

Reading Interest and Proficiency of Grade 7 Learners

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Abstract. This descriptive-correlational study aimed to assess the reading interest and proficiency of 170 randomly selected Grade 7 learners. It utilized two sets of research instruments – the Learner’s Reading Interest Survey (RIS) and the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (PHIL-IRI). Specifically, a self-made questionnaire was used to assess the respondents’ reading interest, while the PHIL-IRI assessment tool was employed to gauge their reading proficiency. Statistical tools such as percentage, weighted mean, Linear Regression Analysis, and Multiple Linear Regression Analysis were used to analyze the data. The results indicated that the majority of learners have a favorable attitude toward reading, with a preference for social media platforms as their primary reading resource. Overall, the learners’ reading proficiency, in terms of word reading score and comprehension score, is at the “frustration” level. The data further revealed that the frequency of (a) reading fiction and books, (b) utilizing online learning tools like social media posts, and (c) watching social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok is positively and significantly related to the learners’ reading proficiency in terms of reading score. Conversely, the frequency of (a) reading magazines and (b) watching TV programs like Food Network Asia is negatively and significantly related to the learners’ reading proficiency in terms of reading score. In conclusion, this inquiry sheds light on the complex relationship between students’ reading preferences and their proficiency levels. While there is a prevalent inclination towards reading among learners, a noteworthy segment demonstrates restrained enthusiasm, primarily due to time constraints. Therefore, addressing obstacles such as limited time and harnessing digital tools are essential for devising effective approaches to improve reading engagement and skill levels.

Keywords: Reading interest; Reading proficiency; Word reading score; Comprehension score; Social media; Online learning; Digital tools.

1.0 Introduction

In a groundbreaking study highlighted by Spector (2021), researchers at Stanford Graduate School of Education have unveiled a compelling narrative on the impact of the pandemic on the educational journey of young learners. Delving into the academic landscape of the school year 2019-2020, the study illuminated profound shifts in the foundational reading skills of students. Through a comprehensive reading assessment spanning grades one to four nationwide, the research blatantly revealed a disruption in the development of oral reading fluency among students in 2020, directly attributed to the unforeseen closures of educational institutions amid the COVID-19 crisis (Spector, 2021).

Correspondingly, the abrupt shift in the Philippine education system due to the pandemic has left an indelible mark on students’ reading proficiency, as noted by DepEd Assistant Secretary Malcolm Garma (cited by Hernando-Malipot, 2022) in his comprehensive study of limited face-to-face classes. Garma’s findings not only revealed behavioral challenges but also illuminated the alarming disparities in reading and writing abilities among students. Furthermore, as observed by educators, Filipino children persist in missing out on critical

educational opportunities (Chin, et al., 2021). Adding to the complexity, a comparative analysis conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) predicts that fifth-grade Filipino pupils are likely to encounter hurdles in secondary school due to a lack of essential skills in mathematics, writing, and reading (Balinbin, 2020). These insights collectively highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions to address the widening educational disparities exacerbated by the pandemic.

Numerous researchers, such as Macandili (2019) and Maramag (2022), have delved into oral reading difficulties and reading behaviors, shedding light on the challenges faced by learners in grasping reading comprehension. Ludewig et al. (2022) further emphasized these struggles, particularly evident in poor exam results across subjects taught in English, exacerbated by the extended learning restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. While these studies aimed to comprehend students' reading performance and its implications, they primarily focused on assessing reading achievements both before and during the pandemic, leaving a notable gap in understanding post-pandemic dynamics. To address this gap, the current study centers on Grade 7 learners, scrutinizing their reading interests and proficiency in the aftermath of the pandemic. By honing in on this critical phase, the research aims to pinpoint the nuanced effects of the pandemic on reading habits and skills.

One of the researchers has taken the responsibility to teach English to Grade 7 students at a public school located in a remote area. These students belong to less privileged families where access to learning materials and internet connectivity is limited. They have also been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, considering their location. Therefore, the researchers believe that by assessing the factors that influence students' reading preferences and evaluating their reading skills, educators can devise targeted remediation programs to overcome potential deficiencies, enhance reading abilities, and encourage a strong culture of literacy. With this intention, the researchers have conducted an inquiry to determine the reading interests and proficiency levels of the Grade 7 learners.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This quantitative investigation employed the descriptive-correlational method of research because it attempts to, first, identify the reading interest and level of reading proficiency of the learners and then find the correlation between these two variables.

2.2 Research Participants

The Grade 7 learners enrolled in the three junior high schools for the school year 2023-2024 were the research respondents. Out of the total 291 learners, 170 were selected using the systematic sampling design, wherein every second learner in the list was chosen to participate in the study.

