



English language proficiency of students in relation to reading comprehension

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ABSTRACT

This research sought to assess students' proficiency in the English language and examine how it correlates with their ability to comprehend written texts. To assess the English language proficiency of 86 junior Liberal Arts students, the study utilized a researcher-developed survey questionnaire comprising ten items for each of the four core skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The questionnaire's validity was affirmed with a mean score of 4.27. Additionally, a reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha yielded a high-reliability index of 0.94, ensuring the consistency of the measurements. The second part of the questionnaire, adapted from Vibal (2017), assessed students' reading comprehension levels with 25 items. The mean was used to measure these levels, while the relationship between the two variables was analyzed using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient. The study revealed that junior Liberal Arts students exhibited high levels of English language proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, with means of 3.70, 3.72, 3.72, and 3.61, respectively, and an overall mean of 3.69. However, their reading comprehension level was moderate, with a mean of 13.91, suggesting a disparity between their proficiency and comprehension skills. The analysis revealed a significant correlation between students' English language proficiency and their reading comprehension levels. This suggests that enhancing English language proficiency could improve reading comprehension skills, underlining the importance of integrated language learning approaches and targeted interventions to address areas of weakness.

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INTRODUCTION

English proficiency is considered a critical skill for thriving in the 21st century, significantly influencing individual success and societal progress (Rao, 2019). Beyond basic communication, it encompasses cultural understanding and the critical processing of information. Strong proficiency enables full participation in academic, professional, and global contexts, while deficiencies create barriers to education, career growth, and social integration. The core components of language proficiency—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—function as deeply interconnected, with mastery in one reinforcing competence in others (Nan, 2018).

A growing concern is students' reading comprehension, as many struggle with analyzing and interpreting complex texts, which hinders their ability to engage critically with information. Recognized as a cornerstone of overall fluency, proficient reading comprehension supports effective communication, knowledge acquisition, and critical thinking, all of which are vital for academic and career success (Bruggink et al., 2022). The increasing demand for English proficiency in higher education and professional fields further underscores its importance, particularly for students majoring in English or preparing for careers requiring advanced language skills (Alghonaim, 2020; Daller & Phelan, 2013).

At La Carlota City College, junior Liberal Arts students encountered difficulties in reading comprehension, particularly in understanding complex texts and identifying key ideas, which affected their overall English language proficiency. Understanding their strengths and areas for improvement was essential in identifying targeted interventions that enhanced their language skills and academic performance. Despite the acknowledged significance of English proficiency, there were limited studies that specifically explored its relationship with reading comprehension among students in local institutions.

This study examined the correlation between reading comprehension and overall English proficiency among junior Liberal Arts students at La Carlota City College. By studying this connection, the study aimed to provide information about the variables that affect English language learning and support educational strategies that enhance students' competency, equipping them for academic and professional success.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the English language proficiency of Junior Liberal Arts students in relation to their reading comprehension skills. Specifically, it aimed to answer the following research questions: (1) What is the level of English language proficiency among these students, both overall and across the domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing? (2) What is their level of reading comprehension? (3) Is there a statistically significant relationship between English language proficiency and reading comprehension among Junior Liberal Arts students?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A descriptive research methodology was employed in this study to investigate the link between English language proficiency and reading comprehension. The respondents consisted of 86 junior Liberal Arts students enrolled in the AB English program at La Carlota City College during the academic year 2022-2023, including both regular and irregular students.

The research instrument utilized was composed of two sections. The first section included a total of 40 questions intended to evaluate the learners' proficiency across the domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This instrument was researcher-developed and underwent validation by three expert jurors, who assigned an average rating of 4.27, interpreted as "very good," confirming its validity. Additionally, the instrument was tested for reliability, yielding an index of 0.94, indicating a high level of consistency. The second section, adapted from Vibal (2017), consisted of 25 items designed to measure reading comprehension levels.

