

READING Attitude and Anxiety as Determinants of Reading Comprehension in English of Grade 7 STUDENTS

Aika A. Rocha¹, Maureen D. Aguisando²

¹Bago Oshiro National High School, Tugbok, Davao City
aikaalcoesebarocha@gmail.com

²Graduate School Department, University of the Immaculate Conception, Davao City, Philippines
maguisando@uic.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine the influence of reading attitude and anxiety as determinants of reading comprehension in English among Grade 7 students. The study was conducted using a quantitative method, specifically the descriptive-correlational approach. Through stratified random sampling, 259 Grade 7 students in the reading remediation program of three public high schools in Cluster 6, Davao City Division, Davao del Sur, Philippines served as respondents. An adapted and expert-validated questionnaire was used to gather the necessary data. The statistical tools employed were the mean, standard deviation, Pearson-r correlation coefficient, and regression analysis. The study findings revealed a moderate level of reading attitude, reading anxiety, and reading comprehension in English among Grade 7 students. Moreover, the results showed a significant relationship between reading attitude, reading anxiety, and reading comprehension in English among Grade 7 students. Further, regression analysis results showed a positive causal relationship between reading attitude and reading comprehension of Grade 7 students, and a negative causal relationship between reading anxiety and reading comprehension of Grade 7 students.

KEYWORDS: *Education, English, reading attitude, reading anxiety, reading comprehension, Grade 7 students, descriptive-correlational design, Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a complex intellectual process that integrates reading and comprehension. To fully comprehend reading material, it is necessary to correlate words with sentences and new information with previous

information (Agustiani, 2017 & Oktaviani, 2017). Despite its importance, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development revealed that many students still need help with this skill, encountering difficulties examining text meanings, connecting ideas, finding important messages, and making inferences (OECD, 2019). Furthermore, the Program for International Student Assessment attested that this issue impacts students at all school stages and can impair overall academic success. Moreover, more significant consequences are anticipated, as high reading comprehension skills are essential for academic success and successful communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving in everyday life (Schleicher, 2019). Acknowledging the crucial significance of reading comprehension in education and broader contexts, Smith et al. (2021) conceded the pressing necessity to explore contributing factors, comprehend underlying causes, and explore effective solutions to address this challenge.

In the global setting, a study conducted in Turkey by Bayar and Tertemiz (2022) discovered that four of the six individuals scored 50 percent or worse on the reading comprehension test. These participants also had trouble answering "how" questions, forming cause-and-effect relationships, and determining the text's central theme. Thus, these participants demonstrated higher comprehension of simple queries than complex ones. Similarly, in Pakistan, Iqbal et al. (2015) observed analogous issues influencing Pakistani students' reading comprehension, such as difficulties in inferring meaning from text and a lack of vocabulary fluency.

In the Philippines, a substantial number of learners fail to meet the established learning standards in early language and literacy, as the Department of Education reported. The critical importance of comprehension as a central element in literacy, highlighted by Motimore (2000), underscores the need for understanding what is read. Hence, the low achievement levels, particularly in Math and Science, can be traced back to students' limited reading comprehension in English (DepEd, 2019). Furthermore, a study conducted in Iloilo by Manggasang and Belasoto (2021) revealed that Grade 11 learners achieved a 'Good' level in literal and interpretive reading comprehension but underscored a 'fair' degree of comprehension at the critical level. This finding means that Grade 11 learners can answer basic questions, follow simple instructions, and apply and analyze cognitive processes, albeit not at a very high level.

Locally, Mendoza and Panganiban (2018) conducted a study revealing a significant prevalence of poor reading comprehension skills among junior high

school students in Davao City. The study, which involved 200 students from 10 schools, disclosed that only 10 percent demonstrated good skills. Notable factors contributing to poor skills included a lack of reading habits, inadequate vocabulary, and poor critical thinking skills. Furthermore, Dela Cruz and Tantengco (2019) revealed that students from private schools exhibited significantly better reading comprehension skills than those enrolled in public schools. The study attributed the variation in reading comprehension skills between public and private school students to factors such as better access to resources and well-trained teachers.

Language researchers have also investigated elements that may be associated with reading comprehension. Many revealed that reading attitude is a cognitive factor that can influence reading comprehension (Bagolong & Usop, 2021; Herdawan & Rahmawati, 2022; Wangchuk et al., 2021), whereas anxiety is an influential factor that is important in second language learning (Elaldi, 2016); cited in (Berowa, 2018). For example, Smith and Feng (2018) conducted a study that discovered a substantial positive association between students' good reading attitudes and reading comprehension abilities. Similarly, Brown et al. (2019) discovered a strong positive relationship between students' pleasant reading attitudes and enhanced reading comprehension scores. Wilson and Turner (2020), on the other hand, investigated reading anxiety and its impact on reading comprehension, discovering a negative association between high levels of reading anxiety and lower reading comprehension skills.