2.3 Research Instrument

The researchers employed two main sets of research instruments: the Learner's Reading Interest Survey (RIS) and the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI). The Phil-IRI serves as a graded assessment tool aimed at determining a student's reading level, starting with the Phil-IRI Group Screening Test (GST), which assesses comprehension based on passages tailored to each grade. Students scoring below 14 (74%) on the GST undergo further evaluation to pinpoint potential reading difficulties. Subsequently, the Phil-IRI Graded Passages, employing the Oral Reading Test, provides a detailed analysis of reading proficiency by identifying miscues, recording words per minute, and assessing comprehension. The Phil-IRI-Oral Test measures reading levels using predetermined criteria outlined in the Phil-IRI Manual (2018), as per DepEd Order 14, s. 2018.

Concurrently, the researcher utilized a self-made questionnaire to gauge reading interest and this tool is divided into two parts covering learner profiles and reading preferences. To ensure reliability, a dry run was conducted with selected learners, testing item consistency using Cronbach's alpha, with a score of 0.70 considered acceptable for internal consistency. For the frequency of reading materials, the following Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients were identified: print reading is 0.701; online reading is 0.723; and exposure to TC programs and social media platforms is 0.766.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

Regarding the data gathering process, authorization to conduct the study was obtained from the Schools Division Superintendent on October 6, 2023. Upon approval, the requests were then presented to the respective student advisors of the Grade 7 learners. Subsequently, data collection commenced through the dissemination of questionnaires, with the entire process finalized by October 16, 2023. The research's purpose and significance were elucidated to the learners during the distribution of questionnaires, followed by the retrieval of completed questionnaires immediately afterward.

During the proficiency assessment phase, students were tasked with orally reading a passage while the researcher and Phil-IRI coordinator meticulously noted any errors or deviations using the Miscue chart. This tool facilitated the identification of various types of errors, including insertions, mispronunciations, omissions, repetitions, reversals, substitutions, and transpositions. Following the oral reading test, students engaged in silent reading of passages and subsequently answered comprehension questions. The assessment involved tallying observed miscues, recording reading duration, and evaluating comprehension accuracy. The cumulative results from both word recognition and comprehension assessments determined each student's reading proficiency level for the respective passages, categorized as independent, instructional, or frustration levels.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Confidentiality of information was strictly observed, especially since students were involved in this research. The researchers ensured to safeguard the respondents' dignity and privacy and to minimize possible risks they might experience. Ethical approval was also obtained from the Ethical Committee. Moreover, the respondents were made to sign a consent form along with a full understanding of the risks and benefits of this study.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 How Much Grade 7 Learners Like Reading

Table 1. presents proof that the learners find great pleasure in reading, as indicated by a weighted mean of 2.36. The data further reveal that 40% of the learners derive immense pleasure from reading, while the remaining 55% enjoy it occasionally. Notably, a small percentage of learners (4%) expressed their complete disinterest in reading. Overall, these data suggest that the majority of learners hold a favorable attitude towards reading, with only a minority exhibiting a lack of interest.

Table 1. Learners' degree of liking reading (n=170)		
Degree of Liking Reading	Frequency	Percent
I enjoy reading a lot	68	40.00
I only like reading sometimes.	95	55.88
I don't like reading at all.	7	4.12
$\bar{w}x = 2.36$ (I enjoy reading a lot.)		
Legend: Scale	Verbal Description	
2.34 – 3.00	I enjoy reading a lot	
1.67 – 2.33	I only like reading sometimes	
1.00 – 1.66	I don't like reading at all	

The Grade 7 learners' reading interest in terms of the degree of liking is generally "high." This corresponds to the findings of Zur, Hestiana, and Zulkifli (2022) that learners had a strong desire to read and that their reading interest is dominantly affected by the motivation to read English texts because they have a goal and purpose in developing themselves through English language learning. However, Wijayanti (2020) had an opposite claim that not all learners are fond of reading, particularly in the digital era because most of the learners make use of their leisure time by using social media to interacting with their peers. Kafusha, Mwelwa, Mkandawire, and Daka (2021) support this statement saying that learners like reading not for fun or pleasure, but only for compliance with the requirement for them to pass certain courses.

3.2 Why Grade 7 Learners Lack Reading Interest

Table 2 shows that the learners' disinterest in reading is primarily due to a lack of time, accounting for 42.35% of the responses. The second most common reason is the perception that reading is a tiresome activity, cited by 35.29% of the respondents. Other factors include a lack of reading materials (31.18%) and insufficient motivation from parents or guardians (21.76%).

