

Vocabulary Proficiency: Its influence on Reading Comprehension Skills among Students in Selected Secondary Schools in Isabela Basilan

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Abstract: This study was undertaken to determine the vocabulary proficiency and reading comprehension skills among the Grade 10 students. It also investigated the correlation between the students' vocabulary proficiency and reading comprehension skills. It further showed the degrees of difference in the respondents' vocabulary proficiency as well as their reading comprehension skills when data are grouped according to gender and family income. This study made use of a standardized Vocabulary Proficiency Test and a standardized 40-item reading test from the California High School Exit Examination (2004) and statistical tools were likewise used in this study which included mean, standardized deviation, Mann-Whitney U Test and Spearman's rank correlation. Employing Descriptive-Quantitative Correlational Research Design with forty-two (42) student-respondents, the result shows that respondents are good both in their vocabulary proficiency and reading proficiency with the mean of 24.00 and 17.95 with SD of 7.51 and 6.25. Further, a positive strong correlation was seen between the vocabulary proficiency and reading comprehension skills while no significant difference was found in the vocabulary proficiency and reading comprehension skills when data are classified according to gender and family income.

Keywords: Vocabulary Proficiency, Reading Comprehension Skills, Gender, Family Income

1. Introduction

The need for vocabulary proficiency has come to the forefront of literacy education. As early as in primary level, learners began to acquire significant number of vocabularies through reading. However, if learners found difficulties in reading, they are less likely to gain the appropriate knowledge and vocabulary necessary for comprehension of texts in academic areas (Glende, 2013).

One of the challenges faced by many learners is their inability to define meaning of words, even if they are able to pronounce them. A new form of literacy instruction is introduced to learners as they move beyond primary education. Instruction upgrades from learning the processes of acquisition, to genre and text type, and even structures carefully utilizing those systems of language to gain knowledge of concepts and content. This system is considered much wider and learners' strategies gained from primary grades may not always transfer to those content areas. If readers are not proficient in using vocabulary strategies, they will struggle with gaining comprehension from content-related texts.

Vocabulary proficiency and reading comprehension skills are both essential skills for learners to succeed in their academic journey. Research on the relationship between these skills has started to gain attention. Several literatures focused more on how learners acquire their vocabulary through reading and other studies have dwelled too much attention on what roles does vocabulary play in reading comprehension skill in the context of the academic. Moreover, a wealth of research has also documented the relationship of vocabulary and comprehension.

Vocabulary is defined as a set of words known to a person or that is part of specific language. The word "vocabulary" is also figuratively for qualities or techniques distinctive to a particular style, especially an architectural style. (Wikipedia). Vocabulary is vital to reading comprehension; without knowing what most of the

words in the text mean, a text cannot be fully understood. Reading comprehension on the other hand is the level of understanding of a text. It is the process to read text and understand its meaning. This understanding comes from the interaction between the words that are written; how these words mean and how these will trigger learners' schema to come up with the necessary interaction. The ability to comprehend may also depend on the level of vocabulary proficiency the learners possess, that will aid them to understand the text.

The language teachers have expressed their problem related to vocabulary proficiency and its influence to the reading comprehension skills among the students. It is one of the serious problems which have to be looked into. This problem has continued to exist particularly when the NAT result in English of the students has declined each year. Teachers find it hard to plan and construct methods that would help improve the students' performance in those skills. The teachers need to measure and evaluate the readiness of the students as these students will take standardized examinations like the National Achievement Test (NAT).

The problem on how to enhance the students' vocabulary and improve their comprehension that confront the language teachers as well as the desire to provide empirical data relating to this matter served as the motivating force for the conduct of this study.

2. Methodology

This study utilized a Descriptive Quantitative Correlational Research Design. It sought to determine the over-all vocabulary and reading comprehension proficiencies of the students; it aimed to determine the influence of vocabulary proficiency to reading comprehension of the students. It also aimed to determine the degrees of differences in the students' vocabulary proficiency as well as the degrees of differences in the student's reading proficiency when data are grouped according to gender and family income.

This study followed the following flow chart: conceptualization of the research problem, construction of research instrument, data gathering, analysis and interpretation of the data, and finalizing of report for presentation.

