



Article

# Reading Level Distribution in School Districts: Implications for Curriculum Enhancements

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## A B S T R A C T

Reading is a core component of standardized tests and a cornerstone of academic success, prompting schools in the basic education to invest in reading programs for elementary learners. This study investigates the reading levels of Grades 4 to 6 students, analyzes reading performance trends across grade levels and school districts, and proposes curriculum enhancements in school districts in Cebu City, Philippines. Utilizing a cross-sectional study design, reading proficiency data were analyzed using frequency distribution and chi-square tests. Results indicate an overall improvement in reading levels, with a higher percentage of students moving from Frustration to Instructional reading levels, particularly in the North District. However, ongoing difficulties exist in the South District, where many higher-grade students remain at the Frustration level. Gender analysis reveals that females tend to demonstrate higher reading levels compared to males, with the difference becoming more pronounced from Grade 5 onward. Targeted curriculum enhancements like reading intervention programs in Grade 4 may support struggling readers, while teachers may benefit from professional development on culturally responsive reading strategies to improve reading instruction and promote literacy outcomes across district schools.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected world, the quality of education serves as a cornerstone for individual success and national development. Educational assessments, such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), provide valuable insights into the global standing of educational systems, including the Philippines. Despite efforts to improve educational outcomes, the Philippines continues to face challenges, particularly in the domains of reading, science, and math. The country's performance in PISA 2018 and 2022 indicates a five- to six-year lag in learning competencies in the country and revealed that the Philippines is still among the lowest in math, science, and reading in global student assessment (OECD, 2023).

Building upon these discussions, the 2019 Southeast Asia Primary Learning Assessment revealed that merely 10 percent of Grade 5 learners in the Philippines attained minimum proficiency levels. Furthermore, the country's standing in the 2020 English Proficiency Index (EPI) dropped from 20th to 27th place. In June 2022, the World Bank reported staggering statistics: 90 percent of ten-year-old children struggled to comprehend simple texts. These findings spurred extensive online debates and discussions on social media platforms, particularly in light of school closures during the pandemic, which exacerbated the number of students failing to meet minimum reading proficiency standards.

These findings underscore the severity of the comprehension challenge we are currently facing. If left unaddressed, learners risk carrying

this deficit into adulthood, hindering their ability to secure employment where English proficiency is often a prerequisite for effective communication and understanding of instructions. Given that many English language learners rely on the language to engage with the global community and workplaces, individuals with low-level reading skills may find themselves increasingly isolated. Gunn (2018) highlights the pivotal role of proficiency in English comprehension in enabling grade school learners to achieve their educational objectives and effectively participate in societal interactions. In reality, instructing students to comprehend various genres is a significant objective during the elementary school period, particularly for students in grades 4 and beyond. At this stage, learners read various materials to expand their knowledge and literary exposure (Gementiza & Alda, 2023). Thus, reading instruction stands out as the pivotal phase in elementary education. Proficient readers exhibit fluency, strategic thinking, and enthusiasm; furthermore, these individuals are equipped for future endeavors and can thrive throughout their educational journey (Slavin et al., 2010). However, research also points out some factors that contribute to students' reading performance. These factors include socioeconomic status, resources, curriculum implementation, teachers' qualifications, parents' educational attainment, and parents' involvement (Bacus & Alda, 2023; Balnig et al., 2024; Howie et al., 2017; Sumabong et al., 2023). Disparity is also observed between the learners from wealthy and poor schools (Spaull, 2017). These factors and the disparities in reading proficiency within and across school districts underscore the need for localized strategies to improve educational outcomes effectively.

Reading proficiency is a multifaceted issue influenced by cognitive processes, social factors, and cultural aspects. Research found a positive relationship among the students' reading habits, study skills, and academic achievement (Abid et al., 2023), and a significant relationship between the students' reading proficiency and academic performance (Kobina, 2018). Considerably, the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) underscores the significance of a nurturing home literacy environment and parental involvement in fostering early reading skills.

Disparities in students' reading proficiency within and across regions have caught the attention

of school leaders, teachers, researchers, and policymakers in the Philippines, and as such, several programs have been launched and implemented. One of these includes the US-funded and multi-year program of DepEd, the Basa Pilipinas (Read Philippines), which aimed to improve the literacy skills of 1 million learners from kindergarten to grade 3. Aside from innovative models, the program aimed to improve reading delivery systems, reform reading instruction, and increase access to quality reading materials. Fully aware of the multitude of struggling readers who lag behind their expected reading comprehension skills, DepEd introduced the Tara, Basa! Program, and the project BASA (Building and Advancing Students' Ability in Reading). Miranda (2019) claimed that the reading classes in Project BASA catered to the needs of the Grade 7 students with Frustration Levels as revealed by their PHIL-IRI results.

Although several theories can explain students' reading readiness and reading performance, reading proficiency in a second language could be explained using the lens of literacy theories—cognitive, social, and socio-cultural. These theories explain how children learn to read, write, and communicate effectively using various means. The cognitive theory focuses on the mental processes involved in reading, including decoding, comprehension, and memory, which can aid teachers in designing more effective curriculum enhancements. In contrast, social theory highlights the impact of socioeconomic status, cultural background, and family environment on students' reading abilities. Addressing these social aspects can help reduce disparities in reading proficiency. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes learning through social interactions and cultural practices, stressing the importance of creating a supportive environment and considering students' backgrounds when designing reading instruction programs. Although various theories explain reading readiness and performance, second language reading proficiency can be framed through cognitive, social, and socio-cultural lenses. Cognitive theory focuses on decoding, comprehension, and memory; social theory considers socioeconomic, cultural, and family influences; and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory emphasizes contextualized learning through interaction. Western research supports adaptive, evidence-based approaches: the 2010 IES practice guide (Shanahan et al., 2010) recommends

structured comprehension strategies; Shanahan and Shanahan (2017) clarify the role of disciplinary literacy as texts become more complex; Connor et al. (2013) report gains from individualized, data-driven instruction; and Hattie (2023) finds sustained benefits from explicit vocabulary and metacognitive teaching. These findings reinforce the study's emphasis on tailoring curriculum enhancements to learner needs.

Furthermore, with over 60% of the world's adolescents not reaching the minimum reading proficiency levels, schools have invested in various programs to address the factors associated with low reading abilities (Lopez & Manzanilla, 2021). With every school's presence of learners who struggle to reach their grade-appropriate reading level, Baye et al. (2019) purported the need for an evidence-based recommendation to curriculum enhancements. In the same vein, Torgesen (2015) suggested implementing evidence-based reading interventions targeting foundational skills and comprehension strategies, while Gallagher and Smith (2021) highlighted the potential benefits of culturally relevant and inclusive curricula to engage diverse learners in reading.