Table 2. Learners' reasons for lack of reading interest (n=170)

*Reasons	Frequency	Percent
I do not have the time to read.	72	42.35
I find reading a tiresome activity.	60	35.29
I do not have sources of reading materials.	53	31.18
I get less motivation from my parents/guardians.	37	21.76

*multiple response

These findings stress the importance of encouraging learners to carve out more time for reading and to find enjoyment in it. Equally important is the role parents can play in boosting their children's interest in reading by providing them with adequate reading materials and motivating them to read. Kasáčová and Babiaková (2019) also found that pupils who quit reading state the following reasons: 1) reading is boring; 2) it causes suffering; and 3) it is a loss of time. Similarly, Teksan (2019) posited that several factors contribute to the waning of reading motivation, including school, social engagements, and a general loss of interest in reading. Furthermore, parents' limited understanding of the importance of reading can impede their ability to help their children develop this skill. Rather than prioritizing home-based learning, many parents tend to focus on domestic tasks and responsibilities.

3.3 How Grade 7 Learners View Themselves as a Reader

Table 3 data indicate that over one-third (36.47%) of the respondents prefer reading alone, signifying that solitary reading helps maintain focus and eliminate distractions. About 23% of the respondents enjoy listening to stories or being read to, highlighting the benefits of auditory learning in terms of both entertainment and improved understanding. Moreover, 20% of the respondents prefer discussing their reading materials, emphasizing the value of collaborative thinking and knowledge sharing. On the other hand, a smaller but significant percentage (11.18%) of the respondents adopt an analytical approach to reading by asking questions and critically evaluating content while reading, indicating a deeper level of understanding beyond mere memorization. Additionally, only 9.41% described themselves as open-minded readers, indicating their willingness to adjust their perspectives in response to new information.

Table 3. Learners' description as a reader (n = 170)

Variables	Frequency	Percent
1. I prefer to read by myself. It makes me focus better on what I'm reading without any distractions.	62	36.47
2. I prefer listening to stories or being read to. Listening to others read stories is entertaining. It also helps me understand the topic better.	39	22.94
3. I prefer talking about what I've read. It helps me reflect on the ideas better and I want others to also learn from me.	34	20.00
4. I raise questions in my mind while reading. I evaluate facts and solve issues rather than simply memorizing information.	19	11.18
5. I am an open-minded reader. I reassess my views when new information is introduced to me during reading.	16	9.41

This is affirmed by Erbeli and Rice (2022) who believe that silent independent reading yields favorable outcomes across various aspects of reading. Scholars, researchers, and practitioners widely agree that promoting extensive individual reading among children and adolescents correlates with improved reading achievement. A recent empirical study conducted by Vadiraja, Santhosh, Moulay Dengel, and Ishimaru (2021) supports this notion, revealing that undistracted readers demonstrate heightened interest levels. This suggests that engaged silent reading may serve as a buffering mechanism against the challenges posed by complex texts, ultimately enhancing reader engagement.

On the contrary, Anderson (2023) expressed that listening to others exposes students to novel vocabulary and aids in the pronunciation of new words, a benefit not typically acquired through silent reading. Additionally, this active listening engages their minds in processing both the auditory aspects and meanings of words, offering them a rigorous cognitive exercise that enhances their comprehension. Similarly, Tanrikulu (2020) discovered that digital storytelling fosters students' listening skills, ultimately boosting their motivation.

3.4 Print Materials Grade 7 Learners Read

Table 4 shows that "Books" received the highest rating ($w\bar{x}=3.56$), indicating that the learners read books frequently. The data also revealed that the respondents sometimes read magazines and comics ($w\bar{x}=2.56$ and 2.52 , respectively), but seldom read fiction ($w\bar{x}=2.46$), non-fiction stories ($w\bar{x}=2.41$), newspapers ($w\bar{x}=2.36$), and journals ($w\bar{x}=1.89$). The overall composite score ($w\bar{x}=2.54$) suggests that, on average, learners rarely engage in reading print materials.

Table 4. Learners' frequency of reading print materials

Print Materials	$w\bar{x}$	Verbal Description
1. Books	3.56	Frequent
2. Magazine	2.56	Sometimes
3. Comics or Graphic Novels	2.52	Sometimes
4. Fiction (novels, short stories)	2.46	Seldom
5. Non-fiction (biographies, informational books)	2.41	Seldom
6. Newspaper	2.36	Seldom
7. Journal	1.89	Seldom
Composite	2.54	Seldom

This result is consistent with the data presented in Table 1, indicating that most respondents only like to read sometimes. Johnston and Ferguson (2019b) emphasized that compared to prior generations, youngsters today read less frequently and are less interested in reading than young people were in the past. As published by the National Literacy Trust in 2019, 26% of individuals below 18 allocate a portion of their daily routine to reading. Additionally, the study revealed a decline in the enjoyment of reading among children, with this decline becoming more pronounced as they grew older. Nearly twice as many five to eight-year-olds expressed enjoyment in reading compared to 14 to 16-year-olds. In total, only 53% of children reported enjoying reading "very much" or "quite a lot," marking the lowest level since 2013.

