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Socio-cultural Factors Affecting Reading Comprehension Levels and Demographic-based Grammatical Competence of Higher Education Students

Benigno A. Garil

College of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Communication, Basilan State College, Isabela City, Zamboanga Peninsula, 7300, Philippines

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to analyze the socio-cultural factors affecting reading comprehension levels of first-year college students from Basilan State College. This study also analyzed their level of grammatical competence. Stratified random sampling was carried out to sample 464 first-year college students from the college. The mixed method allowed the gathering of quantitative and qualitative data from the participants. While the students generally demonstrated good reading comprehension skills, with an overall competent average score, noticeable individual differences suggested the need for designed support to aid their further development. Conversely, the students displayed a low level of grammatical competence, categorized as limited users, indicating a substantial area requiring educational intervention to enhance their grammatical skills. Notably, education and health sciences students had significantly higher levels of reading comprehension compared to other first-year students. most students believed that factors such as knowledge and attitude directly influenced their reading comprehension levels, with some attributing it to socio-economic status, experience, and hobbies. This study calls for the implementation of strategies that consider the demographics of the students as well as their learning characteristics where educators could effectively assist students in their academic growth and enhance their proficiency in reading and language skill.

Keywords: Grammatical competence; Reading comprehension; Socio-cultural factors

*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:
Benigno A. Garil, College of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Communication, Basilan State College, Isabela City, Zamboanga Peninsula, 7300, Philippines; Emil: benignogaril@gmail.com

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1. Introduction

The process of reading comprehension involves the assimilation and synthesis of information, which in turn enhances the ability to acquire new knowledge and successfully interact with various educational and personal contexts. These should foster the development of critical thinking skills, particularly about community service. Recent research suggests that university students may lack the necessary preparation or face challenges when it comes to effectively engaging with academic texts (De-la-Peña and Luque-Rojas, 2021; Lawrence et al., 2022; Nguyen, 2022). These difficulties in reading may potentially hinder the effectiveness of academic training that heavily relies on written materials.

The level of reading comprehension pertains to the cognitive process by which individuals construct mental representations of written text. The reader constructs a cognitive representation in which they can absorb both explicit and implicit information derived from the text, personal experiences, and prior knowledge (Afflerbach, 2015; Kucer, 2016).

Research conducted (Bar-Kochva et al., 2023; Botello, 2013) has revealed that university students typically possess a limited level of comprehension. They frequently encounter challenges in drawing inferences and identifying the overall structure of written texts, which hinders their ability to construct a mental representation of the text's context. According to Bharuthram (2012), it has been observed that university students generally lack the ability to access and employ effective strategies (like abstraction and synthesis-analysis) for reading comprehension.

Livingston et al. (2015) discovered that individuals in their first year of education exhibit a limited range of reading strategies and encounter challenges when it comes to comprehending written texts. In their study, Ntereke and Ramoroka (2017) discovered that a mere 12.4% of students demonstrated high performance in a reading comprehension task, while a significant 34.3% exhibited a low level of proficiency in completing the task.

One of the key components of reading comprehension is grammar. Learning grammar is essential to being proficient in any language since it plays a significant role in how meaning is expressed in language (Ceneciro et al., 2023; Chavez et al., 2024; Cook, 2016). Grammar is necessary for learning any language, as it enables students to generate well-organized written and spoken English. Language production will be insufficient if the learners' grammar competence is inefficient, as grammar instruction serves as a bridge that connects them to other skills (Alqahtani, 2022).

The goal of the study was to investigate and understand the reading comprehension levels and grammatical competence of first-year college students at Basilan State College. Through comprehensive analysis, the study aimed to identify any variations in reading comprehension and grammatical proficiency among the student cohort, as well as to explore potential factors influencing these skills. By examining the students' performance and perceptions regarding reading comprehension, the study sought to provide valuable insights into areas of strength and areas needing improvement within the educational context.

This study might contribute to the development of targeted interventions and strategies to enhance the reading and language skills of first-year college students, thereby supporting their academic success and overall learning outcomes.