While existing research acknowledges the influence of reading attitude and anxiety on reading comprehension among students, there is a noticeable gap in the literature regarding the specific dynamics and nuanced interactions between reading attitude, anxiety, and reading comprehension, especially within the context of Grade 7 students studying English. Current studies often provide general insights, but a deeper exploration into how these factors manifest and interact among this particular age group still needs to be developed. Additionally, limited attention has been given to identifying potential interventions that can positively impact the relationship between reading attitude, anxiety, and reading comprehension in this demographic. Addressing this gap is crucial for developing targeted educational strategies that enhance English reading comprehension for Grade 7 students, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping their reading skills.

In this context, the researcher is interested in studying the influence of reading attitude and anxiety on reading comprehension in English of Grade 7

students. Hopefully, this study may discover enlightening facts about the crucial roles of reading attitude and reading anxiety toward reading comprehension. This study is valuable to English or reading teachers and school heads. Hence, it will be presented and discussed with them during the School Learning Action Cells (SLAC) session so they can utilize this study's findings in their classes, particularly the Grade 7 students.

Additionally, the researcher aims to present the study's findings at national and international research forums to reach a wider audience and foster discussions on students' reading comprehension. Furthermore, the researcher plans to publish the study's findings in print and online. Publishing the study in print allows distribution to libraries, educational institutions, and other relevant stakeholders. Simultaneously, publishing online ensures that the study's findings are accessible to a broader audience, including researchers, educators, and policymakers worldwide. By employing these dissemination strategies, the researcher aims to maximize the impact of the study on students' reading comprehension, facilitate knowledge sharing, and contribute to the existing body of research in the field.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational approach to determine whether reading attitude and anxiety are determinants of reading comprehension in English of Grade 7 students.

Research Locale

This study was conducted in Davao City, particularly in Cluster 6 of the Department of Education (DepEd), in Tugbok District, Davao City, Philippines. The study was carried out in this location because the schools within this cluster are reported to experience issues with reading comprehension among their students.

Research Respondents

Using a stratified random sampling design, the study included 259 Grade 7 students selected from three randomly chosen public high schools in Cluster 6. The respondents were distributed among the following schools: 41 Grade 7 students from School A, 138 Grade 7 students from School B, and 80 Grade 7 students from School C. This study's exclusive focus was on Grade 7

students, aiming to gather specific information from this particular group. Therefore, only Grade 7 students enrolled in three selected schools, who were also participating in their respective reading remediation programs, were included. Hence, those who failed to meet these criteria were not included in the study to maintain the accuracy and relevance of the probable results of this study.

Research Instruments

The study used three questionnaires addressing students' reading attitudes, reading anxiety, and reading comprehension in English. A panel of experts validated the instruments and underwent pilot testing. The first instrument of the study focuses on reading attitude with (2) indicators, followed by reading anxiety containing (3) indicators, and the last part focuses on reading comprehension with (5) indicators. The reliability test was computed using Cronbach's alpha for reading attitude, which is .71, and for reading anxiety, which is .75. These results indicate that the questionnaires demonstrate high internal consistency. Therefore, the entire test is deemed reliable. A 5-point Likert scale was employed to score each item in the independent variables, while a multiple-choice question format was used in the reading comprehension test.

Data Analysis

The statistical techniques used to total and analyze the information obtained from the questionnaires include the mean, standard deviation, Pearson product-moment correlation, and multiple regression analysis.

Data Collection

The following steps were undertaken during the data-gathering procedure: The researcher obtained a letter from the Dean of the University of the Immaculate Conception (UIC) Graduate School granting permission to conduct the study. Upon receiving the approved permission letter, the researcher formally requested ethical clearance from the UIC Research Ethics Committee (REC) before administering the instruments to the study's target respondents.

After obtaining permission from the Dean and after the UIC REC had released ethical clearance, the researcher formally submitted the letters and other necessary documents to the Schools' Division Superintendent of Davao City, requesting official approval to conduct the research. Consequently, the researcher personally sent a separate request letter to the principals of the

participating schools. The letter included attachments, such as the approved request letter from the Schools Division Superintendent (SDS) and an endorsement letter from the Dean of the UIC Graduate School.

On the other hand, the intended respondents were formally notified and provided with an Informed Consent Form (ICF) and Assent Form about their participation in the study before the data-gathering process. Additionally, the respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and the importance of their contribution to the research. It was emphasized that participation was voluntary, and data collection would be conducted through face-to-face interactions. Subsequently, the collected data were encoded, tabulated, and analyzed by the study's objectives.

