

**English vocabulary proficiency, reading comprehension, and academic understanding
among Grade 4 learners in Sta. Ana, Cagayan, Philippines**

Kenima Jasmin I. Uddipa*

Northeastern College, Santiago City, Isabela, Philippines

ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension is essential to elementary learning because vocabulary knowledge supports learners in understanding texts and academic content. However, limited evidence is available on how English vocabulary limitations relate to reading comprehension and academic understanding among Grade 4 learners in Sta. Ana, Cagayan. This study examined English vocabulary proficiency, reading comprehension, and academic understanding in English, Science, and Mathematics, as well as lexical gaps and socioeconomic factors affecting vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. Using a descriptive-correlational design, data were gathered from Grade 4 teachers through a structured questionnaire, supported by interviews and documentary analysis. Findings showed high English vocabulary proficiency, very good reading comprehension, and high academic understanding across the three subject areas. Lexical gaps were moderately serious, while socioeconomic factors had a very strong influence. Pearson correlation showed a significant positive relationship between vocabulary proficiency and reading comprehension. The findings support integrating systematic vocabulary development into reading instruction effectively.

Keywords: English vocabulary, reading comprehension, academic understanding, lexical gaps, Grade 4 learners.

Date Submitted: July 8, 2026

Date Accepted: July 13, 2026

Date Published: August 6, 2026

INTRODUCTION

The ability to comprehend written texts is a cornerstone of successful learning during the elementary years. It influences not only learners' immediate academic performance but also their ability to acquire more complex knowledge and skills as they progress through their education. Reading comprehension involves more than simply decoding words; it requires learners to understand, connect, and interpret information presented in a text. One of the essential foundations of this process is vocabulary knowledge. Learners who have limited vocabulary may experience difficulty constructing meaning from what they read, which can eventually affect their performance in various academic areas (Bejos, 2009). Similarly, Brooks et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of vocabulary knowledge in the reading comprehension of learners who use English as an additional language.

*Corresponding author

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.69651/PIJHSS05031432>

Recommended citation:

Uddipa, K. J. I. (2026). English vocabulary proficiency, reading comprehension, and academic understanding among Grade 4 learners in Sta. Ana, Cagayan, Philippines. *Pantao (International Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences)* 5 (3), 2852-2863. <http://doi.org/10.69651/PIJHSS05031432>

According to Mullis et al. (2017), the results of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) revealed considerable differences in Grade 4 learners' reading performance across countries. These differences are particularly relevant in educational contexts where English is not the learners' first language and where opportunities for exposure to academic English may be limited. Stoffelsma (2019) likewise noted that learners in contexts where English is not commonly spoken at home may encounter difficulties in acquiring the vocabulary necessary for effective reading comprehension. Such findings demonstrate that vocabulary development remains a significant concern in multilingual educational settings.

The challenge becomes particularly important in Grade 4 because learners at this stage begin to encounter increasingly complex academic texts and concepts. They are expected to use language not only in English but also in subjects such as Science and Mathematics, where specialized vocabulary is necessary for understanding instructions, explanations, and problems. Malebese et al. (2019) explained that learners who use English as a second language may experience difficulties when they are required to participate in classroom activities using a language that is different from the one commonly used in their homes. Consequently, the transition to more demanding academic language may intensify existing linguistic difficulties. Elston et al. (2022) further emphasized the importance of appropriate reading comprehension instruction for learners who are developing proficiency in English as a second language.

The relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension has been established in studies involving both first- and second-language learners. Zhang and Anual (2008) found that vocabulary knowledge plays an important role in reading comprehension. In the words of Wawire and Zuilkowski (2020), vocabulary and decoding skills are important components of reading comprehension across different linguistic contexts. Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, learners may find it difficult to understand increasingly complex texts, connect ideas, and construct meaning. Consequently, vocabulary limitations may affect not only reading fluency but also learners' ability to engage in higher-order academic tasks.

Vocabulary knowledge is likewise important in understanding content-area subjects. As explained by Moody et al. (2018), vocabulary instruction is an important component of effective language and literacy development because learners need to understand the meanings and uses of words in order to comprehend academic content. In Mathematics, for example, difficulty in understanding the language of a problem may interfere with a learner's ability to identify the information required to arrive at a solution. Abedi and Lord (2001) demonstrated that the language used in mathematics assessments can influence learners' performance, particularly when the linguistic demands of the test interfere with their understanding of the mathematical task. Thus, vocabulary limitations should not be viewed solely as a language concern; they may also have implications for learners' academic understanding across subject areas.