Population and Sampling Procedures

This research was conducted in the selected Secondary Schools in Isabela City Basilan. The participants in this study were the selected Grade 10 students enrolled in the school year 2016-2017. Particularly, these participants come from three (3) secondary schools in Isabela City Division. To identify the number of respondents, simple random sampling method using Gay's formula was employed in which 20% of the population was extracted. Hence, only 42 respondents were utilized of which seven (7) respondents were taken from school A, ten (10) respondents from school B and twenty-five (25) respondents from school C.

Research Instruments

To determine the vocabulary proficiency and reading proficiency of the high school students, vocabulary and reading proficiency tests were used in the study. To determine the vocabulary proficiency of the respondents, the University of the Philippines Test of English as a Second Language was used. This test was also used by Lopina (2010) Emmanuel (2011) and Acabo (2016) in their study and California High School Exit Examination (2004) which was used by Acabo (2016) for reading comprehension skills. The tests are consisted of forty (40) items.

Data Analysis Procedure

Scoring Procedure for Vocabulary and Reading Proficiencies

The tests were checked independently by a corrector following an answer key. For every correct answer, the respondents were given one point.

The result of the tests was converted into percentage and referred to the rating as shown below in order to determine the Overall proficiencies in vocabulary and reading among the respondents.

Range of Scores and percentage equivalent for the Proficiency levels in Vocabulary and Reading

Individual Scores	Percentage Equivalent (%)	Individual Scores	Percentage Equivalent (%)
40	100	20	50.00
39	97.50	19	47.50
38	95.00	18	45.00
37	92.50	17	42.50
36	90.00	16	40
35	87.50	15	37.50
34	85.00	14	35.00
33	82.50	13	32.50
32	80.00	12	30.00
31	77.50	11	27.50
30	75.00	10	25.00
29	72.50	9	22.50
28	70.00	8	20.00
27	67.50	7	17.50
26	65.00	6	15.00
25	62.50	5	12.50
24	60	4	10.00
23	57.50	3	7.50
22	55.00	2	5.00
21	52.50	1	2.50
		0	0

The corresponding average score of each student was described as very poor, poor, fair, good, proficient, and very proficient.

Scale of Measurement for the Overall Proficiencies in Vocabulary and Reading (Percentage)

Scores (<i>In Percentage</i>)	Description
81%-100%	Very Proficient
61%-80%	Proficient
41%-60%	Good
21%-40%	Fair
1%-20%	Poor
0	Very Poor

3. Results and Discussion

Research Problem 1: What is the Overall Vocabulary Proficiency of the Respondents?

Table 1.0 shows the overall vocabulary proficiency of the Grade 10 students. It reveals that the students are *good* in their vocabulary skills with the mean of 24.00 and standard deviation of 7.51. It means that students performed well in the vocabulary test. It presupposes that these respondents may have similar or common background knowledge and experience in the English Lexicon.

According to Anderson and Freebody (1981), having good and acceptable command of the knowledge of vocabulary will help the students to the better understanding of the reading text. Literacy experts are in agreements that good knowledge of vocabulary storage and the capability to inseparably linked, the strength word is a based predictor of his or her ability to comprehend an extensive range of texts.

Table 1.0 – The Overall Vocabulary Proficiency of the Respondents

Variable	Mean	SD	Percentage Equivalent (Mean)	Descriptor
Vocabulary Proficiency	24.00	7.51	60.00%	Good

0 Very Poor; 1-20 Poor; 21-40 Fair;41-60 Good; 61-80 Proficient; 81-100 Very Proficient

Further, Tables 1.1 and 1.2 also show that the vocabulary proficiency of female respondents is slightly higher than the vocabulary proficiency of male respondents which differ around 7.5%. The vocabulary proficiency score of respondents with family income of at most 10,000 pesos is 15% higher than those respondents with family income of more than 11,000 pesos. However, considering the proportion of the respondents, the data show that the result is not absolutely accurate.

The finding of vocabulary proficiency based on gender and family income disproves the study of Rescorla and Achenbach (2002) whose result revealed that there was a significant effect of age, gender and higher SES in the vocabulary performance of the students.