2. Literature

2.1 Grammatical competence

Pašinska (2021) asserted that an individual's competence in language is determined by their understanding of the underlying grammar or set of language rules. This competence is represented mentally and is demonstrated through one's comprehension and application of acceptable language usage within a particular linguistic framework.

Grammar as rules, grammar as form, and grammar as a resource are the three areas of grammar instruction that must be considered (Murtisari et al., 2020). For numerous foreign language students, the acquisition of grammar skills frequently involves

the acquisition of a high level of erudition regarding the principles of grammar, which facilitates communication (Daloğlu, 2018). The students must be exposed to the interaction between grammar and the content of their speech and the expectations of others regarding the interpretation of their language use and its intended purpose because grammatical competence is a valuable communication skill (Dinçer, 2022).

Emerging research indicates that the way teachers impart grammar instruction is influenced by their individual background knowledge, personal experiences, beliefs, and the specific educational settings in which they operate (Hidayatulloh and Murtiningsih, 2020). This suggests that classroom practices are not solely determined using handouts and prescribed guidelines (Chavez and Lamorinas, 2023). It is suggested that teachers should prioritize assisting students in the acquisition of a comprehensive understanding of grammatical rules and structures (Badash et al., 2022). Grammar is widely recognized as a crucial component due to its role in conveying meaning and expressing ideas with grammatical structures (Chavez et al., 2023; Janfeshan, 2017; Tarigan and Stevani, 2022).

Reading comprehension

The purpose of this research was to identify the factors affecting the reading comprehension levels of students and their potential causes. Consequently, it is important to consider the foundational elements that contribute to good reading comprehension.

Silawi, Shalhoub-Awwad, and Prior (2020) emphasize that reading comprehension comprises three essential components: process strategies (including word recognition), prior knowledge, and conceptual abilities. These components are crucial in the learning process, enabling students to develop their reading skills effectively. The absence of any one of these components can result in significantly reduced reading comprehension levels or greatly impact the ability to understand text. Therefore, a comprehensive approach that addresses all three components is necessary to support and enhance students' reading comprehension abilities.

Park and Yoon (2020) noted that reading comprehension encompasses the ability to remember important details and draw conclusions. Essentially, reading comprehension levels can significantly impact the learning process in other areas, as remembering information and drawing conclusions are essential for understanding and applying theories learned in school. These related skills are crucial for success in various aspects of life, including finding jobs, passing examinations, and completing education.

Poor reading comprehension can hinder problem-solving skills, as individuals need to fully understand what they read to be competent problem solvers (Capin et al., 2022). This issue is particularly evident in mathematical problem tests in secondary schools, where difficulties arise not just from solving the problem but also from comprehending the given problem (Ayça, 2022). Park (2020) emphasized that reading comprehension involves the ability to remember important details and draw conclusions. The capacity to understand every detail in a text correlates with a high level of reading comprehension, making it easier to conclude from the overall context.

Karanja (2023) reports that poor readers often have low self-esteem, which results in their decreasing learning achievement. When a student is not confident in reading to the listeners, there is a tendency for the confidence level to decrease which may directly affect the learning process, especially in developing the reading comprehension level.

Past research confirmed several causes and effects of poor reading comprehension. For instance, Hamra and Syatriana (2010) asserted that poor reading comprehension among high school students in Indonesian is due to students' lack of vocabulary, learning support, and reading motivation. This implies that reading comprehension is immensely related to the learner's level of knowledge of vocabulary that is still under the umbrella of grammatical knowledge. In addition, Cahyono and Widiati (2006) conclude that poor prior knowledge also contributes to the low level of reading comprehension. This suggests that prior knowledge may have included the language itself and the context.

2.2 Research question

This study aimed to examine, determine and analyze the socio-cultural factors affecting reading comprehension levels and demographic-based grammatical competence of higher education

students. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions.

(1) What was the reading comprehension level of first-year college students?

(2) What was the overall grammatical competence of first-year college students?