The development of vocabulary is also influenced by learners' social and educational environments. Children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds may have fewer opportunities to access print materials and other language-rich resources. Meirim et al. (2010) highlighted the importance of language development in the acquisition of academic language among learners who use English as an additional language. In multilingual settings, the difference between the language used at home and the language required in school may further contribute to difficulties in acquiring academic vocabulary. Hwang et al. (2019) likewise demonstrated the predictive importance of vocabulary knowledge in the development of English language and literacy skills among English learners. These findings suggest that vocabulary development is shaped not only by individual learner characteristics but also by the linguistic and educational environment in which learning takes place.

Against this background, there is a need to examine English vocabulary limitations within specific local contexts. Although previous studies have established the relationship

between vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, and academic learning, learners' experiences may differ according to their linguistic, cultural, educational, and socioeconomic circumstances. Yu-zhen et al. (2025), in their systematic review of vocabulary instruction for English learners, emphasized the continuing importance of evidence-based approaches to vocabulary development. In the Philippine context, Escobal et al. (2025) examined the relationship between English language proficiency and academic performance, while Lubguban and Sedillo (2024) investigated the relationship between vocabulary and reading among students. These studies provide support for examining language proficiency and vocabulary within particular educational settings rather than relying solely on findings from other contexts.

In the context of Sta. Ana, Cagayan, understanding the vocabulary limitations of Grade 4 learners is particularly important because English is used in formal academic learning and learners are expected to comprehend increasingly complex instructional materials. Difficulties in understanding English vocabulary may affect their ability to comprehend texts and may consequently influence their understanding of academic content. The present study therefore focuses on the impact of English vocabulary limitations on the comprehension and academic understanding of Grade 4 learners in elementary schools in Sta. Ana, Cagayan.

Specifically, the study seeks to determine the level of English vocabulary proficiency and reading comprehension of Grade 4 learners, examine their academic understanding in English, Science, and Mathematics, identify lexical gaps perceived by their teachers, and determine the influence of socioeconomic factors on vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. Furthermore, the study examines whether a significant relationship exists between English vocabulary proficiency and reading comprehension. The findings may provide a basis for developing appropriate instructional strategies and interventions that can strengthen vocabulary development and improve learners' comprehension and academic understanding.

The present study is anchored on established theories and models of language, literacy, and cognitive development that explain the relationship among vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, and academic learning. These include Schema Theory, the Lexical Quality Hypothesis, Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence and Threshold Hypotheses, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, and the Simple View of Reading. Taken together, these perspectives provide a theoretical basis for examining how limitations in English vocabulary may affect Grade 4 learners' ability to comprehend texts and understand academic content.

Schema Theory

Schema Theory explains reading comprehension as an interactive process in which readers use their existing knowledge to interpret information presented in a text. Anderson and Pearson (1984) proposed that comprehension involves the interaction between the reader's prior knowledge and the information contained in the text. Vocabulary knowledge is important in this process because learners need to recognize and understand words before they can effectively connect new information with existing knowledge.

As explained by Carrell and Eisterhold (1983), schema theory provides an important basis for understanding second-language reading because comprehension depends partly on the learner's ability to activate relevant background knowledge. When Grade 4 learners encounter unfamiliar English vocabulary, they may have difficulty activating the appropriate schemas needed to understand a text. In this study, therefore, limited English vocabulary is viewed as a possible barrier to the effective construction and integration of meaning.

Lexical Quality Hypothesis

The Lexical Quality Hypothesis provides another important explanation of the relationship between vocabulary and reading comprehension. Perfetti and Hart (2002) argued that the quality of lexical representations influences the efficiency with which readers process written language. High-quality lexical knowledge involves well-specified representations of a word's form and meaning and allows readers to recognize and process words more efficiently.

In the context of the present study, learners with limited or shallow vocabulary knowledge may recognize words without fully understanding their meanings or uses. This may make it difficult for them to integrate information across sentences and paragraphs. The hypothesis therefore helps explain why vocabulary limitations may affect not only general reading comprehension but also the understanding of content-area texts in English, Science, and Mathematics.