The research observed established ethical procedures to ensure the protection of participant rights and the confidentiality of personal data. Before collecting the information, informed consent was obtained following a clear explanation of the study's aims, process, and the voluntary nature of the participants' involvement, including their unrestricted right to withdraw at any time. Throughout the investigation, anonymity and data privacy were upheld by excluding any personal identifiers in both the analysis and reporting phases.

The collected responses were initially organized using Microsoft Excel and subsequently imported into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for in-depth evaluation. To determine the levels of English language proficiency and reading comprehension among students, the mean was calculated. Furthermore, Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was employed to examine the extent of the relationship between the studied variables.

English Language Proficiency

Fluency in English is a critical component of language acquisition, enabling individuals to communicate effectively both verbally and in writing. Additionally, proficiency in English facilitates adaptation when relocating to another country, as it serves as a global language. Mastery of English provides numerous advantages, including better career opportunities, deeper engagement with global entertainment, improved understanding of the international economy, and access to technological advancements (Adytia, 2020). Despite these benefits, many students struggle with English proficiency, even if exposed to the language at an early age. This challenge is particularly pronounced among non-native speakers, for whom English remains a foreign language.

Educational institutions face mounting pressure to transition English learners (ELs) to fluent proficiency as efficiently as possible (Umansky & Reardon, 2014). However, low proficiency levels can impede students' academic progress, manifesting difficulties with sentence structure, writing, reading comprehension, and grammar. These issues demand serious attention to ensure effective language development.

To enhance proficiency, English language instruction focuses on covering the four essential components of communication: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Himangani, 2017). Listening is the initial stage of language acquisition, laying the groundwork to support the advancement of oral and written expression, which are essential for effective communication. Reading is fundamental for academic success across disciplines, while writing enhances cognitive and communication skills, making it a key job competency. Speaking contributes to vocabulary and grammar development, ultimately strengthening writing proficiency. A person is considered proficient in English when they can fluently comprehend texts, produce structured written works, understand spoken English, and communicate intelligibly (Rintaningrum, 2018).

While exposure to an English-speaking environment can be beneficial, students must also adopt strategic techniques to improve their fluency. One effective method is active listening, which involves closely engaging with spoken language and applying key elements to reinforce learning (Mallillin & Villareal, 2016). By incorporating deliberate language-learning strategies, students can strengthen their English proficiency and overcome linguistic challenges.

Listening and Speaking

Listening serves as a foundational skill in language acquisition, positively influencing speaking, reading, and writing abilities. A child who excels in listening is more likely to develop strong communication and literacy skills (Başkanlığı, 2019).

Historically, listening has been undervalued in language education, often perceived as a passive skill. However, Efrizal (2012) supports the notion that speaking skills are heavily influenced by listening ability, as oral communication relies on comprehensible input from auditory sources. Later, Nasiri and Gilakjani (2016) identified

listening as a crucial element in developing practical communication skills. The 2019 Turkish Ministry of National Education (MEB) curriculum aligns with these earlier studies, emphasizing the interconnected and mutually reinforcing nature of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, advocating a holistic approach to language development. Rather than treating these skills as isolated competencies, the curriculum recognizes that proficiency arises from an integrated system, where listening plays a crucial role (Başkanlığı, 2019).

The shadowing method, examined by Ho (2022), provides empirical evidence reinforcing the MEB curriculum's emphasis on listening. Shadowing—where learners immediately repeat what they have heard—is more than a pronunciation exercise; it engages multiple cognitive processes simultaneously, improving fluency, intonation, and pronunciation. This method builds on previous findings by Lightbrown and Spada (2010), who noted that listening exposure has a significant impact on motivation and engagement in second-language acquisition. The combination of theoretical frameworks and practical listening strategies strengthens language learning outcomes, particularly in fostering communicative competence.

