

Assessment of Reading Comprehension Skills of Primary Learners in Private and Public Schools: A Comparative Study

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Date Submitted:
January 14, 2026

Date Accepted:
February 9, 2026

Date Published:
February 24, 2026

DOI:
10.5281/zenodo.18759050

ABSTRACT

The study aimed to investigate the reading comprehension skills of Grade 3 primary learners in both private and public schools, focusing on their literal and inferential comprehension abilities. Employing a quantitative-comparative research design, the study evaluated and compared the performance of 62 pupils, 29 from a private school and 33 from a public school, selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevant and useful data. Research instruments included short stories, questionnaires, and rubrics, with the comprehension measures developed using Barrett's taxonomy and written at a level appropriate for Grade 3 learners. Data collection involved formal

requests to school principals and the use of short stories aligned with the existing curriculum, reviewed and approved by teachers. The gathered data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency count, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, while inferential statistics were conducted using the Mann-Whitney U test at a .05 level of significance. Findings revealed that private school learners demonstrated higher comprehension skills in both literal and inferential categories compared to public school learners, although both groups remained at an average level overall. This suggests that while both sets of learners possess basic literal comprehension skills, disparities exist in inferential comprehension, with private school learners benefitting from advanced teaching methods and richer learning resources. The results highlight the need for a review of instructional strategies and resource allocation in public schools to enhance reading comprehension outcomes and bridge the gap between private and public school learners.

Keywords: *Reading comprehension, Grade 3 learners, private school, public school, quantitative-comparative design, literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, Barrett's taxonomy, purposive sampling, short stories, questionnaires, rubrics, Mann-Whitney U test, educational resources, teaching methods, learning outcomes*

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill that plays a crucial role in academic achievement and overall learning. For elementary learners, reading comprehension involves the ability to understand and interpret written text, which is essential for acquiring knowledge across various subjects. According to Duke and Carlisle (2011), reading comprehension for elementary learners entails not only decoding words but also making meaning from the text through inference-making, summarizing, and critical thinking skills.

Reading assessment is also a critical element in education, especially for elementary learners, as it plays a role in evaluating students' reading abilities, tracking their progress, and identifying areas for improvement. A study by Pearson and Johnson (2018) underscored the significance of reading assessment in elementary education, emphasizing its role in providing insights into students' comprehension skills, guiding instructional strategies, and fostering the development of effective reading practices to meet the diverse needs of young learners. Many factors contribute to successful reading comprehension. According to studies, there are five major components of reading comprehension needed to be an efficient reader. These include phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Learning Point Associates, 2014). Concerns had been raised over the years regarding children's reading habits globally, including in the Philippines, and the direct impact this attitude had on children's academic achievement, as the reading habits of both boys and girls deteriorated as they grew older (Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004).

During the COVID pandemic, education experienced extraordinary disruption. Understanding how children had adapted as the pandemic progressed and some communities had returned to more traditional schools could help shape a suite of policy actions and subsequent studies. The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on reading comprehension in education systems worldwide for children in various ways. Many schools worldwide closed or switched to remote learning, disrupting the traditional classroom environment.

This change made it challenging for children to receive the same level of personalized instruction and support they might have received in a classroom, which could impact their reading development. Thus, with remote learning and increased leisure time spent at home, many children spend more time in front of screens, including screen time for educational purposes. While technology could provide valuable learning tools, excessive screen time could also be detrimental to reading development. The pandemic also placed a greater burden on parents and caregivers to support their children's education at home. Not all parents had the time, resources, or knowledge to effectively assist with reading instruction, which could impact a child's reading comprehension.

The global SARS-CoV-2 pandemic completely altered education in many countries worldwide. Face-to-face instruction for pupils was hampered throughout the 2019-2020 school year due to the pandemic. The majority of schools delivered some virtual education during the final months of school in 2019 (Lake and Dusseault, 2020), and the same scenario repeated itself at the start of 2021. For some time, educators and parents have been looking for the ideal way to continue formal education through remote or virtual learning. Furthermore, studies predicted that virtual learning would worsen socioeconomic gaps in

student learning due to differences in children's abilities to learn at home (Bol, 2020), as many working parents struggled to work and care for their children at the same time.

The imperative need to identify the gap in reading comprehension skills of students' post-pandemic educational experience in the Philippines was significant to understanding the educational impact of prolonged disruptions. The study by Lee and Tan (2019) exemplified that there was a need for assessment of this problem to address the learning disparities, create interventions effectively, and ensure educational recovery and progress for students in the aftermath of the pandemic. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the reading comprehension skills of primary learners between public and private schools, not only due to the problem of the pandemic, which hindered the process of the reading skills but also to inscribe the reading comprehension quality and resources of the schools.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to investigate the reading comprehension skills of primary learners in public and private schools.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the mean score of reading comprehension skills of primary learners in a public school in terms of
 - a) Literal Comprehension
 - b) Inferential Comprehension
2. What is the mean score of reading comprehension skills of primary learners in a private school in terms of
 - a) Literal Comprehension
 - b) Inferential Comprehension
3. Is there a significant difference in the mean score of reading comprehension skills of primary school learners between public and private schools?

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the mean score of reading comprehension skills between private and public schools.

Theoretical framework

This study is supported by two primary theories. The first one is by Dr. Hollis Scarborough, called the Reading Rope model. The Reading Rope Model breaks down the essential skills of word recognition and language comprehension. It contributes directly to the knowledge of why some children succeed while others struggle, and it gives the required guidelines for effective instruction. Each of these is made up of several smaller strands.

Accordingly, when these strands are joined, they form the rope that represents the entire reading ability. All the components are interconnected and interdependent. A single frayed strand might have an impact on both the entire rope and the reader.

Scarborough's Reading Rope's lower section focuses on word recognition skills. In discussing about teaching children to read, these are the skills that come to mind first. Consider a child sounding out the letters on a page or combining phonics sounds and syllables. These are the fundamentals of word recognition. Under the strand language comprehension, this represents the broader language, and cognitive skills needed to comprehend the text. It includes skills such as background knowledge, vocabulary, and literacy knowledge. These skills help readers make sense of the text and understand its meaning.

The Reading Rope model recognizes that these strands are not linear or sequential, but rather interdependent and highly interconnected. Effective reading instruction must address all these strands simultaneously, starting with a strong foundation in oral language and building from there.

Language comprehension and word recognition are both important aspects of language that must be developed early in life. If we want our students to leave the classroom as skilled readers, we must focus on the connections between the written word and spoken language when teaching reading and writing.

This study is also supported by the theory of Edward Thorndike called Bond Theory under the third law of learning—the “Law of Readiness”, a prepared set on the part of the subject to learn referred to in Edward Thorndike's Law of Readiness. It makes the point that learning only occurs when a person is mentally and physically prepared for it. This principle states that education can take place only when a pupil is ready to learn. When students feel prepared, they study more efficiently and with greater satisfaction. It will help prepare the students to be ready for the task. This framework seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of learning and behavior. The law of readiness asserts that individuals are most receptive to learning and behavior change when they are in the state of readiness, characterized by their willingness, interest and psychological preparedness.