The assessment conducted by the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) on student performance in reading at grades 4, 8, and 12 in both public and private schools across the nation revealed a consistent disparity in reading proficiency among different demographic groups. Beyond demographics, other factors contribute to disparities in reading proficiency, including instructional practices, teacher qualifications, and home literacy environments. Bauer (2022) emphasized the importance of high-quality reading instruction, while Caliskan and Ulas (2022) discussed the significance of school and family partnerships in fostering literacy development, maintaining that parent-involved reading activities had a positive effect on the students' attitudes toward reading, reading motivation, and reading comprehension (Dhokal, 2024; Ho & Lau, 2018; Husin & Rawian, 2025; Yulmiati et al., 2025). Moreover, proficiency in reading is also influenced by several factors, which include grade level (Jones et al., 2016), socio-economic status (Romeo et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2023; Wu, 2019; ), intrinsic motivation (Baharum et al., 2024; Li & Gan, 2022; Miyamoto et al., 2020) duration of school closures (Kennedy & Strietholt, 2023) Additionally, studies

by Mohammad and Hasbi (2021) and Martinez et al. (2020) emphasized the impact of language barriers and limited English proficiency on reading achievement.

According to the comprehensive National Reading Panel (NRP) study, effective reading instruction directly impacts students' comprehension ability and overall literacy levels. The research supports the tenet that different theoretical models of reading—top-down, bottom-up, and meta-cognitive—can have varying impacts on the development of students' reading skills. The report also provides a framework for effective reading instruction. Known as the five blocks of the science of reading, it emphasized the importance of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Understanding these models and frameworks could be used to improve reading instruction. According to Mehra (2024), proficiency in reading requires students' fluency and comprehension, which can be addressed in teacher education and reading institutes using educational technological tools.

This study aims to investigate reading level distribution in school districts to identify specific areas for curriculum enhancement and address the underlying factors contributing to disparities in reading proficiency. Specifically, it addresses the following:

1. What is the current distribution of reading levels across different grade levels within school districts?
2. What are the patterns and trends in reading level distributions, including variations between grade levels, school districts, and sex?
3. What curriculum enhancements may be proposed based on the findings of the study?

By investigating the distribution of reading levels in school districts and their implications for curriculum enhancements, this research aims to contribute valuable insights to the ongoing efforts to improve educational outcomes in the Philippines. Ultimately, this study seeks to inform policymakers, educators, and curriculum developers in their endeavors to create a more equitable and effective educational system that empowers all students to reach their full potential.

## II. METHODS

### *Research Design*

The study utilized a cross-sectional study design, which entails measuring outcomes and exposures among study participants at a single time. The participants were selected based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, independent of their outcome or exposure status. This design is frequently employed for population-based surveys and to evaluate the prevalence of educational outcomes within particular groups, such as students in various grades or districts in the Cebu City Division (Setia, 2016). Given these characteristics, the cross-sectional study design is well-suited for this study's objectives.

### *Research Participants*

The participants in this study are the Grades 4-6 students of the Department of Education (DepEd), Division of Cebu City. Their reading proficiency levels, among other variables, are the focus of the analysis. The secondary data of these students, obtained from the DepEd Division of Cebu City records, allowed the researchers to examine patterns, trends, and relationships among variables across different districts and student populations.

### *Research Instruments*

Given that the data have already been collected and archived by the Department of Education, the primary instrument employed in this study is the data collection form. This form serves as the tool for extracting crucial data pertinent to the research questions. Although the study benefited from the use of official DepEd records, it is acknowledged that reliance on secondary data carries inherent limitations, such as the inconsistencies in reporting across schools or districts, or variations in how assessments were administered. Additionally, since the researchers had no control over the original data collection process, issues such as misclassification or missing information may have affected the accuracy of the dataset. These limitations were recognized and considered in the interpretation of findings, with the understanding that results represent the best available estimates based on existing data sources.

### *Data Analysis*

Before conducting the analysis, the researchers undertook data cleaning and preparation to ensure

the accuracy and integrity of the secondary data. This process involved several steps, including removing duplicates, handling missing values, correcting errors, and restructuring the data using appropriate techniques. Once the data were cleaned, it was analyzed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS version 26. These tools provide a robust platform for various statistical analyses, including descriptive and inferential statistics. In this study, the data were summarized using frequency and percentage distributions. Inferential statistics, such as the chi-square test, were used to identify differences between groups. In this analysis, any test statistic with a p-value less than the conventional threshold of 0.05 was considered significant.

### *Ethical Considerations*

This study upholds the ethical standards under the guidelines reflected in the institution's guidelines, especially in conducting educational research involving minors. Prior to the implementation of the study, ethics clearance was sought. Moreover, the study utilized exclusively anonymized secondary data obtained from the Department of Education (DepEd) Division Office, specifically students' reading scores, with all personally identifiable information removed prior to access. The researchers confirm that the DepEd Division Office conducted data collection in compliance with its established consent procedures and data privacy protocols, particularly those safeguarding the rights and welfare of minors. The study protocol was reviewed and acknowledged by the researchers' institution, and the use of anonymized data was deemed exempt from formal Research Ethics Committee (REC) approval under prevailing ethical standards. Strict measures were observed to ensure data security, including secure storage, access limited to authorized research personnel, and transparent reporting of results only in an aggregated and anonymized form. These ethical safeguards emphasize integrity, respect, and beneficence in the responsible use of educational data.

## III. RESULTS

### **The Reading Level Distributions in Various School Districts**

A detailed analysis of reading proficiency levels among students in the eight north districts and eight south districts, focusing on Grades

4, 5, and 6, is reported in Tables 1-16. The data categorizes students' reading abilities into Independent, Instructional, and Frustration levels, offering a comprehensive view of their literacy development. Statistical comparisons across grade levels within each district reveal significant patterns, providing valuable insight into students' progress and challenges as they advance through the education system.

The distribution of reading proficiency levels among students in North District 1 reveals notable differences across Grade 4, Grade 5, and Grade 6. In Grade 4, a majority of students (53.99%) are at the Frustration level, indicating significant challenges with reading, while only a small percentage (11.88%) are reading independently. As students progress to Grade 5 and Grade 6, the percentage of those at the Independent reading level increases, with Grade 6 showing the highest proportion of students at the Instructional level (43.82%) and a balanced distribution across all levels. The significant test statistic ( $p < 0.001$ ) and a medium Phi coefficient (0.25) suggest that there

is a medium significant association between grade level and reading proficiency, with reading skills generally improving as students advance in grade levels.

