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Reading Comprehension and Habits of Year 8 Students in Denla British School After Using the Accelerated Reader (AR) Star Test

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Abstract. Despite the widespread use of the Accelerated Reader (AR) STAR test in schools, a gap remains in understanding its long-term impact on students' reading comprehension and attitudes, particularly within international educational contexts. This quantitative study addressed that gap by investigating 33 Year 8 students at Denla British School who have used the AR program consistently for five years. The research aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of AR in enhancing literal, inferential, and critical comprehension, as well as its influence on students' enjoyment, engagement, and attitudes toward reading. A researcher-developed questionnaire was used for data collection, comprising a cognitive test with 39 comprehension questions and a survey exploring students' perceived improvements, helpful features, and challenges related to the STAR test. The tool was reviewed for content validity and piloted with Year 7 students, resulting in refinements to the layout and instructions. It yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.5, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. Results showed that students performed above average in literal and inferential comprehension, but only at an average level in critical comprehension. While students appreciated adaptive difficulty, genre variety, and feedback features, they also cited issues such as time constraints, limitations with multiple-choice questions, and technical problems. Correlation analysis revealed a weak relationship between comprehension and reading attitudes. Overall, the study concluded that while AR supports basic reading comprehension, it has a limited impact on critical thinking and intrinsic reading motivation.

Keywords: Accelerated Reader; Attitudes toward reading; Comprehension skills; Digital reading programs; STAR test.

1.0 Introduction

Reading is an essential skill that supports academic success, critical thinking, and lifelong learning. It plays a central role in how individuals process and communicate information (Farha & Rohani, 2019). Reading also contributes to the development of cognitive abilities, language competencies, and general knowledge (Henríquez et al., 2020; Napa-Rodriguez, 2025). In language learning, it reinforces listening, speaking, and writing skills (Sadiku, 2015; Zaccoletti et al., 2020). More than just decoding, reading is a cognitive and emotional activity that fosters critical thinking and deeper personal understanding (Karadeniz & Can, 2014). Comprehension is at the core of reading. Snow (2002, as cited in Smith et al., 2021) explains that it involves decoding text, constructing meaning, and engaging cognitively with the content. Duke (2003, as cited in Gilakjani, 2016) emphasizes the role

of prior knowledge and experience in this process. Adequate comprehension is essential not only for academic achievement but also for meaningful participation in society (Kendeou & van den Broek, 2022).

In addition to comprehension, developing strong reading habits is key to long-term literacy. Erdem (2015) highlights that a love for reading benefits both academic progress and personal growth. Educators continue to seek effective methods to improve literacy and engage students (Whitten et al., 2016). Among these, the Accelerated Reader (AR) program has garnered attention for utilizing digital tools to assess reading levels, guide book selection, and promote independent reading through gamified elements (Renaissance Learning, 2021). Despite AR's popularity in Western schools, limited research has explored its long-term effectiveness in international schools in Thailand. While previous studies have identified a need to improve reading comprehension among Thai students (Wonglao, 2022; Mala, 2019), little is known about how programs like AR influence reading comprehension, habits, and motivation in these contexts.

This study aims to address this gap by examining the impact of the AR program at Denla British School, an international school in Thailand. It focuses on Year 8 students who have consistently used AR over the past five years. The study explores how AR affects students' comprehension across literal, inferential, and critical levels, as well as their engagement, enjoyment, and attitudes toward reading. Findings are intended to support curriculum development and inform practices in similar educational settings.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive research design, which systematically and accurately describes characteristics or phenomena as they naturally occur, without manipulation of variables (Purdy & Popan, 2023). It was used to collect empirical data on Year 8 students' reading comprehension and attitudes following their use of the AR programme. The study also examined students' perceptions of the AR STAR test, including its helpful features and challenges. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics to provide an overview of student interactions with the programme.

2.2 Research Locale

The research was conducted at a British international school in Nonthaburi, Thailand, where the researcher was based. The school has a diverse student population and follows a co-educational model, offering education to students aged 2 to 18.