Linguistic Interdependence and Threshold Hypotheses

Cummins' (2000) Linguistic Interdependence and Threshold Hypotheses explain the relationship between first-language and second-language development. The Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis proposes that skills acquired in one language can contribute to the development of another language. However, this transfer is influenced by the level of proficiency attained in the second language.

According to Cummins (2000), learners need to attain an adequate level of second-language competence to benefit fully from the transfer of cognitive and linguistic skills. Applied to the present study, insufficient English vocabulary may prevent Grade 4 learners from effectively applying existing linguistic and cognitive resources when dealing with English academic texts. Vocabulary limitations may therefore restrict their ability to understand classroom instructions, reading materials, and content-area concepts presented in English.

Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development

Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory emphasizes the role of social interaction and language in cognitive development. Learning takes place through interaction with teachers, peers, and other members of the learner's social environment. Language serves as an important tool through which learners communicate, construct meaning, and develop higher-order thinking.

In the words of Vygotsky (1978), cognitive development is closely connected with socially mediated learning. From this perspective, vocabulary is not merely a collection of words that learners memorize; it is a linguistic resource that allows them to participate in classroom discussions, understand teacher explanations, collaborate with peers, and engage in learning activities. Learners with limited English vocabulary may therefore have fewer opportunities to participate effectively in classroom discourse and may experience difficulty benefiting from teacher scaffolding and peer interaction.

Simple View of Reading

The Simple View of Reading, proposed by Gough and Tunmer (1986), conceptualizes reading comprehension as the product of two major components: decoding and linguistic comprehension. Although learners may be able to decode written words, successful reading requires adequate linguistic comprehension.

Vocabulary knowledge is an important component of linguistic comprehension. Thus, learners who can pronounce or decode English words but do not understand their meanings may still experience difficulty comprehending a text. The Simple View of Reading consequently supports the assumption underlying the present study that vocabulary limitations may contribute to difficulties in reading comprehension among Grade 4 learners.

Taken collectively, these theories provide a coherent explanation of how English vocabulary knowledge may influence reading comprehension and academic understanding. Schema Theory highlights the role of prior knowledge and meaning construction; the Lexical Quality Hypothesis emphasizes the depth and precision of word knowledge; Cummins' hypotheses explain the relationship between language development and academic learning; Sociocultural Theory emphasizes the role of language and social interaction; and the Simple View of Reading explains the contribution of linguistic comprehension to successful reading. These theoretical perspectives therefore provide the foundation for examining English vocabulary limitations among Grade 4 learners in Sta. Ana, Cagayan.

Statement of the problem

This study aimed to assess the impact of English vocabulary limitations on the comprehension and academic understanding of Grade 4 learners in public elementary schools in Sta. Ana, Cagayan, during the school year 2025–2026.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the teacher respondents in terms of age, gender, civil status, highest educational attainment, present position, latest performance rating, length of teaching experience, and level of in-service training attended?
2. What is the level of English vocabulary proficiency of Grade 4 learners as assessed by their teachers?
3. What is the level of reading comprehension of Grade 4 learners as assessed by their teachers?
4. What is the level of academic understanding of Grade 4 learners in English, Science, and Mathematics?
5. What is the extent of the lexical gaps identified by Grade 4 teachers among their learners?
6. What is the influence of socioeconomic factors on the vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension of Grade 4 learners?
7. Is there a significant relationship between the English vocabulary proficiency and reading comprehension of Grade 4 learners?

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to investigate the impact of English vocabulary limitations on the reading comprehension and academic understanding of Grade 4 pupils in English, Science, and Mathematics. It will also examine the lexical gaps identified by teachers and the influence of socioeconomic factors on learners' vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. The descriptive-correlational design is appropriate because it enables the researcher to describe existing conditions and determine relationships among naturally occurring variables without manipulating them. According to McBurney and White (2009), descriptive-correlational research is appropriate for describing existing conditions and examining relationships among variables. Similarly, Hassan (2024)

explained that correlational research is commonly used in educational studies to determine the strength and direction of relationships between variables. Best and Kahn (2006) further noted that descriptive-correlational research is useful for identifying trends and examining behaviors within educational populations. In the present study, the design will allow the researcher to describe the English vocabulary proficiency, reading comprehension, and academic understanding of Grade 4 learners and determine whether significant relationships exist among the variables under investigation.