(3)What were the factors for the reading comprehension levels of the first-year college students?

(4) Is there a significant difference in the respondents' reading comprehension level when data are grouped according to college course and socio-economic status?

2.3 Methodology

Research design

This paper was a mixed-method study that analyzed the reading comprehension level and grammatical competence of first-year college students from the Basilan State University main campus.

In analyzing the quantitative data, this study conducted a descriptive-comparative analysis. Descriptive analysis was carried out to analyze the reading comprehension level and grammatical competence of the students based on their scores in the exam. It involves a comprehensive analysis of the data emphasizing patterns and trends without making any inferences or predictions (Chavez, 2020; Chavez, 2021; Chavez and Madrazo, 2019). Comparative analysis was conducted to determine whether the reading comprehension level and grammatical competence of the first-year college students differed based on their college course and socioeconomic status.

Qualitative analysis was carried out to analyze the sociocultural factors that influenced the reading comprehension level of first-year college students. This study employed thematic analysis of the responses of the participants to determine essential factors that had relevant effects on their overall reading comprehension.

Participants

The study involved a population of 2,323 first-year college students enrolled during the School Year 2021–2022 at the five colleges within the main campus of Basilan State University. Specifically, there were 157 students from the College of Education (CE), 1,210 from the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), 179 from the College of Criminal Justice Education (CCJE), 232 from the College of Information, Communication, Computer & Technology (CICCT), and 545 from the College of Health and Sciences (CHS).

To determine the sample size, the study applied Gay's (1979) formula, which recommends using 20% of a small population. Accordingly, 20% of the population of 2,323 students resulted in a sample size of 464 students for this study. To obtain samples from the different colleges, the study used proportionate stratified simple random sampling (Al-Darabahah et al., 2011). This method involves selecting 20% from each college, ensuring that each college is proportionately represented in the sample. Simple random sampling was then applied using the lottery technique, which gave each student an equal chance of being selected. **Table 1** below presents the number of sampled participants from each college on the campus.

Table 1. Stratified sampling of participants.

College/Course	N	20%
CE	157	31
CAS	1,210	242
CCJE	179	36
CICCT	232	46
CHS	545	109
Total	2, 323	464

Instrument

To determine the reading comprehension level, this study adopted the standardized Reading Comprehension Test from the California High School Exit Examination. This instrument, consisting of 25 items, was used to measure the reading comprehension levels of first-year college students at Basilan State University.

The grammatical competence test used in this study was a standardized test designed to assess vocabulary and grammar skills, specifically for college freshmen. The vocabulary test consisted of 45 items divided into three levels: Easy (15 items), Average (15 items), and Difficult (15 items). The grammar test comprised two sections: Subject-Verb Agreement with 25 items, and Verb Tenses with 20 items. These two subcategories were chosen

because they represent the areas where students most commonly make grammatical errors.

In determining the sociocultural factors that influenced the reading comprehension of the students, they were asked to identify which sociocultural factors (*e.g., knowledge, attitude, socio-economic status, environment*) they felt were essential factors for reading comprehension.

Data Gathering Procedure

After the research instruments were prepared, the researcher sought permission from the office of the college president. A letter of consent was then forwarded to the college deans to facilitate the administration of the research instruments to the prospective respondents. Upon approval, the researcher obtained a list of first-year college students.

A consent form, indicating the respondents' willingness to participate in the study, was attached to the questionnaire. Students were allotted one hour to complete both the Reading Comprehension test and the open-ended question, and another two hours for the Grammatical Competence test. In total, respondents were given three hours to complete all parts of the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Jeffreys' Amazing Statistics Program (JASP) version 0.18.2, a user-friendly, open-source software tool, was used to organize, analyze, and interpret the data. This study used its built-in data analysis tool pack for descriptive and inferential analysis.

This study employed descriptive analysis in their exam results to determine the reading comprehension and grammatical competence of the first-year students. A mean score in an exam represents the average performance of students who have completed the test. Calculating the mean involves summing up the scores achieved by all participants and dividing the total by the number of participants. Essentially, it provided a measure of central tendency, indicating the typical level of attainment within the group.