Conceptual framework

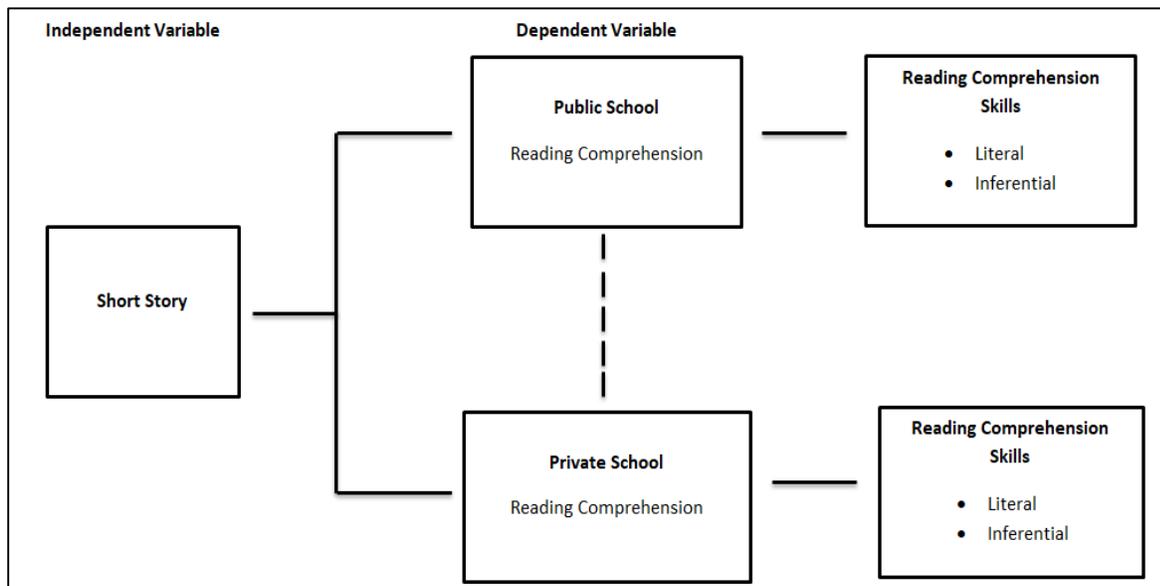
The figure below shows the comparison of public and private schools' reading comprehension. It is presumed that the comprehension skills of the primary learners from public and private schools may improve by answering the literal and inferential questions.

The figure depicts the relationship between reading comprehension skills and different types of schools, using a short story as a common stimulus and independent variable. The dependent variable is the type of school - public or private - and the independent variable is the reading comprehension skills, specifically focusing on literal and inferential comprehension.

Furthermore, it also indicated that the study would use a short story as a standardized reading material for both groups of students. This allowed for a controlled comparison of the student's reading comprehension skills based on their school type. The researchers would likely assess both literal comprehension, or the ability to understand the explicit information presented in the story, and inferential comprehension, or the ability to draw conclusions and make inferences based on the story's content. Hence,

by analyzing the differences in reading comprehension scores between public and private school students, the researchers aimed to understand the reading comprehension abilities of the students.

Figure 1
The Reading Comprehension Skills of Students from Public and Private School



Definition of Terms

For clarity and understanding, the following terms are defined conceptually and operationally.

Assessment. Assessment is a process of obtaining and debating information from a variety of sources to generate a thorough understanding of what students know, comprehend, and can do with their knowledge because of their educational experiences (Westminster College, 2000).

In this study, it was the basis of collecting and reviewing the previous and current performance of Grade 3 learners in reading comprehension skills.

Reading. Reading is an action or skill of reading written or printed matter silently or aloud (Oxford Dictionary).

In this study, it is a cognitive process in which the Grade 3 learners decode symbols to determine their meaning.

Reading comprehension. Reading comprehension is an exercise consisting of a previously unseen passage of text and related questions used to assess a student's comprehension, particularly of a foreign language (Collins Dictionary).

In this study, it is the individual's ability to not only recognize words but also grasp the meaning and context of reading short stories.

Short stories. Short stories are fictional prose narratives that are shorter than a book. Usually, only a few characters are involved. (Britannica.com).

In this study, the short stories are the literate work that is developed and one of the teaching strategies of primary teachers to measure and improve the learner's reading skills.

Public School. Public school is a government-funded educational institutions that provide free education to students (Allainz Care).

In this study, it is one of the variables needed to conduct and gather data.

Private School. Private school is usually owned and managed by private individuals, organizations, or religious groups. Students attending private schools often pay tuition fees, and these institutions may have more autonomy in their curriculum and administration compared to public schools. (Western Kentucky University, 2013).

In this study, it is one of the variables needed to conduct and gather data.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study would provide significant benefits to the following:

Students. The findings in this study will motivate the students to improve their reading comprehension using short stories. This study will also assist them in the learning process, as of creating more enjoyable and meaningful learning. They will be inspired and learning will be more enjoyable and meaningful because of the help of short stories. The short stories will help in enthusing and encouraging the students in their academic endeavors and assist their reading comprehension.

Parents. The findings of this study will make them aware and assist their child's improvement in reading comprehension. It will also aid the parents who frequently base their decisions about their children's education on the perceived quality of private versus public schools. This research can help parents make informed decisions on where to enroll their children.

Teachers. The information in this study will help guide and give ideas of proper techniques to improve the reading comprehension of children. The results of this research will be useful in teaching reading, as it can provide them with additional means in developing their learners' anticipation of reading. The study might point out areas where teachers in both private and public schools may need further training or support to improve their teaching approaches, particularly when it comes to teaching reading comprehension abilities.

Principals. The findings of the study may help them to recognize the best instructional leadership practices to help students improve. This research will also evaluate which reading comprehension strategies are more effective and relevant for certain types of schools that can lead to better teaching materials and procedures.

Future Researchers. The findings of this study will be used as a reference by future researchers who wish to undertake research comparable to this study. This research will also assist in broadening the

researchers' understanding of the reading instructions techniques, gain an observational experience, and utilize the classroom action research in the classroom. In addition, it can also be used by researchers in their field of profession.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study aimed to evaluate and compare the reading comprehension skills of Grade 3 learners in public and private schools and utilized a quantitative-comparative research design. The respondents in the study were 62 pupils, 29 from a private school and 33 from a public school, who were selected through purposive sampling. The purposive sampling method was used to select respondents most likely to yield appropriate and useful information. The frequency count, percentage, mean and standard deviation were employed for descriptive analysis. The Mann-Whitney U was used for the inferential statistics, all set at .05 level of significance. This study was conducted in March 2024 of SY 2023-2024, for three days in both public and private schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension has been defined as “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language” (Snow, 2002). Additionally, Snow mentioned that reading involves three interrelated elements: the reader, the text, and the activity or reading task, all situated in a broader sociocultural context. To comprehend a text, a reader must be equipped with a host of abilities (e.g., attention, memory, and inferencing), motivation (e.g., reading goals, interest), and knowledge (e.g., domain knowledge, linguistic knowledge), all of which are influenced by the specific texts used and the activity the reader is engaging in.

According to Kendeou, et al. (2016), reading comprehension is considered one of the most complex activities humans can perform. This complexity hinders the development of a comprehensive theory that can make precise predictions across readers, texts, and discourse contexts (Kendeou & O'Brien, 2014; Perfetti & Stafura, 2014). Consequently, researchers have put forth models that focus on a limited set of components and processes of reading comprehension. Reading comprehension involves the reader, the text, and the activity—all embedded into a broader sociocultural context. Thus, reading comprehension is both multidimensional and complex, as comprehending written language is necessary for success through development and into adulthood. Therefore, understanding and fostering the development of comprehension skills is critical. However, despite the importance of literacy, students' comprehension outcomes worldwide have not been satisfactory (OECD, 2015).

Assessment of Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is not only a process of decoding texts and building a particular understanding. It can be viewed as a process that involves skills and strategies by which the reader reconstructs equitably the message encoded by the author. That is to say that reading comprehension is a blend of identification and construction skills. It is an interactive process between the reader and the text

which leads to a specific comprehension. In this process, the reader interacts dynamically with the text to appropriately elicit the meaning and the ideas entailed in this text.