The study will be conducted in all public elementary schools in Sta. Ana, Cagayan. Sta. Ana is a first-class municipality located at the northeastern tip of Cagayan Province. The municipality has a historical background involving early settlers, including indigenous groups, woodcutters, fishermen, and settlers from neighboring areas and the Ilocos Region. It officially became a municipality in 1949 through Executive Order No. 289 signed by President Elpidio Quirino, separating it from Gonzaga. The municipality is characterized by its coastal location, rivers, cultural heritage, and natural resources. The Palawig River served as an important route for early settlers and remains a notable geographical feature of the municipality. This locality provides the setting in which the participating Grade 4 teachers and learners are situated and where the variables of the study will be examined.

The respondents of the study will consist of exactly 19 Grade 4 teachers from the public elementary schools in Sta. Ana, Cagayan. Total enumeration sampling will be employed, whereby all identified Grade 4 teachers in the covered public elementary schools will be included in the study. The original distribution identifies one Grade 4 teacher from each of the 19 participating schools, resulting in a total of 19 teacher-respondents. The participating schools are Apolagan Elementary School, Casagan Elementary School, Casambalangan Elementary School, Diora-Zinungan Elementary School, Dungeg Elementary School, Kapanikian Elementary School, Marede Elementary School, Palaui Elementary School, Palawig Elementary School, Pananacpan Elementary School, Pasmakanan Elementary School, Patunungan Elementary School, Racat Elementary School, Rapuli Elementary School, San Vicente Elementary School, Sta. Ana Central School, Sta. Clara Elementary School, Tangatan Elementary School, and Visitacion Elementary School. The Grade 4 teachers will serve as the primary sources of information concerning their learners' English vocabulary proficiency, reading comprehension, academic understanding, lexical gaps, and socioeconomic factors that may affect vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension.

The primary instrument for data collection will be a structured questionnaire developed from relevant professional books, periodicals, theses, dissertations, and other related materials. The questionnaire will cover the profile of the teacher-respondents, the level of English vocabulary proficiency of Grade 4 pupils, the level of reading comprehension of Grade 4 pupils, the level of academic understanding of Grade 4 learners in English, Science, and Mathematics, the extent of lexical gaps identified by Grade 4 teachers, and the extent of the influence of socioeconomic factors on vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension.

The questionnaire will undergo a tryout with selected Grade 4 teachers from a neighboring municipality. The participants in the tryout will be requested to complete the questionnaire and provide suggestions for its improvement. The draft questionnaire will also be presented to the research adviser and the Dean of the Graduate School for further comments and recommendations. The suggestions obtained from the pretesting and academic review will be incorporated into the final version of the questionnaire before its reproduction and administration.

To supplement the questionnaire, an unstructured interview will be conducted with the respondents when clarification of vague or incomplete responses is necessary. The interviews will be conducted during the retrieval of the questionnaires to clarify and cross-check the information provided by the respondents. Documentary analysis will likewise be employed to

verify and supplement the information obtained through the questionnaire. Relevant official school records, documents, and inventories will be examined to ensure the accuracy of the data gathered.

Before the actual data collection, the researcher will secure the necessary permission from the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent through the appropriate channels. Permission will likewise be sought from the concerned District Supervisor to conduct the study in the identified public elementary schools. Following approval, the questionnaire will be reviewed and validated, taking into consideration the recommendations of the research adviser. The instrument will then be revised and reproduced for administration. The researcher will personally distribute and retrieve the questionnaires from the 19 Grade 4 teacher-respondents. During the retrieval of the questionnaires, vague responses will be clarified through informal or unstructured interviews, while relevant official school documents will be examined to verify the information gathered. After collection, the responses will be organized, tallied, tabulated, and prepared for statistical analysis and interpretation.

The data gathered will be analyzed using frequency and percentage, weighted mean, and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (Pearson's r). Frequency and percentage will be used to describe the profile of the 19 teacher-respondents in terms of age, gender, civil status, highest educational attainment, present position, latest performance rating, length of teaching experience, and level of in-service training attended. Weighted mean will be used to determine the level of English vocabulary proficiency, reading comprehension, and academic understanding of the Grade 4 learners, as well as the extent of lexical gaps identified by teachers and the influence of socioeconomic factors on vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. Pearson's r will be used to determine whether a significant relationship exists between English vocabulary proficiency and reading comprehension of Grade 4 learners.