The finding on the performance of the vocabulary proficiency based on family income has also disproves the claim of Onocha (1985) who concluded that a child from a well-educated family with high socioeconomic status is more likely to perform better than a child from an illiterate family. This is because the child from an educated family has a lot of support such as decent and good environment for academic work, parental support and guidance, enough textual and academic materials and decent feeding.

Table 1.1 - Mean Score of the Respondent’s Vocabulary when data are classified according to Gender

Gender	Frequency	Vocabulary	Percentage Equivalent	Descriptive Equivalent
M	12	21.83	55.00%	Good
F	30	24.87	62.50%	Proficient

0 Very Poor; 1-20 Poor; 21-40 Fair;41-60 Good; 61-80 Proficient; 81-100 Very Proficient

Table 1.2 - Mean Score of the Respondent’s Vocabulary when data are classified according to Family Income

Family Income	Frequency	Vocabulary	Percentage Equivalent	Descriptive Equivalent
Below - 10,000	39	24.46	60.00%	Good
11,000 –36,999	3	18.00	45.00%	Good

0 Very Poor; 1-20 Poor; 21-40 Fair;41-60 Good; 61-80 Proficient; 81-100 Very Proficient

Research Problem 2: What is the Overall Reading Comprehension Skills of the Respondents?

Table 2.0 presents the overall reading comprehension level of the grade 10 students. At a closer look at this table,

it shows that the reading comprehension skills of the students are *good* with the mean of 17.95 and a standard deviation of 6.25. This implies that the respondents have good comprehension ability on the reading test.

Reading proficiency is the royal road to knowledge. It is essential for the success in all academic subjects. In modern life, learning depends largely upon one’s ability to interpret the printed page accurate and fully. Reading is the most important subject to be learned by students. A student will learn little in today’s world if he does not learn to read with comprehension. Sprang (1995).

Table 2.0 – The Overall Reading Comprehension Level of the Respondents

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Percentage Equivalent	Descriptor
Reading Comprehension Skills	17.95	6.25	45.00	Good

0 Very Poor; 1-20 Poor; 21-40 Fair;41-60 Good; 61-80 Proficient; 81-100 Very Proficient

Also, Tables 2.1 and 2.2 show that the reading comprehension proficiency of the female respondents is slightly higher than the proficiency of male respondents, which differs by a und 7.5%. The reading comprehension score of respondents with family income of at most 10,000 pesos is 10% higher than those respondents with family income of more than 11,000 pesos. However, considering the proportion of the respondents, the data show that the result could be more accurate.

This finding validates the claim of Salehi, Lari & Rezanejad (2014) whose study revealed that the female and male students showed different levels of comprehension but female outperform male in the reading comprehension test.

The most important variable affecting reading comprehension is gender. There are clear differences between men’s and women’s use of language. These differences can be attributed to women domination in using language Tannen, (1984).

The finding on the reading comprehension skills based on family income contradicts to the study of Parker et. al (1999) who reported that low-income parents show higher level of frustration and aggravation with their children and these children are more likely to have poor verbal development and exhibit higher levels of distractibility and hostility in the classroom.

Table 2.1 -Mean Score of the Respondent’s Reading Comprehension Skills when data are classified according to Gender

Gender	Frequency	Reading (Mean Score)	Percentage Equivalent	Descriptive Equivalent
M	12	15.58	40.00	Fair
F	30	18.90	47.50	Good

0 Very Poor; 1-20 Poor; 21-40 Fair;41-60 Good; 61-80 Proficient; 81-100 Very Proficient

Table 2.2 - Mean Score of the Respondent’s Reading Comprehension Skills when data are classified according to Family Income

Family Income	Frequency	Reading (Mean Score)	Percentage Equivalent	Descriptive Equivalent
Below - 10,000	39	18.26	45.00	Good
11,000 –36,999	3	14.00	35.00	Fair

0 Very Poor; 1-20 Poor; 21-40 Fair;41-60 Good; 61-80 Proficient; 81-100 Very Proficient

Research Problem 3: Is There A Significant Relationship between Vocabulary Proficiency and Reading Comprehension Level Among The Respondents?