Table 2 shows that across all three grade levels in North District 2, a majority of students are at the Frustration reading level, with percentages increasing slightly from Grade 5 (56.96%) to Grade 6 (66.10%). The percentage of students at the Independent reading level remains very low across all grades, with minimal variation. The instructional level is relatively consistent but also shows a decrease from Grade 5 to Grade 6. The test statistic indicates no significant difference in the distribution of reading proficiency across the grade levels ( $p = 0.462$ ), and the Phi coefficient of 0.10 suggests a small association between grade level and reading proficiency.

In North District 3, the distribution of reading proficiency levels varies across the different grade levels. In Grade 4, more than half of the students (54.99%) are at the Frustration level, while the Instructional and Independent levels account for

**Table 1. The Distribution of Reading Levels across Different Grade Levels in North District 1, n = 1548**

Grade Levels	Reading Proficiency Levels		
	Independent	Instructional	Frustration
Grade 4	70 (11.88)	201 (34.13)	318 (53.99)
Grade 5	104 (26.46)	135 (34.35)	154 (39.19)
Grade 6	160 (28.27)	248 (43.82)	158 (27.92)
<b>Test Statistic (P-Value)</b>	99.03 * (<0.001)	<b>Phi (Description)</b>	0.25 (medium)

Note: values are presented in frequency (percentage); \* Significant at 0.05

**Table 2. The Distribution of Reading Levels across Different Grade Levels in North District 2, n = 363**

Grade Levels	Reading Proficiency Levels		
	Independent	Instructional	Frustration
Grade 4	5 (5.75)	31 (35.63)	51 (58.62)
Grade 5	7 (4.43)	61 (38.61)	90 (56.96)
Grade 6	7 (5.93)	33 (27.97)	78 (66.10)
<b>Test Statistic (P-Value)</b>	3.61 (0.462)	<b>Phi (Description)</b>	0.10 (small)

Note: values are presented in frequency (percentage); \* Significant at 0.05

**Table 3. The Distribution of Reading Levels across Different Grade Levels in North District 3, n = 2339**

Grade Levels	Reading Proficiency Levels		
	Independent	Instructional	Frustration
Grade 4	120 (14.44)	254 (30.57)	457 (54.99)
Grade 5	175 (24.82)	248 (35.18)	282 (40.00)
Grade 6	95 (11.83)	324 (40.35)	384 (47.82)
<b>Test Statistic (P-Value)</b>	70.80 * (<0.001)	<b>Phi (Description)</b>	0.17 (small)

Note: values are presented in frequency (percentage); \* Significant at 0.05

30.57% and 14.44% of the students, respectively. As students progress to Grade 5, there is an increase in the proportion of students reading at the Independent level (24.82%) and a corresponding decrease in those at the Frustration level (40.00%). However, in Grade 6, while the Instructional level continues to rise (40.35%), the Independent level drops back to 11.83%, and the Frustration level remains high at 47.82%. The significant test statistic ( $p < 0.001$ ) indicates a meaningful difference in reading proficiency distribution across grade levels, while the Phi coefficient of 0.17 suggests a small but notable association between grade level and reading proficiency.

The reading proficiency levels in North District 4 reveal distinct patterns across the different grade levels. In Grade 4, nearly half of the students (45.07%) are at the Instructional reading level, while 32.04% are at the Frustration level, and 22.89% are reading independently. As students progress to Grade 5, the proportion of students at the Instructional level decreases to 31.35%, with a corresponding increase in the Frustration level

(46.70%) and a slight decrease in the Independent level (21.95%). By Grade 6, the Independent and Instructional levels rise to 24.15% and 41.78%, respectively, while the Frustration level decreases to 34.07%. The test statistic ( $p < 0.001$ ) indicates a significant difference in reading proficiency distribution across the grade levels, and the Phi coefficient of 0.14 suggests a small association between grade level and reading proficiency. This pattern indicates fluctuations in reading proficiency as students progress through the grades, with a notable decrease in Frustration levels by Grade 6.

In North District 5, the distribution of reading proficiency levels shows varied trends across Grade 4, Grade 5, and Grade 6. In Grade 4, the majority of students are at the Instructional reading level (45.12%), followed by Independent (24.71%) and Frustration levels (30.17%). As students move to Grade 5, the percentage of students at the Independent level decreases slightly (20.75%), while those at the Frustration level increase to 39.00%. By Grade 6, there is a notable increase in the percentage of students at the Independent level (29.09%), with a

**Table 4. The Distribution of Reading Levels across Different Grade Levels in North District 4, n = 1849**

Grade Levels	Reading Proficiency Levels		
	Independent	Instructional	Frustration
Grade 4	130 (22.89)	256 (45.07)	182 (32.04)
Grade 5	133 (21.95)	190 (31.35)	283 (46.70)
Grade 6	163 (24.15)	282 (41.78)	230 (34.07)
<b>Test Statistic (P-Value)</b>	<b>36.50 * (&lt;0.001)</b>	<b>Phi (Description)</b>	<b>0.14 (small)</b>

Note: values are presented in frequency (percentage); \* Significant at 0.05

**Table 5. The Distribution of Reading Levels across Different Grade Levels in North District 5, n = 2418**

Grade Levels	Reading Proficiency Levels		
	Independent	Instructional	Frustration
Grade 4	190 (24.71)	347 (45.12)	232 (30.17)
Grade 5	166 (20.75)	322 (40.25)	312 (39.00)
Grade 6	247 (29.09)	337 (39.69)	265 (31.21)
<b>Test Statistic (P-Value)</b>	<b>26.02 * (&lt;0.001)</b>	<b>Phi (Description)</b>	<b>0.10 (small)</b>

Note: values are presented in frequency (percentage); \* Significant at 0.05

**Table 6. The Distribution of Reading Levels across Different Grade Levels in North District 6, n = 1933**

Grade Levels	Reading Proficiency Levels		
	Independent	Instructional	Frustration
Grade 4	106 (18.89)	203 (36.19)	252 (44.92)
Grade 5	147 (22.44)	174 (26.56)	334 (50.99)
Grade 6	173 (24.13)	288 (40.17)	256 (35.70)
<b>Test Statistic (P-Value)</b>	<b>41.83 * (&lt;0.001)</b>	<b>Phi (Description)</b>	<b>0.15 (small)</b>

Note: values are presented in frequency (percentage); \* Significant at 0.05

slight decrease in both the Instructional (39.69%) and Frustration levels (31.21%). The significant test statistic ( $p < 0.001$ ) indicates a meaningful difference in reading proficiency distribution across grade levels, while the Phi coefficient of 0.10 suggests a small association between grade level and reading proficiency. This pattern suggests gradual improvement in reading proficiency as students advance to higher grades, with an increase in the Independent reading level by Grade 6.

