

Reading Performance of First Year Students in The College of Teacher Education

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Abstract — This study examined the reading performance of first year students at Urdaneta City University during the Academic Year 2024–2025, focusing on their levels of reading comprehension and fluency, the significant difference between these two aspects, and the challenges encountered. A descriptive quantitative research design was employed, involving 350 student respondents from various majors. Data were gathered using structured survey questionnaires and reading materials. Findings revealed that students were generally at an instructional level in reading comprehension, with applied comprehension scoring the highest and literal comprehension the lowest. In contrast, students demonstrated an advanced level of reading fluency in terms of speed, accuracy, and expression across disciplines. The study concluded that while students meet academic expectations in reading comprehension, improvement is needed, particularly in literal understanding, while current practices in developing reading fluency should be sustained. The study recommends enhancing reading programs, developing tailored instructional materials, and implementing interactive reading activities to further improve students' reading performance.

Keywords — *Reading Performance, Reading Comprehension, Reading Fluency, First-Year Students, College of Teacher Education, Literacy Skills, Descriptive Quantitative Research, Higher Education, Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), Philippines*

I. Introduction

Reading performance remains a significant concern in contemporary education despite advancements in instructional strategies and learning technologies. Reading is a fundamental skill that supports academic achievement, critical thinking, and lifelong learning. Its importance is closely aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which aims to ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all learners (UNESCO, 2020). Addressing challenges in reading comprehension and fluency is essential to improving educational outcomes and reducing learning gaps, particularly among students transitioning to higher education.

Globally, international assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) have consistently shown that many students struggle with basic and higher-order reading skills, indicating weaknesses in comprehension and critical thinking (Schleicher, 2019). In the Philippine context, similar concerns persist, as national and international reports reveal that while students can read texts, many struggle to understand and interpret meaning. The Department of Education has emphasized that the core issue is not basic literacy but reading comprehension (DepEd, 2020). These difficulties are influenced by factors such as language barriers, limited exposure to academic texts, and insufficient instructional support, which become more evident at the tertiary level (Marcelo & Santillan, 2020).

For first-year college students, particularly those in the College of Teacher Education, strong reading skills are crucial to academic success and professional preparation. As future educators, these students must demonstrate proficiency in reading comprehension and fluency while modeling effective literacy practices. In response, the present study investigated the reading performance of first-year students, focusing on comprehension, fluency, and the challenges they encounter. The findings aim to inform instructional planning, strengthen reading programs, and support institutional initiatives aligned with SDG 4, ultimately contributing to the development of future teachers capable of fostering meaningful reading and critical thinking skills among learners.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significance for multiple stakeholders involved in improving reading performance and literacy skills among first-year students in the College of Teacher Education. Students can benefit by becoming aware of the challenges they face in reading comprehension and fluency, allowing them to adopt strategies to enhance their academic skills and learning outcomes. Teachers can use the findings to understand their students' difficulties better, design targeted instructional strategies, and implement reading activities that strengthen comprehension and fluency. School administrators may draw on the results to guide curriculum development, allocate resources effectively, and implement reading programs that support student literacy. Parents can gain insights into their child's reading challenges, enabling them to create a supportive home environment that reinforces learning. Future researchers may use the study as a foundation for exploring interventions, examining additional factors affecting reading performance, or conducting longitudinal studies among teacher education students. Ultimately, first year students are the primary beneficiaries, as this study contributes to improving their reading skills and prepares them to become future educators capable of fostering effective literacy practices and critical thinking in their own classrooms.

Aim of the Study

The study aimed to examine the reading performance of first-year students in the College of Teacher Education for the academic year 2024–2025, specifically focusing on their levels of

comprehension and fluency, and to identify the significant differences between these skills across various majors and demographic factors.

Objectives of the Study

1. Identify the level of reading performance of the students in terms of:
 - a. Reading comprehension; and
 - b. Reading fluency.
2. Determine whether there is a significant difference between the students' reading comprehension and reading fluency levels.