2.3 Research Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select 33 Year 8 students who had been using the AR program since its introduction. Participants were selected based on their availability, willingness to participate, and relevant characteristics for the study, without regard to factors such as race, gender, age, disability, or religion.

2.4 Research Instrument

The primary instrument was a researcher-developed questionnaire with two parts. Students read passages and answered 39 cognitive test items, reduced from an original 45 after pilot testing with Year 7 students and revisions for content validity and reliability. The second part was a survey on students' perceptions of reading improvement, helpful features, and challenges with the AR STAR test. Experts reviewed the final questionnaire to ensure validity.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection was conducted in a structured manner to maintain validity and reliability. Permission to conduct the research and use the school's name was formally obtained from the Senior Leadership Team at Denla British School (DBS). This request, which outlined the research objectives and methodologies, was submitted via email to the Head of School. In the first phase of data collection, the cognitive reading comprehension test was administered to Year 8 students through Google Forms. The test assessed students' comprehension across three levels: literal, inferential, and critical. Students worked independently, and their responses were automatically recorded in a Google Spreadsheet, facilitating efficient data organization. After completing the cognitive test, students filled out a paper-based survey designed to measure their attitudes toward reading and their experiences with the AR program. Once the survey was completed, the responses were entered into the same Google Spreadsheet used for the cognitive test data, enabling a streamlined analysis.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to the ethical guidelines for research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their privacy was safeguarded. Data were stored securely in accordance with institutional research ethics protocols and were used exclusively for this study. All information was kept confidential throughout the process.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3. 1 Level of Reading Comprehension of Year 8 Students

This section presents the reading comprehension levels of Year 8 students after five years of exposure to the AR programme, assessed across three levels: literal, inferential, and critical comprehension.

Literal Comprehension

As detailed in Table 1, most students performed above average in literal comprehension, demonstrating a strong foundation in recognising and recalling explicitly stated facts and details. This foundational skill supports more complex comprehension abilities (Alptekin, 2006). However, a small number of students may require additional support to improve their fluency and overall comprehension skills (Cockerill et al., 2023).

Table 1. *The Level of Literal Comprehension of Year 8 Students*

Level	Score	Frequency (%)	Percentage
Above Average	10-13	31	93.94
Average	5-9	2	6.06
Below Average	0-4	0	0
Mean Score	**12.96**	**Above Average**	

Inferential Comprehension

As detailed in Table 2, most students performed above average in inferential comprehension.

Table 2. *Level of Inferential Comprehension of Year 8 Students*

Level	Score	Frequency (%)	Percentage
Above Average	10 - 13	25	75.76
Average	5 – 9	7	21.21
Below Average	0 – 4	1	3.03
Mean Score	**10.25**	**Above average**	

Critical Comprehension

According to Table 3, students' critical comprehension skills were generally at an average level. While some students excelled in engaging critically with texts, the majority demonstrated only moderate ability to evaluate, critique, and analyse complex textual features (Kelly et al., 2023a). This highlights the importance of instructional strategies aimed at developing higher-order thinking skills and personalised interventions for students with significant difficulties (Kelly et al., 2023b; Kirby, 2007).

Table 3. *The Level of Critical Comprehension of Year 8 Students*

Level	Score	Frequency (%)	Percentage
Above Average	10 - 13	9	27.27
Average	5 – 9	21	63.64
Below Average	0 – 4	3	9.09
Mean Score	**7.77**	**Average**	

3.2 Level of Agreement on the Enhancement of Reading Attitudes after Using the AR Programme

This section summarizes Year 8 students' perceptions of how the AR program influenced their reading attitudes, organized into three themes: Personal Growth in Reading, Reading and Social Connections, and Growing Enjoyment and Engagement.