Since both vocabulary proficiency and reading comprehension are not normally distributed and the two variables have monotonic relationship, Spearman's rank correlation was run to determine the relationship between the vocabulary proficiency and reading comprehension skills. Tested at 0.05 level of significant, the Spearman's correlation coefficient is $r_s=0.615$ at $p<0.05$ which is statistically significant (see Table 3.0). This shows that there was a **strong, positive correlation** between the vocabulary proficiency and reading comprehension. It implies that, reading comprehension skills and vocabulary proficiency are strongly related to each other. That is, good vocabulary proficiency strongly contributed to the good reading comprehension and a good reading comprehension strongly contributed to the good vocabulary proficiency.

In the study of Zamanian (2014), finding from Pearson's Correlations shows that there are significant relationships between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. The Pearson's Correlation test indicated positive and significant relationship for vocabulary knowledge. Thus, supports the finding of this study.

The result also supports the claim of Gelderen et. al (2004) who examined the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension among 397 Dutch students from Grade 8 to Grade 10 in secondary education. As results, found significant relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension with the correlation of .63.

Further, the finding in this study proves the claim of Qian (1998, 2002) who stated that vocabulary size and reading comprehension is highly and positively correlated. The correlation among vocabulary proficiency and reading proficiency indicate that the vocabulary knowledge is moderately correlated with the learners' general academic reading comprehension levels.

Table 3.0 – The Result of the Correlation between Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension

Statistical Test	r_s -value	p-value	Remark
Spearman's rho	0.615	<0.005 Significant	Strong Correlation

0.00-0.19 Very Weak Correlation; 0.20-0.39 Weak Correlation; 0.40-0.59 Moderate Correlation; 0.60-0.79 Strong Correlation; 0.80-1.00 Very Strong Correlation

Research Problem 4: Is There a Significant Difference in the Vocabulary Proficiency among the Respondents when data are grouped according to Gender and Family Income?

Since the data are not normally distributed, Mann-Whitney U Test was run to test the significant difference between male and female respondents on the vocabulary proficiency. Tested at 0.05 level of significant, p-value of 0.277, the result shows that there is no significant difference on the vocabulary proficiency between male and female respondents. Hence, gender of the student does not determine their vocabulary proficiency.

The study supports the claim of Genoso (2005) who concluded that sex did not influence the level of achievement in the post test of the pupils exposed to two types of learning approaches.

The study of Covarubias (2005) yielded the findings that sex or gender did not significantly influence the chance for a student to succeed in his college life. Students of Canavan & Heckman, Robies, Show, Met and Geneses showed that proper development of vocabulary skills is significant to all subject areas and is a vital part of effective communication. Furthermore, having a good vocabulary is a clear hallmark of successful students in school.

Further, the result of this study proves the finding of WEI Xuemei (2014) which shows that there is no significant difference in the performance of the male and female in the vocabulary acquisition strategies. Ding (2006) revealed that L2 vocabulary learning did not lie in the frequency of strategy use but in how to effectively and appropriately use the strategies.

Also, this study disproves the study of Anghay (2007) as cited by Lopina (2009) whose findings showed that respondents' age and sex were significantly related with their English vocabulary level.

Similarly, since the data are not normally distributed, Mann-Whitney U Test was run to test the significant difference between family incomes of 10,000-below and 11,000-36,999 on the vocabulary proficiency. Tested at 0.05 level of significant, p-value of 0.129, the result shows that there is no significant difference on the vocabulary proficiency between family incomes of 10,000-below and 11,000-36,999. Hence, family income does not determine the vocabulary proficiency of the students.

This current study contradicts to the claim of Eamon (2005), Majoribanks (1996), Jeynes (2002) & Arkanle (2007) who believed that low family income negatively affects academic achievement because they both prevents access to vital resources and creates additional stress at home, also mentioned parental income in his work to be strong factor upon which the academic and vocational successes of secondary lie.

Further, the study disproves the finding of Onocha (1985) who concluded that a child from a well-educated family with high socioeconomic status is more likely to perform better than a child from an illiterate family. This is because the child from an educated family has a lot of support such as decent and good environment for academic work, parental support and guidance, enough textual and academic materials and decent feeding. He or she is likely to be sent to good schools where all seasoned teachers will handle his or her subjects. Children's academic achievement was found to be affected by varying family process.