According to Urquhart and Weir (1998), reading is the process of receiving and interpreting information encoded in language form via the medium of print. This means that the message conveyed by the text is decoded and interpreted through the vocabulary items, the grammatical points, and the rhetorical structure of the text. Besides, Anderson (1991) views reading as a dynamic fluent process that involves the reader and the reading materials in building meaning. In assessing reading comprehension, most teachers use multiple test techniques to have a clear view of their learners' capacities. In this respect, multiple-choice questions, gap-filling, comprehension questions, and writing summaries are the most used activities. Habib (2016) also chimed in that the assessment of reading comprehension is a vital teaching activity that can be conducted for the benefit of both teachers and learners, as it certainly, involves several methods and strategies that impulse students to disclose their learning skills to their teachers, making the learners aware about their weaknesses and strengths and helps them to seek solutions to improve their reading comprehension.

Effects of COVID-19 to Student Achievement

Several studies in the field of education revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic has raised expectations of potential stagnation or decline in student performance and a rise in existing inequities. While initial concerns pointed towards a decline in student achievement and widened learning gaps due to pandemic-related disruptions, the actual outcomes have been less conclusive than anticipated. Surprisingly, students in the first pandemic cohort surpassed their pre-pandemic counterparts and displayed a trend toward reduced variations during the initial lockdown period. In contrast, the second pandemic cohort exhibited no consistent mean differences but showcased greater individual variances compared to pre-pandemic cohorts. Despite the pandemic's impact, the gender achievement gap appeared unaffected, while the gap between students with and without a migration background widened over time, a trend observed even before the pandemic.

Studies by Helm et al. (2021), Kuhfeld et al. (2020), Leopoldina (2020), and Wößmann (2020) suggest that anticipated consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on student achievement align with concerns of potential stagnation or decline and increased inequities. While some research supports these apprehensions, indicating declines in student performance and broader learning gaps due to school closures, other findings present a contrasting narrative. Some studies surprisingly report minimal or even no loss of learning, with low-performing students achieving levels comparable to their pre-pandemic counterparts. However, most of these studies compare student achievement at specific time points before and after school closures, lacking a comprehensive understanding of the pandemic's dynamics. Notably, data are scarce for younger students at the onset of primary school, emphasizing the need for ongoing research to provide a more nuanced perspective on the impact of the pandemic on student performance and educational disparities.

Filipino Pupils Reading Ability Post-Pandemic

Reading plays a vital role in academic learning and is essential for social and economic progress, with reading comprehension and fluency being highly valued skills necessary for cognitive development

and access to knowledge across various disciplines (Cimmiyotti, 2013). The ability to recognize and interpret words in context, understand complex sentences, and grasp the main ideas of a text are crucial components of reading proficiency. Poor reading comprehension and study habits have been linked to academic challenges among students, emphasizing the importance of effective reading skills in academic success (Iheakanwa, Obro, and Akpochafo, 2021).

Workers in the twenty-first century require literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills for successful engagement in the workplace, with reading literacy playing a significant role in economic competitiveness and societal advancement (OECD, 2013; Luo et al., 2016). The K–12 Basic Education Program in the Philippines aims to enhance students' competitive reading skills through planned reading and writing activities, creating independent readers and writers (DepEd Memorandum No. 4, series of 2004). Assessing students' reading proficiency using tools like the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) is crucial for evaluating their reading abilities and implementing remediation strategies to improve literacy levels (Department of Education, 2018; Aquino & De Vera, 2018).

Despite efforts to enhance reading skills, the Philippines' performance on international assessments like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) remains below the average among participating OECD nations, indicating ongoing challenges in reading proficiency (DepEd, 2019). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education has further exacerbated reading difficulties, with school closures affecting students' ability to acquire essential literacy skills (De Vera, 2022). Researchers are exploring the reading skills of students in Upper Lapu-Lapu Elementary School in Palawan post-pandemic to develop remediation plans addressing emerging issues related to learners' reading abilities.

Reading Skills

Reading, according to the National Council of Teachers of English (2004), is "a complex and purposeful socio-cultural, cognitive, and linguistics process in which readers simultaneously use their knowledge of verbal and printed dialect, their knowledge of grammar, and their knowledge of linguistics, knowledge of the text's topic and their cultural knowledge to construct textual meaning." Children have experienced inspiring early infancy and made literacy feasible. However, from a psycholinguistic standpoint, reading is predominantly a visual process that also incorporates non-visual processes. The visual technique uses information from printed pages, whereas the non-visual approach uses information from the reader's brain (Ngabut, 2015). Reading has an impact on literacy attainment and is a crucial doorway to personal growth as well as social, economic, and civic life (Clark & Akerman, 2006). Reading is one of the most motivating aspects, especially at the primary level. Students' attitudes influence their reading abilities, but teachers can aid by teaching effective reading skills. These attitudes and beliefs are required to comprehend the thought process. However, instructors' perspectives on subjects and teaching methods are deeply established in them, providing a solid foundation for their instructional conduct (Holden, 2004).

Comprehension Skills

Reading is more than just reading the material; it also entails understanding and comprehending the text. One of the most crucial abilities to learn throughout a language education is reading comprehension (Issa, 2004). Moreover, Birsch (2022) stated that reading comprehension is defined as the ability to derive

meaning from what is read. According to Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016), reading comprehension necessitates the rapid application of a few reading abilities such as word recognition, fluency, lexical knowledge, and prior knowledge for the reader to gain knowledge from the text. According to Tompkins (2011), reading comprehension is the level of understanding of a text. He claims that comprehension is a creative process including four skills: phonology, syntax, pragmatics, and semantics. Syntax, semantics, and pragmatics are all aspects of language. The writer's goal is obvious so the reader can understand the message, and the writer's intention is evident. Pang (2006) claims reading is described as the interpretation of written texts. Reading, in his opinion, consists of word recognition and comprehension are two interrelated processes. Word recognition examines how written symbols correspond to spoken language, whereas comprehension is the act of identifying the meaning of related words, phrases, and paragraphs. The reader who has prior knowledge, and vocabulary can benefit from grammatical understanding, experience, and other tactics to understand printed texts.

Importance of Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is an important skill that contributes to the development of students' varied academic assignments. It aids children in deciphering a text, evaluating, explaining, and expressing their thoughts on written things. Learners should develop a solid ability to read textual materials to struggle with the academic duties assigned to them by their teachers. Reading comprehension is considered one of the most important challenges for educational institutions, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Clarke (2014) emphasized that reading comprehension is an important skill for all children since it involves both getting meaning from written language and producing meaning via involvement. Understanding word meanings, judging the author's point of view, writing with purpose, and learning new vocabulary are all key reading skills that assist reading comprehension. In contrast, according to Gough and Tunmer (1986), word decoding and speech or listening comprehension are two skills that must be integrated and coordinated to understand what is decoded in spoken form. Reading comprehension is a multidimensional process that necessitates these and other abilities. Furthermore, according to Clark et al. (2014), kids must enhance their reading comprehension skills to flourish academically and personally.

Reading comprehension is the foundation for understanding all academic information throughout a student's academic career. It becomes increasingly important in all academic fields as pupils progress through the grades. Reading comprehension skills are necessary for students to achieve academic objectives at school and in the classroom. For instance, to conduct research in a range of academic disciplines, students must be able to understand the material they read from various sources. Furthermore, being able to understand what they are reading allows pupils to swiftly discover vital information, screen out irrelevant material, and focus on the important aspects.