The distribution of reading proficiency levels in North District 6 demonstrates varied trends across the different grade levels. In Grade 4, a significant portion of students are at the Frustration level (44.92%), while 36.19% are at the Instructional level, and 18.89% are reading independently. In Grade 5, the Frustration level further increases to 50.99%, with a decrease in the Instructional level (26.56%) and a slight increase in the Independent level (22.44%). By Grade 6, the Independent reading level increases to 24.13%, and the Instructional level rises to 40.17%, while the Frustration level decreases to 35.70%. The significant test statistic ( $p < 0.001$ ) indicates a meaningful difference in reading proficiency distribution across grade levels, and the Phi coefficient of 0.15 suggests a small but notable association between grade level and reading proficiency. This pattern shows that while the Frustration level is highest in Grade 5, there is an improvement in reading proficiency by Grade 6, with more students reaching the Independent and Instructional levels.

In North District 7, the distribution of reading proficiency levels reveals considerable variation across Grade 4, Grade 5, and Grade 6. In Grade 4, a substantial majority of students (64.18%) are at the Frustration reading level, with 23.08% at the Instructional level, and only 12.74% reading independently. By Grade 5, the Frustration level decreases to 50.20%, while the Instructional level slightly increases to 26.80%, and the Independent level rises to 23.00%. In Grade 6, the Instructional level significantly increases to 44.90%, while the Frustration level further decreases to 42.40%, and the Independent level remains relatively low at 12.70%. The significant test statistic ( $p < 0.001$ ) indicates a meaningful difference in reading proficiency distribution across the grade levels, and the Phi coefficient of 0.24 suggests a medium association between grade level and reading proficiency. This pattern highlights a positive shift in reading proficiency as students advance to higher grades, with more students moving from the Frustration level to the Instructional level, particularly by Grade 6.

In North District 8, the distribution of reading proficiency levels shows varied trends across Grade 4, Grade 5, and Grade 6. In Grade 4, more than half of the students (51.04%) are at the Frustration reading level, while 32.29% are at the Instructional level, and 16.67% are reading independently. As students progress to Grade 5, the Frustration level slightly decreases to 49.82%, and the Instructional level drops to 29.65%, while the Independent level

**Table 7. The Distribution of Reading Levels across Different Grade Levels in North District 7, n = 1475**

Grade Levels	Reading Proficiency Levels		
	Independent	Instructional	Frustration
Grade 4	53 (12.74)	96 (23.08)	267 (64.18)
Grade 5	115 (23.00)	134 (26.80)	251 (50.20)
Grade 6	71 (12.70)	251 (44.90)	237 (42.40)
<b>Test Statistic (P-Value)</b>	86.49 * (<0.001)	<b>Phi (Description)</b>	0.24 (medium)

Note: values are presented in frequency (percentage); \* Significant at 0.05

**Table 8. The Distribution of Reading Levels across Different Grade Levels in North District 8, n = 3162**

Grade Levels	Reading Proficiency Levels		
	Independent	Instructional	Frustration
Grade 4	160 (16.67)	310 (32.29)	490 (51.04)
Grade 5	225 (20.53)	325 (29.65)	546 (49.82)
Grade 6	137 (12.39)	269 (24.32)	700 (63.29)
<b>Test Statistic (P-Value)</b>	56.15 * (<0.001)	<b>Phi (Description)</b>	0.13 (small)

Note: values are presented in frequency (percentage); \* Significant at 0.05

increases to 20.53%. However, in Grade 6, the Frustration level spikes to 63.29%, and both the Instructional (24.32%) and Independent (12.39%) levels decline. The significant test statistic ( $p < 0.001$ ) indicates a meaningful difference in reading proficiency distribution across the grade levels, and the Phi coefficient of 0.13 suggests a small but notable association between grade level and reading proficiency. The increase in Frustration levels in Grade 6 suggests that students face greater reading challenges as they advance, particularly in the final year of elementary school. This trend may indicate the need for targeted interventions to support reading proficiency in higher grades.

In South District 1, the distribution of reading proficiency across Grades 4 to 6 shows a noticeable shift in levels. In Grade 4, nearly half of the students (49.85%) are at the Frustration level, with 34.85% at the Instructional level, and 15.30% reading independently. Moving to Grade 5, the percentage of students at the Frustration level increases to 53.45%, while those at the Instructional and Independent levels decrease slightly to 31.97% and 14.59%, respectively. By Grade 6, although the Frustration

level decreases to 43.74%, the Instructional level rises to 42.54%, and the Independent level drops to 13.72%. The significant test statistic ( $p < 0.001$ ) indicates a statistically meaningful difference in reading proficiency across the grade levels. The Phi coefficient of 0.10 suggests a small association between grade level and reading proficiency.

In South District 2, the distribution of reading proficiency across Grades 4 to 6 reveals a significant shift in reading levels as students progress through the grades. In Grade 4, the majority of students (46.04%) are at the Frustration level, with 36.05% at the Instructional level and 17.91% reading independently. By Grade 5, there is a slight improvement, with the Frustration level dropping to 40.88% and the Instructional level rising to 39.55%. The Independent level also increases slightly to 19.57%. However, a stark contrast is observed in Grade 6, where the Frustration level dramatically increases to 64.77%, the Instructional level decreases to 24.56%, and the Independent level drops to 10.68%. This significant change suggests a decline in reading proficiency as students move into Grade 6. The test statistic ( $p < 0.001$ )

**Table 9. The Distribution of Reading Levels across Different Grade Levels in South District 1, n = 3298**

Grade Levels	Reading Proficiency Levels		
	Independent	Instructional	Frustration
Grade 4	151 (15.30)	344 (34.85)	492 (49.85)
Grade 5	167 (14.59)	366 (31.97)	612 (53.45)
Grade 6	160 (13.72)	496 (42.54)	510 (43.74)
<b>Test Statistic (P-Value)</b>	31.09 * (<0.001)	<b>Phi (Description)</b>	0.10 (small)