Guo (2023) likewise added that young people are becoming less focused and less patient in reading lengthy paragraphs. Teenagers believe they do not need to read paper books because of the internet summaries of the book's contents. Moreover, adolescents struggled to find a book that suited their interests (Wilkinson, et al. 2020). However, Loh and Sun (2022) postulated that adolescents still prefer printed books. They mentioned that secondary school students exhibit a preference for reading physical books as opposed to digital ones. This preference is primarily attributed to the strain caused by prolonged digital reading, the increased distractions present while reading on a digital device, and the absence of the tactile experience provided by hardcopy books.

3.5 Online Reading Tools Grade 7 Learners Utilize

The data in Table 5 shows how often the respondents use online reading tools. According to the data, most of the respondents frequently use social media posts as reading tools (mean score = 3.61). However, the respondents only sometimes read online articles or blog posts (mean score = 2.67), and seldom use Wattpad (mean score = 2.35) and Webtoon (mean score = 1.92). The data also revealed that the respondents never utilized E-library (mean score = 1.54). Overall, the composite mean of 2.42 suggests that the respondents' use of online reading tools is described as "sometimes."

Table 5. Learners' frequency of utilization of online reading tools

Online Reading Tools	$w\bar{x}$	Verbal Description
1. Social media posts	3.61	Frequent
2. Online articles or blog posts	2.67	Sometimes
3. Wattpad books	2.35	Seldom
4. Webtoon	1.92	Seldom
5. E-library	1.54	Never
Composite	2.42	Seldom

Analyzing the data, one could say that, among the various online reading tools available, social media is the most popular among learners. It is currently the trend, something that most learners find more interesting to read. This result coincides with the claim of Dimacangun and Guillena (2023) that social media has a ubiquitous presence in contemporary society, which is why it has entrenched itself deeply into the fabric of people's daily lives. Consequently, the results of their investigation unveiled the multifaceted ways in which students employ social media, spanning from research endeavors and problem-solving to peer engagement, curriculum comprehension,

and cooperative learning. Students concurred that social media exerted a positive impact on their academic pursuits, social interactions, entertainment preferences, and acquisition of information.

Similarly, Tus (2021b) in their study concluded that a significant proportion of the survey participants utilize their social media platforms to engage in academic activities. However, it is worth noting that despite the informative potential of social media, respondents were less likely to use these platforms for research purposes. In contrast, many respondents reported using social media for entertainment purposes, but not necessarily to conduct research. As for socialization, the majority of the respondents reported using social media platforms to communicate and interact with others.

Correspondingly, Calunsag and Calunsag (2023) exposed that people use social media for educational reasons. A considerable number of students engage in daily utilization of social networking sites (SNS) as a means to augment their educational pursuits. This entails activities such as accessing instructional content via YouTube tutorials, engaging in discussions with peers on platforms like Facebook and Twitter, as well as sourcing information from diverse academic and social forums such as Blogspot, Yahoo Answers, and Wikipedia.

3.6 TV Programs and Social Media Platforms Grade 7 Learners Watch

As reflected in Table 6, the learners tend to frequently engage in watching TV shows and browsing social media platforms. The data indicate that the respondents most commonly view Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, with a rating of "always" ($w\bar{x}= 4.22$). Conversely, TV news, Brain Games, Animal Planet, and Planet Earth are viewed "sometimes," while Discovery Science, Asian Food Channel, The World Tonight, and Food Network Asia are hardly ever viewed. The respondents have never watched "The Source," a current affairs and talk show program of CNN Philippines. Overall, the composite mean of the learners' frequency of watching TV programs and social media platforms is described as "sometimes" (2.69).

Table 6. Learners' frequency of watching TV programs and social media platforms

TV Programs & Social Media Platforms		$w\bar{x}$	Verbal Description
1.	Facebook/Twitter/ Instagram/Tiktok	4.22	Always
2.	TV News	3.35	Sometimes
3.	Brain Games	3.21	Sometimes
4.	Animal Planet	3.09	Sometimes
5.	Planet Earth	2.67	Sometimes
6.	Discovery Science	2.50	Seldom
7.	Asian Food Channel	2.24	Seldom
8.	The World Tonight	1.95	Seldom
9.	Food Network Asia	1.94	Seldom
10.	The Source	1.68	Never
Composite		2.69	Sometimes

These findings suggest that most learners prefer using social media platforms, particularly Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, which is consistent with the data shown in Table 1.5 illustrating the learners' preference for reading social media posts. As stressed by Ortiz-Ospina and Roser (2023), One out of every three individuals worldwide utilized social media platforms, constituting over two-thirds of the total internet user population. Also, Paliktzoglou et al., as cited by Koranteng, Wiafe, and Kuada (2018), acknowledged that the majority of students are familiar with and are active in using social networking platforms.

