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VOCABULARY AND READING COMPREHENSION IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and English reading comprehension among Grade 6 students at Zamboanga Central School SPED Center during School Year 2026–2027. A descriptive-correlational research design was used. The study population consisted of 290 Grade 6 students across eight sections. Two sections were selected, and 63 students provided complete data for analysis. Vocabulary knowledge was assessed using the 2,000-word and 3,000-word levels of the Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT), while reading comprehension was assessed using students' existing Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) pre-test results. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize vocabulary scores and reading-comprehension classifications, while Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to examine the relationship between the variables at the 0.05 significance level. Students obtained mean scores of 17.49 out of 30 at the 2,000-word level and 15.81 out of 30 at the 3,000-word level, both below the mastery criterion of 26. At the 2,000-word level, 14 students (22.2%) achieved mastery, while 49 (77.8%) did not. At the 3,000-word level, 11 students (17.5%) achieved mastery, while 52 (82.5%) did not. Phil-IRI results showed that 20 students (31.7%) were classified at the Independent level, 7 (11.1%) at the Instructional level, and 36 (57.1%) at the Frustration level. The findings revealed a strong positive relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension ($r = 0.986$), ($p < 0.001$). The results highlight the need for vocabulary-building activities and targeted reading interventions to address students' learning needs. Future researchers may explore other factors influencing the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension among learners across different grade levels.

KEYWORDS*: Vocabulary Knowledge; Reading Comprehension; Grade 6 Students; Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT); Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI)*

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary knowledge is an important part of language learning because students need to understand and use words to communicate and learn effectively. Sufficient vocabulary helps students understand lessons, participate in classroom activities, and comprehend what they read. Coxhead and Boutorwick (2018) explained that many learners struggle to learn common and academic words needed to understand school texts. With limited vocabulary, students may struggle to understand information and complete school tasks. In the Philippines, vocabulary knowledge is important in improving students' language skills and academic performance. Santillan and Daenos (2020) explained that vocabulary helps develop the four language skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. They also stated that understanding word meanings helps students understand and explain what they read. However, some Filipino students continue to struggle with vocabulary development because they have limited exposure to English reading materials, meaningful conversations, and vocabulary-building activities.

Reading comprehension is an important skill because it helps students understand and get information from what they read. Tran and Nguyen (2023) stated that reading comprehension allows students to learn new ideas, answer questions, and use information in different situations. However, some students struggle to understand English texts because they have difficulty with unfamiliar words, connecting ideas, and finding important details. In the Philippines, reading comprehension is still a challenge for students. Lagdaan and Sevilla (2025) explained that reading comprehension helps students understand texts, think carefully, and use information in different situations. However, some Filipino students still struggle with understanding what they read despite reading programs and activities.

Previous research shows that vocabulary knowledge relates to reading comprehension because students need to understand word meanings to understand a text. Dong et al., (2020) reviewed 89 research samples and found a significant relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. Their findings showed that students who knew more words tended to understand what they read better. This suggests that sufficient vocabulary knowledge can help students understand ideas and information in English texts.

Based on observation, many children struggle to understand English texts because they have fewer opportunities to read English materials, which affects how often they see and learn new words. Reading English materials and doing other language activities can help students become more familiar with word meanings and uses. Teng (2016) found that students who had more exposure to English words through reading learned more vocabulary. This supports the idea that students who have more opportunities to read English materials may become more familiar with new words and their meanings.

This is also important for Grade 6 students because they are expected to read and understand more difficult English texts

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as they move to higher grade levels. At this stage, knowing more words can help students understand what they read. However, students with limited vocabulary may struggle to understand English texts. Hu et al., (2022) found that vocabulary played an important role in the reading comprehension of sixth-grade students learning English. This supports the need to examine how vocabulary knowledge relates to reading comprehension. Therefore, this study aims to determine the relationship between Grade 6 students' vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension in English.

Research Questions

This study aimed to determine the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension in English among Grade 6 elementary students.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of students' vocabulary knowledge?
2. What is the level of students' English reading comprehension?
3. Is there a significant relationship between students' vocabulary knowledge and English reading comprehension?