Table 2 presents the reading comprehension level of the participants based on their mean scores on the Reading Comprehension Test.

Table 2. Scale of Measurement for respondent's comprehension level

Score Interval	Adjectival Rating
21–25	Very proficient
16–20	Proficient
11–15	Good
6–10	Fair
1–5	Not proficient

Table 3 presents the descriptors used to interpret the results for grammatical competence based on the mean score of the participants.

Table 3. Descriptors for grammatical competence.

Scale	Level	Description
82–90	Expert user	Has fully operational command of the language; appropriate accurate and affluent with complete understanding.
73–81	Very good user	Has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriateness; misunderstanding may occur in unfamiliar situation; handles complex detailed argument well.
64–72	Good user	Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriateness and misunderstanding in some situation; generally, handles complex language well and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situation.
55-63	Competent user	Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriateness and misunderstanding; can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situation.
46–54	Modest user	Has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situation, though is likely to make mistakes; should be able to handle + D6 basic communication in own field.
37–45	Limited User	Basic competence is limited to familiar situation; has frequent problem in understanding and expression; is not able to use complex language.
28–36	Extremely Limited User	Coveys and understands only in general meaning in familiar situations; frequent breakdown in communication occur.
19–27	Intermittent User	No real communication is possible except for the most basic information using isolated words or short formulas in familiar situation and to meet immediate need; has great difficulty understanding spoken and written English.
10–18	Non-user	Essentially has no ability to use the language beyond possibly a few isolated words.
1–9	Did not attempt the test	No essential information

Descriptive analysis was also used to analyze the socio-cultural factors that influenced the reading comprehension of first-year college students. Using the two approaches in qualitative coding, the researcher utilized the deductive and inductive approaches, which means, there were pre-determined codes to categorize descriptively the answers of the respondents. Some codes were discovered during the coding process; this time, the inductive approach got in and added an additional theme to describe the answers of the respondents. An open-ended question was utilized to solicit the answers of the respondents. These answers were collected and later analyzed by the codes of the researcher using the descriptive thematic method. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that it is the first qualitative method that should be learned as it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other kinds of analysis. After thematic analysis, this study used a frequency table to organize the themes. A frequency table is a structured way of organizing and displaying data by listing the categories or values of a variable along with the frequency of each category. It presents a summary of the distribution of data, showing how often each value or category occurs within a dataset.

Inferential analysis was conducted to determine whether the reading comprehension of the first-year college students differed based on their course and socio-economic status. This study employed One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to compare the subgroups of course and socio-economic status.

Results

Question 1. What was the reading comprehension level of first-year college students?

Findings in **Table 4** revealed that the first-year college students from Basilan State College were generally good (= 13.26; S.D. = 4.406) in reading comprehension. This data suggested that, although most students were good at reading comprehension, there were still strong differences in individual performance levels. These results highlighted the overall reading competency among the student cohort, while also pointing to areas where some students may need further support or intervention to enhance their reading skills.

Question 2. What was the overall grammatical competence of first-year college students?

Findings in **Table 5** revealed that the first-year college of Basilan State College were limited users of grammar and had somehow a low level of grammatical competence (= 37.02; S.D. = 9.181) based on the standard test scores. This variability implied that while some students may have demonstrated skills grammar, a significant number of students struggled with various aspects of grammatical competence. These results highlighted a critical area for educational improvement, suggesting that additional instructional resources and support may be necessary to enhance the grammatical skills of these students.

Table 4. Reading comprehension level of first-year college students.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Adjectival Rating
Reading Comprehension Level	13.26	4.409	Good
Legend: 21–25 (Very Proficient); 16–20 (Proficient); 11–15 (Good); 6–10 (Fair); 1–5 (Not Proficient)			

Table 5. Grammatical competence of first-year college students.