A similar finding was also obtained by Kafusha, Mwelwa, and Mkandawire (2021) who revealed that the reading culture of their respondents has shown tremendous progress with a bias on social media. They also emphasized the rise or increase in the amount of reading and writing on social media, especially WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, in houses that have phones and other internet-connected devices. Reading of phone messages was also reported to occur daily. Nonetheless, print media reading remains remarkably low.

Furthermore, Twenge, Martin, and Spitzberg (2019) argued that teenagers consume less traditional media, such as books, television, and periodicals, as increasingly they allocate more time to digital media. Between the mid-2000s and the widespread availability of cell phones and high-speed Internet connection, this trend has been more noticeable. The significant amount of time iGen teenagers spend on digital media—about six hours a day on average as of 2016—indicates a discernible shift in their focus away from print sources and traditional media.

3.7 Reading Proficiency of Grade 7 Learners

Table 7 shows that a significant proportion of respondents, specifically 76%, are in the frustration level. A mere 9% of respondents are classified as independent readers, while approximately 15.30% are instructional readers.

Table 7. Learners' reading proficiency (n = 170)

Classification	Word Reading Score		Comprehension Score		Reading Proficiency	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Independent	7	4.12	15	8.82	15	8.82
Instructional	19	11.18	39	22.94	26	15.30
Frustration	144	84.71	116	68.24	129	75.88
Total	170	100.00	170	100.00	170	100.00

The data revealed that the majority of the learners are at the "frustration" level both in terms of their word reading score and their comprehension score. These results underscore the importance of enhancing reading proficiency among learners. The high percentage of respondents experiencing frustration highlights the need for effective intervention strategies to tackle this issue.

Similarly, Abril, Acerbo, and Abocejo (2022) maintained that one of the issues plaguing the Philippine educational system is the high percentage of Filipino children who struggle with reading, which is strongly connected to low accomplishment levels, especially in public schools. The low achievement results are further attributed to the poor development of reading skills among the learners. Rivera and Aggabao (2020) also that fifth-grade students encountered challenges related to word recognition and comprehension while engaging in reading activities. Tomas, Villaros, and Galman (2021) also agreed with the current results, as they found that the majority of the students experienced frustration.

3.8 Connecting Reading Interest with Reading Proficiency

Table 8 illustrates the relationship between the learners' reading interest and proficiency, as measured by word reading and comprehension scores. The F-test significance, or p-values, for both variables (word reading score: $p = 0.078$; comprehension score: $p = 0.287$) are greater than the level of significance (0.05), indicating that there is no significant relationship between the learners' reading interest and reading scores. Therefore, changes in reading interest did not impact word reading or comprehension scores. These findings suggest that there is insufficient evidence to support the notion that reading interest affects these variables on a population level.

Table 8. Relationship between reading interest and reading proficiency

Variables	Coefficients	SE	t Stat	P-value
Word Reading Score				
Intercept	33.38	7.18	4.65	0.000
Degree of Reading Interest	5.25	2.96	1.77	0.078
R = 0.1355				
R ² = 0.0184				
adjusted R ² = 0.0125				
F-ratio = 3.14				
p-value = 0.078				
Comprehension Score				
Intercept	72.58	5.82	12.47	0.000
Degree of Reading Interest	2.57	2.40	1.07	0.287
R = 0.0822				
R ² = 0.007				
adjusted R ² = 0.001				
F-ratio = 1.142				
p-value = 0.287				

Contrary to the results, the research conducted by Fitria (2019) and Despita (2020) showed that there is a clear correlation between children's propensity for reading and their ability to understand written content. Fitria (2019) supports this claim by emphasizing that students' reading interest has a strong relationship with their reading comprehension. Analyzing the data stresses how important reading preferences are in determining comprehension competency because most children had excellent ratings in both reading interests and reading comprehension. Despita (2020) strengthens this claim by concluding that if students have a high interest in

reading, they also have a good ability to comprehend text. Thus, the students' ability to translate an intralingual text is also good.

Even so, it can be implied that, although the two variables have a significant correlation, the nature of the relationship tends to be weak. Therefore, it is possible that the relationship between the two variables does not have a strong influence because it is caused by other factors that occur in the learning activities (Alfatihah & Tyas, 2022).

3.9 Connecting Frequency in Print Reading with Reading Proficiency Level (Word Reading Score)

According to Table 9, the overall F-test is significant ($p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$), which means that the sample data provide sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis for the entire population. This implies that some of the explanatory or independent variables have a significant impact on the learners' proficiency in terms of word reading scores. The regression output shows that the frequency of reading print materials, namely, fiction stories ($p = 0.006$), magazines ($p = 0.003$), and books ($p = 0.000$), are significant predictors of their word reading score.