Effective reading is a critical component of language learning success. Reading is the most significant academic instrument (Anderson, 2004). Anderson believes that the ability to read in a second language is the most important aspect in autonomous language learning. According to Alptekin (2006), reading is "an interaction of the readers combined literal comprehension, which is based on lower-level cognitive processes of reading such as lexical access and syntactic parsing, with inferential comprehension,

which is based on higher-level cognitive processes. When processing texts, higher-level cognitive processes such as the text base of comprehension (to grasp what the text says) and the scenario model of interpretation (to understand what the text says) are used to realize what's going on". One of the fundamental goals of elementary education is to assist children in developing fluent reading skills. Strong reading skills are vital for avoiding poverty, forming successful relationships, and eliminating inequality in our society, and to become literate, kids must first learn to read fluently.

According to the TEA, good readers "connect the meaning of one sentence to the meaning of another." They consider the meaning of individual words, but they can also infer the meaning of unfamiliar terms by evaluating them in context. They frequently interact with the text and ask questions while reading to reflect on what they have read. However, one of the most important parts is goal setting, which assists the reader in focusing on what is important in the text and retaining the information they require. This is the primary goal of teaching reading comprehension, and students can use their reading comprehension skills in any school topic and throughout their learning process.

Short Stories as Effective Tools

Short stories have been identified as a useful strategy for increasing reading comprehension because they give the learners who struggle with reading manageable bits of material and encourage repeated reading (Rasinski, 2003). Also, Grabe (2011) said that one of the most crucial duties of the instructor is tale choosing. Since short stories vary in length, one that is short enough to be completed within the course hours must be selected. Using short stories with simple language might help children grasp the content more easily. It is also beneficial and suitable for pupils to learn. It improves their reading comprehension by providing an entertaining and helpful story to read. Also, a variety of interesting themes and a picture may catch the student's curiosity in reading. Short stories should be appealing to pupils so that they can enjoy learning. They will increase their reading comprehension and critical thinking skills by reading short stories (Padede, 2011).

Furthermore, short stories can drive children because they will be able to explore their feelings by experiencing what happens in the stories, and they will be urged to keep reading until the conflict is resolved. As Elliott (1990) stated, writing is "motivationally effective if students can genuinely engage with its thoughts and emotions and appreciate its aesthetic qualities."

Short stories are regarded as valuable tools for use in language schools. According to Wheeler (2001), "stories are a natural part of a child's life." Good stories can capture a child's attention, excite his or her imagination, and increase the child's willingness to use language (Wheeler, 2001). The learners' trust was also tested and investigated to see if they might feel more comfortable using English. It involved the use of several pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities stages, which included forecasting the story's topic and main characters storylines, reordering story events, developing a new book cover, and rewriting the ending of the story. The findings of this investigation are expected to provide additional information.

Reading Comprehension in Academic Vocabulary

In academic situations, general academic language is used more frequently than in nonacademic contexts (Nagy & Townsend, 2012). These words have been proposed as a suitable educational objective because of their importance in reading academic papers across disciplines (Townsend, et al. 2012). General academic terms are especially important for middle school students who are exposed to instructional texts that contain a higher proportion of lower-frequency words and morphologically complex words (Hiebert, et al. 2018). For a variety of reasons, these words may be difficult for adolescent readers. Unlike discipline-specific vocabulary, general academic words may not receive explicit training in content area classrooms (Hiebert & Lubliner, 2008). These words may be longer and more difficult to understand than those experienced in previous grades. Academic words are frequently morphologically complex. They are less common in regular language than in many other words. Many general academic words have many related senses, some of which are abstract (Nagy & Townsend, 2012). In a study on the difficulty in the academic vocabulary of middle school students, it was investigated whether sorts of general academic words are challenging for students. It also determined the relationship between lexical aspects of items in the current study and item complexity over the reading performance continuum using vocabulary. Reading is more than just getting the information; it also entails understanding and comprehending the material content. Reading is one of the most important skills to develop during a language education understanding (Issa, 2004). Another study stated that reading comprehension is the ability to make sense of what is read (Birsch, 2011).

According to Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016), reading comprehension requires a variety of reading skills such as word recognition, fluency, lexical knowledge, and prior knowledge to be applied swiftly so that the reader can gain knowledge from the text. Reading comprehension, according to Tompkins (2011), is the level of understanding of a text. He contends that comprehension is a creative process including four skills: phonology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Reading is one of the English skills together with speaking, listening, and writing (Arens, 2016).

According to Nuttall (2022), reading is the result of contact between the writer's and the reader's minds. It is the process by which the reader seeks to comprehend the writer's intended message and its meaning. The reader seeks to create the meanings intended by the author during this process. The message is understood, and the writer's meaning is clear. According to Pang (2006), reading is defined as comprehending written texts and consists of two interconnected processes: word recognition and understanding. Word recognition is described as the act of determining how written symbols relate to spoken language, whereas comprehension is defined as the process of determining the meaning of words, sentences, and connected material (Abidin, 2020).

Along this line, background information, vocabulary, grammatical expertise, experience with, and other tactics can assist readers in understanding written texts. Reading comprehension is a vital talent for all students. According to Clarke et al. (2004), it entails the process of concurrently drawing meaning from written text through engagement and involvement because understanding word meanings and determining the author's point of view in writing, and picking up new vocabulary are all essential reading skills that help with reading comprehension. However, Gough and Tunmer (1986) stated that vocabulary acquisition is also essential, since reading is the foundation for learning in all academic fields throughout a student's

education, it is crucial for pupils to acquire this skill as early as possible in the educational process (Sloat et al., 2018).

Reading Gaps of Grade 3 Learners

The Grade 3 level marks the conclusion of the foundation phase, where learners are expected to acquire essential skills to transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn" in Grade 4 and beyond (Spaull, 2017). However, Pier et al. (2021) highlighted that the pandemic-induced disruptions significantly impeded children's learning and academic progress, particularly affecting their reading development as schools abruptly closed. The transition from learning to read to reading to learn was hindered by the pandemic, raising concerns about potential long-term consequences (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). The impact of COVID-19 restrictions on students' reading proficiency in elementary schools remains challenging to assess, as noted in studies by Hammerstein et al. (2021), Rose et al. (2021), and Sánchez Amate et al. (2021).

Teaching elementary learners to read fluently and comprehend text is a critical educational focus (Audina et al., 2020). Educators employ various strategies, such as small group interventions, one-on-one sessions, and Directed Reading Activities (DRA) to support struggling readers and enhance reading comprehension (Noviarini, 2021). The challenges faced by primary school teachers in addressing reading difficulties are underscored (Gundogmus, 2018). The Philippines' poor performance in reading proficiency, as revealed by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 results, highlights the urgent need to improve students' reading skills (Cabalo & Cabalo, 2019). The Department of Education (DepEd) has initiated the Hamon: Bawat Bata Bumabasa (3Bs Initiatives) to enhance reading proficiency and ensure that every learner achieves the appropriate reading level for their grade.

Reading Comprehension Predictors

Reading comprehension is crucial for total community functioning, yet many students, like those in Turkey, and young learners in general, struggle with this skill (Caliskan & Ulas, 2021; Miñoza & Montero, 2021). In the Philippines, a high percentage of students fall short of required reading proficiency, impacting their performance in various subjects (Tomas et al., 2021). Reading comprehension is considered the primary goal for proficient readers, linking success in school and life to comprehension skills (Deluaio et al., 2021; Bruggink et al., 2021). Reading comprehension issues can hinder understanding vital documents and hinder success in work or school due to low self-esteem and communication difficulties (Caraig & Quimpo, 2021). The Department of Education in the Philippines aims to enhance students' reading skills through initiatives like the 3Bs Initiatives to promote reading advocacy (Tomas et al., 2021).

