

FILIPINO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' READING ENGAGEMENT AND INTERESTS DURING THE PANDEMIC: IMPLICATIONS FOR ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF STRUGGLING READERS

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Abstract

The present study examined Grade 7 Junior High School Filipino students' reading engagement and reading interests during the pandemic and the factors that hinder them from reading. A survey was administered to 200 randomly selected students from four Department of Education (DepEd) schools in Northern and Southern portions of Palawan, Philippines. Questionnaires were administered face to face to students at the learners' home. Data revealed the following: (1) About 55 percent of the students reported occasional interest in reading; (2) printed books remain a preferred reading materials followed by Facebook ; (3) 55 percent reported reading everyday but only 30 minutes to one hour is spent in reading; (4) a majority admitted engagement in Facebook, Tiktok and texting every day; (5) among the challenges affecting the reading interest of students are: household chores, noise in the neighborhood, playing online games, and watching TV series or movies; (6) about half of the students perceive their reading fluency to be an average and about 58 percent perceive that their reading habit is good. Despite the positive self-assessment of students about their reading ability and reading habit, data show that the limited time spent in reading every day is being spent mostly in facebook, Titktok and playing online games. Besides, the household chores and noise in the home and in the neighborhood contribute to diminished interest and engagement in reading. During the transition period, language teachers and the schools have important roles in promoting intensive reading in school and at home with cooperation from parents.

Keywords: Reading Interest, Reading Covid-19 Pandemic

1. INTRODUCTION

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world, several institutions were placed at a standstill; businesses were closed, travel restricted, and education halted. As the school year 2020–2021 opened, the Department of Education in the Philippines strategized ways to continue serving the learners amidst the pandemic by implementing distance learning modalities. In this modality, learners have to stay at home while learning by themselves. Different concerns about

education aroused. Language teachers started to become more concerned about the students' reading ability. In the study of Yeatman and Domingue (2021) new evidence on the impact of the pandemic on learning among students in early grades showed a distinct change in the growth of basic reading skills. Students' reading skills' growth stalled when schooling was interrupted and it remained stagnant.

Reading is one of the important skills that students need to master because it is the foundation for learning subjects in all sciences (Rintaningrum, 2009). English as the language of the global community has found a prominent place in the lives of the Filipino people. Learning the language for effective and efficient communication has been considered imperative for school learning. Learning how to learn and how to foster a critical understanding and appreciation of how they give expression to their experiences in the community of well-meaning educators and language experts have oftentimes been associated with the deterioration of the language skills of the outputs of the educational system during a pandemic. Studies reveal that junior high students nowadays are left behind in their language skills and their passport to landing in senior high. They fail in academics and the reason lies in their inability to express themselves clearly and be competitive in language and communication.

In this new face of education brought by COVID19 Pandemic, recent studies show some of its eminent effects on students' performance in school particularly in these three aspects, namely, reading comprehension (Tingson & Aquino, 2021; Pham, 2021; Tomas et. al., 2021), reading habit (Pham, 2021, Hanah et.al., 2020; Alegado, 2021), and reading interest (Fahrurrozi, 2017; Hanah et.al., 2020).

Reading comprehension is an activity that is difficult and complex; a challenging skill for many students worldwide and for Filipino students as well. This is evident from the literacy levels of students in the Philippines which is quite low. One important assessment that reveals the status of students' reading comprehension in the Philippines is the 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) where 79 participating countries' level of literacy were shown. Here, the average of reading score result was 395, while the average score of the OECD was 496. Philippines only had an average reading score of 340-100 points short of the OECD average of 487. It obviously reflected that the Philippines ranked as lowest in reading comprehension which implies that Filipino students have reading comprehension difficulties (San Juan, 2019). This falls on the frustration level of reading comprehension (Tomas et.al, 2021). If this had happened before pandemic, much worst is then expected to happen during its stage. There have been various studies conducted in exploring ways and varied strategies to improve students' reading comprehension, however, with the current form of education "the new normal education" where modular distance learning is employed, the usual suggested means for improving students' comprehension ability and the commendable methods and strategies undertaken by the teachers are being challenged because face-to-face sessions are strictly prohibited in carrying out distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to Labastida (2021), failure to teach difficult reading skills during pandemic, such as phonics and decoding, especially that learning is given online or by modular means, can detrimentally affect comprehension skills. Tingson & Aquino (2021) revealed that students

experienced reading comprehension difficulties in the given self-learning modules and teachers' task outputs. In the study conducted by Tomas et. al (2021), it was found that a majority of students' reading comprehension skills were at the frustration level. One important reason for this result is the culture or habit of reading. Pham (2021) reported that students' reading comprehension is affected by students' reading habit. Factors such as students' reading attitude, reading frequency, materials read, purpose of reading, and time spent on reading contribute to reading habit. As illustrated by Hanah et.al (2020), students read less than an hour a day; read 2-3 times a week; read article on internet than academic books; and mostly choose education genre.

