National High School – Annex (Pantao). The participants were equally distributed across grade levels, ensuring balanced representation.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents

Grade Level	Number of Respondents
Grade 7	25
Grade 8	25
Grade 9	25
Grade 10	25
Total	100

2.4. Sampling Procedure

The study utilized stratified random sampling, where the population was grouped according to grade level. Respondents from each group were then randomly selected using a random number generator to ensure equal representation.

This sampling method enhances the accuracy and reliability of results by ensuring that each subgroup is adequately represented. According to William G. Cochran (1977), stratified random sampling is effective in reducing sampling bias and improving the precision of estimates when dealing with heterogeneous populations.

2.5. Research Instrument

The primary data collection instrument was a structured survey questionnaire adapted from the study of Bernal, Lagrisola, Raypan, and Aquino (2025). The instrument was designed to measure reading comprehension difficulties and their relationship to academic performance, motivation, and engagement.

The questionnaire consisted of three parts:

- Part I: Demographic profile (age, gender, grade level, parents’ monthly income)
- Part II: Reading comprehension difficulties in relation to academic performance
- Part III: Reading comprehension difficulties in relation to motivation and engagement

The use of a standardized instrument ensured consistency in measurement and alignment with the study objectives.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to the data collection, permission was secured from the School of Graduate Studies and the school administration. Upon approval, the researcher personally distributed the questionnaires to the selected respondents.

The respondents were given clear instructions on how to answer the questionnaire. After completion, all questionnaires were immediately collected to ensure completeness and accuracy of responses. The gathered data were then organized and prepared for statistical analysis.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Permission was obtained from the appropriate authorities before conducting the research. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by ensuring that respondents’ identities were protected. All collected data were used solely for academic purposes and handled securely to safeguard participants’ rights and privacy.

3. RESULTS

Table 2. Reading Comprehension Difficulties in Relation to Academic Performance

Statements	Mean	SD	Rating
I struggle to grasp concepts in English when reading complex texts.	4.58	.755	Strongly Agree
Reading materials are hard to follow	4.01	1.115	Agree
Difficulty completing written assignments	3.94	1.135	Agree
Trouble answering comprehension questions	3.93	1.148	Agree
English grades suffer	4.12	.924	Agree
Spend more time reading	3.79	1.233	Agree
Miss deadlines	3.75	1.209	Agree
Performance affected	4.09	1.102	Agree
Feel unprepared	3.97	1.150	Agree
Teachers observed difficulty	4.07	1.208	Agree
Total Weighted Mean	4.03	.57	Agree

The results show that reading comprehension difficulties are highly evident and significantly affect academic performance. Students particularly struggle with understanding complex texts, which impacts their ability to complete tasks and perform well in English.

Table 3. Reading Comprehension Difficulties in Relation to Motivation and Engagement

Statements	Mean	SD	Rating
Feel disheartened	4.28	1.111	Agree
Discussions not interesting	2.88	1.387	Undecided
Avoid group work	3.38	1.489	Undecided
Reading feels overwhelming	3.73	1.213	Agree

Less enjoyment	3.32	1.428	Undecided
Feel self-conscious	3.99	1.267	Agree
Seek help	4.14	1.231	Agree
Procrastinate	2.75	1.373	Undecided
Feel anxious	4.12	1.200	Agree
Lack motivation outside class	3.17	1.511	Undecided
Total Weighted Mean	3.58	.58	Agree

Reading comprehension difficulties negatively affect students’ motivation and engagement, particularly in emotional aspects such as anxiety, discouragement, and dependence on support.

Table 4. Correlations Among the Subcategories Subsumed Under Reading Comprehension Difficulties Among Junior High School Students in Talipao National High School- Annex (Pantao)

Variables	Pearson r	Sig.	Description
Academic Performance & Motivation	.463	.000	Moderate

There is a moderate positive relationship, meaning motivation contributes to academic performance but is not the only factor.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of the study reveal that junior high school students at Talipao National High School – Pantao experience notable reading comprehension difficulties, which significantly affect their academic performance. The overall rating indicates that students struggle particularly with understanding complex texts, answering comprehension questions, and completing written tasks. These results suggest that comprehension challenges hinder students’ ability to process and interpret information effectively, which in turn impacts their academic achievement.

This finding is consistent with the work of Eric J. Lovett et al. (2022), who emphasized that difficulties in comprehension limit students’ ability to engage with academic content across subjects. Similarly, Cabural and Infantado (2023) found that reading challenges directly influence students’ academic performance, particularly in language-based subjects. In the Philippine context, De Ocampo (2023) noted that limited comprehension skills contribute to poor academic outcomes among secondary students. These studies support the present findings, confirming that reading comprehension is a critical determinant of academic success.

The results further indicate that reading comprehension difficulties negatively influence students’ motivation and engagement. Students reported feelings of anxiety, discouragement, and lack of confidence when dealing with reading tasks. This suggests that comprehension problems extend beyond cognitive challenges and also affect students’ emotional and behavioral engagement in learning.

This observation aligns with the findings of Puspitaloka (2022), who reported that students with reading difficulties often experience reduced motivation and increased frustration. Likewise, Penida (2025) emphasized that comprehension challenges can lead to disengagement and avoidance of reading activities. In addition, Cruz and Villanueva (2023) highlighted that emotional factors such as anxiety and low confidence are closely associated with poor reading performance. These findings reinforce the idea that reading difficulties have both academic and psychological implications for learners.

The correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive relationship between reading comprehension difficulties in academic performance and motivation and engagement. This indicates that students who demonstrate higher levels of motivation and engagement tend to perform better academically, despite experiencing reading difficulties.

This finding supports the view of Allan Wigfield and Jacquelynne Eccles (2000), who emphasized that motivation plays a crucial role in academic achievement. Students who are more engaged and motivated are more likely to persist in challenging tasks, including reading activities. However, the moderate level of correlation also suggests that other factors, such as instructional strategies, teacher support, and access to learning resources, may also influence academic performance.

Overall, the findings of the study highlight that reading comprehension difficulties are a significant concern among junior high school students, affecting not only academic performance but also motivation and engagement. These difficulties are influenced by multiple factors, including cognitive development, grade level progression, and socioeconomic background.

The results suggest the need for targeted interventions that address both the cognitive and affective dimensions of reading. Schools should implement strategies that enhance comprehension skills while also promoting positive learning attitudes and engagement. By addressing these challenges holistically, educators can help improve students' reading proficiency and overall academic success.

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that junior high school students at Talipao National High School – Pantao experience noticeable reading comprehension difficulties that significantly affect their academic performance, as well as their motivation and engagement in learning. Students particularly struggle with understanding complex texts, which limits their ability to complete tasks, answer comprehension questions, and perform effectively in academic activities.

The findings further reveal that reading comprehension difficulties extend beyond cognitive challenges and influence students' emotional and behavioral responses. Many students experience anxiety, discouragement, and reduced confidence when engaging in reading tasks, which in turn affects their participation and interest in learning.

Moreover, the study establishes a moderate positive relationship between academic performance and motivation and engagement. This suggests that students who are more motivated and engaged tend to perform better academically, even when facing reading difficulties.

Overall, the findings indicate that reading comprehension difficulties are a multifaceted issue that requires both cognitive and affective interventions. Addressing these challenges through appropriate instructional strategies, increased support, and improved access to reading resources can help enhance students' comprehension skills, motivation, and overall academic achievement.

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ideas, perform the analysis, interpret the results, or write the main parts of the paper. The author takes full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of this study, including its analysis, discussion, and conclusions.

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