Hypothesis of the Study

The subsequent hypothesis was tested at a significance level of 0.5%.

The null hypothesis (H_0) supposes that there is a significant difference between the level of reading comprehension performance and reading fluency of first-year students in the College of Teacher Education.

The statistical test conducted resulted in the rejection of the null hypothesis. The results revealed a significant difference between students' reading comprehension and reading fluency, indicating that while students may perform well in one aspect, variations exist in the other, highlighting the need for targeted strategies to further improve both areas of reading performance.

Conceptual Framework

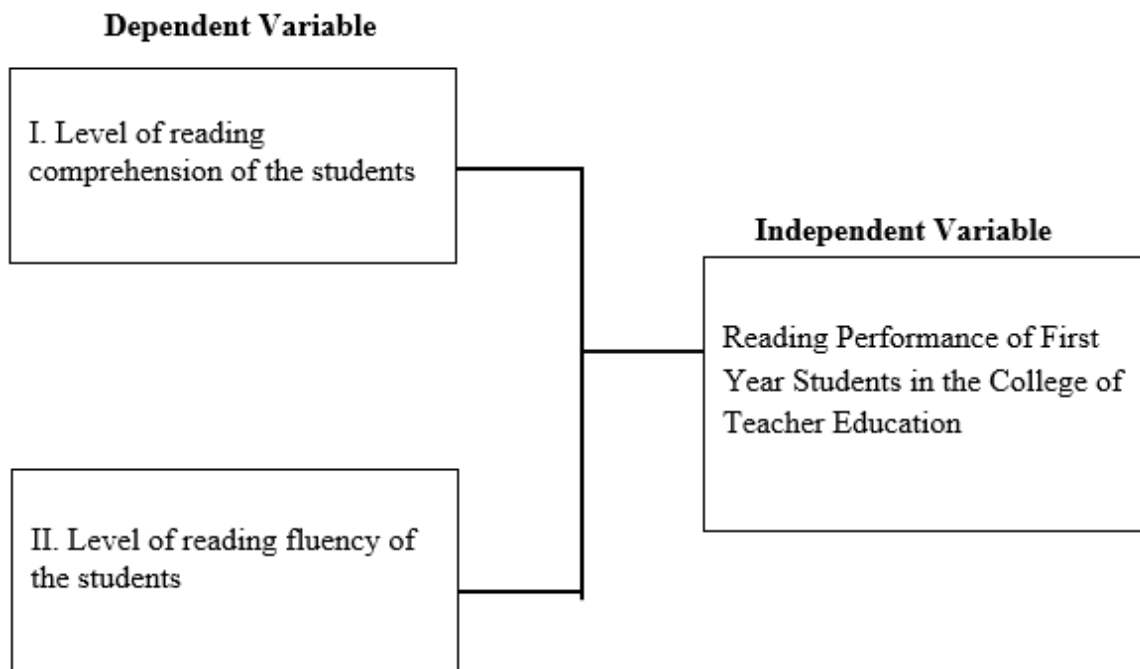


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of the research, highlighting the relationship between the reading performance of first-year students in the College of Teacher Education and its components. The independent variable is the reading performance of the students, which represents their overall literacy achievement. The dependent variables are reading comprehension and reading fluency, which are influenced by the students' reading performance. Reading comprehension is assessed at three levels: literal, interpretive, and applied, while reading fluency is measured using categories such as advanced, proficient, approaching proficiency, developing, and beginning. The arrows in the figure indicate the directional relationship, showing that students' reading performance affects their comprehension and fluency levels, and identifying specific areas of strength and challenges that can guide targeted instructional strategies to enhance overall literacy skills.

Literature Review

Reading proficiency has assumed a central position in educational research and policy, as it is fundamental to academic success and lifelong learning. The importance of strong reading skills is reflected in initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goal 4, which promotes equitable and inclusive quality education for all learners (UNESCO, 2020). In the Philippine context, teacher education programs play a critical role in developing students' reading skills, particularly in comprehension and fluency, which are essential for effective learning across disciplines. However, the effectiveness of these programs varies, often due to differences in students' prior reading experiences, limited vocabulary, and varying levels of critical thinking skills (Petersen & Spencer, 2024; Florit & Cain, 2011).