Table 9. Relationship between the learners' frequency in print reading and level of reading proficiency in terms of word reading score

Variables	Coefficients	SE	t Stat	P-value
Intercept	65.66	4.18	15.71	0.000
Fiction	2.75	0.99	2.78	0.006
Non-Fiction	1.23	1.18	1.05	0.297
Magazine	-2.93	0.99	-2.97	0.003
Books	4.67	1.05	4.47	0.000
Journal	-1.56	1.14	-1.37	0.174
Newspaper	-1.64	1.09	-1.52	0.132
Comics/Graphic Novels	0.36	0.96	0.37	0.709
R = 0.4623				
R ² = 0.2137				
adjusted R ² = 0.1798				
F-ratio = 6.291				
p-value = 0.000				

This finding is supported by the fact that the learners' reading habits, both academic and non-academic, enhance their capacity for critical thought, language fluency, and conceptual understanding. Consequently, these improvements contribute to better academic achievement (Balan, Katenga, & Simon, 2019). Throughout history, printed materials have been the primary means for both acquiring literacy skills (reading to learn) and gaining knowledge through reading (learning to read). Additionally, according to Kathryn Starke in her online article "Developing a Love of Reading in Students" (2020), the first step in enticing kids to read is letting them choose the books they want to read. Students who take ownership of their reading become proficient, independent readers.

Additionally, reading skills encompass competencies associated with an individual's capacity to comprehend, interpret, decode, and understand written language and textual content, according to Herrity (2023). Reading fiction, news articles, magazines, or any other type of print material is one of the best methods to build reading skills. Nonetheless, Mohammed and Amponsah's (2018) research indicated that the lack of pre-reading materials and other resources in the classroom are among the factors that contribute to students' subpar reading proficiency.

3.10 Connecting Frequency in Print Reading with Reading Proficiency Level (Comprehension Score)

The statistical analysis presented in Table 10 reveals that the overall F-test is not statistically significant, as the p-value obtained (0.053) is greater than the predetermined significance level (α) of 0.05. The data imply that the relationship between the frequency of reading print materials and the learners' reading proficiency, as measured by their comprehension score, is not significant. Thus, one can conclude that changes in the frequency of reading print materials do not result in significant shifts in the comprehension scores of the learners. This finding is crucial, as it suggests that other factors, such as the learners' background, motivation, and learning strategies, may play a more critical role in determining their reading proficiency.

According to Sari and Fitriisa (2022), Reading offers individuals a wealth of information and knowledge. Those who grasp the material they read can adequately address questions about it, emphasizing that comprehension serves as the fundamental aim of reading. By exposing students to new words, they can expand their vocabulary.

Table 10. Relationship between the learners' frequency in print reading and level of reading proficiency in terms of comprehension score

Variables	Coefficients	SE	t Stat	P-value
Intercept	37.60	5.61	6.70	0.000
Fiction	2.75	1.33	2.07	0.040
Non-Fiction	2.03	1.58	1.29	0.199
Magazine	-0.04	1.33	-0.03	0.976
Books	0.53	1.40	0.38	0.704
Journal	1.87	1.53	1.22	0.225
Newspaper	-3.12	1.46	-2.14	0.034
Comics/Graphic Novels	-0.58	1.29	-0.45	0.652
R = 0.2845				
R ² = 0.0809				
adjusted R ² = 0.0412				
F-ratio = 2.038				
p-value = 0.053				

The result presented above, however, contradicts the findings of Danaei et al. (2020), which revealed a significant difference between respondents in terms of overall reading comprehension. The latter found that children who experienced augmented storybooks performed better while recounting stories and responding to comprehension questions. The aforementioned respondent also received a higher score for implicit question answers.

3.11 Connecting Frequency in Utilizing Online Learning Tools with Reading Proficiency Level (Word Reading Score)

Table 11 shows that the F-test is significant with a p-value of 0.001, which confirms that some of the independent variables can be considered significant determinants of the learners' reading proficiency. However, upon examining the regression output, it is determined that only the learners' frequency of utilizing social media posts ($p = 0.001$) is significantly related to their word reading score.

Table 11. Relationship between the learners' frequency in utilizing online learning tools and level of reading proficiency in terms of word reading score

Variables	Coefficients	SE	t Stat	P-value
Intercept	62.89	3.83	16.41	0.000
e-Library	-0.15	1.29	-0.12	0.905
Webtoon	0.07	1.12	0.06	0.953
Wattpad	0.49	1.06	0.46	0.648
Online Articles/Blog Posts	1.17	1.00	1.17	0.245
Social Media Posts	3.21	0.92	3.49	0.001
R = 0.3459				
R ² = 0.1196				
adjusted R ² = 0.0928				
F-ratio = 4.457				
p-value = 0.001				

Regular engagement with social media content can enhance word-reading skills among learners, highlighting the significance of specific online activities in shaping academic proficiency. Conversely, tools like e-libraries, webtoons, Wattpad, and online articles do not significantly impact learners' word-reading scores, emphasizing the predominant influence of social media use frequency. These findings carry implications for educators and policymakers aiming to enhance language skills, suggesting the integration of social media into learning strategies.