Nonetheless, the most essential skill needed to succeed in all educational contexts is reading (Brown, 1996). Reading is one of the four language skills that have to be mastered by students who are learning a language; in this context, English. To widen one's mental horizons through reading, an individual must have a good reading habit (Loan, 2009), which is obtained through forming and developing reading activities that will gradually turn into a habit (Andayani and Maryam, 2018). Good reading habits give three significant results to a learner: they help the students to easily comprehend the context of a text; they make the students able to speak confidently in front of the class; and they help to improve one's analytical skills in comprehension tasks (Hanah, D., Lisniyanti, K., & Yulianto, S. W., 2020).

In addition to this, previous researches have also shown that learners who show a greater interest in reading English have significant improvement in reading comprehension. According to Hanah, D. et al, (2020), one's interest in the topic affects the mood, which makes an individual engage in reading. It is also added that interest in reading influences one's processing of text (Ebbers, 2011), comprehension, and positive recall of information (Hidi, 2001, as cited by Hanah, D. et al., 2020).

Indeed, reading interest impacts reading comprehension, too (Fahrurrozi, (2017); Hanah et.al. (2020); Firtria (2019). It was found that students have minimum level reading interest in English reading materials (Hanah et.al. 2020). They only read during English classes. Based on studies conducted, the higher the students' interest, the higher the students' reading comprehension (Fahrurrozi, (2017); Hanah et.al. (2020); Firtria (2019)). Genre of English reading materials, types of English reading materials, time spent in reading are factors that contribute to reading interest.

These studies show that reading interests are constructed through good reading habits; when one is interested in reading, a good reading habit will be developed. When these two factors are combined, the learners can expect to have good English reading proficiency.

However, depending on contexts and cultures, any habit and interest can be affected. One of these influencing factors is the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has unpredictably changed the way people live, by influencing their behavior and beliefs (Ceccato, I., di Crosta, A., Palumbo, R., Marchetti, D., La Malva, P., Maiella, R., Marin, A., Mammarella, N., Verrocchio, M. C., & di Domenico, A., 2021). Aside from the changes in the practices of education, business, religion, communication, and other areas, reading habits have also been

affected as students remain at home and are expected to have lots of time to read.

In the new study by Jahan, N., Rahman, M. A., Mohiuddin, M. G., Mansur, A. A., Habib, A., & Mondol, M. S. (2021) on the Impact of COVID 19 on the Reading Habits of the Students in Bangladesh, they found out that most of the students would read books more than 8 hours before the pandemic, but during the COVID 19, they only spent 1-2 hours reading, and the alarming part is that they spent much time online with electronic devices for 6-7 hours while the remaining 4 hours of their day were consumed by activities like gaming, Facebook, youtube, and others. It is evident in their study that reading habits have had a serious setback during this pandemic; students have become more involved in other activities and devices rather than reading. An analysis of more than 9.9 million students, however, discovered that only those students who read for 15 minutes or more per day made accelerated reading gains; thus, students with less than 15 minutes of daily engaged reading time saw below-average reading gains, putting them at risk of falling behind their peers, and students who read for just over a half-hour to an hour per day saw the greatest gains of all (Bryan, J., & Kerns, G., 2021).

In addition to this, in Utami and Nor's (2021) study on the reading interests of learners during learning from home, they learned that 55.7% of the students got reading materials from both online and offline sources, while 38% of them purely got materials from online sources, and only 6.3% got them from offline sources. The most used online sources were websites, followed by Google Classroom and WhatsApp, while some chose Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Podcast, NewsPortal, and other social media platforms to get reading materials. Meanwhile, offline sources that were mostly used by the students to obtain reading materials were print books, followed by copies of lecture materials, magazines, newspapers, and journals.

On the other hand, the study conducted by Parikh, Vyas, & Parikh (2020, as cited in Jahan, N., et al., 2021), showed that different library users during the pandemic read more e-resources, particularly e-books, and a noticeable increase in the reading period of the users was recorded. In the study by Anuar and Che Wan (2021), they found out that most of the Malayan students (52%) prefer reading both fiction and non-fiction genres during the COVID-19 pandemic, while 38% of their respondents prefer reading fiction, and 10% choose non-fiction genres.

