

ASSESSING THE READING SKILLS OF INTERMEDIATE GRADERS USING THE PHILIPPINE INFORMAL READING INVENTORY (PHIL-IRI): INSIGHTS FOR TEACHERS

Mae Caroline J. Tolibas

Department of Education (DepEd)- Schools Division of Tacloban City
Bayanihan Elementary School, Tacloban City 6500, Leyte, Philippines

<https://doi.org/10.54922/IJEHSS.2025.0887>

ABSTRACT

Reading proficiency is a fundamental skill significantly influencing learners' academic success and lifelong learning capabilities. This study assessed the reading skills of intermediate-grade learners (Grades 4 to 6) in a public elementary school in Tacloban City, Philippines, using the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI). Employing a descriptive survey design, the study involved 251 learners (138 males and 113 females) whose reading proficiency was evaluated through the Independent, Instructional, and Frustration levels of the Phil-IRI. Data were collected through oral and silent reading assessments, with results analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that most learners were at the Instructional level (46.39% for Grade 4, 48.15% for Grade 5, and 63.01% for Grade 6), indicating their need for teacher assistance in achieving comprehension. A significant proportion of learners, particularly males, were categorized under the Frustration level, highlighting persistent challenges in fluency and comprehension. Conversely, only a small percentage of learners achieved the Independent level, with females consistently outperforming males. These results underscore the need for targeted reading interventions and differentiated instruction to address learners' varied needs. The study concludes that strategic efforts are crucial to improving reading proficiency and ensuring learners' readiness for the demands of higher education.

Keywords: Intermediate Graders, Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), Reading Skills

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the emphasis on literacy in Philippine education has highlighted the critical role of reading proficiency in shaping learners' academic success and lifelong learning capabilities. Studies have underscored that reading proficiency among elementary learners significantly influences their comprehension skills and overall academic achievement (Denton et al., 2021; Pua, 2021; Uccelli et al., 2015). Despite these efforts, reports from the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) reveal persistent challenges, such as declining literacy levels among students in both rural and urban settings (Idulog et al., 2023; Librea et al., 2023; Mangarin & Climaco, 2024). This highlights the need to assess reading skills at key education stages to address learning gaps effectively.

The Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) has been a vital tool, offering educators a reliable means to assess students' reading performance (Anthony et al., 2024; Cainoy et al., 2024). The tool's ability to classify learners into independent, instructional, or frustration reading levels has provided insights into their strengths and areas for improvement. However, a dearth of localized studies focuses on how intermediate graders perform in Phil-IRI assessments,

particularly those in public schools. This gap is notable as intermediate grades (4–6) serve as a transitional stage, preparing learners for the demands of higher education. Issues such as insufficient exposure to varied reading materials, large class sizes, and limited teacher training have been identified as barriers to improving reading skills among elementary learners (Cabuquin & Tolibas, 2024; Jang, 2024; Khan et al., 2020; Roberts-Tyler et al., 2020). These factors, compounded by socioeconomic constraints (Ticoy et al., 2024), further exacerbate literacy challenges in the Philippine educational system. Addressing these issues requires robust data to guide interventions tailored to students' needs.

This study uses the Phil-IRI to assess the reading skills of intermediate graders in a public elementary school in Tacloban City. It focuses on identifying their reading levels and understanding the factors contributing to their reading challenges. By doing so, the study intends to provide valuable insights that can help teachers and administrators design more effective reading programs. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the body of knowledge on reading proficiency in Philippine schools. They will also support the development of policies and practices that enhance literacy education, ensuring that learners acquire the foundational skills necessary for academic and professional success.

1.1 Study Objectives

This study aims to assess intermediate graders' reading skills using the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) in a public elementary school in the DepEd Tacloban City Division, Leyte, Philippines. Specifically, it aims to (1) determine the reading levels (Independent, Instructional, and Frustration) of Grades 4 to 6 learners and (2) identify the distribution of reading levels by gender and grade level.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a **descriptive survey design** to assess the reading skills of intermediate graders. This design is appropriate as it allows for the systematic collection and analysis of data regarding students' reading performance, facilitating an accurate description of their reading levels and the factors influencing these outcomes.