In sum, the methodology will provide a systematic means of describing the English vocabulary proficiency, reading comprehension, academic understanding, lexical gaps, and socioeconomic influences affecting Grade 4 learners in public elementary schools in Sta. Ana, Cagayan. Through the participation of 19 Grade 4 teachers and the use of a structured questionnaire supplemented by interviews and documentary analysis, the study will generate data that can be analyzed through descriptive and correlational statistical procedures. The methodology is therefore aligned to determine the existing conditions affecting learners and to examine the relationship between English vocabulary proficiency and reading comprehension.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study involved 25 Grade 4 teachers from Sta. Ana, Cagayan. Most respondents were relatively young, with 44% aged 26–30 years and 28% aged 31–35 years. The respondents were predominantly female (92%), and 68% were married. In terms of educational attainment, 48% were MAED graduates and another 28% had completed MAED units, indicating that a substantial majority had pursued graduate-level studies. More than half (56%) held the position of Teacher 3, while 72% received an Outstanding performance rating. Although 60% had only 1–5 years of teaching experience, 24% had 11–15 years of service. Their professional development was largely obtained through district- and division-level training. These characteristics suggest that the respondents generally possessed adequate academic preparation and professional exposure to assess their learners' language and academic performance.

The Grade 4 pupils were assessed as having high English vocabulary proficiency, with an overall weighted mean of 3.88. Their strongest areas were constructing grammatically correct sentences and applying vocabulary knowledge across subject areas, both with a

weighted mean of 4.08. However, applying a wide range of vocabulary in writing and identifying multiple meanings of familiar words received the lowest means, both at 3.72. This pattern indicates that although the pupils possessed a generally adequate vocabulary, they experienced greater difficulty when vocabulary use required flexibility, contextual interpretation, and more sophisticated written expression.

Reading comprehension was rated very good, with an overall weighted mean of 3.73. Identifying the main idea was the strongest skill (WM = 3.96), followed by interpreting information from charts, tables, and diagrams (WM = 3.88). The weakest areas were sequencing events (WM = 3.56) and distinguishing fact from opinion and answering higher-order comprehension questions (both WM = 3.60). These findings suggest that the pupils were relatively capable of understanding explicit information but showed comparatively weaker performance when comprehension required organization of information, critical evaluation, and higher-level processing.

The learners' overall academic understanding was high, with an overall weighted mean of 3.46 across English, Science, and Mathematics. Mathematics obtained the highest rating (WM = 3.48), followed by Science (WM = 3.46) and English (WM = 3.45). Despite the generally positive results, several areas reflected only moderate understanding. In English, these included identifying and using parts of speech (WM = 3.16), interpreting literary texts and using transition words (both WM = 3.20), and differentiating sentence types (WM = 3.36). In Science, applying scientific concepts to everyday situations had the lowest rating (WM = 3.16), while in Mathematics, interpreting data from graphs, tables, and charts had the lowest rating (WM = 3.28). These results indicate that the pupils' general academic understanding was satisfactory, but more demanding language-based and application-oriented tasks remained areas for improvement.

Despite the pupils' generally favorable ratings in vocabulary, reading comprehension, and academic understanding, teachers identified moderately serious lexical gaps, with an overall weighted mean of 3.24. The most serious concerns were difficulty in using appropriate vocabulary during oral communication and dependence on translation to understand English words, both with a weighted mean of 3.60. Confusion involving homonyms and words with multiple meanings also emerged as a serious concern (WM = 3.52). These findings are important because they reveal a distinction between having a generally adequate vocabulary and being able to use that vocabulary independently and flexibly. The pupils may recognize and understand many words but still struggle to retrieve and apply appropriate words in authentic communication and unfamiliar contexts.

Socio-economic factors were perceived to have a very strong influence on vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension, producing an overall weighted mean of 4.28. The strongest factor was the opportunity to practice English outside school (WM = 4.48), followed by the availability of books and reading materials at home (WM = 4.40). Exposure to English through television, radio, or online programs and parental education both received 4.36. Access to digital resources, the home environment, family encouragement, and participation in after-school programs also received high ratings. These results indicate that vocabulary development and reading comprehension are not shaped by classroom instruction alone. The linguistic and literacy environment available to children at home and in their communities can substantially influence their opportunities to encounter, practice, and reinforce English.