The development of reading proficiency is closely linked to the use of effective instructional strategies. Programs that integrate guided reading, repeated reading, and structured literacy activities have been shown to enhance both comprehension and fluency (Schwanenflugel et al., 2006; Cadime et al., 2017). Comprehension skills, in particular, benefit from scaffolding that supports vocabulary acquisition, background knowledge, and inferential thinking, while fluency improves through practice that emphasizes speed, accuracy, and expression. Empirical evidence suggests that when reading instruction systematically targets both fluency and comprehension, students demonstrate higher engagement, better academic performance, and greater confidence in reading (Alnahdi, 2020; Almogren, 2023).

Students' reading motivation and performance are also influenced by personal, cognitive, and environmental factors. Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020) explains that students are more likely to persist in reading tasks when their needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness are met. When instructional support is aligned with students' readiness and interests, learners are more likely to engage actively and develop higher-order comprehension skills. In addition, peer support, mentoring, and targeted feedback have been shown to enhance resilience and performance among learners who struggle with complex texts (Alghamdi & Abdulaziz, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2022).

The theoretical framework of this study is anchored in four interconnected models. Tyler's (1949) model of curriculum emphasizes setting clear objectives, sequencing content, and continuously assessing learning outcomes. Universal Design for Learning (UDL; Meyer et al., 2014) provides a framework for creating instruction that accommodates diverse reading abilities, allowing all students to access and engage with texts meaningfully. Differentiated Instruction (Tomlinson, 2017) complements this approach by tailoring reading activities to students' varying levels of comprehension and fluency. Finally, Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020) offers a lens for understanding the motivational processes that influence students' engagement in reading. Together, these frameworks support the study's investigation into the reading performance of first-year students in the College of Teacher Education, identifying both their strengths in fluency and the areas requiring targeted support in comprehension.

II. Methodology

The research employed a descriptive quantitative design, allowing for a systematic examination of the reading performance of first-year students in the College of Teacher Education. The quantitative strand consisted of administering structured reading assessments and survey questionnaires to all 350 first-year students across various programs, including Bachelor of Secondary Education, Bachelor of Elementary Education, Bachelor of Physical Education, and Bachelor of Culture and Arts in Education. The instruments collected information on students' reading comprehension at literal, interpretive, and applied levels, as well as reading fluency, categorized from beginning to advanced. These tools enabled consistent and reliable measurement of the students' reading performance.

To complement the assessments, survey questionnaires provided additional information on students' self-perceived difficulties and experiences in reading. The primary objective was to identify patterns in comprehension and fluency, and highlight specific areas where students faced challenges. This allowed the study to gain a deeper understanding of students' reading performance across programs. The combination of assessments and questionnaires ensured a comprehensive collection of quantitative data.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to present trends in reading comprehension and fluency levels. Inferential statistics were employed to test the hypothesis regarding significant differences between comprehension and fluency. The analysis provided insights into areas requiring targeted instructional strategies to improve reading performance. This approach ensured the study could draw meaningful conclusions from the data.

Before data collection began, ethical procedures were observed. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their participation. Confidentiality of responses was strictly maintained. These measures safeguarded students' rights and ensured the integrity of the research process.

III. Results and Discussion

Table 1. Level of Reading Performance of all the majors in terms of Comprehension

	MEAN	ORAL READING	DESCRIPTIVE EQUIVALENT
ENGLISH	23.56	Instructional	Interpretative
FILIPINO	19.43	Instructional	Interpretative
GENSCI	21.12	Instructional	Interpretative
MATH	22.32	Instructional	Interpretative
SOCSTUD	19.88	Instructional	Interpretative
BEED	21.52	Instructional	Interpretative
BECED	19.31	Instructional	Interpretative
BSNED	21.75	Instructional	Interpretative
BCAED	14.40	Frustration	Literal
BPED	18.78	Instructional	Interpretative
TOTAL	20.12	Instructional	Interpretative

