Learners' level of reading comprehension: Basis for contextualized reading materials

Glenna Rose B. Santuya
Agusan Colleges, Inc.
Butuan City, Philippines
Email: glennarose.santuya@deped.gov.ph

Abstract: This study investigated the efficacy of contextualized reading materials (CRMs) in improving reading comprehension level among Grade 3 learners. The study was anchored on the cognitivist theory developed by Jean Piaget (1950). This study employed a qualitative approach with an emphasis on a descriptive research design. In selecting the respondents, a purposive sampling was utilized, of which 35 learners from the two (2) sections of Grade 3 were part of the study. Using Phil-IRI results, significant challenges in reading comprehension were identified, with most learners classified under the "Frustration" level. The CRMs development aimed to address these challenges by aligning with educational standards, incorporating real-world examples, and promoting active engagement. Validation across six criteria, including Intellectual Property Rights, Learning Competencies, and Readability, indicated strong compliance with minor areas for improvement. Post-CRMs utilization assessments revealed significant improvements in reading comprehension levels, supported by Wilcoxon tests. Observations during implementation highlighted increased learner interest and performance in reading activities. Recommendations include tailoring materials to accommodate varying comprehension levels, aligning with curriculum objectives, and enhancing readability. This study contributes to effective literacy interventions and underscores the importance of collaboration among educators, parents, students, and administrators to support reading comprehension development.

Keywords: Reading Comprehension, Contextualized Reading Materials (CRMs), Material Development

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill that enables learners to understand, interpret, and analyze written texts. It plays a vital role in various academic subjects and everyday life. However, many learners need help with reading comprehension, which can hinder their educational progress and limit their opportunities for success.

According to Pallathadka et al. (2022), proficient word recognition skills are essential for efficient reading since they allow learners to decode and understand the words they encounter quickly. Difficulties in word recognition can impede reading comprehension, making it challenging for students to grasp the meaning and context of the text. Chen & Zhang (2021) stated that several factors can contribute to poor word recognition and reading comprehension skills among students. These factors may include limited vocabulary, decoding difficulties, lack of phonemic awareness, inadequate exposure to reading materials, and insufficient reading instruction. Identifying and addressing these factors is crucial for improving students' reading abilities and ensuring academic success.

Educators and policymakers have faced a significant challenge regarding the reading abilities of Filipino learners. Despite the government's efforts to enhance literacy rates in the Philippines, recent research indicates that many learners require assistance in reading

comprehension, vocabulary development, and critical thinking skills. The study of Idulog et al. (2023) specifically observed difficulties in word recognition and reading comprehension among Grade 3 learners, emphasizing the importance of addressing these challenges to enhance learners' overall academic performance.

The researcher observed that the learners' low reading comprehension level negatively impacted their academic performance. It hampered their ability to engage with and comprehend subject-specific materials across various fields of study. Due to the urgency of addressing this issue, the study assessed the learners' current reading comprehension level as a basis for developing contextualized reading materials tailored to their needs, aiming to improve their reading comprehension skills and enhance their academic success. By conducting a comprehensive analysis, the researcher identified specific difficulty areas and developed contextualized reading materials.

Problem Statement

The study determined the level of Reading Comprehension of Grade 3 learners of Magsaysay Elementary School (MES) using Contextualized Reading Materials (CRMs). Specifically, it answered the following questions.

1. What is the reading comprehension level of Grade 3 learners as determined by Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) results?

2. What contextualized reading materials may be developed?

3. How do the experts evaluate the developed contextualized reading materials?

4. What are the learners' reading comprehension levels after using contextualized reading materials?

5. Is there a significant difference in the learners' reading comprehension levels before and after utilizing the contextualized reading materials?

Theoretical framework

This study was anchored on Cognitivism Theory developed by Jean Piaget (1950). Cognitivism emphasizes active learning, where learners construct understanding through engagement. Contextualized reading materials achieve this by being relevant and engaging, drawing on learners' real-life experiences.

This active engagement helps learners to construct new knowledge effectively. Additionally, schema theory, a key component of cognitivism, highlights the importance of organizing knowledge into mental structures and building on prior knowledge. Contextualized materials activate prior knowledge by connecting new information to what learners already know, facilitating better understanding and retention.

Metacognition, another crucial aspect of cognitivism, involves learners thinking about their thinking processes. Contextualized reading materials can include prompts and activities that encourage metacognitive strategies, helping learners monitor their comprehension and adjust their strategies as needed. Scaffolding, supported by cognitivism, involves providing support structures that help learners move towards stronger understanding and independence. Contextualized materials can be structured to provide initial support and gradually increase complexity, helping learners build confidence and skills progressively.