Personal Growth in Reading

Table 4 indicates that students generally disagreed with statements regarding overall improvements in reading confidence, fluency, and motivation; however, certain items, such as improved comprehension when reading independently, received higher levels of agreement. These mixed responses suggest some perceived gains in specific areas but limited overall growth, aligning with Huang (2012a) and Vollands et al. (2011). Conversely, low enthusiasm for new books points to potential limitations in fostering intrinsic motivation (Smith & Westberg,

2011a).

Table 4. *Personal Growth in Reading*

Statements	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
I enjoy reading more as I explore different books.	2.85	Disagree
I am becoming a more confident and capable reader.	2.94	Disagree
Reading is becoming easier and more enjoyable for me.	2.82	Disagree
I have come to understand that improving my reading skills will help me in many ways.	3.24	Agree
When I come across a new word, I am getting better at figuring out its meaning.	2.94	Disagree
I understand more when I read on my own than I used to.	3.33	Agree
My reading aloud is improving, and I feel more fluent and expressive.	2.70	Disagree
I feel more excited when I receive a new book because it gives me a chance to grow as a reader.	2.33	Disagree
I am learning to be more confident in my reading abilities, no matter what others think.	2.67	Disagree
I now believe that developing strong reading skills will help me succeed.	3.12	Agree
Overall Mean	**2.89**	**Disagree**

Reading and Social Connections

As shown in Table 5, students reported minimal impact of the AR programme on social engagement related to reading. Scores indicate a slight improvement in discussing books or sharing recommendations, reflecting a limited enhancement of social interaction around reading. This finding corresponds with Schenck (2018) and Spiller (2020), who noted challenges in promoting collaborative reading experiences through AR.

Table 5. *Reading and Social Connections*

Statements	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
My friends are noticing that I enjoy reading more.	2.00	Disagree
I have started sharing books I like with my friends.	2.09	Disagree
I am improving as a reader and feel proud to recommend books to others.	2.61	Disagree
Reading is becoming a fun way for me to connect with friends.	1.97	Strongly Disagree
I am getting better at discussing books with my classmates and teachers.	2.45	Disagree
Overall Mean	**2.22**	**Disagree**

Growing Enjoyment and Engagement in Reading

Table 6 reveals limited success in increasing students' enjoyment and voluntary reading outside structured activities. While students acknowledged improvements in comprehension during teacher-led discussions, they generally disagreed with statements about increased free-time reading or developing a positive reading identity. These results echo critiques by Huang (2012b), Krashen (2003), and Smith and Westberg (2011b) regarding AR's emphasis on quizzes, which potentially undermines intrinsic motivation.

Table 6. *Growing Enjoyment and Engagement in Reading*

Statements	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
I am choosing to read more often in my free time.	2.52	Disagree
When my teacher asks questions about a book, I am improving my understanding and ability to answer them.	3.15	Agree
I now admire people who read a lot because I can see how it helps them learn and grow.	2.73	Disagree
I am spending more time in the library, discovering books that interest me.	2.12	Disagree
I am realizing that reading is a great way to learn, relax, and explore new ideas.	2.29	Disagree
Overall Mean	**2.66**	**Disagree**

3.3 Correlation between Reading Comprehension and Level of Agreement on the Enhancement of Reading Attitudes

Table 7 summarises the correlations between Year 8 students' reading comprehension levels and their attitudes towards reading, highlighting the interplay between cognitive skills and affective responses.

Literal Reading Comprehension

Correlations between literal comprehension and reading attitudes were generally negligible. Notably, no meaningful relationship was found with personal growth or enjoyment in reading, indicating that proficiency in understanding explicit text does not necessarily translate into enhanced reading motivation or self-perception. A

weak positive correlation with social connections suggests that stronger literal comprehension may slightly encourage social interactions related to reading, although this influence appears to be limited.