Meanwhile, Ponton, M., Saritama, A., Solano, P., Rios, L., & Zuniga, A., (2019) presented in their study a confirmation that students' reading habits were weak because they just read when they had to complete assignments. They discovered that only 20.49% of their respondents read for classwork, 12.27% read because they had to, 5.3% read for pleasure, and 4.82% read as a hobby. The sudden migration of education from traditional face-to-face learning to distance learning has put students at a great disadvantage. Because of this, their reading activities have also been affected by different factors. Rotas, E. & Cahapay, M. (2020) analyzed the difficulties faced by the students during remote learning and found that Filipino students faced challenges in unstable internet connectivity, inadequate learning resources, overloaded lesson activities, conflict with home responsibilities; poor learning environment; financial-related problems, and such. These variables can also be attributed as factors that can influence learners' reading habits and interests.

Given the country's current situation, speculations about learners' English language proficiency, as well as their reading habits and interests, have become widely discussed. Thus, the purpose of this study was to describe the reading habits and interests of high school students during the pandemic, as well as the factors that influenced them.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of reading interest of Grade 7 learners during the pandemic in terms of the following:
 - a. Attitude toward Reading?
 - b. Preferred Materials In Reading?
 - c. Factors affecting their choice of materials for leisure reading?
2. What are the students' reading habit in terms of the following:
 - a. Frequency of reading per week
 - b. Amount of time spent in reading per day?
3. Which among the following factors hinders the reading interest of the high school students?
 - a. Noise At Home/ In The Neighborhood
 - b. Working While Studying
 - c. Household Chores
 - d. Food And Security
 - e. Vlogging
 - f. Playing Online Games
 - g. Watching TV or movies
4. What is the level of students' engagement in the following platforms:
 - a. Internet Games?
 - b. Facebook?
 - c. Tiktok?
5. What are the students' perceptions about the following:
 - a. Their Reading Comprehension Ability?
 - b. Their Reading Habit?

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

In order to investigate the study's problem, this study used both qualitative and quantitative design. It was undertaken for six months, starting in November 2021 and ending in June 2022.

2.2 Participants

The respondents were 200 randomly selected Grade 7 (junior high school) students from different DepEd schools in Northern and Southern portions of Palawan. 50 students came from each of the following high schools namely: San Jose National High School (in Roxas Palawan), Panacan National High School, (in Narra), Canique National High School in Taytay Palawan, and Leonides S. Virata Memorial School (from Brooke's Point, Palawan). The respondents were selected using the simple random sampling technique,. After securing approval of school heads, surveys were administered either online or were administered face to face at the learner's home.

To collect the data, the researchers secured the approval of the school heads of the four schools to conduct the study involving the Grade 7 learners. After securing approval, the questionnaire was administered through face to face mode at the learners' home after getting the informed consent of their parents and the learners' assent. Questions from the survey were read orally to the learner twice together with the options for answers. One survey form was assigned for each respondent. Researchers were the ones marking the survey based on the learners' responses. Queries by learners regarding the items were accommodated.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main findings of the study are presented in this section, which consists of four main parts. The first part deals with the effect of the students' reading interests and reading preferences; the second part deals with the learners' reading habits; the third part deals with the factors that hinder the reading engagement of high school students and the level of students' engagement in social media platforms; and the last part is the students' perceptions about their reading comprehension ability and their reading habits.

3.1 Learners' reading interest, preferred supplemental reading materials and factors affecting students' choice of reading materials

Table 1

Attitude Toward Reading	Frequency	Percentage
1. I enjoy reading a lot.	84	42□
2. I like reading occasionally.	109	54.5%
3. I don't like reading at all.	7	3.5%

Table 1 shows the general attitude of students about reading. The lockdown and the distance learning implemented in public and private schools in the Philippines because of the pandemic has allowed the students more time supposedly to spend in reading. After doing their assigned tasks per subject during the week, students may decide how to use their free time. As can be

seen, although 42 percent is quite a large percentage for those who admittedly enjoy reading, a greater 55 percent do not as much share the same feeling. As a matter of fact, about 4 percent reported not enjoying reading at all.