RESULTS

Correlation between Variables

Table 1

Correlation of Variables

Variables paired with Reading Comprehension of Grade 7 Students	r	p-value	Remarks
Reading Attitude	0.706	0.000	Significant
Reading Anxiety	- 0.718	0.000	Significant

**Significant at 0.05*

Table 1 shows the relationship between reading attitude and reading comprehension in English and reading anxiety and reading comprehension in English.

Furthermore, a significant positive correlation ($r=0.706$, $p<0.05$) between reading attitude and reading comprehension in English among Grade 7 students was revealed. This result indicates that reading attitudes, mainly recreational and academic reading attitudes, influence reading comprehension. Moreover, it implies that an increase or change in students' reading attitudes

directly causes an increase in their reading comprehension.

Meanwhile, these findings align with a study by Güngör and Ayvaz (2020), where they examined how students with positive reading attitudes toward various text types, including fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, achieved exceptional results in reading comprehension, while those with negative reading attitudes had substantially lower results. Additionally, the findings are consistent with Karaman (2022), who revealed that students with more favorable reading attitudes were likelier to engage in deep reading, entailing thinking about the author's purpose, drawing inferences, and relating the text to their knowledge and experiences.

Similarly, the findings can be associated with the research conducted by Celik and Güngör (2022), who observed that students with positive reading attitudes exhibited more frequent use of efficient reading comprehension skills, such as summarization and inference-making. However, these results stand in contrast to the findings of Kim et al. (2023), Wang et al. (2021), and Zhang et al. (2022), all of whom identified a negative relationship between reading attitude and reading comprehension.

Likewise, a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.718$, $p = 0.05$) was revealed among Grade 7 students. This result indicates that their reading comprehension decreases as students' reading anxiety increases. These findings support the hypothesis that reading anxiety significantly impacts reading comprehension, aligning with Eysenck and Calvo's (1990) Attentional Control hypothesis. This theory suggests that individuals with high anxiety levels may struggle to focus attention due to increased attentional control processes, negatively affecting reading performance by narrowing attention and complicating the processing and integration of multiple information sources simultaneously.

In addition, these findings are consistent with Rahmatwati (2020), who discovered that higher levels of reading anxiety are associated with lower reading comprehension levels. A similar pattern emerged in Petrus and Shah (2020), who investigated that reading anxiety had a more pronounced negative impact on reading comprehension in students with lower reading proficiency. Additionally, Mohammadpur and Ghafournia (2015) concluded that the association between reading anxiety and reading comprehension was more pronounced in students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) than in

those learning it as a second language (ESL).

Influencers of Reading Comprehension of Grade 7 students

Table 2 shows the regression analysis of reading attitude, reading anxiety, and reading comprehension in English of Grade 7 students.

Table 2

Influencers of Reading Comprehension of Grade 7 Students

Individual Predictors	Standard Coefficient Beta	t	p-value	Remarks
Reading Attitude	0.411	7.898	0.000	Significant
Reading Anxiety	- 0.447	- 8.590	0.000	Significant
Holistic Model				
Predictors Combined	R ²	F	p-value	Remarks
	0.611	200.940	0.000	Significant

**Significant at 0.05*

The data revealed that the two independent variables, reading attitude and reading anxiety, could significantly influence the reading comprehension of Grade 7 students ($p < 0.05$). Specifically, individual beta standardized results, which show the positive causal relationship between the reading attitude and reading comprehension of Grade 7 students ($\beta = 0.411$, $p < 0.05$), imply that the increasing change in the level of reading attitude of students is directly causing an increased change of about 41.10 percent in their level of reading comprehension. The findings align with Cheng et al. (2022), who suggest that positive reading attitudes, reflected in engagement, can contribute to better comprehension. This perspective is corroborated by Gu et al. (2022), who propose that interventions designed to make reading more engaging and enjoyable can positively impact attitude and comprehension.

On the other hand, the negative causal relationship between reading

anxiety and reading comprehension of Grade 7 students ($\beta = -0.447$, $p < 0.05$) implies that the increased change in the level of reading anxiety felt by students is directly causing a decreased change in about 44.70 percent in their level of reading comprehension. Considering the highest Beta standardized coefficient value of -0.447 , the variable reading anxiety is considered the best predictor of the reading comprehension of Grade 7 students in this study. This result aligns with the proposition of Mohammadpur and Ghafournia (2015), who state that reading anxiety significantly impacts the reading comprehension of rural ESL secondary students.