Note: values are presented in frequency (percentage); \* Significant at 0.05

**Table 10. The Distribution of Reading Levels across Different Grade Levels in South District 2, n = 2744**

Grade Levels	Reading Proficiency Levels		
	Independent	Instructional	Frustration
Grade 4	226 (17.91)	455 (36.05)	581 (46.04)
Grade 5	235 (19.57)	475 (39.55)	491 (40.88)
Grade 6	30 (10.68)	69 (24.56)	182 (64.77)
<b>Test Statistic (P-Value)</b>	52.69 * (<0.001)	<b>Phi (Description)</b>	0.14 (small)

Note: values are presented in frequency (percentage); \* Significant at 0.05

**Table 11. The Distribution of Reading Levels across Different Grade Levels in South District 3, n = 1596**

Grade Levels	Reading Proficiency Levels		
	Independent	Instructional	Frustration
Grade 4	184 (28.53)	194 (30.08)	267 (41.40)
Grade 5	212 (39.63)	150 (28.04)	173 (32.34)
Grade 6	81 (19.47)	194 (46.63)	141 (33.89)
<b>Test Statistic (P-Value)</b>	68.29 * (<0.001)	<b>Phi (Description)</b>	0.21 (medium)

Note: values are presented in frequency (percentage); \* Significant at 0.05

indicates that these differences are statistically significant. The Phi coefficient of 0.14 suggests a small but notable association between grade level and reading proficiency. The sharp increase in the Frustration level in Grade 6 highlights a critical area of concern that may require targeted interventions to support struggling readers.

In South District 3, the distribution of reading levels shows significant changes as students move from Grade 4 to Grade 6. In Grade 4, 41.40% of students are at the Frustration level, with 30.08% at the Instructional level, and 28.53% reading independently. By Grade 5, there is a marked improvement, with 39.63% of students achieving Independent reading proficiency, while the Frustration level drops to 32.34%. However, in Grade 6, the trend shifts, with the Instructional level rising to 46.63%, the Frustration level decreasing slightly to 33.89%, and the Independent level dropping significantly to 19.47%. The test statistic ( $p < 0.001$ ) indicates that the differences in reading proficiency across grade levels are statistically significant. The Phi coefficient of 0.21 suggests a medium association between grade level

and reading proficiency. This pattern highlights the need for additional support in Grade 6 to maintain or improve reading proficiency levels.

In South District 4, there is a concerning trend of increasing levels of frustration as students advance in grade levels. In Grade 4, 58.71% of students fall into the Frustration reading level, which further increases to 65.61% in Grade 5 and reaches 66.77% in Grade 6. Meanwhile, the percentage of students reading at the Independent level is low across all grades, with a slight drop from 16.50% in Grade 4 to around 12% in Grades 5 and 6. The test statistic ( $p < 0.001$ ) confirms that these differences in reading proficiency across grades are statistically significant. The Phi coefficient of 0.10 suggests a small association between grade level and reading proficiency. The data points to an urgent need for targeted interventions, particularly in the upper grades, to reduce the high levels of reading frustration and to support more students in achieving independent reading proficiency.

In South District 5, the distribution of reading proficiency shows significant variation across

**Table 12. The Distribution of Reading Levels across Different Grade Levels in South District 4, n = 3302**

Grade Levels	Reading Proficiency Levels		
	Independent	Instructional	Frustration
Grade 4	179 (16.50)	269 (24.79)	637 (58.71)
Grade 5	120 (12.24)	217 (22.14)	643 (65.61)
Grade 6	152 (12.29)	259 (20.94)	826 (66.77)
<b>Test Statistic (P-Value)</b>	20.08 * (<0.001)	<b>Phi (Description)</b>	0.10 (small)

Note: values are presented in frequency (percentage); \* Significant at 0.05

**Table 13. The Distribution of Reading Levels across Different Grade Levels in South District 5, n = 3893**

Grade Levels	Reading Proficiency Levels		
	Independent	Instructional	Frustration
Grade 4	257 (20.20)	452 (35.53)	563 (44.26)
Grade 5	379 (36.37)	261 (25.05)	402 (38.58)
Grade 6	229 (14.50)	861 (54.53)	489 (30.97)
<b>Test Statistic (P-Value)</b>	318.62 * (<0.001)	<b>Phi (Description)</b>	0.29 (medium)

Note: values are presented in frequency (percentage); \* Significant at 0.05

**Table 14. The Distribution of Reading Levels across Different Grade Levels in South District 6, n = 3259**

Grade Levels	Reading Proficiency Levels		
	Independent	Instructional	Frustration
Grade 4	136 (14.44)	364 (38.64)	442 (46.92)
Grade 5	229 (21.42)	339 (31.71)	501 (46.87)
Grade 6	156 (12.50)	671 (53.77)	421 (33.73)
<b>Test Statistic (P-Value)</b>	132.83 * (<0.001)	<b>Phi (Description)</b>	0.20 (medium)

Note: values are presented in frequency (percentage); \* Significant at 0.05

grade levels. In Grade 4, 44.26% of students are at the Frustration reading level, but this percentage decreases to 38.58% in Grade 5 and further to 30.97% in Grade 6. On the other hand, the percentage of students at the Independent reading level is highest in Grade 5 (36.37%) but drops sharply in Grade 6 (14.50%). The test statistic ( $p < 0.001$ ) indicates that these differences are statistically significant. The Phi coefficient of 0.29 suggests a medium association between grade level and reading proficiency. This data implies a noteworthy shift in reading proficiency patterns as students progress through grades, with a notable challenge in maintaining independent reading levels by Grade 6. This may indicate the need for interventions focusing on sustaining reading proficiency and reducing frustration levels as students advance.

In South District 6, the distribution of reading levels shows notable patterns across grades. The percentage of students at the Frustration level remains relatively high across all grades, with 46.92% in Grade 4 and 46.87% in Grade 5. However, there is a significant improvement in Grade 6, where the Frustration level drops to 33.73%, coinciding with a rise in the Instructional level to 53.77%. The Independent reading level remains low across all grades, with a slight increase in Grade 5 (21.42%) but a drop in Grade 6 (12.50%). The test statistic indicates a significant difference in reading proficiency across grades ( $p < 0.001$ ), and the Phi coefficient of 0.20 suggests a medium association between grade level and reading proficiency.

This indicates a gradual shift from Frustration to Instructional levels as students progress to Grade 6, although the overall Independent reading level remains concerningly low. These findings highlight the need for targeted strategies to support students in achieving higher reading proficiency, particularly focusing on reducing Frustration levels and increasing Independent reading proficiency by Grade 6.