Factors influencing reading comprehension among young learners include reading attitudes, directly correlated with reading abilities (Tisa et al., 2021). Positive attitudes lead to active engagement in reading activities, enhancing comprehension and skills. Reading attitudes are shaped by various factors, including prior experiences and cultural backgrounds, influencing engagement with reading (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2021). Enjoyment of reading, characterized by pleasure and satisfaction, is crucial for promoting a positive reading attitude and engaging with text (Clark & Rumbold, 2021). On the other hand, anxiety and reading difficulty can hinder comprehension, affecting reading performance (Kesici & Erdogan, 2021). Motivation to read is essential for academic success, with a strong relationship between reading

engagement, motivation, and academic achievements (Permatasari & Wienanda, 2021). Ultimately, positive attitudes and motivations toward reading can significantly improve reading comprehension (Urhahne & Wijnia, 2021).

Filipino Student's Reading Abilities

The Philippines faces challenges in producing effective readers, as indicated by the 2019 PISA statistics showing Filipino pupils underperforming in reading comprehension compared to their international counterparts, highlighting the need to address obstacles and enhance reading abilities among Filipino children. Inadequate English reading materials, inappropriate teaching methods, and insufficient English language development have been identified as causes of reading difficulties (Mule, 2014). Learners who struggle with reading at an early stage often find it challenging to catch up, leading to persistent reading difficulties (Lerner, 2000).

Factors contributing to the country's reading comprehension issues include distractions from cellphones and social media, lack of parental involvement in teaching reading basics, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on learning (Caasi & Pentang, 2022). Absenteeism due to school distance, financial constraints, and the 4P's program influence on enrollment for financial incentives also contribute to reading comprehension challenges among Filipino students. High student-to-teacher ratios, large classroom sizes, and limitations in individualized attention hamper effective teaching and learning, affecting reading proficiency levels in the country (Roper, 2019).

Efforts to address reading comprehension difficulties include initiatives like the "Every Child a Reader Program" and the "National Capital Region: Championing Reading" campaign by DepEd NCR, aimed at promoting a rich reading environment in schools and enhancing students' academic performance through improved literacy skills (Ganaden, 2022). The government's focus on improving students' reading proficiency through programs like "Hamon: Bawa't Bata Bumasa" and Research O'clock underscores the commitment to enhancing education quality and literacy levels in the country (Llego, 2014).

The concept of emergent literacy emphasizes the importance of early exposure to literacy-rich environments and home literacy practices in fostering positive attitudes toward reading among children (Boulhrir, 2017). Students from low-income backgrounds may face challenges in developing reading comprehension skills due to a lack of supportive family and school environments that promote a growth mindset (Cruz, 2021). Targeted interventions at the family and school levels, promoting parental involvement, and fostering a growth mindset among students could help improve reading comprehension outcomes and promote equitable access to education for all students in the Philippines.

Effectiveness of Reading Comprehension Strategies

The act of reading serves as a fundamental habit through which students acquire knowledge and develop essential skills (Olivar et al., 2014). Recognizing the paramount importance of reading, the Department of Education (DepEd) introduced the "Every Child A Reader Program" (ECARP) to enhance reading and writing proficiency among public elementary pupils (DepEd Memorandum No.402 s.2004). A study conducted to address frustrated readers in a Grade VI class revealed that implementing reading comprehension strategies significantly impacted the English performance of students.

Clark and Graves (2005) stated that promoting independent reading comprehension skills is a critical focus for educators, with the belief that reading strategies and adequate grammar knowledge play a vital role in enhancing text understanding (Baleghizadeh & Golbin, 2010). Drawing on schema theory, Anderson (1977) emphasized the interactive nature of comprehension, where readers' background knowledge interacts with textual material to facilitate understanding. McNamara and Kendeou (2011) stress the importance of teaching reading as a process, underlining the impact of strategy instruction on learners' comprehension skills and appreciation for reading. The study aims to assess the efficacy of various reading comprehension strategies in improving Grade VI learners' reading performance, to reduce the number of non-readers and frustrated readers in Kananga Central School.

Barrett's Taxonomy

Reading is one of those important language skills taught in every grade, and it can be done through many resources, such as newspapers, articles, and especially English textbooks. According to Longan (2001), reading is like any other skill; the more the students practice, the better they get. When the students want to improve their English, they need to read a lot. Reading is a beneficial activity. Every time the students read, unconsciously they also improve their reading ability. According to Longan (2001), regular reading is a habit with many rewards. Research has shown that frequent reading improves vocabulary, spelling, reading speed, reading comprehension, as well as grammar and writing style (p. 537).

Barrett's Taxonomy formulated by Thomas C. Barrett in 1968 categorizes reading comprehension questions into four levels: (1) Literal recognition or recall, (2) inference, (3) evaluation, and (4) appreciation. Reading comprehension is a process of gaining understanding from printed material (Dupuis and Askov, 1982).

To improve their reading ability, their English textbooks have an important role as media to support their reading comprehension. According to Dupuis and Askov (1982), students should be given questions of four levels of Barrett's taxonomy. By having a good textbook as their medium to learn, senior high school students can surely improve their learning, especially with a textbook that has numerous reading passages and an appropriate number of readings for the four comprehension questions in each level of comprehension taxonomy. To know whether the English textbook used in senior high school can support the students' reading ability by having various levels and appropriate numbers of reading comprehension questions, this study entitled "The Classification of Reading Comprehension Questions in English Textbook Entitled "English" Based on Barrett's Taxonomy" was conducted.

Related Studies

One of the local studies conducted by Panaligan, et al. (2022) was conducted with the desire to have a better understanding of the gap in the reading performance between students from more affluent backgrounds and those students from poorer backgrounds. The study also aimed to determine aspects of reading where the students significantly differ. Their participants in the study were Grade 6 students from a public school in Lipa City, Batangas and Grade 6 students from a private school in Pasig City. They used Diagnostic Placement Tests & Phonics Survey Assessment for Grade 6 from Scholastic as the main tool for measuring the reading ability of the children. The data was statistically examined using frequency, mean,

and standard deviation. For independent samples, the standard deviation and the t-test were used. The results of their study revealed that grade six students from private schools have better reading ability than their counterparts in terms of (a) phonics and (b) vocabulary. However, more public school students have a reading ability that is appropriate for their grade level in terms of comprehension.

Another study was conducted by Lilis (2013) to discover the disparities in reading comprehension between junior high school pupils in cities and rural areas, as well as the factors that contribute to these differences. According to Burns and Richards (2012), reading is the cornerstone for successful language and academic acquisition. Furthermore, Assaly and Smadi (2015) stated that reading is fundamental knowledge and that learners should improve their reading comprehension ability because comprehension is at the heart of the teaching-learning process.

Moreover, Duke and Pearson (2001) claimed that to become effective readers, students must be able to obtain information about what they read and be able to create a prediction about what the reading is all about. In this study, learners have a low level of proficiency in text interpretation and text integration, information, and creating concepts based on written stuff. Reading comprehension was determined by how rapidly readers can cover the text without losing track of what they they reading (Djamal et al., 2006). As a result, the reading problem is that English learners prioritize word accuracy above the comprehension of what they are reading (Assaly and Smadi, 2015). They struggle to identify concepts and choose the key points of texts; yet, to comprehend a book, students must have a comprehensive learning concept, which is required (Khusniyah and Lustyantje, 2017). In addition, if a learner believes a text is difficult to understand and does not suit them, they will reject it.

Lestari (2014) states that people gradually lose interest in reading. As a result of this, since Indonesian kids have already struggled with reading, they have a good understanding of Indonesian, the language that they have gained and learned. It was found that it is significantly more difficult to read and comprehend English, the foreign language they have only lately acquired and mastered as a language (Siagian & Katemba, 2016). Typically, students struggle with reading material. For example, difficult words, phrase comprehension, how to correctly comprehend a word or sentence, and so on. The majority of reading activities in reading class are centered on reading for comprehension (Katemba and Samuel, 2017).