Similarly, speaking plays a central role in language proficiency, serving as the primary method of verbal expression. Traditional language teaching methodologies, such as the Grammar-Translation method, often prioritized reading and writing over listening and speaking (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). However, newer pedagogical approaches recognize that speaking is essential for interpersonal communication. Ur (2000) asserts that among the four language skills, speaking is the most vital for establishing effective relationships, a viewpoint echoed by more recent studies such as Eslit and Valderama (2023), which found that students demonstrate proficiency in spoken English when adequately exposed to communication-based learning environments.

In examining motivation, Lightbrown and Spada (2010) identify two critical factors that influence language learning: communicative necessity and attitudes toward the target language community. Students are often motivated to learn English not solely for academic purposes but also to achieve personal and professional goals, making speaking proficiency an essential component of their language development. This perspective aligns with the findings of Nasiri and Gilakjani (2016), who emphasized the role of motivation in encouraging speaking engagement in second-language learners.

Reading and Writing

The skills of reading and writing play a crucial role in developing overall language competence, as each contributes to the development of communication skills and academic success. These two skills are closely interconnected, as reading enhances comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, which directly influence writing proficiency. Similarly, writing solidifies understanding by allowing individuals to express ideas effectively and refine their linguistic knowledge (Paesani, 2016).

As one of the four core language skills—alongside listening, speaking, and writing—reading plays a crucial role in the language acquisition process. It involves comprehending and interpreting written texts, ranging from basic sentences to complex academic works. Beyond simple decoding, reading promotes personal growth, effective communication, and critical thinking (Celik & Altun, 2023). Through engagement with texts, learners develop connections between prior knowledge and new information, which broadens their perspectives and deepens their understanding of the world.

Research highlights the significant role of reading comprehension in developing language proficiency. Armea et al. (2022) found that reading comprehension serves as a key mediator in the correlation between literary competence and English language proficiency. Enhanced vocabulary acquisition, grammatical precision, and familiarity with various writing styles contribute to greater textual and conceptual understanding. This supports the idea that combining literature and language education strengthens reading proficiency and improves overall academic performance. These findings align with earlier research by Justol (2022), which established a strong correlation

between general ability, reading comprehension, and writing proficiency among first-year college students. This connection underscores the importance of reading as a foundational skill for writing development.

Writing, on the other hand, is not only a means of communication but also a skill developed through reading and critical thinking. A solid foundation in reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and grammar significantly enhances writing abilities (Justol, 2022). It requires analytical and critical thinking, which is cultivated through exposure to complex texts. When students read diverse materials, they develop the ability to structure their thoughts logically, refine their grammar, and expand their vocabulary, all of which improve their writing proficiency.

Moreover, tactile learning preferences further strengthen the relationship between reading and writing proficiency. Writing requires hands-on engagement, reinforcing cognitive processing and linguistic accuracy. This idea is supported by Lumettu and Runtuwene (2018), who emphasized that proficiency in English requires mastery of all four interconnected language skills. Their study suggests that the development of one skill, such as reading, naturally supports the enhancement of writing ability.

Earlier language teaching methodologies often emphasized either reading or writing in isolation. Traditional methods, such as the Grammar-Translation approach, prioritized reading over speaking and listening (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). However, contemporary approaches advocate for integrated skill development, recognizing the interplay between reading and writing. Lumettu and Runtuwene (2018) highlighted that language instruction should be designed to simultaneously develop multiple skills, as teaching materials often incorporate both reading comprehension and writing tasks.

This integrated approach aligns with modern language education models that prioritize active reading strategies to improve writing proficiency. For example, structured writing activities that incorporate extensive reading exposure help students internalize proper grammatical structures, refine their writing style, and enhance coherence in their written works. Similarly, incorporating reading-based discussions and analysis allows students to develop critical thinking skills essential for effective writing.

Reading Comprehension

Reading plays a vital role in lifelong learning and educational growth. It enables individuals to integrate previous knowledge with new concepts, deepening their grasp of ideas and contributing to the transmission of these insights to future generations (Torres, 2019). As a fundamental academic skill, reading is essential for acquiring information, supporting student achievement, and progressing through successive stages of formal education, which are key components of daily functioning. It serves as the foundation for learning across subjects such as mathematics, science, and home economics, reinforcing its critical value (Dadzie, 2008). Information can be accessed and understood through various formats, including traditional print sources such as textbooks and journals, as well as digital and audio-based media. In today's information-driven society, the ability to process and apply knowledge effectively is indispensable for both personal advancement and professional development.