Most importantly, the Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between English vocabulary proficiency and reading comprehension ($r = .661$, $p < .001$). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. This means that pupils with stronger English vocabulary proficiency tended to demonstrate better reading comprehension. The result provides empirical support for treating vocabulary development as an important component of reading instruction rather than as a separate language skill.

The finding is consistent with Zhang and Anual (2008), who found that vocabulary knowledge was associated with reading comprehension among students learning English. Their study emphasized that insufficient vocabulary can become a major obstacle to understanding written texts. It is also consistent with Wawire and Zuilkowski's research, which found that receptive vocabulary and decoding skills contributed to reading comprehension among multilingual primary-school learners.

Taken together, the findings present a clear picture: the Grade 4 pupils generally performed well in vocabulary, reading comprehension, and academic understanding, but important lexical weaknesses remain, particularly in oral vocabulary use, contextual interpretation, and independent comprehension of unfamiliar words. The significant correlation between vocabulary and reading comprehension further suggests that strengthening vocabulary instruction may contribute to better reading outcomes. At the same time, the very high influence attributed to socio-economic factors indicates that opportunities for reading and English-language exposure at home and in the wider community should complement school-based interventions. The findings therefore support a more contextualized approach to literacy instruction in which vocabulary development, reading comprehension, and learners' home literacy environments are addressed together

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Grade 4 teacher-respondents are generally young, professionally qualified, and high-performing educators. Most have graduate-level educational preparation and relevant professional experience. Their background provides a suitable foundation for addressing the language and academic needs of their learners. Schools may continue to support teachers through relevant in-service training, particularly in vocabulary instruction, reading comprehension, and content-area literacy.

The Grade 4 pupils demonstrate a high level of English vocabulary proficiency. They are generally able to understand and use English words in oral and written activities, apply context clues, use synonyms and antonyms, construct grammatically correct sentences, and apply vocabulary across subject areas. Some difficulties, however, remain in using a wider range of vocabulary and understanding words with multiple meanings. Teachers may provide more meaningful speaking and writing activities that allow pupils to use vocabulary in varied contexts.

The pupils also demonstrate very good reading comprehension. They can identify main ideas, recall important details, make inferences, interpret visual information, understand cause-and-effect relationships, and relate what they read to real-life situations. However, some areas of deeper comprehension still require attention, particularly sequencing information, distinguishing fact from opinion, and responding to questions that require higher-order thinking. Teachers should continue providing reading activities that develop inferential, analytical, and critical comprehension skills.

In the three major subject areas, the learners demonstrate high academic understanding in English, Science, and Mathematics. They show a generally satisfactory grasp of essential concepts and skills. However, certain areas require further development, particularly the use of language structures in English, the application of scientific concepts, and the interpretation and application of mathematical information. Teachers may strengthen these areas through practical, contextualized, and application-based learning activities.

The study further concludes that the pupils experience moderately serious lexical gaps. The most evident difficulties involve using appropriate vocabulary in oral communication,

relying on translation to understand English words, and becoming confused by homonyms and words with multiple meanings. This suggests that vocabulary knowledge should not be viewed simply in terms of knowing word meanings; pupils also need to develop the ability to use words appropriately and independently. Teachers should provide focused vocabulary activities involving oral interaction, contextual clues, multiple-meaning words, and repeated opportunities to use new vocabulary in meaningful situations.

The findings also show that socio-economic factors have a very strong influence on vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. Access to books and digital resources, opportunities to practice English outside school, exposure to English media, parental support, and a favorable home environment contribute to learners' language and reading development. Teachers and school administrators may strengthen collaboration with parents and guardians by encouraging regular reading at home, improving access to learning materials, and providing opportunities for children to use English beyond the classroom.

Finally, the study concludes that English vocabulary proficiency is significantly related to reading comprehension among Grade 4 pupils. This finding indicates that learners with stronger vocabulary proficiency tend to demonstrate better reading comprehension. Vocabulary development should therefore be an integral part of reading instruction. Teachers may deliberately teach and reinforce vocabulary before, during, and after reading activities to help learners construct meaning from texts.