Short stories are thought to be a potent educational tool, and they play important roles in schools because they give beneficial authentic learning material, enhance language development, provide cultural enrichment, and increase personal involvement. Several studies have explored the effectiveness of short stories in improving reading comprehension and fluency among learners of different age groups and proficiency levels. Smith (2017) conducted a meta-analysis of 15 studies and found that short stories can significantly enhance reading skills, especially when used as supplementary materials in language classrooms. It is a great idea to use short stories as teaching material and a teaching strategy, especially if you want to improve your students' reading comprehension. This is because short stories inspire readers with their moral lessons and engage readers in educational activities. Because of short stories, students can connect with the text by reading the complete story from a variety of short stories. Short stories are also exciting since they are diverse and help kids increase their vocabulary. Finally, short stories help students to consider the messages they offer critically.

Reading may appear to be a solitary activity when contrasted with social activities. Numerous academics have suggested that social-cognitive processes are critical during tale reading. That is, the abilities we employ in everyday life to make sense of others. Empathy, emotion recognition, and other human sentiments, beliefs, intentions, actions, and theory of mind are also aroused when we read about imaginary characters in Sunshine's (2006) and Mar and Oatley's (2008) stories. Despite research indicating it is uncertain whether social-cognitive abilities are important for story reading, readers must use these skills as part of the story-processing process. In other words, studies on the relationship between social-cognitive abilities and the processing of certain story parts are constrained.

Reading comprehension is critical for language and literature, as well as for academic success. Increasing a learner's critical thinking and memory skills, as well as focus and problem-solving abilities are required for any type of student or professional.

Synthesis

Reading comprehension is a multifaceted process that involves extracting and constructing meaning from written language, influenced by various factors such as attention, memory, inference, motivation, and knowledge (Snow, 2002). The complexity of reading comprehension poses challenges in developing a comprehensive theory that can predict outcomes across different readers, texts, and contexts (Kendeou et al., 2016). Researchers have proposed models that focus on specific components and processes of reading comprehension, emphasizing the interactive nature of comprehension involving the reader, the text, and the activity in a broader sociocultural context (Snow, 2002). Despite the complexity, understanding and fostering comprehension skills are crucial due to the unsatisfactory literacy outcomes observed globally (OECD, 2015).

Assessing reading comprehension involves more than decoding texts; it requires a combination of skills and strategies to reconstruct the author's message equitably. The interactive process between the reader and the text involves identification and construction skills, where the reader dynamically interacts with the text to derive meaning and ideas (Urquhart & Weir, 1998). This dynamic interaction between the reader and the text is essential for eliciting specific comprehension. Employing various assessment techniques such as multiple-choice questions, gap-filling, comprehension questions, and writing summaries provides insights into students' comprehension abilities and helps identify strengths and weaknesses (Habib, 2018). Effective assessment of reading comprehension is a vital teaching activity that allows both teachers and learners to understand and improve reading skills through different methods and strategies (Habib, 2018).

Research Design

This study which aimed to evaluate and compare the reading comprehension skills of Grade 3 learners in public and private schools, utilized quantitative-comparative research design. Quantitative-comparative design is a type of research design that involves comparing and analyzing quantitative data to draw conclusions and make comparisons between different variables or groups. More specifically, it aims to quantify variables, analyze statistical relationships, and draw conclusions based on numerical evidence. In this study, the reading comprehension skills of the Grade 3 learners were used to gather the data and analyze the significant difference between public and private school learners specifically, the literal and inferential skills.

The quantitative-comparative research design was considered appropriate for this study because it aimed to evaluate, compare, and analyze the comprehension skills of primary learners in private and public schools.

Participants of the Study

The participants of this study were Grade 3 pupils aged between 9 to 10 years old. The researchers chose the respondents through purposive sampling. This type of method is a population subset chosen at random. The purposive sampling method was used to ensure that the respondents can have a fair chance of being selected and that unbiased results can be prevented.

Inclusion Criteria

1. The age of respondents must be between 9-10 years old
2. Both male and female respondents are included
3. Respondents must be Grade 3 learners from both private and public schools

Exclusion Criteria

1. Those who do not meet the criteria as stated are deemed excluded.

Research Instrument

The instruments used in this study are the following:

1. *Short stories.* The stories used to gather the data in this study are published stories. The study also used a researcher-made questionnaire based on the curriculum of Grade 3 private and public schools in the Philippines. The titles of the stories utilized in private school are Maxwell, The Gentle Giant, The Legend of Maria Makiling, and Diego Silang: The Filipino Hero from Ilocos, while The Carrot Seed, Mike Rides a Bike, And Bud, The Hungry Turtle were the titles used for the public school. The stories were given to the learners to read and answer.

2. *Short stories questionnaire.* The questionnaire is composed of two parts: Literal and Inferential questions. The questions were made by the researchers and were validated by the panel of experts. These questionnaires determined the comprehensive skills of the learners in private and public schools.

3. *Rubrics for short stories questionnaire.* There is no rubric for the literal questions, as it has a definite answer equivalent to 1 point. For the inferential questions, a rubric was utilized to prevent any biased score that may affect the measurement. The rubric for the inferential category is composed of points (0,1,2,3) with 0 point for no answer, 1 point for providing a wrong answer, 2 points for answers showing some understanding of the question but may lack depth or clarity, and 3 points for answers showing a clear understanding of the question and provide relevant information asked.

Validity of the Questionnaire

The questionnaires were submitted and validated by a total of three validators, who checked the questionnaire for its relevance to the story, grammar, and clarity.

Reliability of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was administered for pilot testing in both private and public schools. Forty participants were involved in the pilot testing of the study. Of this number, 26 came from the public school and 14 from the private school. The results of the pilot-test were proven to be reliable given the performance of the comprehensive skills of the students are consistent.

Ethical Considerations

A written communication was submitted to the Research Ethics Review Board of Central Philippine University for the review of the research protocol. Moreover, the researchers have ensured that the ethical standards are met through the observance of certain protocols that are required by the University Research Committee in the conduct of research studies.

Voluntary Non-Coercive Recruitment and Withdrawal of Participants

An informed consent form was requested from the participants/respondents to confirm their willingness and voluntariness to join in the study. They were informed that they could withdraw from their participation in the study at any given time that they wanted.

Privacy, Anonymity, and Confidentiality

Privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality were also maintained in observance of the ethical standards. All gathered information was solely utilized for the study. The identity of the participants was kept private and confidential to the extent provided by the law. To maintain anonymity, the participants' names were not revealed, and their information was assigned by number. The data gathered were stored with utmost respect for their privacy and confidentiality. The electronic copy of the data was kept in a computer and hard copies were stored in a secured place that only the researchers can access. The data were kept for five months and were disposed of after that period. A bound copy of this study will be provided to the Central Philippine University Library as part of dissemination plans.

Risk and Benefits Assessment

Furthermore, the possible risks involved in participating in this study could be attributed to certain misunderstandings of important terms that have a significant value in the study. It was assessed that there was a low risk involved since the instructions were given clearly to the respondents. There were no monetary benefits to participating in the study and joining was purely voluntary.

During the conduct of the study, the participants were requested to answer the questionnaire thoroughly. It was planned that when certain questions in the questionnaire would cause stress and agitation, the researchers should stop the participants from answering and give them a break. After a while, the researcher should ask the participants if he/she still wished to continue or not. If the participant decides not to continue, the questionnaire used by the participant should be properly disregarded, although this situation did not occur.

Declaration of Potential Conflicts of Interest

This study was personally funded by the researchers, and no funding was obtained from other sources. Also, this study used different sources of information that were considered relevant to the study. As such, the study used only sources from Google, Google Scholar, and other references that were properly cited.