In South District 7, the distribution of reading levels shows a high prevalence of students at the Frustration level across all grades. Specifically, Grade 4 has the highest percentage of students at the Frustration level (71.43%), with only slight decreases in Grades 5 (65.51%) and 6 (67.00%). The percentage of students at the Independent level is notably low across all grades, with a slight increase in Grade 5 (13.12%) but a drop in Grade 6 (8.28%). The Instructional level shows a gradual increase from Grade 4 (17.56%) to Grade 6 (24.72%). The test statistic reveals a significant difference in reading proficiency across grades ( $p < 0.001$ ), and the Phi coefficient of 0.10 indicates a small association between grade level and reading proficiency. This suggests that while there is a slight improvement in Instructional reading levels as students progress, a significant number of students remain at the Frustration level, indicating an urgent need for intervention to enhance reading proficiency, particularly focusing on elevating students from the Frustration level to the Instructional and Independent levels.

**Table 15. The Distribution of Reading Levels across Different Grade Levels in South District 7, n = 2621**

Grade Levels	Reading Proficiency Levels		
	Independent	Instructional	Frustration
Grade 4	94 (11.01)	150 (17.56)	610 (71.43)
Grade 5	113 (13.12)	184 (21.37)	564 (65.51)
Grade 6	75 (8.28)	224 (24.72)	607 (67.00)
<b>Test Statistic (P-Value)</b>	22.70 * (<0.001)	<b>Phi (Description)</b>	0.10 (small)

Note: values are presented in frequency (percentage); \* Significant at 0.05

**Table 16. The Distribution of Reading Levels across Different Grade Levels in South District 8, n = 1877**

Grade Levels	Reading Proficiency Levels		
	Independent	Instructional	Frustration
Grade 4	212 (35.69)	212 (35.69)	170 (28.62)
Grade 5	154 (25.00)	127 (20.62)	335 (54.38)
Grade 6	103 (15.44)	381 (57.12)	183 (27.44)
<b>Test Statistic (P-Value)</b>	243.16 * (<0.001)	<b>Phi (Description)</b>	0.36 (medium)

Note: values are presented in frequency (percentage); \* Significant at 0.05

Table 16 presents the distribution of reading proficiency levels across Grade 4, Grade 5, and Grade 6 students in South District 8, with a total sample size of 1,877 students. The data reveal that in Grade 4, students are evenly split between independent and instructional reading levels, with a notable proportion also in the frustration level. In Grade 5, there is a high percentage of students in the frustration level, indicating significant challenges with reading, while Grades 4 and 6 have more balanced distributions. Grade 6 shows a predominance of students at the instructional level, with fewer at the independent level and a similar proportion in frustration. The test statistic of 243.16 with a p-value less than 0.001 suggests a statistically significant difference in reading proficiency levels across grades. The Phi coefficient of 0.36 indicates a medium effect size, signifying a moderate association between grade level and reading proficiency.

**The Reading Level Distributions across School Districts and Sexes**

The data across Grades 4, 5, and 6 show varying levels of reading proficiency (Independent, Instructional, and Frustration) among male and female students across different school districts,

with notable trends and differences.

Table 17 reveals a significant but small association between gender and reading proficiency at the Independent level ( $p = 0.006$ ,  $\phi = 0.12$ ) among Grade 4 students. However, no significant gender differences were found at the Instructional and Frustration levels, indicating that while gender influences the Independent reading level slightly, it does not substantially impact the other levels across the districts.

For Grade 5 students (as shown in Table 18), the data show statistically significant associations between gender and all three reading proficiency levels (Independent, Instructional, and Frustration), with p-values all below 0.05. Despite these significant findings, the effect sizes are small ( $\phi$  ranging from 0.09 to 0.13), suggesting that while gender differences exist in reading proficiency, they are relatively minor across the school districts.

The analysis for Grade 6 students (as shown in Table 19) also indicates statistically significant associations between gender and reading proficiency levels at all three levels (p-values all below 0.05). The effect sizes remain small ( $\phi$  ranging from 0.08 to 0.11), similar to Grade 5, implying that gender

**Table 17. The Distribution of Reading Levels of Grade 4 Students across School Districts and Sexes**

SDOs	Reading Proficiency					
	Independent		Instructional		Frustration	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
North District 1	29 (41.43)	41 (58.57)	90 (44.78)	111 (55.22)	186 (58.49)	132 (41.51)
North District 2	3 (60.00)	2 (40.00)	16 (51.61)	15 (48.39)	32 (62.75)	19 (37.25)
North District 3	57 (47.50)	63 (52.50)	136 (53.54)	118 (46.46)	268 (58.64)	189 (41.36)
North District 4	73 (56.15)	57 (43.85)	147 (57.42)	109 (42.58)	87 (47.80)	95 (52.20)
North District 5	93 (48.95)	97 (51.05)	186 (53.60)	161 (46.40)	129 (55.60)	103 (44.40)
North District 6	43 (40.57)	63 (59.43)	100 (49.26)	103 (50.74)	131 (51.98)	121 (48.02)
North District 7	23 (43.40)	30 (56.60)	47 (48.96)	49 (51.04)	149 (55.81)	118 (44.19)
North District 8	79 (49.38)	81 (50.63)	161 (51.94)	149 (48.06)	287 (58.57)	203 (41.43)
South District 1	76 (50.33)	75 (49.67)	173 (50.29)	171 (49.71)	293 (59.55)	199 (40.45)
South District 2	75 (33.19)	151 (66.81)	232 (50.99)	223 (49.01)	320 (55.08)	261 (44.92)
South District 3	87 (47.28)	97 (52.72)	110 (56.70)	84 (43.30)	147 (55.06)	120 (44.94)
South District 4	87 (48.60)	92 (51.40)	141 (52.42)	128 (47.58)	376 (59.03)	261 (40.97)
South District 5	112 (43.58)	145 (56.42)	227 (50.22)	225 (49.78)	306 (54.35)	257 (45.65)
South District 6	65 (47.79)	71 (52.21)	179 (49.18)	185 (50.82)	234 (52.94)	208 (47.06)
South District 7	36 (38.30)	58 (61.70)	70 (46.67)	80 (53.33)	336 (55.08)	274 (44.92)
South District 8	111 (52.36)	101 (47.64)	116 (54.72)	96 (45.28)	88 (51.76)	82 (48.24)
<b>Test Statistic (P-Value)</b>	32.42 * (0.006)		14.76 (0.469)		19.92 (0.175)	
<b>Phi (Description)</b>	0.12 (Small)		0.06 (Small)		0.06 (Small)	