3.1.2 Students' Preferred Supplemental Reading Materials

Students are expected to spend considerable time for pleasure reading, that is apart from reading their textbooks to understand assigned lessons, review for quizzes and examinations, and respond to assignments, they read materials from online and printed sources either to acquire more information for academic purposes or simply, reading for general intellectual satisfaction or for pleasure. Although printed books of varied interests are widely available in bookstores anywhere, an infinite number of online materials are available in the internet which are either free or for sale. The students therefore were surveyed regarding their preferred materials for supplemental reading.

Table 2: Students' Preferred Supplemental Reading Materials

Supplemental Reading Material	FREQUENCY					Weighted Mean	Rank
	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5		
Printed books	53	40	20	18	11	2.25	1
e-books	25	35	29	23	13	2.712	3
Blogs	18	26	19	17	13	2.80	4
Magazines	20	15	28	19	22	3.08	5
Newspapers	10	16	15	12	29	3.41	6
facebook updates	30	32	44	13	7	2.48	2
Wattpad	44	36	45	98	105	3.56	7

Table 2 shows that most of the respondents prefer reading printed books to e-books. Apart from the obvious reasons that textbooks are in printed form and therefore, may be accessed through public and school libraries, many places in the Philippines do not have efficient wifi-connection are more often than not, students are solely dependent on their textbooks to respond to their assigned school-related tasks. It is therefore, not surprising to know that students will prefer printed books, which can be accessed for free and will provide additional knowledge to students. Facebook comes second among the preferred reading materials. Apart from the entertainment that it provides to users, Facebook may be a source of knowledge from news, to informative articles which users of varied ages and interests may benefit from.

Results also showed that during the pandemic, learners have become less interested in reading magazines and newspapers which are more likely available for reading in the classroom or in school libraries. About 40 percent of the respondents admitted they are not interested in news whether they are on TV or online or in print. Besides, not many homes nowadays subscribe to printed magazines and newspapers because they are more expensive to acquire. Adults normally watch news from TV and update themselves of local and world events online. It has been observed that the younger generation do not share the same interest for reading as adults do. When there are opportunities to access online sources, students would rather use them for facebook such as updating posts and reacting to posts. This finding is similar to Utami and Nor's (2021) finding only 6.3% of their respondents rely mainly on reading offline sources.

Table 3: Factors Affecting Learners' Choice of Materials for Supplemental Reading

Factors Affecting Learners' Choice of Materials for Leisure Reading	FREQUENCY			Weighted Mean	Rank
	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3		
1. I choose what I read	44	58	63	2.12	4
2. I read what my friends recommend	52	33	35	1.86	2
3. I read what my family recommends	39	49	53	2.10	3
4. I read materials which are prescribed by my teacher	65	60	49	1.91	1

Table 3 shows the factors affecting students' choice of supplemental reading materials. As can be seen, most of the students prefer reading the materials that are prescribed by their teachers, followed by the materials recommended by their friends, then materials recommended by their families, and the materials they personally chose, respectively.

These show the greater role of teachers in recommending reading materials to their learners. It was observed that in some schools where the respondents are located, their language teachers provide a list or additional reading materials they could use or read for better comprehension of the lesson, particularly those who are under Modular Distance Learning where teachers cannot really provide additional input to what is written in the modules.

This emphasizes the significant role of teachers in recommending to learners a list of reading materials that they should read, even if these materials are not directly related to classroom lessons. Interviews with the same learners yield that that 31% of the students borrow books from friends, 27 percent borrow books from the school library, and 22% use books that were bought by their parents, while the remaining 13 and 8 percent of the students buy books from the online or local store and receive them as gifts, respectively.

This reveals that while the impact of teachers is very significant on students' choice of reading materials, during the pandemic, it is actually the books borrowed from peers or friends, that students were reading during the pandemic. This brings us to the reality that when the world was struggling financially, students from developing countries like the Philippines were not thinking of buying books online because many of them could not afford to do so.

This implies that recommending materials for reading seemed not enough, rather, sharing of resources for free among members of an academic community seemed the more ideal, although admittedly, sharing physical resources became very challenging during the time when people were observing a very stringent health protocol.

3.2 Learners' Reading Habit

This section discusses the findings on students' reading habit. Reading habit refers to (a/ number of days allotted in reading and the number of hours spent in reading on a daily or weekly basis.