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Interpretation
Grammatical competence level	37.02	9.181	Limited users
Legend: 82–90 (Expert user); 73–81 (Very good user); 64–72 (Good user); 55–63 (Competent user); 46–54 (Modest user); 37–45 (Limited user); 28–36 (Extremely limited user); 19–27 (Intermittent user); 10–18 (Non-user); 1–9 (Did not attempt the test).			

Question 3. What were the factors of the reading comprehension levels of the first-year college students?

Findings in **Table 6** indicated that most first-year college students from Basilan State College believed that knowledge (16.4%) and attitude (15.9%) had a direct effect on their reading comprehension level. Some believed it could be their socio-economic status (10.8%), experience (10.6%), and hobby (9.2%). Small portions of the sample believed it was their culture (4.7%), their previous attended school (4.0%), or their life situation (0.3%).

Question 4. Is there a significant difference in the respondents' reading comprehension level when data are grouped according to college course and socio-economic status?

Findings in **Table 7** indicated that there was a significant difference (F = 32.397; p = 0.012) in the reading comprehension level of first-year college students based on their college. This means that the college/course of the student could have a relevant effect on their overall reading comprehension level.

Table 6. Perceived factors influencing the reading comprehension level.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Knowledge	62	13.4	16.4	66.5
Attitude	60	12.9	15.8	35.4
Socio-economic Status	41	8.8	10.8	10.8
Experience	40	8.6	10.6	90.8
Hobby	35	7.5	9.2	100.0
Environment	29	6.3	7.7	50.1
Mother-tongue	27	5.8	7.1	42.5
Preference	26	5.6	6.9	73.4
Time	25	5.4	6.6	80.2
Culture	18	3.9	4.7	19.5
Previous school	15	3.2	4.0	14.8
Life situation	1	0.2	0.3	73.6
Total	379	81.7	100.0	
System	85	18.3		
Total	464	100.0		

Table 7. Reading comprehension level based on college.

Independent Variable	Groups	N	Mean	S.D.	F	p-value	Interpretation
College	CE	31	14.94	4.195	32.397	0.012	Significant
	CAS	242	12.31	3.662			
	CCJE	36	9.97	4.620			
	CICCT	46	11.85	4.867			
	CHS	109	16.57	3.660			

After identifying the difference based on the college/course of the first-year college students, this study carried out Scheffe test as a post-hoc test for significance presented in **Table 8**. Specifically, this study found out that the reading comprehension level of CE students was significantly higher compared to CAS (S.E. = 0.746; p = 0.015), CCJE (S.E. = 0.958; p = 0.000), and CICCT (S.E. = 0.909; p = 0.022). Similarly, the reading comprehension level of students from CHS was significantly higher compared to students from CAS (S.E. = 0.451; p = 0.000), CCJE (S.E. = 0.752; p = 0.000), and CICCT (S.E. = 0.688; p = 0.000), but not significant from CE (S.E. = 0.796; p = 0.380). Consequently, the overall reading comprehension level of students from CE and CHS could be higher compared to other students in CAS, CCJE, and CICCT. Notably, the reading comprehension of CAS students was significantly higher compared to students from CCJE (S.E. = 0.699; p = 0.026).

Findings in **Table 9** indicated that no significant difference (F = 0.830; p = 0.509) in the reading comprehension level of the first-year college students based on their socio-economic status. This means that their socio-economic status might not directly mediate their overall reading comprehension level.

Table 8. Post-hoc examination using Scheffe test.