Transparency and accountability were always demonstrated to ensure that either the perceived or actual conflict of interest was eliminated.

Dissemination Plan

The findings of the study are considered important in teaching and learning activities. Consequently, these data were expected to become the basis for the development of teaching methods and instructional materials that can be used by the learners of both private and public basic education institutions. Moreover, the output of the study had been shared by the researcher with the academic community through the CPU Library.

Data Gathering Procedure

The following steps were taken to collect the data required for the study. First, a letter was sent to the principal of both private and public schools and teachers in charge of teaching English to the primary learners. The researchers requested a list of short stories included in the lesson plan. The researchers examined the short stories provided to them, and these have been approved and agreed upon by the teacher for distribution. The researchers analyzed and observed the teachings of short stories that are used to improve students' comprehension skills.

Data-Gathering Instrument and Processing Procedure

The data used in this study were collected from questionnaires from the short story reading comprehension measures developed by Barrett's Taxonomy. Students completed the comprehension assessment by reading one short story and then answering the three literal and three inferential questions that are related to the passage. The stories and questions were written at a reading level appropriate for the 3rd grade and students completed the assessment as part of the research.

Data-Analysis Procedure

The responses of the respondents served as the data that were processed, analyzed, and interpreted in the assessment of the short story for the learners' reading comprehension skills. This was utilized in the comparative study. The statistical tools, specifically the frequency count, percentage, mean and standard deviations, were utilized to evaluate and interpret the data gathered in comparing the comprehensive skills of primary learners in private and public schools through short stories.

Mean. The mean was used to describe and present the results of the major variables measured in the study. The mean score was used to describe the results of the study.

Tables 1 and 2 show the literal and inferential comprehension skills scale.

Table 1
Literal Comprehension Skills Scale

Mean Score	Description
8-9	High
5.1-7.9	Average
5-0	Low

Table 2
Inferential Comprehension Skills Scale

Mean Score	Description
18.1-27	High
9.1-18	Average
9-0	Low

Standard Deviation. Standard deviation was used to determine the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the participants' responses.

Mann-Whitney U. Mann-Whitney U is a non-parametric test that is used to compare two sample means that come from the same population, and used to test whether two sample means are equal or not.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The textual discussion and analysis of the study used literal and inferential questions. The tables below present a detailed overview of the 62 student respondents, including their performance in answering literal and inferential questions. The data illustrates the students' corresponding scores in each question type, providing insights into their comprehension and critical thinking abilities.

Descriptive Data Analysis

The results of the study, as answers to descriptive objectives are presented sequentially based on the objectives of the study.

Table 3 displays the average scores for literal and inferential comprehension among primary students in a public school. The results show that the mean score for literal comprehension is 6.48 (SD = 1.94), while inferential comprehension has a mean of 10.12 (SD = 4.41), both classified as "average." While students demonstrate a moderate understanding in these areas, the greater variability in inferential comprehension (as indicated by the higher standard deviation) suggests a wider range of ability levels in this skill. This variation points to a need for focused teaching strategies, particularly for inferential comprehension, where some learners may need additional guidance to improve their performance. By addressing these gaps, educators can help raise overall reading comprehension levels and better support students' learning progress.

The data align with the literature review, which emphasizes the importance of reading practice for improving comprehension skills. Research indicates that frequent reading not only enhances vocabulary and comprehension but also improves reading speed and overall language proficiency (Vernon, 2012). Reading is considered a fundamental activity that contributes to continuous improvement in reading ability with each reading session, highlighting the need for consistent engagement with text to develop literacy skills (Adams, 2011). It also aligns with Barrett's Taxonomy, which aims to assess and foster a variety of reading comprehension skills. That further reinforces the importance of providing students with a range of comprehension questions. Effective reading strategies, including comprehension-focused teaching methods, play a crucial role in enhancing students' reading abilities and academic performance (Guthrie & Klada, 2014). The study's focus on public school students' comprehension skills underscores the significance of promoting reading habits and implementing effective instructional strategies to support students' literacy development and academic success (Guthrie, 2018).

Therefore, the data in Table 3 suggest that public school students in the study demonstrated average levels of literal and inferential comprehension skills. This aligns with the understanding that reading comprehension is a skill that improves with practice and exposure to diverse types of questions, as outlined by Barrett's Taxonomy and supported by the research.

Table 3

Mean Score of Reading Comprehension Skills of Primary Learners in a Public School

Reading Comprehension	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Literal Comprehension	2	9	6.48	1.94	Average
Inferential Comprehension	2	21	10.12	4.41	Average

Note:

Literal: 8-9 (High), 5.1-7.9 (Average), 0-5 (Low)

Inferential: 18.1-27 (High), 9.1-18 (Average), 0-9 (Low)

Table 4 presents the mean scores of reading comprehension skills among primary learners in a private school, focusing on both literal and inferential comprehension. The mean score for literal comprehension is 7.90 (SD = 1.74), which is interpreted as "average," while the mean score for inferential comprehension is 17.72 (SD = 5.16), also classified as "average." Notably, the mean score for literal comprehension is at the upper threshold of the "average" range, nearing the "high" classification, whereas inferential comprehension is similarly close to the "high" category. The standard deviations for both skills indicate moderate variability, with inferential comprehension showing more variation among learners. These results imply that primary learners in private schools generally perform better in reading comprehension, particularly in inferential comprehension, than their counterparts in public schools as seen in Table 3. However, the variability in scores also suggests that while many learners are approaching higher comprehension levels, some may still need targeted interventions, particularly in developing inferential comprehension skills to reach higher proficiency.

This finding aligns with literatures emphasizing the significance of frequent reading practice in enhancing various reading skills such as vocabulary, spelling, speed, comprehension, grammar, and writing style (Anderson, 2014). Reading is identified as a beneficial activity that contributes to continual improvement in reading ability with each reading session, underscoring the importance of regular reading habits in academic development (Snow, 2012). This also aligns with the assessment of how English textbooks in private schools support the enhancement of students' reading abilities, reflecting the broader consensus that effective reading skills are essential for academic success and cognitive growth (Cimmiyotti, 2016).

Therefore, this shows that students from private schools have an average level of reading comprehension in the literal and inferential categories.

Table 4

Mean Score of Reading Comprehension Skills of Primary Learners in a Private School

Reading Comprehension	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Literal Comprehension	2	9	7.90	1.74	Average
Inferential Comprehension	7	25	17.72	5.16	Average

Note:

Literal: 8-9 (High), 5.1-7.9 (Average), 0-5 (Low)

Inferential: 18.1-27 (High), 9.1-18 (Average), 0-9 (Low)

Inferential Data Analysis

The results of the study as answers to inferential objectives are presented vis-a-vis the specific objectives of the study.

Table 5 displays the results of a Mann-Whitney U test, which was conducted to determine if there is a significant difference in the reading comprehension skills between primary learners in public and private schools. For literal comprehension, private school learners had a significantly higher mean rank (39.71) compared to public school learners (24.29), with a Mann-Whitney U value of 240.5 and a p-value of 0.001, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0). Similarly, for inferential comprehension, private school learners also had a significantly higher mean rank (43.28) compared to public school learners (21.15), with a Mann-Whitney U value of 137 and a p-value of 0.000, resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis. The findings indicate that primary learners in private schools perform significantly better in both literal and inferential reading comprehension compared to those in public schools. These results imply a need for public schools to review and enhance their reading programs, especially in inferential comprehension, to close the performance gap. Additionally, further investigation into the factors contributing to superior performance in private schools, such as resources, teaching strategies, or curriculum differences, may provide valuable insights for improving reading comprehension outcomes in public schools.