2.2 Locale and Study Respondents

The research was conducted in a public elementary school within the DepEd Tacloban City Division, Leyte, Philippines. The locale was chosen due to its diverse student population and alignment with the study's focus on public education. Grades 4 to 6 students served as respondents, comprising 251 learners (138 males and 113 females). This demographic provided a representative sample for analyzing reading proficiency among intermediate graders.

2.3 Research Instrument

The Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) served as the primary tool for data collection in this study. This instrument evaluates students' reading proficiency through oral reading and silent reading. The oral reading component assesses fluency and pronunciation, while the silent reading component focuses on comprehension skills. Students' reading abilities are categorized into three levels: the independent level, where students read fluently with excellent comprehension; the instructional level, where students require teacher assistance to achieve

understanding; and the frustration level, where students struggle significantly with reading and comprehension. Scoring is based on the accuracy, fluency, and comprehension rates, comprehensively evaluating the learners' reading skills.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure and Ethical Considerations

The data-gathering process was conducted in three phases. Before the assessment, permissions were secured from the Department of Education (DepEd) and school authorities to ensure proper authorization. Informed and parental consent were obtained to comply with ethical standards. During the data collection, the Phil-IRI assessments were administered individually to students, with each session lasting approximately 20–30 minutes per participant. After the evaluation, the results were analyzed and summarized using descriptive statistics, with the data presented in tables and interpreted accordingly. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the process, including safeguarding participants' confidentiality, securing informed consent from parents, and ensuring voluntary participation. All data were handled with integrity, respecting the rights and dignity of the students involved.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as frequency counts and percentages, to summarize the distribution of reading levels. Results were processed in Microsoft Excel and presented in tables and textual narratives for clarity.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The profile distribution of intermediate graders shows that the study included 251 learners, with slightly more males (138 or 54.98%) than females (113 or 45.02%). In terms of grade levels, the majority of the participants were in Grade 4 (97 or 38.65%), followed by Grade 5 (81 or 32.27%) and Grade 6 (73 or 29.08%), reflecting a balanced representation across the intermediate grades. The learners were distributed across seven sections, with Ruby (41 or 16.33%) having the highest number of students, followed closely by Pearl (40 or 15.94%) and Sapphire and Platinum (each with 37 or 14.74%). The relatively even distribution across sections ensures the data captures a diverse range of learners within the school's intermediate grades. These demographic details provide a strong foundation for analyzing the learners' reading skills and highlight the importance of considering gender and grade level differences when planning targeted interventions for literacy development.

Table 1. Profile Distribution of Intermediate Graders

Variables	Frequency	Percent (%)
Sex		
Male	138	54.98
Female	113	45.02
Grade Level		
Grade 4	97	38.65
Grade 5	81	32.27
Grade 6	73	29.08
Section		
Amethyst	35	13.94
Beryl	25	9.96
Sapphire	37	14.74
Ruby	41	16.33
Pearl	40	15.94
Amber	36	14.34
Platinum	37	14.74

Note: No. of Cases= 251

Furthermore, the findings reveal that among Grade 4 learners, 30.93% reached the Independent level of reading proficiency, with females (36.36%) outperforming males (26.42%). The majority of students (46.39%) fell within the Instructional level, indicating they require teacher assistance for comprehension, with comparable results for males (47.17%) and females (45.45%). Meanwhile, 22.68% of the learners were categorized at the Frustration level, where males (26.42%) showed higher struggles than females (18.18%). These results suggest a significant portion of Grade 4 learners require structured support to progress to independent reading proficiency, highlighting the need for targeted interventions, particularly for male students who face more significant challenges.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of the Phil-IRI Results among Grade 4 Learners

Level	Male		Female		Overall	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Independent	14	26.42	16	36.36	30	30.93
Instructional	25	47.17	20	45.45	45	46.39
Frustration	14	26.42	8	18.18	22	22.68

Note: Male= 53; Female= 44

The observed trends align with studies indicating that females often exhibit stronger literacy skills than males at the elementary level (Below et al., 2010; Raižienė et al., 2019; Vasilyeva et al., 2021), possibly due to differences in developmental and learning behaviors. The practical implications of these findings emphasize the importance of differentiated instruction in addressing the varied needs of learners. Remedial programs, particularly for those at the

Frustration level, are crucial to preventing further academic difficulties. Encouraging parental engagement and providing male-focused reading strategies may enhance male students' reading outcomes.