Note: values are presented in frequency (percentage); \* Significant at 0.05

**Table 18. The Distribution of Reading Levels of Grade 5 Students across School Districts and Sexes**

SDOs	Reading Proficiency					
	Independent		Instructional		Frustration	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
North District 1	43 (41.35)	61 (58.65)	69 (51.11)	66 (48.89)	88 (57.14)	66 (42.86)
North District 2	4 (57.14)	3 (42.86)	36 (59.02)	25 (40.98)	41 (45.56)	49 (54.44)
North District 3	97 (55.43)	78 (44.57)	138 (55.65)	110 (44.35)	182 (64.54)	100 (35.46)
North District 4	68 (51.13)	65 (48.87)	97 (51.05)	93 (48.95)	156 (55.12)	127 (44.88)
North District 5	89 (53.61)	77 (46.39)	174 (54.04)	148 (45.96)	170 (54.49)	142 (45.51)
North District 6	64 (43.54)	83 (56.46)	91 (52.30)	83 (47.70)	187 (55.99)	147 (44.01)
North District 7	42 (36.52)	73 (63.48)	69 (51.49)	65 (48.51)	158 (62.95)	93 (37.05)
North District 8	97 (43.11)	128 (56.89)	141 (43.38)	184 (56.62)	308 (56.41)	238 (43.59)
South District 1	66 (39.52)	101 (60.48)	181 (49.45)	185 (50.55)	340 (55.56)	272 (44.44)
South District 2	117 (49.79)	118 (50.21)	262 (55.16)	213 (44.84)	275 (56.01)	216 (43.99)
South District 3	66 (31.13)	146 (68.87)	82 (54.67)	68 (45.33)	96 (55.49)	77 (44.51)
South District 4	40 (33.33)	80 (66.67)	100 (46.08)	117 (53.92)	427 (66.41)	216 (33.59)
South District 5	169 (44.59)	210 (55.41)	120 (45.98)	141 (54.02)	206 (51.24)	196 (48.76)
South District 6	101 (44.10)	128 (55.90)	193 (56.93)	146 (43.07)	275 (54.89)	226 (45.11)
South District 7	42 (37.17)	71 (62.83)	75 (40.76)	109 (59.24)	308 (54.61)	256 (45.39)
South District 8	68 (44.16)	86 (55.84)	69 (54.33)	58 (45.67)	185 (55.22)	150 (44.78)
<b>Test Statistic (P-Value)</b>	48.26 * (<0.001)		34.77 * (0.003)		48.57 * (<0.001)	
<b>Phi (Description)</b>	0.13 (Small)		0.10 (Small)		0.09 (Small)	

**Table 19. The Distribution of Reading Levels of Grade 6 Students across School Districts and Sexes**

SDOs	Reading Proficiency					
	Independent		Instructional		Frustration	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
North District 1	74 (46.25)	86 (53.75)	120 (48.39)	128 (51.61)	94 (59.49)	64 (40.51)
North District 2	3 (42.86)	4 (57.14)	15 (45.45)	18 (54.55)	38 (48.72)	40 (51.28)
North District 3	48 (50.53)	47 (49.47)	158 (48.77)	166 (51.23)	215 (55.99)	169 (44.01)
North District 4	98 (60.12)	65 (39.88)	144 (51.06)	138 (48.94)	128 (55.65)	102 (44.35)
North District 5	121 (48.99)	126 (51.01)	166 (49.26)	171 (50.74)	131 (49.43)	134 (50.57)
North District 6	71 (41.04)	102 (58.96)	132 (45.83)	156 (54.17)	168 (65.63)	88 (34.38)
North District 7	30 (42.25)	41 (57.75)	127 (50.60)	124 (49.40)	135 (56.96)	102 (43.04)
North District 8	55 (40.15)	82 (59.85)	122 (45.35)	147 (54.65)	394 (56.29)	306 (43.71)
South District 1	71 (44.38)	89 (55.63)	233 (46.98)	263 (53.02)	278 (54.51)	232 (45.49)
South District 2	11 (36.67)	19 (63.33)	29 (42.03)	40 (57.97)	112 (61.54)	70 (38.46)
South District 3	39 (48.15)	42 (51.85)	102 (52.58)	92 (47.42)	87 (61.70)	54 (38.30)
South District 4	62 (40.79)	90 (59.21)	108 (41.70)	151 (58.30)	461 (55.81)	365 (44.19)
South District 5	103 (44.98)	126 (55.02)	470 (54.59)	391 (45.41)	349 (71.37)	140 (28.63)
South District 6	67 (42.95)	89 (57.05)	325 (48.44)	346 (51.56)	219 (52.02)	202 (47.98)
South District 7	30 (40.00)	45 (60.00)	101 (45.09)	123 (54.91)	345 (56.84)	262 (43.16)
South District 8	38 (36.89)	65 (63.11)	213 (55.91)	168 (44.09)	95 (51.91)	88 (48.09)
<b>Test Statistic (P-Value)</b>	26.55 * (0.033)		31.27 * (0.008)		68.87 * (<0.001)	
<b>Phi (Description)</b>	0.11 (Small)		0.08 (Small)		0.11 (Small)	

differences in reading proficiency are present but not strongly pronounced across the school districts.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The observed increase of learners (in the North district) from Frustration to Instructional level reveals clear progression in their reading proficiency, which is supported by Chall's Fluency and Reading for Learning theory. With the instructional support and scaffolding, learners can advance their reading levels. Studies by Bacus and Alda (2023) support this finding, noting that guided practice and an engaging learning environment can enhance the learners' reading skills. The findings imply that while advancing grade levels contributes to improved reading proficiency, students who are at the Frustration level can benefit from reading interventions. These form part of the support in early reading in Grade 4 and in subsequent grades. In addition, the progression to higher proficiency levels by Grade 6 is supported by Rasinski's fluency studies, where continuous practice and exposure to more complex texts led to students' improved reading abilities. Such data trends underscore the value of a structured literacy curriculum that accommodates learning needs in upper elementary levels.

The consistent decrease in the Independent reading level across grades and the increase in the Instructional and Frustration levels, particularly in Grade 5, highlight potential challenges in reading development as students progress through school, necessitating interventions to support students at the higher grade levels. The data from the South District revealed a complex pattern of the students' reading abilities as they progress through grades 4 to 6. The majority of the districts showed considerable challenges in reading with students at the Frustration level, yet a significant improvement was noted as they moved to higher grades. The overall progress is uneven, with some districts showing persistent high frustration levels even in Grade 6, while others exhibit more balanced distributions in reading proficiency.