Academic track		Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CE	CAS	2.630*	0.746	0.015	0.32	4.94
	CCJE	4.963*	0.958	0.000	2.00	7.93
	CICCT	3.088*	0.909	0.022	0.28	5.90
	CHS	–1.633	0.796	0.380	–4.10	0.83
CAS	CE	–2.630*	0.746	0.015	–4.94	–0.32
	CCJE	2.334*	0.699	0.026	0.17	4.49
	CICCT	0.458	0.629	0.970	–1.49	2.40
	CHS	–4.263*	0.451	0.000	–5.66	–2.87
CCJE	CE	–4.963*	0.958	0.000	–7.93	–2.00
	CAS	–2.334*	0.699	0.026	–4.49	–0.17
	CICCT	–1.876	0.870	0.327	–4.57	0.82
	CHS	–6.597*	0.752	0.000	–8.92	–4.27
CICCT	CE	–3.088*	0.909	0.022	–5.90	–0.28
	CAS	-0.458	0.629	0.970	–2.40	1.49
	CCJE	1.876	0.870	0.327	–0.82	4.57
	CHS	–4.721*	0.688	0.000	–6.85	–2.59
CHS	CE	1.633	0.796	0.380	–0.83	4.10
	CAS	4.263*	0.451	0.000	2.87	5.66
	CCJE	6.597*	0.752	0.000	4.27	8.92
	CICCT	4.721*	0.688	0.000	2.59	6.85

*Note: Significant at α = 0.5

Table 9. Reading comprehension level based on socio-economic status.

Independent Variable	Source of Variance	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	p-value	Interpretation
Socio-economic status	Between	64.657	4	16.164	0.830	0.506	Not significant
	Within	4391.55	459	19.468			
	Total	90541.00	463				

*Note: *Significant at α = 0.5*

Discussion

Question 1. What was the reading comprehension level of first-year college students?

Gardner (2019) posited that the reflection or level of reading comprehension may also be affected by the beguilement of the children in reading. The statement suggested that the students must have continuous activities that may develop their reading comprehension level. With the continuity, there will be a possibility that the students will be improved as time goes by.

In support of this, Zuhra (2015) discovered in her study that the student-respondents have low reading comprehension levels because of their background in the English language which means that they have no prior knowledge of the language itself. It implies that when the knowledge or schemata is absent from the learners about a certain thing may affect their reading comprehension level, which may show poor

results. The sensation took place because the students had not been exposed to a similar context or passage before (Zuhra, 2015). For example, if a Southeast Asian student reads a passage according to an event during the winter season, there is a possibility that these students cannot surely comprehend the text at a high level.

Question 2. What was the overall grammatical competence of first-year college students?

Respondents have basic competence in language which is limited to familiar situations. They have frequent problems with understanding and expression. The data further show that they are not able to use complex language during their learning. This means that English, being a second language in the Philippine context, seem to be quite difficult for some second language learners especially those in the provinces and the island barangays perhaps due to exposure and inadequate acquisition of the target language.

This study is parallel to the study of Aque (2015), that the grammatical competence of the elementary school teachers or the respondents is described as limited users of the English language. It means that the respondents have basic grammatical competence which is limited to familiar situations. They have frequent problems with understanding, comprehension and expression. And because of this, they are not able to use complex language.

Question 3. What were the factors of the reading comprehension levels of the first-year college students?

Garcia-Castro (2020) affirmed in the result that poor vocabulary is another factor in low-level reading comprehension as the by-product of Indonesian high school students. It is in the result of the study that the low-level knowledge of the vocabulary of the English language may also result in the poor reading comprehension of the secondary students in Indonesia. An experiment was done by the Indonesian government to identify the level of knowledge of the students in reading comprehension in English. The students must at least master 2,500 to 3,000 words in the English language to attain the passing level of reading comprehension in the English text.

The findings of this study may support the study conducted by Surtantini (2018) with the result that learners in Indonesia seldom participate in the classroom, especially in English subjects. First, they are not English speakers which is why they lack responses in the classroom. If the subject is English instead, they only use Indonesian to answer. Second, their level of confidence and self-esteem is low since they are not sure if their comprehension is correct in terms of English; thus, they prefer not to respond at all. What is apparent in the classroom of English subjects is that it is only shows the teacher has too many interactions rather than the students' responses. With this, students' learning is limited by just the teacher's interpretation of the text but not their comprehension.

In addition, Ulfa (2020) posited from the result of her study that the low score of the students is because of their low level of reading comprehension, and it is due to their knowledge of the English language which may support the findings of this study.