Moreover, cognitivism stresses the importance of managing cognitive load to avoid overwhelming learners' working memory. Contextualized reading materials should be clear, concise, and organized into manageable sections, helping learners process content more

effectively. By integrating these cognitive principles, educators can create contextualized reading materials that enhance reading comprehension and foster a deeper, more meaningful learning experience, aligning cognitive processes with instructional design for maximum effectiveness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Importance of reading comprehension
Reading comprehension is a vital component of literacy development, enabling learners to understand, interpret, and analyze written texts, which is essential for academic success across all subject areas. As Smith et al. (2021) emphasize, students with strong reading comprehension skills can navigate a wide range of content—from textbooks to scientific articles—and apply higher-order thinking skills such as synthesizing information, drawing conclusions, and critically evaluating arguments. Gupta and Lee (2020) further highlight that proficient readers consistently perform better across disciplines because they can access and grasp subject-specific vocabulary and concepts, supporting broader learning and achievement. However, reading comprehension is influenced by multiple factors, including language proficiency, vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge, cognitive abilities, and motivation. Learners with limited vocabulary or insufficient background knowledge often struggle to comprehend complex texts, as noted by Lupo et al. (2019), while metacognitive strategies such as monitoring comprehension and applying targeted strategies play an essential role in achieving successful understanding (Muhid et al., 2020).

Moreover, proficiency in the language of instruction is fundamental, as limited vocabulary or unfamiliar grammar can significantly impede comprehension. Learners with diverse background knowledge are better equipped to connect new information with existing frameworks, facilitating deeper understanding, while those lacking such foundations may face barriers, especially in specialized or content-heavy texts (Hattan et al., 2023). Peng and Kievit (2020) describe reading comprehension as a developmental process, noting that early experiences—such as oral language development and phonological awareness—lay the groundwork for later comprehension abilities. As learners progress, they acquire more advanced skills, including making inferences, predicting, and synthesizing information, requiring them to think critically and make logical connections.

Evidence-based instructional practices are critical for enhancing reading comprehension, with Elleman and Oslund (2019) highlighting the value of explicitly teaching strategies like summarizing, questioning, and clarifying. Brevik (2019) reinforces the importance of modeling these strategies through guided practice, gradually transferring responsibility to learners for independent use. Tools such as close reading, collaborative discussions, and graphic organizers further scaffold comprehension by helping students analyze key elements of the text and make meaningful connections. Yanto et al. (2020) advocate for extensive independent reading to promote fluency, expand vocabulary, and deepen background knowledge across diverse genres and styles.

For learners struggling with comprehension, targeted interventions are crucial. Conradi Smith et al. (2022) stress the importance of differentiated, small-group, or one-on-one interventions that provide tailored instruction, enabling struggling readers to develop effective strategies and overcome challenges. Regular progress monitoring ensures that interventions are adjusted to meet evolving learner needs. Ultimately, proficient reading comprehension empowers learners to engage with and critically evaluate texts, driving learning and success across

academic domains. Understanding the components of comprehension, its developmental nature, and effective instructional practices equips educators to foster and assess students' abilities, while continued research remains essential to refine strategies, address individual differences, and support diverse learners effectively.

Contextualized reading materials

Contextualized reading materials refer to instructional resources or texts deliberately designed to align with students' interests, experiences, and prior knowledge, as emphasized by Zimmerer et al. (2018). These materials often incorporate real-world examples, relatable scenarios, and familiar contexts, enabling learners to better connect with and apply their understanding to the texts they engage with. Contextualized reading materials include authentic texts, culturally relevant content, and opportunities for active participation, and research shows that they can significantly enhance students' reading comprehension (Acedillo, 2023). By presenting information within meaningful contexts, these materials help students activate prior knowledge, establish connections, and develop deeper levels of understanding. Real-life examples and culturally relevant scenarios further increase learners' engagement and motivation, which are critical for improving text comprehension.

Learners are more intrinsically motivated to read and understand texts that resonate with their own interests, cultural backgrounds, and lived experiences. Including culturally diverse content within contextualized materials fosters inclusivity and strengthens students' sense of belonging and engagement in the classroom. As Rao (2019) notes, one of the distinct advantages of contextualized reading materials is their capacity to help learners transfer reading comprehension skills to real-life situations, equipping them to apply reading strategies beyond the classroom and empowering them as lifelong readers. Furthermore, as Saguin et al. (2020) explain, contextualized materials support differentiated instruction by accommodating diverse reading levels, interests, and cultural backgrounds, ensuring that all learners can access texts that are both relevant and engaging. This approach not only promotes inclusive learning environments but also enables teachers to meet the individualized needs of their students, ultimately improving comprehension outcomes.