Since the majority of information is conveyed through written text, strong reading and comprehension abilities are essential for children to interpret their environment and function effectively within society. In the Philippine context, literacy—particularly in reading and writing—is actively supported by various sectors, including the government, private individuals, and civic organizations, emphasizing its national significance. One foundational aspect of comprehension is identifying the central idea of a passage. This skill enables learners to differentiate key concepts from less relevant details, recognizing the primary message along with supporting evidence. Accurately grasping the main idea is essential for meaningful interpretation of texts. As students refine this ability, they become better prepared to understand academic materials and participate constructively in community life (Torres, 2019).

Reading comprehension involves the skill of fully understanding and summarizing a text. It entails the student's ability to comprehend and accurately interpret the main ideas and content. The goals of reading for students

include identifying the main idea, sentences, paragraphs, or discourse; pinpointing key points; understanding the flow and instructions; organizing reading materials; interpreting visual representations and other images in reading; drawing conclusions; predicting meanings and outcomes; summarizing discourse; differentiating factual statements from subjective viewpoints; and accessing content through a range of references, including printed and digital materials such as encyclopedias, atlases, cartographic resources, or annotated digital platforms (Azmuiddin et al., 2020).

Instructors can evaluate learners' ability to interpret and make meaning using comprehension tests. These tests measure the ability to understand written information and assess students' grasp of the content or data presented in the reading material. Accordingly, the discourse assessment must feature content that requires learners to demonstrate interpretive understanding (Irwansyah & Nurgiyantoro, 2019). Reading proficiency evaluations also consider the extent to which students comprehend, recall, and analyze the given information (Febrina et al., 2019).

Findings from reading intelligence assessments indicated that students are expected to examine specific elements within an essay. They must be able to observe, distinguish, and evaluate both messages and viewpoints. This analytical process extends beyond simple comprehension, requiring critical thinking and precise attention to detail to identify and interpret specific sections. Such assessments align with broader discourse principles by integrating synthesis skills—abilities that enable learners to formulate new ideas, make informed predictions, and address complex problems, all of which reflect advanced cognitive engagement (Lazarus, 2020; Salem, 2018).

Grabe and Stoller (2002) state that reading comprehension serves several functions: locating simple information, quick skimming, functioning in academic and professional settings, and integrating, writing, and critiquing texts. The national framework for reading emphasizes that comprehension involves a dynamic and complex interaction of skills. It encompasses grasping written content, constructing and interpreting meaning, and applying that meaning appropriately based on the nature, intent, and context of the text. Thama (2014) notes that several elements—such as physical health, cognitive capacity, environmental conditions, economic status, and emotional well-being—can affect an individual's ability to comprehend what they read.

Learners at SMP Negeri 06 Rejang Lebong face notable challenges in developing practical reading comprehension skills, as indicated by their limited understanding of written text. Ideally, students should not only grasp the text's literal meaning but also construct and derive interpretations and use them appropriately based on the text type, purposes, and context. Observations have shown that students continue to struggle with understanding both literal and non-literal meanings, finding it challenging to interpret and clarify the ideas presented in the reading material. This implies that literal comprehension of texts is a fundamental yet essential skill in reading comprehension. The lack of reading comprehension skills is partly due to learners exhibiting minimal motivation to read printed texts, preferring instead to read on social media and messaging applications that use non-formal language. Additionally, there is a lack of discipline in reading habits (Sari et al., 2020).