However, data from the five South Districts-1,2,3,5, and 7 shows a concerning trend. Rafanan and Raymundo (2024) stressed the importance of early remediation to address students' reading struggles as they progress to higher levels. This assumption contradicts the results of several studies, which indicate that reading proficiency challenges

persist even as students progress to higher levels (Conradi et al., 2015; Vaughn et al., 2013). This may also imply that as the students progress, they might encounter developmentally complex reading demands (Balnig, et al, 2024), which led to reading comprehension difficulty, hence, the need for targeted interventions to support foundational reading skills development. Moreover, the findings suggest that while there is some progress in reading proficiency as students advance in grade levels, the challenge of reducing the number of students at the frustration level remains. The observed patterns in South District schools may lead to a widening gap between struggling and proficient readers, with a far-reaching impact on their overall academic success.

The reading proficiency levels may be attributed to reading engagements, as students' motivations and time spent reading outside the classroom can vary due to parental support and modelling (Dhakal, 2024; Ho & Lau, 2018; Husin & Rawian, 2025). In addition, teacher approaches differ among schools, affecting how reading skills are taught and reinforced, hence the need for the adoption of structured literacy programs that address the students' current reading levels.

Furthermore, the data revealed that the significance of gender differences in reading proficiency from Grade 4 to Grade 6 across districts becomes more consistent. In Grade 4, gender differences are only significant at the Independent level, while in Grades 5 and 6, they are significant across all levels. Particularly, it reveals that females generally show higher proficiency compared to males at the independent level. While significant gender differences are noticed in Grades 5 and 6, but not in Grade 4, this suggests that these differences may become more evident as students progress through grade levels. This could be due to factors such as cognitive development, maturity, teaching strategies, or social expectations influencing reading skills differently for boys and girls as they age.

Other confounding variables contributing to this trend are the socio-cultural expectations of gender norms, where reading habits and academic engagement vary for boys and girls as they mature (Boerma et al., 2015; Bouchamma et al., 2014; Griva et al., 2012; Logan & Johnston, 2010). Girls may receive more encouragement or model reading

behaviors from family and teachers. Another potential influence is the development trajectory of cognitive and language skills, where girls often exhibit earlier maturation in verbal abilities, which may give them an advantage in reading at intermediate levels. Jenina et al. (2019) suggest that values and beliefs, as well as the role of parents, play a role in children's reading achievement. It was revealed that students' enjoyment, a factor in proficiency in reading, was found to be stronger in girls than in boys.

Further, there are considerable variations in gender differences across different school districts at each grade level. Some show more pronounced gender gaps, while others have relatively balanced results. This implies that contextual factors like teaching methods and resources may have shaped these trends (Chiu, 2018). District-level socio-economic disparities and resource allocations can interact with gender to influence reading habits and learning environments for boys and girls.

While the trends are statistically significant, gender is not a dominant factor influencing reading proficiency. However, the findings still suggest several key actions to address the noted gender differences in reading proficiency. Since gender differences become more evident from Grade 5 onward, early literacy interventions are essential. There should be more differentiated activities that would engage boys in reading activities while providing targeted interventions and enhancements as they progress in grade level. School districts should revisit their reading programs to ensure they are meeting the specific needs of their students rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach. This is to address the widening gap in reading proficiency between boys and girls and, simultaneously, lower the percentage of struggling readers as their grade level progresses.

Building from the DepEd's DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) program, which provides students with dedicated time to read independently, contextualized district-specific strategies may also be implemented, with more assistance given to districts with pronounced gaps. Consequently, school districts can focus on curriculum enhancements based on reading level distributions. An example could be a Literacy Remediation Program that provides systematic, intensive English intervention using decoding and fluency-building

techniques per grade level to reduce the identified gaps in grade-level reading proficiency. This study underscores the importance of data-driven, differentiated, and gender-responsive approaches to enhance reading curricula and instruction across school districts.

With the findings on the students' varied reading proficiency levels in both South and North Districts, schools may focus on early intervention, differentiated instruction, contextualized materials, and teacher training. In the early years, especially in Grade 4, early intervention programs involving small-group instruction in phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension can target foundational literacy challenges and help prevent students from falling into the Frustration Level. Through regular assessments and monitoring, school leaders adapt the program delivery and implementation.

Recognizing the local culture and experiences, reading teachers may use contextualized reading materials to make reading more relevant and engaging for students. In districts with a higher prevalence of struggling readers, involving the community and family in reading projects and activities fosters a supportive learning environment. Lastly, an ongoing professional development for teachers on adopting differentiated and culturally responsive reading instruction is beneficial. Techniques shall focus on scaffolding, guided reading sessions, and contextualized strategies to engage the students, thus developing their strong literacy skills.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of reading level distribution among Grades 4, 5, and 6 students across different school districts in Cebu City, highlighting opportunities for curriculum enhancements and strategies to address disparities in reading proficiency. The findings reveal variations in reading levels by grade level and school districts, with notable patterns emerging in terms of gender differences. Although gender is not a dominant factor influencing reading proficiency, the minor, consistent gender differences noted across proficiency levels and grade levels still provide insights into contextualizing reading programs. Additionally, variations among districts reveal that certain areas experience more pronounced challenges in achieving balanced proficiency levels. Other than school-based literacy

programs, access to a mobile library with reading materials across levels may be provided by various stakeholders to assist these schools in promoting and sustaining literacy and educational equity. Consequently, targeted curriculum enhancements and interventions are recommended, focusing on identified gaps and gender differences. Early intervention starting in Grade 4, ongoing monitoring of reading proficiency, and professional development for educators to address subtle gender differences are crucial steps in fostering equitable reading outcomes. While the differences observed are relatively minor, addressing them through these strategies will support improved reading proficiency across all districts and grade levels.

Future directions and initiatives for policymakers and teacher-practitioners may include policy frameworks on literacy education and early reading intervention starting in Grade 4, continuous monitoring of students' reading proficiency, and sustained professional development for English teachers, including gender-responsive pedagogies. Long-term effects of reading interventions may be investigated, exploring the impact of socio-cultural, technological, and cognitive factors influencing reading development. Translational studies can also focus on the stakeholders' perspectives and classroom observations to understand the contextual variables connected to reading proficiency toward designing a responsive curriculum.

## ETHICS STATEMENT

This study was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Review Committee of Cebu Normal University (CNU ERC Code: 1163/2024-09 Bacus et al.). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their identities have been kept strictly anonymous to ensure confidentiality. The research fully complies with the ethical standards and publication guidelines of Jurnal Arbitrer.

## CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT

All authors were involved from the preparation of the manuscript and data collection. Dr. Bacus and Dr. Alda conceptualized the research topic and Dr. Balo was responsible for the data analysis and running the test statistics.

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## DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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