Table 1 presents the reading comprehension performance of the 350 first-year students in the College of Teacher Education. The overall mean comprehension score of 20.12 falls within the instructional level (59–79%), indicating that most students require guidance in understanding reading materials and generally demonstrate interpretative comprehension skills. Among the Bachelor of Secondary Education majors in English, 36 students obtained the highest mean score of 23.56, which corresponds to the independent and applied descriptive level, reflecting strong abilities in analyzing and interpreting texts with minimal instructional support. In contrast, students enrolled in the Bachelor of Culture and Arts Education recorded the lowest mean score of 14.40, classified under the frustration and literal level, suggesting significant difficulties in reading comprehension and a strong need for instructional intervention, particularly in understanding complex texts, making inferences, and applying critical reading strategies. Notably, none of the 350 respondents achieved the highest descriptive equivalent level (24–30) in the independent and applied categories, indicating that complete mastery of reading comprehension was not attained. These findings align with Hardianto (2019), which reported a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.708$) between reading fluency and comprehension, underscoring the importance of strengthening both skills in teacher education programs to ensure future educators can effectively model and teach reading competencies.

Table 2. Level of Reading Performance of all the majors in terms of Fluency

	MEAN	DESCRIPTIVE EQUIVALENT	TRANSMUTED RATING
ENGLISH	186.45	Advanced	Highly fluent
FILIPINO	183.57	Advanced	Highly fluent
GENSCIE	183.41	Advanced	Highly fluent
MATH	184.37	Advanced	Highly fluent
SOCSTUD	186.52	Advanced	Highly fluent
BEED	184.05	Advanced	Highly fluent
BECED	183.86	Advanced	Highly fluent
BSNED	187.00	Advanced	Highly fluent
BCAED	185.10	Advanced	Highly fluent
BPED	185.31	Advanced	Highly fluent
TOTAL	184.93	Advanced	Highly fluent

Table 2 presents the reading fluency levels of the 350 first-year students in the College of Teacher Education at Urdaneta City University. The overall fluency mean of 184.93 places the students in the **Advanced** category, indicating a high level of reading proficiency across all majors. This suggests that the students possess strong reading skills that enable them to comprehend and process academic texts effectively, which is vital for their success in teacher education programs. Among the ten majors included in the study, students enrolled in the Bachelor of Secondary Education major in Special Needs Education obtained the highest fluency mean score of 187.00, also classified as **Advanced**, reflecting well-developed reading abilities necessary for understanding complex and specialized texts. In contrast, students majoring in General Science recorded the lowest fluency mean score of 183.41; however, this score still falls within the **Advanced** category, indicating that they likewise demonstrate strong reading fluency despite minor variations across programs. Overall, these findings support the claim that reading fluency is closely linked to comprehension, consistent with the study of Rafanan et al. (2024), which emphasized that improvements in reading speed and accuracy contribute to better comprehension outcomes.

Table 3. Summary of the table in the Reading Performance

	N	Mean	INTERPRETATION
COMPREHENSION	350	20.12	Instructional Level
FLUENCY	350	184.93	Advanced Level

Table 3 presents the reading comprehension and fluency assessment results of the 350 first-year students in the College of Teacher Education. The overall mean score in reading comprehension was 20.12, which falls within the instructional level under the Oral Reading framework and corresponds to interpretative comprehension skills. This indicates that students are able to understand reading materials with teacher guidance but still require additional instructional support to achieve independent comprehension. In contrast, the mean fluency score of 184.93 was

classified under the advanced level based on the fluency scoring rubric and described as highly fluent within the transmuted rating range of 75–100%. This suggests that the students demonstrate strong reading fluency, characterized by smooth, accurate, and efficient reading with minimal need for remediation. Despite their high fluency, the disparity between fluency and comprehension highlights the need for targeted instructional interventions focused on strengthening comprehension skills. Furthermore, the use of 350 valid cases with no missing data ensures the reliability and accuracy of the findings, providing a solid basis for interpreting the students’ overall reading proficiency and for designing appropriate instructional support programs.