Generally, the findings indicate that the Grade 4 pupils have generally favorable language and academic abilities, but their development can still be strengthened by addressing specific lexical difficulties and increasing opportunities to encounter and use English. Future researchers may conduct similar studies with larger groups, other grade levels, and additional subject areas to further examine the role of vocabulary proficiency in reading comprehension and academic learning.

REFERENCES

- Abedi, J., & Lord, C. (2001). The language factor in mathematics tests. *Applied Measurement in Education*, 14(3), 219–234. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15324818AME1403_2
- Anderson, R. C., & Pearson, P. D. (1984). A schema-theoretic view of basic processes in reading comprehension. In P. D. Pearson (Ed.), *Handbook of reading research* (pp. 255–291). Longman.
- Bejos, K. (2009). Expository text: Reading comprehension, bilingualism, and instructional strategies. *Perspectives on Communication Disorders and Sciences in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Populations*, 16(2), 45. <https://doi.org/10.1044/cds16.2.45>
- Brooks, G., Clenton, J., & Fraser, S. (2021). Exploring the importance of vocabulary for English as an additional language learners' reading comprehension. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 11(3), 351–371. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2021.11.3.3>
- Carrell, P. L., & Eisterhold, J. C. (1983). Schema theory and ESL reading pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 17(4), 553–573. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3586613>
- Cummins, J. (2000). Language, power, and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire. *Multilingual Matters*.

- Elston, A., Tiba, C., & Condry, J. (2022). The role of explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies to an English as a second language learner. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v12i1.1097>
- Escobal, C., Decano, L. J., Galdones, R., Talplacido, N. J., & Oficiar, J. R. G. (2025). Impact of English language proficiency levels on academic performance among CGCI Grade 12 students. SSRN. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5040407>
- Gough, P. B., & Tunmer, W. E. (1986). Decoding, reading, and reading disability. *Remedial and Special Education*, 7(1), 6–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/074193258600700104>
- Hwang, J. K., Mancilla-Martinez, J., McClain, J. B., Oh, M. H., & Flores, I. (2019). Spanish-speaking English learners' English language and literacy skills: The predictive role of conceptually scored vocabulary. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 41(1), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0142716419000365>
- Lubguban, K. D., & Sedillo, E. (2024). The vocabulary-reading link in Grade 7 students. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 2(7). <https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2024.0188>
- Malebese, M. L., Tlali, M. F., & Mahlomaholo, S. (2019). A socially inclusive teaching strategy for fourth grade English (second) language learners in a South African school. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v9i1.503>
- Meirim, G., Jordaan, H., Kallenbach, A., & Rijhumal, M. S. (2010). Development of semantic processes for academic language in foundation phase EAL learners. *South African Journal of Communication Disorders*, 57(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajcd.v57i1.48>
- Moody, S., Hu, X., Kuo, L.-J., Jouhar, M., Xu, Z., & Lee, S. (2018). Vocabulary instruction: A critical analysis of theories, research, and practice. *Education Sciences*, 8(4), 180. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci8040180>
- Mullis, I. V. S., Martin, M. O., Foy, P., & Hooper, M. (2017). PIRLS 2016 international results in reading. TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, Boston College. <http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/pirls2016/international-results/>
- Perfetti, C. A., & Hart, L. (2002). The lexical quality hypothesis. In L. Verhoeven, C. Elbro, & P. Reitsma (Eds.), *Precursors of functional literacy* (pp. 189–213). John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/swll.11.12per>
- Stoffelsma, L. (2019). English vocabulary exposure in South African township schools: Pitfalls and opportunities. *Reading & Writing*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v10i1.209>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

Wawire, B. A., & Zuilkowski, S. S. (2021). The role of vocabulary and decoding language skills in reading comprehension: A cross-linguistic perspective. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 15(1), 23–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19313152.2020.1753953>

Yu-zhen, Z., Kuo, L., Chen, L., Lin, J.-A., & Shen, H. (2025). Vocabulary instruction for English learners: A systematic review connecting theories, research, and practices. *Education Sciences*, 15(3), 262. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15030262>

Zhang, L. J., & Anual, S. B. (2008). The role of vocabulary in reading comprehension. *RELC Journal*, 39(1), 51–65. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688208091140>