In the study by Vasay et al. (2016), the data revealed that the creative level is the highest reading comprehension level among Education students, with a descriptive level of High and an average mean score of 63.91, considered Very Satisfactory. This indicates that students exceeded the expectations of the text authors by applying their ideas to new situations to formulate or match existing concepts. Consequently, students utilized the psychological and aesthetic elements of the texts they read to elicit a reaction reflecting these elements. However, the data also indicated that the interpretive level is the lowest reading comprehension level among Education students, with a descriptive level of Moderate and a mean score of 56.05, considered Satisfactory. This suggests that students' cognitive processes for applying and analyzing ideas or meanings in the selections are not very high.

Additionally, the general ability of Education students to understand and make sense of various texts in terms of literal, interpretive, evaluative, and creative levels is satisfactory, with a mean score of 58.46, classified under the "Moderate" proficiency level. The results suggest that there is still a need to implement a reading program for

Education students to achieve the maximum reading comprehension level, as the overall mean only reached a moderate level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the English language proficiency levels across different skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Table 1. Level of English Language Proficiency of the Junior Liberal arts Students in terms of Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing.

English Language Proficiency	Mean	Interpretation
Listening	3.70	High
Speaking	3.72	High
Reading	3.72	High
Writing	3.61	High
As a whole	3.69	High

As shown in the table above, the data revealed that each skill achieved a mean score of 3.70 in Listening, 3.72 in Speaking, 3.72 in Reading, and 3.61 in Writing. All these means were classified as 'High' proficiency. Overall, English language proficiency in these skills averaged a score of 3.69, which was likewise categorized as 'High.' These results indicated that the students demonstrated a high level of proficiency in English, showing competence in all four core language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Lumettu and Runtuwene (2018) emphasized that mastery of the four interrelated language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—played a vital role in attaining overall proficiency in English. Each skill supported the development of the others, leading to a well-rounded command of the language. Active listening has been shown to improve comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar (Başkanlığı, 2019). Speaking plays a central role in language proficiency, enabling learners to communicate effectively and build relationships (Ur, 2000; Eslit & Valderrama, 2023; Malavika & Muthu Krishnan, 2021). Reading played a vital role in language acquisition, as it involved interpreting texts and fostering growth (Celik & Altun, 2023). Writing, supported by critical thinking and tactile learning, further enhanced proficiency (Justol, 2022). These studies validated the high proficiency levels observed in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Table 2 presents the level of reading comprehension of students.

Table 2. Level of Reading Comprehension of the Junior Liberal Arts Students.

Reading Comprehension	f	Mean	Overall Mean	Interpretation
Very High	6	21.83	13.91	Moderate
High	35	17.71		
Moderate	20	12.9		
Low	22	7.90		
Very Low	3	4.33		
Total	86			

As shown in the table 2, six of the respondents had a very high level of reading comprehension with a mean score of 21.83; 35 had a high level with a mean of 17.71; 20 had a moderate level with a mean of 12.9; 22 had a low level with a mean of 7.90; and three had a very low level with a mean of 4.33. Overall, the level of reading comprehension among junior Liberal Arts students was classified as moderate, with a mean score of 13.91. This

suggested that while some students performed better than others, there remained room for improvement in their reading comprehension skills. Furthermore, students with lower levels of comprehension needed additional support. With proper guidance and instruction, these students could enhance their reading comprehension abilities and achieve a deeper understanding of the texts they encountered.

The results aligned with those of Vasay et al. (2016) regarding the reading comprehension level among students, with a mean score of 58.46 and a descriptive level of "Moderate." These findings indicated that there was still a need to implement a reading program for education students to achieve optimal reading comprehension levels, as the overall mean only reached a moderate level. However, this contrasted with the situation at SMP Negeri 06 Rejang Lebong, where students encountered difficulties with reading comprehension, as reflected in their limited understanding of written texts. Observations revealed that students continued to struggle with both literal and non-literal meanings and found it challenging to explain the content of the texts they read. This emphasized that understanding texts was a fundamental and essential skill in reading comprehension (Thama, 2014).

Table 3 reveals the relationship between the level of English language proficiency and level of reading comprehension of junior Liberal Arts students.