This aligns with existing literature on educational disparities between private and public schools, emphasizing the varying levels of reading comprehension skills among students from different educational backgrounds, as addressing these discrepancies is crucial for promoting equitable learning outcomes and enhancing overall academic achievement among students. Scarborough, Thorndike, and Barrett's contributions to literacy research have emphasized the importance of addressing reading comprehension challenges among students to improve educational outcomes and close achievement gaps (Scarborough, 2001; Thorndike, 2012; Barrett, 1968). This also aligns with the text that reading comprehension, a complex process involving the reader, text, and activity within a broader sociocultural context, is crucial for academic success and cognitive development, as noted by Snow (2002). However, despite its importance, students' comprehension outcomes worldwide remain a concern, highlighting the need for continued research and effective interventions to address reading difficulties and promote equitable access to quality education for all learners. This concern is echoed by the OECD (2015) which found that students' comprehension outcomes worldwide have not been satisfactory.

In conclusion, the findings from the table provide strong evidence that there had been a significant impact on the literal comprehension skills being assessed, as the significant values suggest that the observed differences are highly unlikely to be attributed to chance alone. Thus, resulting in the null hypothesis being rejected.

Table 5
Significant Difference in the Mean Score of Reading Comprehension Skills of Primary School Learners Between Public and Private Schools

Reading Comprehension	School	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Literal	Public	24.29	240.5	0.001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Private	39.71				
Inferential	Public	21.15	137	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant
	Private	43.28				

Note: The p-value is significant below .05

The data presented in Table 6 compares the reading comprehension skills of students from public and private schools, categorized by literal and inferential comprehension. In terms of literal comprehension, the majority of private school students (79.31%) exhibit high levels of comprehension (scores of 8-9), while only 30.30% of public school students fall into this category. Conversely, a greater percentage of public school students (24.24%) demonstrate low comprehension (scores of 5 or below) compared to private school students (6.90%). This pattern extends to inferential comprehension, where almost half of the private school students (48.28%) score in the high range (18.1-27), while only 3.03% of public school students reach this level. Public school students tend to be more concentrated in the low and average ranges, with 48.48% falling into each of these categories. These results suggest a potential gap in reading comprehension skills between students in public and private schools, particularly in the higher levels of both literal and inferential comprehension. The implications of this may point to differences in educational resources, instruction quality, or other socioeconomic factors that affect reading development. Addressing these disparities could involve targeted interventions to enhance reading skills in public schools, particularly in inferential comprehension, where the gap is more pronounced.

Table 6
Reading Comprehension Skills of Students from Public and Private Schools

Reading Comprehension Skills	Public School		Private School	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Literal Comprehension				
Low (0-5)	8	24.24%	2	6.90%
Average (5.1-7.9)	15	45.45%	4	13.79%
High (8-9)	10	30.30%	23	79.31%

Total	33	100.00%	29	100.00%
Inferential Comprehension				
Low (0-9)	16	48.48%	3	10.34%
Average (9.1-18)	16	48.48%	12	41.38%
High (18.1-27)	1	3.03%	14	48.28%
Total	33	100.00%	29	100.00%

SUMMARY

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate and compare the reading comprehension skills of public and private schools.

Specifically, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the mean score of reading comprehension skills of primary learners in a public school in terms of:
 - a) Literal Comprehension
 - b) Inferential Comprehension
2. What is the mean score of reading comprehension skills of primary learners in a private school in terms of:
 - a) Literal Comprehension
 - b) Inferential Comprehension
3. Is there a significant difference in the mean score of reading comprehension skills of primary school learners between public and private schools?

The participants in the study were 62 learners, where 29 of which came from private school and 33 from public school, who were selected through a purposive sampling method. The quantitative-comparative research design was used. The frequency count, percentage, mean and standard deviation were employed for descriptive analysis. The Mann-Whitney U was used for the inferential statistics, all set at .05 level of significance.

FINDINGS

The study revealed several significant findings:

The mean score of reading comprehension skills of primary learners in a public school in terms of literal and inferential comprehension:

a. Level of Literal Comprehension: The Grade 3 learners in public schools demonstrated an average level of literal comprehension in understanding the explicit information presented in texts.

b. Level of Inferential Comprehension: Public school learners demonstrated an average level of inferential comprehension, which is their ability to interpret information that is not explicitly stated in the text.

The mean score of reading comprehension of primary learners in a private school when it is in terms of literal and inferential comprehension:

a. Level of Literal Comprehension: Private school learners exhibited an average level of literal comprehension skills, showcasing their ability to understand and interpret the explicit meaning of text.

b. Level of Inferential Comprehension: The private school learners displayed an average level of inferential comprehension in their ability to understand the explicit text and make thoughtful interpretations.

There is a significant difference in the level of literal and inferential comprehension skills between learners in public and private schools, with private school learners performing better at literal and inferential reading comprehension despite them having on-par results.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, the study concludes that:

1. The type of school significantly influences the development of literal and inferential comprehension skills among Grade 3 learners. Private schools, with their advanced teaching methods and better learning resources, tend to foster better literal and inferential comprehension skills than those of public schools despite having on-par results.
2. Literal comprehension skills are relatively similar among learners in both types of schools, indicating that basic comprehension is achieved across the board.
3. The disparity in inferential comprehension skills between public and private school learners calls for a review of the teaching methods and availability of learning resources in public schools.

IMPLICATIONS

Accordingly, as provided by the extracted themes based on the responses of the participants in the questionnaires, it is understood that there is a need to develop and improve the teaching method and instructional materials, the kind of method and materials that can guide and enhance the student's reading comprehension skills. Moreover, the teaching method and materials must be developed and practiced. The overall and specific result of the reading comprehension of the students was "average", which implies that the teaching methods and materials need to improve to help the learners in their reading comprehension skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the study, there are suggestions worth considering by students, parents, teachers, principals and future researchers.

1. Review of Teaching Methods/Strategies (Pedagogy)

School principals and teachers should review their teaching methods to improve their inferential comprehension skills among learners. They could consider adopting some of the teaching strategies used in private schools and update their teaching skills on active learning, differentiated instruction, technology integration, formative assessment, collaborative learning, culturally responsive teaching, and reflective practice, as through this, educators can create an engaging, inclusive, and effective learning environments that support the development of inferential and evaluative comprehension skills among learners.

2. Improving the School's Access to Learning Resources

Schools should strive to improve access to learning resources, such as libraries and digital tools, to help improve the comprehension skills of their learners. Additionally, schools should prioritize the implementation of comprehensive and inclusive literacy programs that not only focus on improving reading comprehension skills but also provide access to diverse reading materials, foster a love for reading, and cultivate a supportive learning environment that encourages active engagement with texts.

3. Enhancing the Teacher's Instructional Materials (IM's)

Teachers can consider incorporating a variety of resources, such as multimedia presentations, interactive online platforms, hands-on activities, and real-world examples, as by diversifying instructional materials, educators can cater to different learning styles, engage students effectively, and reinforce key concepts. Additionally, utilizing technology and incorporating culturally relevant materials can further enhance the quality and impact of instructional materials on student learning outcomes.

4. Further Conduct of Research on this Topic

Researchers should explore other factors that may influence comprehension skills among Grade 3 learners. This involves investigating the impact of factors such as teacher training and professional development, classroom environment, parental involvement, and the use of different instructional strategies, as by gaining a deeper understanding of these factors, educators can implement targeted interventions and instructional approaches to optimize comprehension skill development in Grade 3 learners.

This research has shed light on the differences in reading comprehension skills among Grade 3 learners in public and private schools. It is hoped that the findings and recommendations of this study will guide educators and policymakers in developing strategies to enhance comprehension skills among learners, particularly in public schools.

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