Table 4: Number of Days Allotted by Students in Reading

	Frequency	Percentage
Everyday	110	55%
Twice a week	29	14.50%
Once a week	41	20.50%
Twice a month	5	2.50%
Once a month	15	7.50%
Not at all	0	0%

Table 4 shows the frequency of reading among the respondents. Fifty five percent (55%) of the respondents maintained that they read every day, while a barely 15 percent reported reading twice a week and about 21 percent do supplemental reading once a week. Although a little more than half of the students do read every day, the fact that more than forty percent read very occasionally implies that a good number of students do not have a regular reading habit during the pandemic. This result coincides with the finding of Jahan, N., et al., (2021), who concluded that there was a serious setback in the reading habits of the learners during the pandemic. Certainly, the amount of time spent on reading determines to a good extent the students' reading proficiency given that they are expected to be reading at home during distance learning since reading supplemental notes or materials for their lesson is necessary.

Table 5: Time Spent in Supplemental Reading on a Daily Basis

Time Spent in Supplementary Reading	Frequency	Percentage
30 minutes everyday	83	41.5%
1 hour	55	27.5%
1 hour and 30 minutes	26	13%
2 hours	21	10.5%
3 – 5 hours	15	7.5%
None, I hardly read at all	0	0

Table 5 shows the time spent by the students reading supplementary materials. As can be seen, barely 42 percent of the students read for only 30 minutes a day, followed by about 28 percent who reported to read for one hour a day, then about 24 percent who reported reading between one hour and thirty minutes to 2 hours a day. Given that the suggested average time for reading to make accelerated reading gains is 15 minutes per day, these data give an impression that the students are making good reading habit at home. However, since data on Table 3 shows that only 55 percent of the students reported to be reading every day, means about 45 percent of the respondents who reported that they spend 30 minutes to 3 or 5 hours a day in reading may be exaggerating their response since 45 percent of the same students reported to be reading only between twice a week, once a week to once or twice a month only which means they do not have a regular reading habit. This finding coincides with Ponton et al. (2019) who found that only 5.3% of their respondents are reading for pleasure and 4.82% read because it is their hobby, while students read only because they are required to read for classwork purposes.

3.3 Challenges Affecting Students' Engagement in Reading and their Engagement in Different Platforms

This section presents data from students' survey of factors that could hinder them from reading. During the lockdown from 2020 to mid-2022, the Philippine schools have implemented distance learning. Students therefore from elementary to high school were dependent on the modules distributed by teachers, for learning. These modules, were read and answered by students with the aid of their parent/parents or other relatives who serve as their tutors in the absence of the teachers.

3.3.1 Challenges Affecting Students' Engagement in Reading

Table 6: Challenges Affecting Students' Engagement in Reading

Factors Affecting Students' Engagement in Reading	FREQUENCY					Weighted Mean	Rank
	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5		
1. Noise in our household.	28	23	58	48	35	3.20	2
2. I am a working student.	18	12	9	17	16	3.01	5
3. Household chores.	39	65	38	31	43	2.88	1
4. Lack of food and security.	15	8	12	19	29	3.47	6
5. I allocate more time for vlogging.	11	16	5	7	9	1.73	7
6. I spend more time in playing online games.	9	45	49	23	46	3.30	3
7. I spend more time watching TV series or movies.	20	32	29	55	22	3.17	4

Table 6 shows the results of the learners' feedback on the possible factors that affect their reading engagement. From the data, it can be seen that the main factors which affect students' reading engagement are the following: household chores, followed by noise in the household or noise in the neighborhood, then the temptation to play online games and the tendency to spend more time in watching TV series or movies. These results are also evident in Rotas & Cahapay's (2020) study where they revealed that during remote learning, learners face challenges in conflict with home responsibilities and a poor learning environment. In this matter, cases in remote learning can be attributed also to factors that affect the reading interests and habits of the learners; learners cannot focus on learning when they don't have a healthy environment and a hassle-free time. Another greater factor seen in the results is the influence of playing online games and watching movies and series; as learners become more engaged in playing online games and watching movies, their time spent reading reduces the time that is supposed to be spent in reading, thus affecting eventually their attitude toward reading, their reading habit and in the long run, may affect their reading proficiency. As the learners become more digital, their love for reading has become more critical as well. While the other factors get lower weight as a contributing factor that affects the learners' reading interests, financial-related problems are still seen as a problem that influences the learners' attention and time spent in reading.