Table 4.0 – The Result on the Significant Difference in the Vocabulary Proficiency when data are grouped according to Gender and Family Income

Group	U-value	p-value	Remark
Gender	U=141.00	p=0.277*	Not Significant
Family Income	U=27.50	p=0.129*	Not Significant

*Not significant @ alpha = 0.05

Research Problem 5: Is there a Significant Difference in the Reading Comprehension Skills among the Respondents when data are grouped according to Gender and Family Income?

Since the data are not normally distributed, Mann-Whitney U Test was run to test the significant difference between the male and female respondents on the reading comprehension skills. Tested at 0.05 level of significant, p-value of 0.159, the result shows that there is no significant difference on the reading comprehension skill between male and female respondents. Hence, gender of the student does not determine their reading comprehension skills.

This finding supports the study of Acabo (2016) whose finding shows that male and female do not statistically differ in their reading performance. This implies that there is no significant difference in the reading proficiency of the Grade 10 students when data are grouped according to gender.

This study also proves the study of Salehi, Lari, Rezanejad (2014) which claims that male and female have different levels of comprehension and based on the differences in means, females outperform males on reading comprehension test. However, no significant difference was found in the study.

Similarly, since the data are not normally distributed, Mann-Whitney U Test was run to test the significant difference between family incomes of 10,000-below and 11,000-36,999 on the reading comprehension skills. Tested at 0.05 level of significant, p-value of 0.240, the result shows that there is no significant difference on the reading comprehension skills between family incomes of 10,000-below and 11,000-36,999. Hence, family income does not determine the reading comprehension skills of the students.

The result of the study validates the claim of Mayer (1997), Duncan and Brooks-Gunn (1997), and others who have pointed out that although some studies reveal the relationship between income and children's outcome, they do not necessarily estimate a causal relationship. Children living in families may have worse environment or other

characteristics that the researcher does not observe. These omitted variables may be part of a reason for substandard achievement and may continue to affect children’s development even if family income were to arise.

Further, the result of this study contradicts to the claim of Snow et al. (1998). He believed that low socio economic status (SES) is known to put students at elevated risk for early difficulties. Differences in SES are associated with differences in access to variety of resources that support reading development and academic achievement, and robust relationship exist between SES and reading achievement at the individual and school levels.

Table 5.0 - The Result on the Significant Difference in the Reading Comprehension Level when data are grouped according to Gender and Family Income

Group	U-value	p-value	Remark
Gender	U=129.50	p=0.159*	Not Significant
Family Income	U=34.50	p=0.240*	Not Significant

*Not significant at alpha = 0.05

Conclusion

Looking at the findings in this study, it can be concluded that Vocabulary Proficiency and Reading Comprehension ability are interrelated skills that are needed to be developed and further, improved among the students. Strong positive correlation was found between vocabulary and reading proficiencies which imply that the students have a better chance of improving their reading comprehension skills when they have good vocabulary knowledge and a better chance of enhancing their vocabulary proficiency through maximizing reading comprehension skills. There are variables found that affect the vocabulary and its influence to the reading comprehension skills among students. However, the results revealed that gender and family income do not significantly affect the performance of the students. It can be inferred that students’ prior knowledge played a role in their proficiencies both in vocabulary and reading as emphasized in the Schema Theory which contributed to the *good* scores of the students.

In addition, female respondents have manifested better performance both in Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension Tests than the male respondents; respondents with low income performed better than the respondents with higher income, which means that these variables do not directly influence the performance of the students.

Recommendation

As a result of the findings and conclusions of this study, the following are hereby recommended.

1. The school’s administration may sponsor a seminar and intensive trainings to update the teachers concerned about the result of this study and to work out on programs to enhance the proficiency of the students to develop a better and satisfying vocabulary and reading skills.
2. The language teachers may include in their daily lesson plan or daily lesson log more classroom activities and effective techniques that would strongly enhance students’ vocabulary and reading comprehension skills in order for the students to yield a better or higher result in the NAT. Activities like “word for the day” and daily vocabulary and daily reading assignments will trigger development among the students.
3. The language teachers may also conduct a constant monitoring on the students’ progress in the use of vocabulary and reading comprehension skills through a periodic evaluation.
4. The students should be more exposed to reading tasks, online researches and library works which will help students expand their word bank and develop understanding of words and text.
5. Future researchers may work on the same study by considering a wider scope and population to further validate the findings of this study.

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