Table 3. Relationship between the Level of English Language Proficiency and Level of Reading Comprehension of Junior Liberal Arts Students.

Level of Reading Comprehension	Level of English Language Proficiency					Total
	Very High	High	Moderate	Low	Very Low	
Very High	0	6	0	0	0	6
High	14	16	4	1	0	35
Moderate	4	7	7	2	0	20
Low	2	13	6	1	0	22
Very Low	0	2	0	0	1	3
Total	20	44	17	4	1	86

Computed value (r) : 0.369

P-value : <0.001

Decision : Reject Ho

Interpretation : Significant at 0.05 level of significance

The data revealed that 44 students achieved a high level of proficiency in English, whereas 20 students attained a very high level of competence. Seventeen students displayed a moderate level, four a low level, and one a very low level. In terms of reading comprehension, 35 students achieved a high level, six attained a very high level, 20 were at a moderate level, 22 performed at a low level, and three registered a very low level.

Based on the computed Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.369$ and a P-value less than 0.001—significantly below the 0.05 threshold—the null hypothesis was rejected. This statistical outcome indicated a significant positive relationship between junior Liberal Arts students' English language proficiency and their reading comprehension levels. This implied that the higher the students' English language proficiency, the better the students' reading comprehension level.

Armea et al. (2022) reported that reading comprehension served as a significant mediating factor in the relationship between literary competence and English proficiency. The study found that higher English proficiency improved comprehension and analysis of literary texts, primarily due to enhanced vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, and familiarity with various writing styles. This improved understanding was applicable across diverse reading contexts. The findings emphasized the value of combining language and literature instruction with contemporary teaching strategies to cultivate advanced English proficiency and enhance reading comprehension, both of which are fundamental to achieving academic excellence.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusions

The conclusions outlined below were formulated after a comprehensive analysis of the collected data.

- The junior Liberal Arts students demonstrated a high level of proficiency in the English language, which enabled them to demonstrate confidence in their language skills and perform effectively.
- The majority of students demonstrated a moderate level of reading comprehension, which enabled them to grasp general ideas but presented challenges when encountering complex vocabulary and abstract concepts.
- A significant relationship was found between students' English language proficiency and their reading comprehension levels. Higher English proficiency contributed to better reading comprehension, underscoring the importance of integrating language and literature education to support academic success.

Recommendations

In light of the study's findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed to guide future practice and research:

- To enhance reading comprehension and overall English proficiency, several strategic approaches were suggested: integrating English as a Second Language (ESL) strategies into general education classes to foster disciplined reading habits, developing critical reading modules to promote advanced text analysis and inferential comprehension, designing critical thinking exercises to support students in honing their analytical abilities, and establishing interdisciplinary programs that incorporated English language skills into fields such as the social sciences, law, and business, enabling students to apply their proficiency in diverse contexts.
- To significantly improve engagement and comprehension, the following pedagogical adjustments were recommended: employing interactive reading methods such as text annotation, summarization exercises, and comparative analysis to encourage active participation; implementing peer-assisted reading programs and debate forums to deepen students' engagement with academic literature and develop critical discussion skills; and using adaptive reading assessments to personalize learning strategies based on individual comprehension levels, ensuring tailored support for each student.
- For low-performing students, targeted interventions such as structured mentorship and tutoring programs provided the necessary guidance and support. Remediation workshops focusing on vocabulary enhancement, contextual interpretation, and analytical reasoning were advised to help struggling students develop essential reading skills. In addition, digital learning tools—including self-paced modules, audiobooks, and guided reading sessions—were encouraged to accommodate diverse learning styles and preferences.
- For future research, the conduct of longitudinal studies were recommended to assess the long-term impact of enhanced English proficiency strategies on reading comprehension. Exploring the influence of digital literacy on students' adaptability in online reading environments also promised valuable insights into modern learning dynamics. Furthermore, evaluating the effectiveness of various instructional techniques across student demographics and academic disciplines would help identify best practices for improving reading proficiency in diverse educational contexts.

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