Meanwhile, more evidently, the overall p-value (< 0.05) with an F value of 200.940, as shown in the holistic model, implies that the reading comprehension of Grade 7 students is significantly predicted by the combined independent variables (reading attitude and reading anxiety). The R² value of 0.611 signifies that 61.10 percent of the variance of the reading comprehension of Grade 7 students was influenced by their reading attitude and reading anxiety. This finding accounts for a significant effect size for that matter. Thus, it infers that there are few other combined factors equivalent to 38.90 percent that could significantly influence the reading comprehension of Grade 7 students, which needs to be covered in this study.

Notably, the study's findings support Rosenblatt's (1938) Transactional Theory of Reading, emphasizing the importance of reading attitude and anxiety on reading comprehension. This alignment with Rosenblatt's theory emphasizes the reading process's dynamic interplay and cognitive-affective components. The positive causal relationship between Grade 7 students' reading attitude and reading comprehension emphasizes the dynamic interplay between the reader's attitudes and the text, demonstrating that a positive attitude toward reading contributes significantly to improved comprehension. According to Roseblatt's paradigm, readers actively engage with the text, drawing on their attitudes and experiences to construct meaning.

In contrast, the negative causal relationship between reading anxiety and reading comprehension in Grade 7 students suggests that negative affective aspects, such as worry, can impair the reader's seamless interaction with the text. Higher levels of anxiety appear to operate as a barrier, limiting students' capacity to read English texts with comprehension. This negative association highlights the importance of taking into account both cognitive and affective components, as stressed by Roseblatt's theory.

Moreover, the findings resonate with Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior, which emphasizes the importance of positive attitudes as precursors to deliberate acts, specifically improved reading comprehension. In this study, a positive reading attitude indicates a favorable tendency toward the reading activity, which increases the possibility of engaging in good comprehension processes. On the other hand, increased reading anxiety appears to impair students' ability to comprehend English texts effectively, which has a detrimental impact on their reading behavior.

Importantly, these findings also resonate with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1978), which posits that a positive affective environment, in this case, reflected in favorable attitudes toward reading, can lower the affective filter and facilitate language acquisition. Conversely, high levels of anxiety can raise the affective filter, impeding language acquisition. In the case of reading comprehension in English, elevated anxiety levels appear to act as a barrier, hindering the student's ability to understand texts effectively.

CONCLUSION

The empirical findings significantly shaped the study's conclusions, revealing a significant relationship between reading attitude, reading anxiety, and reading comprehension in English among Grade 7 students. Specifically, reading attitude and anxiety significantly influenced the reading comprehension in English of Grade 7 students, as evidenced by the F-value of 200.940 and $p < 0.000$. The r^2 value of 0.61 indicated that reading attitude and reading anxiety had contributed significantly to the variability of reading comprehension in English among Grade 7 students by 61 percent of the total variability. Further, as evidenced by the regression coefficient value of 0.41, an increase or change in the level of reading attitude of students directly caused an increase or change of about 41.10% in their reading comprehension. Furthermore, based on the regression coefficient value of -0.44, an increase or change in the level of reading anxiety felt by students directly caused a decrease or change of about 44.70% in their reading comprehension level.

The study's results suggest that students explore diverse reading materials, tailoring their choices to their individual interests and academic needs, including books, articles, digital resources, and fiction and nonfiction genres. Additionally, it is recommended that students incorporate mind mapping and self-monitoring to address top-down reading anxiety. Simultaneously, engaging

in pre-reading activities, such as decoding difficult words and activating prior knowledge, can be beneficial in alleviating bottom-up reading anxiety. Additionally, teachers are encouraged to strike a balance between addressing students' specific concerns and fostering a neutral attitude toward English reading to prevent the development of classroom reading anxiety. Given the moderate level of English reading comprehension among Grade 7 students, it is recommended that students seek assistance and interventions in areas where their outcomes fall within the moderate to low range. Embracing a variety of question types, from open-ended to rhetorical, and engaging in home reading activities can foster the development of higher-order thinking skills.

Since reading attitude has a significant positive relationship to English reading comprehension, and conversely, reading anxiety shows a significant negative relationship to English reading comprehension, it is proposed that teachers employ strategies and classroom techniques to help mitigate anxiety and increase positive attitude. Also, the researcher suggests that further studies exploring the factors that affect psychology in English reading be conducted. Furthermore, since both reading attitude and reading anxiety influence Grade 7 students' reading comprehension in English, public schools may strengthen the implementation of their reading remediation program by embedding it into regular class hours four times a week, addressing various indicators of reading comprehension skills in English. Similarly, feedback should be regularly communicated to the students for progress monitoring.

After that, it is recommended that a mixed-method approach be employed to give insights into the figures gathered from this quantitative research. This finding may yield a more comprehensive reading analysis of attitude and anxiety. Additionally, it is suggested that future researchers explore teachers' standpoints regarding reading attitudes and anxiety by conducting qualitative research focusing on teachers' perspectives.

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