Moreover, the study of Hasibuan et al. (2021) strongly supports the findings of this study since he found out in his research that the students experience difficulties in finding information to their answer in the reading comprehension text since they are poor in their vocabulary, they cannot identify the main idea on the paragraph, they do not have the knowledge of the words in terms of pronunciation and do they do not show interest on reading since they experience difficulties in learning the English language since before.

Question 4. Is there a significant difference in the respondents' reading comprehension level when data are grouped according to college course and socio-economic status?

Van Boekel et al. (2017) found out that reading comprehension is a composite interaction among classmates in the academic track or courses they are taking that enables the reader to make a mental description of the text. It implies self and forming a meta description. Which is they are making their

strategy.

Yau (2005) found out in his study that proficient readers employ more sophisticated approaches to reading than less. Proficient readers for instance in this study the skilled reader employed strategies of inference, summarization, and synthesis during and after reading while the skilled reader applied bridging inferences, paraphrasing, and repetition. It implies that the grade eleven student is given more text so that their brain will be exposed and prepared when they embark on college lives taking different courses with different strategies in reading; thus, they will be more strategic in reading some text for the future.

It has been repeatedly demonstrated by research (Balladares Hernández, 2018) that learners from low-SES backgrounds typically have lower reading comprehension levels than their high-SES friends. Numerous factors have been proposed as the causes of these variances, including variations in language use and exposure, family history, and availability of educational resources (e.g., technology, books, and good schools).

Interventions like early literacy programs and parent education initiatives have been put in place to assist children's language and literacy development to overcome these disparities, especially for children from low-SES homes (e.g., Mol and Bus, 2011). Policies like enhanced funding for low-income schools and better teacher preparation that seek to lessen differences in educational opportunities and resources across SES levels have also been suggested as viable remedies (e.g., Chen et al., 2018).

Conclusion

The findings revealed several key insights about the reading comprehension and grammatical competence of first-year college students at Basilan State College. The students generally exhibited good reading comprehension skills, with an average score indicating overall competency, though there were notable individual differences. This suggested that while the first-year students performed well, there was a need for targeted support to help some students improve further. In contrast, the students showed a low level of grammatical competence, categorized as limited users, highlighting a significant area requiring educational intervention to boost their grammatical skills. Most students believed that knowledge and attitude directly influenced their reading comprehension levels, with some attributing it to socio-economic status, experience, and hobbies.

Educational strategies should consider integrating activities that build on students' existing knowledge and positively influence their attitudes towards reading and learning. While some students linked their reading comprehension to socio-economic status, experience, and hobbies, the findings suggest that these factors might play a less direct role, indicating that interventions should primarily focus on academic and cognitive strategies rather than socio-economic adjustments.

Author Contributions

Benigno Garil was solely responsible for all aspects of this research study. This includes the conceptualization and design of the study, data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the results. Benigno Garil also wrote and revised the manuscript and approved the final version for publication.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the authors upon request. To access the data, interested parties should contact the corresponding author. Please note that while the data are not publicly accessible, they can be provided for research purposes upon reasonable request. Any restrictions or conditions on the use of the data will be communicated by the authors. This ensures that the data are used appropriately and ethically, in line with the study's objectives and confidentiality requirements.

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Ethics Statement

This study aimed to analyze the socio-cultural factors affecting the reading comprehension levels and grammatical competence of first-year college students at Basilan State College. A stratified random sampling method was employed to select 464 first-year college students, ensuring a representative sample. The study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to provide an understanding of the participants' skills. Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were strictly observed. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were maintained by assigning codes to each participant and securely storing all data. The study adhered to ethical guidelines by ensuring that no harm came to the participants. The research design included measures to minimize any potential risks and maximize benefits. The gathered data was used solely for the purposes of this study and was not disclosed to any unauthorized parties. Ethical approval was obtained from the research office at Basilan State College prior to the data gathering. This approval confirmed that the study met all ethical standards for research involving human subjects. The researcher was committed to conducting the study with integrity and respect for the participants, ensuring that the findings would contribute positively to the educational development of the students.

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