3.4.2 Level of Students' Engagement in the Following Platforms

Table 7: Level of Students' Engagement in the Following Platforms

Activities	Everyday	Once a week	Twice a week	Once a month	Never	Weighted Mean	Rank
Playing mobile games (offline)	48	29	30	45	38	2.87	6
Playing internet games (online)	84	60	43	4	9	4.03	3
Texting	119	23	21	17	20	4.02	4
Visiting websites/blogs	53	48	43	25	31	3.34	5
Facebooking	147	24	18	11	0	4.5	1
Tiktoking	130	28	30	12	0	4.28	2

Table 7 shows the level of students' engagement on different social media platforms. Results revealed that there is a high level of learners' engagement in using Facebook and TikTok. These two social media platforms are two of the most well-known social media platforms used by teenagers in their leisure time. It is followed by the learners' engagement in playing online games, texting, visiting blogs, and playing offline games, respectively. Although learners have claimed that they have enough time for reading, they still have a high level of engagement in social media platforms which really take them away from reading for intellectual enrichment. In a study examining cross-national gender differences in reading achievement and video gaming and whether video gaming explains gender differences in reading achievement and differences in performance between paper-based and computer-based reading, Borgonovi (2016) found that frequent engagement with collaborative online games is generally associated with a steep reduction in reading achievement, particularly in the paper-based test and particularly among low-achieving students. Excessive gaming may hinder academic achievement, but moderate gaming can promote positive student outcomes.

Table 8: Students' Self -Assessment of One's Reading Ability

Perception of One's Reading Ability	Frequency	Percentage
1. I consider myself a good reader	53	26.5%
2. I consider myself an average reader	95	47.5%
3. I consider myself a poor reader	52	26%

Table 8 shows that most of the respondents perceive themselves as average readers while 53 believe that they are good readers and the 52 believe that they still have a lot to improve. Since the result of the study reveals that not everyone really reads at home, it is considerable that they have just perceptions to themselves

Table 9: Learners' Perception of their Reading Habit

Perception of Their Own Reading Habit	Frequency	Percentage
1. I have a good reading habit	115	57.5
2. I have a poor reading habit	85	42.5

Table 9 shows that most of the learners (57.5%) believe that they have a good reading habit while the 42.5% of the respondents believe that they have a poor reading habit. The factor is definitely rooted on the learners' average time spent in reading where they have varied amount of time although most of them stated that they read every day.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the present study has the following conclusions. It was found that the most disturbing factor in learners' reading interests is the chores in their household. Since learners have to stay at home, different household chores are also given to them while learning. Instead of spending their time reading, they still have household chores to consider during their free time. In addition, the fact that the learners also consider the noise in their household and neighborhood, as a factor that hinders their reading engagement showing that during the pandemic, most of the learners do not have a healthy and conducive learning environment. Aside from these factors that hinder their reading interest, the researchers also concluded that during the pandemic, learners have a high level of engagement on different social media platforms, especially on Facebook. However, social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, blogs, and texting can still help them engage in reading activities, whereas other platforms, such as online and offline gaming, can still consume much of their time rather than reading. Finally, amid the speculations on the decreasing English proficiency of the learners, the present study concludes that if the learners have good reading habits and sustained reading interests, they can still improve their English proficiency, especially in reading. As revealed in the study, most of the learners perceive themselves to have good reading habits at home, which prompted them to assume themselves as good readers. These learners need to have proper time management, reading resources, and conducive learning environment

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered for consideration:

To the academe

Firstly, the academe should initiate the administration of English proficiency exam for learners to determine those who need help. A reading program for struggling learners may be developed institutionally by DepEd which may be used by schools.

Secondly, evaluation research may be conducted by schools with guidance from DepEd to determine whether intervention efforts by schools to help learners with reading problems have been effective.

Thirdly, with the Parent-Teacher Organization, the academe may establish a closer relationship with learners' parents to get their support in ensuring the following:

- That parents will manage the assignment of household chores to children in such a way that children are given ample time to read
- That parents will ensure that unnecessary noise is avoided at home and in the

neighborhood

- That books will be made available at home which are suited to children's age and interests
- That parents may be trained to do storytelling to their children especially those whose children are still between kinder to Grade III so they can encourage their children's passion for literature which eventually help increase their reading ability

Fourthly, teachers in all subject areas should model the moderate use of social media for their students to emulate. Learners do not need to be prohibited from engaging on social media platforms at all times, rather, with guidance from their teachers, students will acquire the attitude of responsible use of their gadgets and social media engagement.

Finally, language teachers may provide reading resources or a list of reading resources that are appropriate for the students' age since their recommendation is perceived as important by the learners. In addition, teachers should strengthen home visitation for those students who are struggling with their reading resources and also monitor the learners who don't have strong connectivity and those who have a not-so-conducive learning environment at home.

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