In Grade 5, 27.16% of learners achieved the Independent level, with a pronounced gap between females (47.06%) and males (12.77%). A majority, 48.15%, were at the Instructional level, with more males (53.19%) requiring teacher assistance than females (41.18%). The Frustration level encompassed 24.69% of learners, with males (34.04%) again struggling more than females (11.76%). These findings indicate a continued need for instructional support, with females progressing faster towards reading independence than males. The higher proportion of males in the Frustration category suggests underlying challenges in literacy acquisition that need to be addressed systematically.

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of the Phil-IRI Results among Grade 5 Learners

Level	Male		Female		Overall	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Independent	6	12.77	16	47.06	22	27.16
Instructional	25	53.19	14	41.18	39	48.15
Frustration	16	34.04	4	11.76	20	24.69

Note: Male= 47; Female= 34

These results support existing literature that points to gender-based differences in reading proficiency, with females often showing more excellent aptitude in comprehension and fluency (Logan & Johnson, 2010; Manu et al., 2023; Reilly et al., 2019). Practical applications include integrating gender-sensitive approaches into literacy instruction, such as offering diverse reading materials that cater to male learners' interests. Additionally, improving classroom management strategies and teacher training could help educators address the needs of struggling readers, ensuring equity in literacy development.

Among Grade 6 learners, only 19.18% achieved the Independent level, with slightly more females (22.86%) than males (15.79%). The majority of students (63.01%) were classified at the Instructional level, requiring teacher assistance, with males (68.42%) showing greater dependence than females (57.14%). The Frustration level comprised 17.81% of learners, with similar proportions of males (15.79%) and females (20.00%). These results suggest that even in the final year of elementary education, most learners are not reading independently, which may hinder their preparedness for secondary education.

Table 4. Frequency Distribution of the Phil-IRI Results among Grade 6 Learners

Level	Male		Female		Overall	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Independent	6	15.79	8	22.86	14	19.18
Instructional	26	68.42	20	57.14	46	63.01
Frustration	6	15.79	7	20.00	13	17.81

Note: Male= 38; Female= 35

These findings highlight the persistent challenges in achieving reading independence among elementary learners, especially for males. The results call for robust interventions during the upper elementary years, such as intensive reading workshops and peer-assisted learning strategies. Moreover, practical steps like integrating technology-based literacy tools and fostering a reading culture can help address these gaps and equip learners with the necessary skills for academic success (Gea et al., 2024; Quimsing & Cruz, 2024; Sadullojevna, 2024).

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study's findings reveal that most intermediate-grade learners, particularly in Grades 4 to 6, fall within the Instructional level of reading proficiency as assessed by the Phil-IRI. This indicates that while they can comprehend text with teacher assistance, they have yet to achieve complete independence in reading. A notable proportion of learners remain at the Frustration level, especially male students, highlighting significant challenges in fluency and comprehension. The results underscore the critical need for targeted interventions to bridge these gaps and improve overall reading proficiency, particularly in preparing learners for the academic demands of secondary education.

Based on the study's findings, it is recommended that schools implement structured reading intervention programs focusing on learners at the Instructional and Frustration levels, with special attention to male students who consistently show lower performance. Differentiated instruction, incorporating both guided reading sessions and individual practice, should be employed to address diverse learning needs. Schools should also provide professional development for teachers on effective literacy strategies and create a classroom environment rich in engaging and culturally relevant reading materials. Furthermore, parental involvement should be encouraged through literacy workshops and home-based reading activities to support students' progress outside the classroom.

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