This aligns with Ahmed et al.'s (2021) discovery that web-based social networking facilitates comprehensive English language learning, particularly through activities like messaging, posting, or gaming. Namaziandost and Nasri (2019) further contend that engaging and enjoyable materials, such as those found on social media, stimulate student learning in the 21st century. Similarly, Çakmak (2020) demonstrates how social networking enhances English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' speaking proficiency. Contrary to this, Permatasari, Wijayanto, and

Kristina (2020) argue for the benefits of extensive reading on Wattpad, emphasizing its role in developing writing, speaking, listening, and vocabulary skills.

3.12 Linking Frequency in Utilizing Online Reading Tools to Proficiency Level (Comprehension Score)

Table 12 displays the results of the F-test, indicating that the p-value is 0.084, which is higher than the pre-determined significance level of 0.05. This implies that there is no statistical evidence to suggest a significant relationship between the frequency of using online reading tools and the learners' level of reading proficiency in terms of comprehension scores.

Table 12. Relationship between the Learners' Frequency in Utilizing Online Reading Tools and Level of Reading Proficiency in terms of Comprehension Score

Variables	Coefficients	SE	t Stat	P-value
Intercept	33.31	4.92	6.764	0.000
e-Library	1.06	1.66	0.64	0.523
Webtoon	0.63	1.45	0.44	0.661
Wattpad	2.26	1.36	1.66	0.099
Online Article/Blog Posts	-0.69	1.29	-0.53	0.593
Social Media Posts	1.69	1.18	1.43	0.154
R = 0.2385				
R ² = 0.0569				
adjusted R ² = 0.0281				
F-ratio = 1.979				
p-value = 0.084				

Level of significance = 0.05

Therefore, changes in the frequency of utilizing online reading tools have no significant impact on the learners' comprehension scores. In other words, the learners' proficiency in reading comprehension is not influenced by how often they use online reading tools. A similar finding was also manifested in the study of Stiegler-Balfour et. al. (2023) as they claimed that although on-screen reading is considered a viable substitute for print by some individuals, those who do not possess adequate reading strategies may experience a perceived disadvantage when reading from screens, known as the screen inferiority effect. Considering the prevalence of digital devices in educational settings, these observations highlight the challenges that less proficient readers face when engaging with text on digital platforms. As emphasized by Park and Lee (2021), printed materials excelled in facilitating thorough and immersive reading experiences, while digital texts proved more conducive to rapid and superficial learning.

This result, however, opposes the findings of Al Khazaleh (2021), which revealed that the reading comprehension of the participants who employed digital reading outshined that of the participants who employed the conventional system of reading. In essence, it was established that digital reading significantly contributed to enhancing learners' reading comprehension skills, both within educational settings and beyond.

3.13 Linking Frequency of Watching TV and Social Media to Reading Proficiency Level (Word Reading Score)

Table 13 reveals that the overall F-test is statistically significant ($p = 0.012 < \alpha = 0.05$), an indication that some of the independent variables are significant predictors of the learners' reading proficiency in terms of word reading score. Further analysis of the regression output shows that the frequency of watching Food Network Asia ($p = 0.012$) and social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or TikTok ($p = 0.005$) are significantly related to the learners' word reading score. Interestingly, watching Food Network Asia shows an inverse relationship with the learners' word reading score, which implies that the more they watch this program, the lower their word reading score becomes.

It is possible that the content of Food Network Asia is not effective when it comes to improving word reading skills. If the programs are entertaining but lacking in educational value related to language skills, learners may not be gaining much in terms of word reading. On the contrary, learners who are more engaged in reading or watching TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter are likely to have a higher word reading score. Social media has a lot of words to read, like captions, comments, and articles. When learners spend more time reading these things, they encounter more words. This can help them get better at reading words.

Table 13. Relationship between the learners' frequency of watching TV programs and social media platforms and level of reading proficiency in terms of word reading score (n=170)

Variables	Coefficients	SE	t Stat	P-value
Intercept	64.56	5.27	12.26	0.000
TV News	-0.23	1.13	-0.21	0.836
Animal Planet	1.26	1.28	0.98	0.326
Planet Earth	-1.51	1.19	-1.27	0.206
Asian Food Channel	1.81	1.05	1.72	0.087
Food Network Asia	-2.94	1.16	-2.54	0.012
Discovery Science	2.08	1.14	1.82	0.071
Brain Games	-0.17	1.05	-0.16	0.876
The World Tonight	-0.58	1.29	-0.45	0.651
The Source	-0.66	1.49	-0.44	0.661
FB, Twitter, Instagram, Tiktok	3.36	1.18	2.86	0.005
R = 0.3598				
R ² = 0.1295				
adjusted R ² = 0.0747				
F-ratio = 2.365				
p-value = 0.012				

Correspondingly, Adelakun et al. (2023) acknowledged the use of social media in education as a cutting-edge technology that significantly affects students' academic success. Moreover, platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram have progressed past their original use as communication tools to serve as platforms for education and collaboration (Adelakun et al., 2023). The distinction between formal education and unofficial internet connections is being eroded by students' familiarity and expertise with these platforms.

