

A Comprehensive Analysis of the Reading Proficiency Gap Among Tertiary Students: An Action Research Study at the University of Eastern Philippines

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Abstract— This action research investigates the reading proficiency gap among tertiary students at the University of Eastern Philippines (UEP), assessing its implications on academic performance, student engagement, and institutional outcomes. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates quantitative assessment data with qualitative insights from structured interviews with students and faculty. Findings reveal that over 65% of incoming students demonstrate reading comprehension below the tertiary standard, particularly in areas such as inferential reasoning, academic vocabulary, and synthesis. The study identifies contributing factors, including limited secondary education resources and a scarcity of university-level reading interventions, calling for strategic curriculum modifications and expanded reading support. Recommendations include structured literacy interventions, faculty development programs, and national policy adjustments to facilitate reading skill development at the tertiary level.

Keywords: Reading proficiency, Tertiary students, Academic performance, Interventions, Curriculum modifications.

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading proficiency is a foundational skill influencing students' academic success, critical thinking, and long-term professional readiness. Filipino tertiary students face increasing reading demands, requiring skills such as comprehension, critical analysis, and mastery of discipline-specific vocabulary. However, many students transition to higher education without sufficient reading preparation, resulting in significant literacy gaps. This study explores these gaps within the UEP context and examines their effects on academic outcomes.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The study aims to address the following questions:

1. How does the reading proficiency gap affect academic outcomes and engagement among tertiary students at UEP?
2. What factors contribute to the reading proficiency gap?
3. What targeted interventions can address this gap effectively?

III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research aims to inform literacy interventions in higher education by highlighting the institutional and systemic factors contributing to the proficiency gap [2]. It also provides actionable insights for stakeholders in Philippine higher education seeking to enhance academic performance and equity [1].

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Grounded in Schema Theory, Cognitive Load Theory, and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, this study examines how reading deficiencies impact comprehension and learning. Research reveals that Filipino secondary education often emphasizes rote learning [5], leaving students underprepared for the advanced literacy demands of higher education [3]. Additionally, resource constraints in rural institutions further hinder literacy development [4].

V. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed-methods action research design.

- Participants: 180 first- and second-year students and 12 faculty members from UEP's College of Arts and Communication.
- Instruments: Standardized reading assessments, survey questionnaires, and focus group discussions.
- Data Analysis: Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation tests, while qualitative data were thematically coded to identify literacy barriers and instructional needs.

VI. RESULTS

Quantitative Findings:

- 67% of first-year and 58% of second-year students scored below tertiary reading standards.

- A strong positive correlation ($r = 0.59$, $p < 0.01$) was observed between reading proficiency and GPA.

Qualitative Findings:

- Student Experiences: Students cited vocabulary challenges and complex syntax as significant barriers.
- Faculty Insights: Faculty noted that reading deficiencies hinder participation and recommended scaffolded instruction.

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VII. DISCUSSION

The findings emphasize the critical role of structured reading support at UEP. Cognitive Load Theory supports the need for scaffolded instruction to reduce cognitive overload during complex reading tasks. Aligning with Vygotsky's ZPD, interventions targeting students' literacy gaps can facilitate academic engagement and success [6]

VIII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Summary of Findings:

The study highlights significant literacy challenges among UEP students, driven by inadequate secondary preparation and institutional resource gaps [7].

Recommendations:

1. Implement reading support programs, including remedial courses and peer tutoring.
2. Train faculty in scaffolded literacy instruction and differentiated teaching methods.
3. Integrate reading support into the tertiary curriculum to develop critical literacy skills continuously [8]

Policy Implications:

National education policies should prioritize literacy development at all levels, ensuring alignment between secondary and tertiary curricula.

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