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study aims to determine the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension in English among Grade 6 elementary students at Zamboanga Central School SPED Center during School Year 2026-2027. The respondents of this study were Grade 6 students from two selected sections of the school. The Grade 6 population consisted of 290 students distributed across eight sections. From the two selected sections, 63 students participated in the study and provided complete data for analysis.

Data were collected by administering the Vocabulary Levels Test and using students' existing Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) results. Participation in the study was voluntary. The researchers obtained permission from the school administration and secured informed consent from the parents or guardians of the participants before conducting the study. The participants could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

This study was limited to Grade 6 students at the Zamboanga Central School SPED Center during School Year 2026-2027. It did not include students from other grade levels or schools and did not examine other factors that may relate to students' reading comprehension.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a descriptive-correlational research design to determine students' vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension in English and examine the relationship between these two variables. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), correlational research examines associations between variables through quantitative analysis. This approach involves the systematic collection and analysis of quantitative data to describe the variables being studied and determine whether a significant relationship exists between them. The descriptive-correlational design is appropriate for this study because it allows the researcher to determine students' vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension in English and examine whether a significant relationship exists between the two variables. This design does not manipulate or control the variables and does not aim to prove that one variable causes the other. Instead, it examines the variables as they naturally occur among Grade 6 elementary students. Thus, this design allows the researcher to collect quantitative data on students' vocabulary knowledge and English reading comprehension and analyze the relationship between the two variables using appropriate statistical procedures. The descriptive part shows students' vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension levels, while the correlational part determines whether a significant relationship exists between the two variables.

Sampling Design

The study employed cluster sampling to select respondents from Grade 6 students at Zamboanga Central School SPED Center. Cluster sampling facilitated the selection of respondents by choosing two Grade 6 sections from a total population of 290 students across eight sections. Each Grade 6 section was considered a cluster, and all eligible students from the two chosen sections were invited to join the study. The two selected sections were expected to include approximately 72 students. However, only 63 students participated and provided complete data for the study. This sampling approach was suitable since Grade 6 students were already organized into sections, making data collection simpler and more manageable for the researcher.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at Zamboanga Central School SPED Center, located approximately 0.6 kilometers from downtown Zamboanga City. Established in 1905, the school provides education through regular elementary and special education programs and implements various activities to support learners' academic development. The school has approximately 2,395 learners, consisting of 1,190 male and 1,205 female students. The respondents were Grade 6 students, with a total enrollment of 290 students for School Year 2026–2027. The study examined students' vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension in English and determined the relationship between these two variables.

Research Participants

This study included 72 Grade 6 students from the two selected sections of Zamboanga Central School SPED Center. However, only 63 students participated and provided complete data for the study. Of the total respondents, 32 (50.8%) were Grade 6 A students, while 31 (49.2%) were Grade 6 B students.

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Research Instruments

The researcher used the Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) by Schmitt et al., (2001) and the students' existing Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) pre-test results. The Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) focused on the 2,000-word and 3,000-word levels, with each level consisting of 30 items. Each correct response earned 1 point, with a maximum score of 30 per level. Scores ranging from 26 to 30 indicated Mastery, while scores from 0 to 25 indicated Not Mastered. The Phil-IRI pre-test results were obtained directly from the students' teacher, with proper permission, to determine their English reading comprehension. The researchers obtained permission from the school administration and secured informed consent from the parents or guardians of the participants before conducting the study. The conduct of the study and handling of the data followed the Data Privacy Act of 2012 of the Republic of the Philippines, with the knowledge of the advisers. Both instruments provided the data needed to assess students' vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension and examine the relationship between these two variables.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher secured an approved letter from the Research Adviser as authorization to conduct the study. This letter was submitted to the principal of Zamboanga Central School SPED Center to request permission. After approval, informed consent forms were distributed to parents or guardians of participating students and collected before the study. The researcher also obtained permission from the principal to access the students' Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) results. The letter was given to the English Coordinator to request access to the records. The study took place face-to-face during students' free time, with clear instructions provided beforehand. Questions were answered and guidance given as needed. Only students with informed consent to participate were included in the study. Participation was voluntary, and all information collected was kept confidential and used only for research purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Problem 1. **Level of Students' Vocabulary Knowledge**

A total of 63 Grade 6 students participated in this study: 32 were Grade 6 A students, and 31 were Grade 6 B students.