Table 4. Difference between the Level of Reading Comprehension Performance and Reading Fluency

COMPREHENSION			
	T-VALUE	SIG-VALUE	REMARKS
FLUENCY	165.48802	.000	SIGNIFICANT

Table 4 presents the results of the test of significant difference between reading comprehension and fluency among the 350 first-year students in the College of Teacher Education. The computed t-value of -165.49 and the corresponding significance value of $.000$ indicate a statistically significant difference between comprehension and fluency levels. This finding confirms that reading comprehension and fluency are not at the same level, with the large negative t-value suggesting that students’ comprehension performance is substantially lower than their fluency performance. As the null hypothesis was rejected, the results imply that although students demonstrate high fluency in reading, they encounter greater difficulty in comprehending texts. This disparity highlights the need for instructional interventions that focus on strengthening comprehension skills to complement students’ fluency. The findings are consistent with the study of Bilbao, Donguila, and Vasay (2016), which reported that education students’ reading comprehension was at a satisfactory or moderate level and varied significantly across year levels, indicating that comprehension development requires sustained and targeted instructional support.

Discussion

The results of the study are meaningful, as they provide insights into the reading comprehension and fluency levels of first-year students in the College of Teacher Education, as shown in Tables 1 to 4. The findings reveal that students demonstrate interpretative comprehension at the instructional level, indicating that while they can understand texts with guidance, they are not yet fully independent readers. At the same time, the students’ reading fluency is consistently at an advanced level across all majors, reflecting strong skills in reading speed, accuracy, and expression. This disparity between comprehension and fluency is supported by Petersen and Spencer (2024), Florit and Cain (2011), and Schwanenflugel et al. (2006), who noted that high reading fluency does not always guarantee high comprehension, as understanding complex texts also requires vocabulary knowledge, background experience, and critical thinking skills.

The data from Tables 1 to 3 show that some students, particularly in language-related majors, perform better in applied comprehension, yet no students achieved the highest level of comprehension mastery. This finding highlights the need for targeted interventions to improve students' comprehension skills while maintaining their strong fluency. The test of significant difference in Table 4 further confirms this gap, showing that comprehension is significantly lower than fluency, with a large negative t-value and a statistically significant p-value, indicating that students read well but struggle to fully understand and interpret texts. These results align with Cadime et al. (2017), who emphasized that fluency alone is not sufficient for deep comprehension and that reading instruction must address multiple skill areas to be effective.

Together, these results demonstrate the importance of designing instructional strategies that balance fluency and comprehension development. While students have a solid foundation in fluent reading, enhancing comprehension through activities that build vocabulary, background knowledge, and higher-order thinking is essential. The findings underscore that future educators must not only develop strong reading skills themselves but also be prepared to teach and model these skills effectively in their own classrooms.

IV. Conclusion

This study shows that first-year students at Urdaneta City University have different levels of reading fluency and comprehension. The students demonstrate interpretative reading comprehension at the instructional level, which means they can understand texts with guidance, and their strongest skill is applied comprehension. On the other hand, their reading fluency is at an advanced level across all ten majors, showing that they can read smoothly, accurately, and at a good pace. However, the findings reveal that good fluency does not always mean good comprehension. Some students can read well but still have difficulty understanding what they read because of limited vocabulary, lack of background knowledge, or weak critical thinking skills. These results highlight the need for focused teaching strategies that improve comprehension skills while maintaining strong reading fluency.

V. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that the University administration, particularly the Vice President for Academic Affairs, provide strong support for the implementation of reading programs and activities initiated by the College of Teacher Education. CTE instructors are encouraged to improve and enrich reading tasks and materials to help students reach the applied level of comprehension. At the same time, efforts should be continued to sustain the students' advanced level of reading fluency through regular and meaningful reading activities. Lastly, future studies should focus on identifying effective strategies that can further improve both reading comprehension and fluency to support students' overall reading development.

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