These claims are affirmed by Muftah (2022), who asserted that students could improve their communication and language skills by using interactive social media platforms for language study. Their findings indicated that approximately 41% of students experienced advancement in their writing proficiency, with about 39% demonstrating progress in reading comprehension. Additionally, gains in listening comprehension and vocabulary were observed among nearly 32% of participants. Speaking skills exhibited improvement in about 31% of students, while grammar proficiency showed enhancement in only around 22% of learners. Furthermore, Shahini and Shahamirian (2021) likewise asserted that in terms of naturalness and authenticity, the main sources including movies and TV series, news programs, shows, and cartoons provide language learners with huge amounts of authentic words, idioms, and expressions, and help them pick up pronunciation, intonation, speech rate, gestures, and facial expressions.

3.14 Linking Frequency of Watching TV Programs and Social Media to Reading Proficiency Level (Comprehension)

The statistical results presented in Table 14 indicate that the overall F-test is not statistically significant ($p = 0.346 > \alpha = 0.05$). This means that there is no significant relationship between the frequency of watching TV programs and social media platforms among the learners and their level of reading proficiency in terms of comprehension scores.

The data indicate that changes in TV viewing frequency and social media usage don't significantly correlate with learners' reading comprehension scores, suggesting minimal impact on comprehension abilities. Social media multitasking's influence on academic performance remains understudied. Lau (2017) found that using social media for non-academic purposes and multitasking negatively predicted academic performance. Supper, Guay, and Talbot (2021) observed that TV viewing time and reading achievement had no direct or indirect link. However, there was a negative relationship between leisure reading frequency and TV viewing time.

However, Tarekegn and Endris (2019) found no meaningful correlation between TV watching and academic achievement. Conversely, Muftah (2022) reported social media's positive impact on English language learning, with most students acknowledging its beneficial effects. Desta et al. (2021) highlighted social media's advantages in improving medical learners' English proficiency, with no significant gender differences in its perceived influence. Overall, while social media appears to positively impact language learning, its effect on academic performance remains uncertain, contrasting with TV's limited influence on reading achievement.

Table 14. Relationship between the Learners' Frequency of Watching TV Programs and Social Media Platforms and Level of Reading Proficiency in terms of Comprehension Score (n=170)

Variables	Coefficients	SE	t Stat	P-value
Intercept	36.26	6.77	5.35	0.000
TV News	-0.62	1.45	-0.43	0.669
Animal Planet	-0.47	1.64	-0.29	0.773
Planet Earth	-1.93	1.53	-1.26	0.208
Asian Food Channel	2.23	1.35	1.65	0.100
Food Network Asia	0.13	1.49	0.09	0.928
Discovery Science	2.39	1.47	1.63	0.107
Brain Games	0.31	1.36	0.23	0.820
The World Tonight	-1.54	1.66	-0.93	0.354
The Source	1.67	1.92	0.87	0.386
FB, Twitter, Instagram, Tiktok	1.46	1.51	0.97	0.334
R = 0.23572				
R ² = 0.0661				
adjusted R ² = 0.0074				
F-ratio = 1.126				
p-value = 0.346				

4.0 Conclusion

This investigation reveals the complex relationship between learners' reading interests and proficiency levels. Despite a generally high interest in reading, a significant portion expresses limited enthusiasm due to time constraints, particularly in rural areas where household responsibilities and long commutes to school pose challenges. Many learners fall into the "frustration" category for reading proficiency, indicating a potential impact on their academic experience. Teachers in remote areas face additional challenges, which necessitate creative solutions and extra support. The study observes a disconnect between reading interest and proficiency, likely due to limited access to diverse reading materials in rural areas. Online learning tools, especially social media, show a positive correlation with higher word reading scores, emphasizing the potential benefits of incorporating digital resources in education. The time spent on reading correlates positively with both interest and proficiency, highlighting the importance of fostering dedicated reading habits from an early age. In conclusion, addressing challenges like time constraints, leveraging digital resources, and recognizing demographic differences are crucial for effective strategies to enhance reading interest and proficiency. In implementing and sustaining effective literacy interventions, especially in rural or underserved areas, collaboration between educators, policymakers, parents, and communities is paramount. By working together, these stakeholders can leverage their unique perspectives, resources, and expertise to ensure that interventions are tailored to the specific needs of the learners, thereby fostering a more successful and inclusive literacy education for all.

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