To determine students' vocabulary knowledge, the researcher used selected parts of the Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) at the 2,000-word and 3,000-word levels. To verify the VLT's clarity and suitability for the students, the researcher conducted a pilot test with 27 non-participating Grade 6 students.

Table 1. Level of Students' Vocabulary Knowledge at the 2,000- and 3,000-word levels

Vocabulary Level	Mean Score	Interpretation
2,000-word level	17.49	Not Mastered
3,000-word level	15.81	Not Mastered

26–30 (Mastery); 0–25 (Not Mastered)

Table 1 shows that students obtained a mean score of 17.49 at the 2,000-word level and 15.81 at the 3,000-word level. Both mean scores were below the study's mastery criterion of 26, indicating that students did not reach the mastery criterion at either vocabulary level.

The finding is consistent with the results reported by Schmitt et al., (2001), who also reported higher scores at the 2,000-word level than at the 3,000-word level. In their study, the mean score was 25.29 for the 2,000-word level and 21.39 for the 3,000-word level. The higher mean at the 2,000-word level in both sets of results suggests that students may be more familiar with 2,000-word-level words than with 3,000-word-level words.

The higher score at the 2,000-word level may reflect students' greater exposure to commonly used words. Words that students often see, hear, and use give them more opportunities to become familiar with their meanings. In contrast, words students encounter less often may be harder to recognize and understand. Bisson et al., (2014) found that prior exposure helped learners recognize and learn vocabulary, showing that repeated exposure supports vocabulary learning.

Table 2. Percentage of Students According to Their Vocabulary Mastery Level at the 2,000-Word and 3,000-Word Levels

Vocabulary Level	Interpretation	Frequency	Percentage
2,000-word level	Mastery	14	22.2%
	Not Mastered	49	77.8%
Total		63	100%
3,000-word level	Mastery	11	17.5%
	Not Mastered	52	82.5%
Total		63	100%

26–30 (Mastery); 0–25 (Not Mastered)

Table 2 shows that out of 63 students, 49 students (77.8%) did not reach mastery at the 2,000-word level, while only 14 students (22.2%) did. At the 3,000-word level, 52 students (82.5%) did not reach mastery, while only 11 students (17.5%) did. These results show that most students were classified as Not Mastered at both vocabulary levels.

One possible explanation for the lower vocabulary performance is that students may have limited opportunities to encounter, practice, and use English vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Students with fewer chances to read and use English words may have fewer opportunities to learn and remember new vocabulary. Repeated exposure to words through reading and

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other language activities may give students more opportunities to become familiar with word meanings and usage. According to Webb (2007), the more often students encounter new or unfamiliar words, the more they learn their meanings and uses. In other words, when students encounter new words multiple times, it helps them build and strengthen their vocabulary.

Problem 2. **Level of Students' Reading Comprehension**

To determine students' reading comprehension level in English, the researcher used the students' existing Phil-IRI pre-test results obtained from their teachers. The students were classified into three levels: Independent, Instructional, and Frustration.

Table 3. Level of Students' Reading Comprehension in English

Reading Comprehension Level	Frequency	Percentage
Independent	20	31.7%
Instructional	7	11.1%
Frustration	36	57.1%
Total	63	100%

80%–100% (Independent); 59%–79% (Instructional); 58% and below (Frustration)

Table 3 shows that out of 63 students, 36 students (57.1%) were classified at the Frustration level. Meanwhile, 20 students (31.7%) were classified at the Independent level, while 7 students (11.1%) were at the Instructional level.

This indicates that more than half of the students were classified at the Frustration level based on their Phil-IRI results. On the other hand, 20 students were at the Independent level, meaning they could understand the texts with little difficulty. Only 7 students were at the Instructional level, meaning they needed guidance to better understand the texts.