Table 7. *Correlation between Reading Comprehension and Attitudes toward Reading*

Level	Personal Growth in Reading	Reading and Social Connections	Growing Enjoyment and Engagement in Reading
Literal	0.03 (A)	0.27 (W)	0 (A)
Inferential	0.15 (W)	0.24 (W)	0 (A)
Critical	-0.05 (A)	-0.03 (A)	-0.16 (A)

Legend: A – No correlation, W – Weak, M – Moderate, S – Strong, P – Perfect

Inferential Reading Comprehension

Slightly stronger, yet still weak, correlations were observed between inferential comprehension and both personal growth and social connections. These suggest that the ability to interpret implied meanings may modestly support students' reading development and social engagement. However, no correlation was found between enjoyment and engagement, suggesting that inferential skills alone do not lead to a deeper emotional investment in reading.

Critical Reading Comprehension

No significant correlations emerged between critical comprehension and any attitudinal category. Interestingly, weak negative trends suggest that students with higher critical skills might experience less personal growth and enjoyment, and engage less socially through reading. This may reflect a more evaluative and individualistic approach to reading, which could lead to diminished emotional engagement and social interaction. Overall, the data indicate weak or no meaningful relationships between comprehension skills and students' attitudes, underscoring that cognitive abilities alone do not strongly influence reading motivation, social engagement, or perceived personal growth. These findings underscore the need for balanced interventions that address both cognitive and affective dimensions to promote holistic reading development.

3.4 Characteristics of the Star Test that Help Enhance Reading Comprehension and Reading Habits

Table 8 highlights students' perceptions of the most and least effective features of the STAR test in supporting their reading comprehension and habits. The highest-ranked feature was the test's adaptive questioning, which tailors difficulty based on student responses. With an average score of 3.88, this personalization helps maintain engagement by matching questions to individual reading levels, avoiding frustration or boredom, and supporting gradual skill improvement.

Table 8. *Ranking of STAR Test Features Based on Student Responses*

Features	Average	Rank
The STAR test adapts the difficulty of questions based on my responses.	3.88	1
The STAR test encompasses a diverse range of topics and text genres, including stories, articles, and factual texts.	4.52	2
After completing the test, I received my reading level (ZPD) based on my performance.	4.55	3
The STAR test assesses essential reading skills, including understanding word meanings, identifying the main idea, and drawing inferences.	4.64	4
The questions in the STAR test vary in difficulty. Some are easy, while others are more challenging.	4.85	5
Taking the STAR test multiple times allows me to measure my improvement in reading comprehension over time.	5.21	6
The STAR test has a time limit for each of its 34 multiple-choice questions.	5.64	7
Some questions in the STAR test are short, while others may be longer.	5.73	8
The STAR test uses multiple-choice questions, where I can select my answer from a list of options.	5.73	9

Next, students valued the inclusion of diverse topics and genres—such as stories, articles, and factual texts—which broadens exposure to different writing styles and content. This variety supports sustained interest and strengthens comprehension skills essential for academic and lifelong reading success. Another well-regarded aspect was the immediate feedback on reading levels (ZPD), which motivates students by helping them understand their progress and choose appropriate reading materials. This promotes independent learning and a sense of ownership over their reading development.

Conversely, the time limit imposed on each test question received the lowest rating, suggesting that many students find time constraints hinder their comprehension and thoughtful engagement. This aligns with Wolf and Barzillai (2009), who argued that deep reading requires sufficient time and cognitive space, and that timed assessments may disrupt the mental processes needed for thoughtful text engagement. Kuhn et al. (2007) similarly emphasized that meaningful learning demands ample time for reflection and evaluation, which timed tests may not provide.

3.5 Challenges Encountered in Using the AR Reading Programme

Table 9 highlights several challenges students face with the AR programme, revealing key obstacles to engagement, learning preferences, emotional well-being, and programme effectiveness. The primary challenge reported is a lack of interest and excitement, which undermines motivation and reading enthusiasm. Many students perceive the programme more as a task than a source of enjoyment, reflecting Guthrie and Humenick's (2004) emphasis on intrinsic motivation as essential for fostering a lasting passion for reading (cited in Brozo & Flynt, 2008). The task-oriented structure of AR appears insufficient in supporting this intrinsic engagement.