One possible explanation for the high number of students classified at the Frustration level may be limited opportunities to practice reading English texts. Students who do not read English texts regularly may have fewer opportunities to practice understanding sentences, identifying important details, and getting the main idea of a text. Reading regularly gives students more chances to practice these skills and become more comfortable with different types of texts. Vargas et al., (2024) found that reading habits were positively related to reading comprehension among Grade 4 to Grade 6 students. This suggests that students who read more often may have more opportunities to practice and improve their reading comprehension skills.

Problem3. **Significant Relationship Between Students' Vocabulary Knowledge and English Reading Comprehension**

Vocabulary knowledge refers to the students' understanding of words and their meanings, while reading comprehension refers to their ability to understand what they read. Because vocabulary knowledge may relate to how well students understand English texts, this study examined the relationship between these two variables to determine whether students' vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension in English are significantly related.

Table 4. Significant Relationship Between Vocabulary Knowledge and Reading Comprehension in English

Variables	Pearson r	P-value	Decision	Interpretation
Vocabulary Knowledge and Reading Comprehension	0.986	<0.001	Reject H_0	Significant

Table 4 shows a significant relationship between students' vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension in English, with a Pearson correlation of $r = 0.986$ and a p-value of $p < 0.001$. This means that students with lower vocabulary scores tended to have lower reading comprehension scores, while students with higher vocabulary scores tended to have higher reading comprehension scores. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis.

One possible reason is that students with limited vocabulary may struggle to understand many words in a text. When students do not know the meaning of important words, they may struggle to understand sentences, connect ideas, and get the overall meaning of the text. In contrast, students who know more words may understand the text more easily because they can recognize and understand more words.

Ludewig et al., (2023) studied 924 fourth-grade students and found that knowing more words in a text was related to better text comprehension. They also found that reading became more difficult when students knew fewer words in the text. This shows that vocabulary knowledge can help students understand what they read.

Ethical Considerations

This study followed basic research rules to keep the participants safe and protect their rights. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the school principal of Zamboanga Central School SPED Center. Informed consent was secured from the parents or guardians of the participating Grade 6 students, ensuring that participation was voluntary and that they were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants' names were replaced with codes, and no personal details were shared in the results. All collected data were used exclusively for research purposes and stored securely. The study made sure that no participant was hurt

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physically, mentally, or emotionally. Data collection was conducted during the students' free time to avoid disrupting their regular classes. The researcher was fair, honest, and careful in collecting, studying, and sharing the results.

Conclusion

The study found that Grade 6 students at Zamboanga Central School SPED Center had not yet reached the mastery criterion for vocabulary knowledge at either the 2,000-word or 3,000-word level, although their mean score was higher at the 2,000-word level. The findings also showed that most students had difficulty in English reading comprehension, with more than half classified at the Frustration level and fewer students at the Independent and Instructional levels. Additionally, the results indicated a significant relationship between vocabulary knowledge and English reading comprehension, showing that students with higher vocabulary scores tended to have higher reading comprehension scores. These findings highlight the importance of enhancing students' vocabulary and offering focused reading support to help them better comprehend English texts. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to use vocabulary-building activities and reading strategies that help students develop their English language proficiency and comprehension skills.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study suggests that the Department of Education officials should improve vocabulary and reading programs in elementary schools by giving students the right learning materials and activities that match their needs. School administrators may use students' vocabulary test results and Phil-IRI results to identify learning difficulties, improve reading programs, and provide additional support to students who struggle with reading in English. Teachers can regularly give vocabulary activities like word matching, games, word cards, using context clues, and making sentences to help students build their vocabulary. They should start with common English words before moving to harder ones, and give regular review and practice so students can remember word meanings. Teachers can also give English reading activities using short stories, passages, and other materials that fit students' reading levels. These activities should help students find main ideas, understand key details, and get information from what they read. Small-group reading, guided reading, and individual support can be given to students who have a hard time with English texts. Parents can help by encouraging their children to read English books, stories, and other simple materials at home, and by helping them understand new words. Students should read often and keep a notebook with new words, their meanings, and example sentences. Future researchers can do similar studies in other grade levels and schools, and look at other factors that affect students' vocabulary and reading comprehension.

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