Another significant issue is the misalignment between the AR's structured, test-based format and the diverse learning preferences of students. This disconnect can lead to frustration and reduced participation, consistent with Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). However, as Pashler et al. (2009) point out, tailoring instruction to preferred learning styles may not significantly improve outcomes, suggesting that AR would benefit from adopting more flexible, inclusive strategies that engage a broader range of learners. Technical problems, such as computer or internet issues, also disrupt learning and contribute to frustration. These findings align with Hattie and Yates (2013) and Warschauer (2011), who highlight the negative impact of technological disruptions on student engagement and academic performance.

In contrast, initial difficulties with navigating the AR system appear less problematic as students adapt over time, echoing findings by Ngampornchai and Adams (2016) that students tend to develop proficiency with digital tools after initial exposure. Additional challenges include time pressure during tests, anxiety from peer comparisons, and distractions from social media. Orfus (2008) and DordiNejad et al. (2011) show that time constraints and test anxiety negatively affect cognitive performance, particularly for less experienced students. Hong et al. (2022) further demonstrate how upward social comparison can increase anxiety and reduce academic self-confidence, undermining motivation. Finally, distractions from non-academic digital content, as reported by Feng et al. (2019) and Deng et al. (2022), significantly impair students' focus and academic achievement.

Table 9. *Challenges Encountered in Using the AR Reading Program*

Problem	Average	Rank
I do not find Accelerated Reader interesting or exciting. I do not want to join in or feel good about reading.	3.42	1
The way Accelerated Reader works may not align with my preferred learning style.	3.52	2
Sometimes, the computer or internet may not function properly, causing issues such as the program crashing or not connecting correctly.	4.03	3
I feel like I do not have enough time during the test, and this makes me hurry. When I rush, it can be hard to understand everything and demonstrate my reading skills effectively.	4.36	4
I look at how well my friends are doing and feel like I am not doing as well. If it feels like a competition, it makes me sad, and I do not want to try my best.	4.76	5
Taking tests in Accelerated Reader makes me feel worried or stressed, especially if I think a lot about getting a high score or meeting specific goals.	4.82	6
When using the same devices for reading, I get distracted by things like social media or games, which makes it hard for me to focus on my reading.	5.48	7
I am not familiar with accessing and navigating the AR program, which can make me feel frustrated and hinder my performance.	5.88	8

Overall, these challenges suggest that while the AR programme offers valuable tools, its impact is limited by motivational, cognitive, and contextual factors that need to be addressed for more effective implementation.

4.0 Conclusion

In summary, this study makes several important contributions to understanding the impact of the AR programme on Year 8 students' reading development. First, it highlights that while students demonstrated proficiency in literal and inferential comprehension, their performance in critical comprehension suggests that the AR programme may effectively support basic reading skills but is limited in fostering higher-order analytical thinking, indicating a gap in cultivating critical literacy. Second, the lack of influence on students' attitudes towards reading, particularly in terms of enjoyment, social interaction, and engagement, suggests a disconnect between the programme's design and its ability to foster a love of reading or meaningful engagement. Additionally, the absence of significant correlations between reading comprehension improvements and students' perceptions of the programme's impact on their reading attitudes underscores that better comprehension does not necessarily translate into increased interest or enjoyment of reading.

Moving forward, several avenues for research arise. Future studies could explore how integrating more dynamic

reading materials and flexible assessment formats might address gaps in critical thinking and engagement. Investigating the role of adaptive learning features, such as question difficulty adjustment and ZPD feedback, in enhancing students' attitudes towards reading would also be valuable. Longitudinal research could track the sustained impact of the AR programme on reading habits and motivation over time.

Importantly, policy considerations should include the integration of AR programmes into the broader curriculum and provide ongoing teacher training to maximise pedagogical effectiveness. Such efforts would ensure that teachers are equipped to utilise AR tools in ways that support both literacy skills and positive reading attitudes. Finally, examining the usability and pedagogical relevance of AR programmes across diverse school contexts and student populations could identify context-specific challenges and best practices, ultimately improving literacy development through tailored implementation.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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