Aligning with the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy, contextualized reading materials recognize and honor students' cultural identities, providing opportunities for learners to see themselves reflected in the texts they read. This fosters greater cultural understanding, empathy, and appreciation among students. Numerous studies have shown a strong relationship between the use of contextualized reading materials and academic success, as personally relevant texts improve comprehension, retention, engagement, and critical thinking abilities. Moreover, these materials support the development of metacognitive skills, enabling learners to monitor and regulate their understanding effectively. Integrating contextualized reading materials into instructional practice enhances academic achievement by providing meaningful, engaging, and culturally responsive learning experiences.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study used a descriptive research design. This type of research design provides a detailed and accurate picture of the characteristics and behaviors of a particular population. By collecting

data on a given topic, descriptive research helps researchers understand a specific issue and provides valuable insights.

This study investigated the learners' reading comprehension level in their pre-test and post-test results to determine their reading profile, which was the basis for developing contextualized reading materials that would cater to their needs. These materials are designed to incorporate relevant and meaningful content, vocabulary, and language structures aligned with the learners' comprehension levels and foster their reading development.

Research Locale

The research locale for this study was at Magsaysay Elementary School, located within the province of Agusan del Sur.

The school is part of the local education system under the administration of the Schools Division of Agusan del Sur. As such, it follows the curriculum and guidelines set by the Department of Education in the Philippines.

Being an elementary school, Magsaysay Elementary School caters to learners in the early stages of their education, typically ranging from kindergarten to sixth grade. The school provides a learning environment that promotes holistic development and academic excellence among its learners. It may have a diverse learner population, comprising children from various backgrounds, cultures, and socioeconomic statuses.

Respondents of the study

The respondents of the study were the 61 Grade 3 learners in Magsaysay Elementary School. 35 out of 61 learners were chosen as the participants of the study.

Research instrument

The research instrument was taken from the Phil-IRI Reading Inventory Material of the Department of Education (2018). The research instrument consisted of four (4) graded passages. It tested the word-reading level and comprehension level of the respondents. Using the instrument, the following reading levels were determined: Independent, Instructional, and Frustration. The researcher used this material in identifying the reading comprehension level of the learners.

The Evaluation Tool for Content was based on the Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM) DepEd-developed Module. The rating sheet has six components: Intellectual Property Rights and Compliance, Learning Competencies, Instructional Design and Organization, Instructional Quality: assessment and Readability. The researcher used this Validation tool to ensure the accuracy and effectiveness of the developed Contextualized Reading Materials.

Validity and reliability of the research instrument

The research instrument utilized was the Phil-IRI tool, which required no validation. The Phil-IRI tool did not need validation since it had already been thoroughly tested and proven effective beforehand. The pretest and posttest were procured in the said materials to evaluate the learners' level of reading comprehension of the Grade 3 learners at Magsaysay Elementary School.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher obtained informed consent from the learners and their guardians, ensuring they understood the purpose of the study, their rights, and how their data would be used.

After obtaining consent, the researcher administered the pre-assessment tests. The researcher used the Phil-IRI Graded Passages (2018) in Grade 3. These passages were intended for the Grade 3 level of learners. In administering the Phil-IRI Graded Passages, the researcher and the learner both had a copy of a passage read by the learner. While the learner read the passage orally, the researcher recorded every miscue committed. The researcher records the time at which the learner started reading the passage orally. After the learner read the passage, the researcher read the comprehension questions and recorded the learner's response.

After gathering the necessary data for pre-assessment, the researcher conducted statistical analysis to determine the learners' reading comprehension level. The researcher developed contextualized reading material that the learners would use. After administering the reading intervention, a post-assessment test was conducted. The post-assessment would be similar to the pre-assessment.

The results statistically analyzed using a Paired Sample t-test to determine if there's a significant difference between the pre-assessment and post-assessment.

Data Analysis Procedure

The following statistical treatment were used to analyze the data:

Frequency count determined the number of participants who belonged to the different levels in the performance in reading of the respondents in the Pre-test.

Percent determined the equivalent value of the frequency count in terms of hundred.

Mean was used to determine the level of reading comprehension in terms of decoding, fluency, vocabulary, sentence construction, reasoning, and background knowledge, working memory, and attention.

Paired Sample T-test was used to analyze the difference between the pre-assessment and post-assessment results on the level of word recognition and reading comprehension.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Level of reading comprehension of Grade 3 learners

In terms of the reading comprehension, majority of Grade 3 learners demonstrated significant difficulties in both word reading and reading comprehension, with none achieving the "Independent" level across assessments. Specifically, 42.9% of learners were placed in the "Instructional" level for word reading, meaning they could read words only with support, while a concerning 57.1% were in the "Frustration" level, struggling to decode words independently. This lack of decoding ability severely hampered their ability to comprehend text. Similarly, comprehension results mirrored this trend: 22.9% of learners showed some ability to understand text with assistance, but the overwhelming majority (77.1%) were categorized as frustrated, unable to understand what they read even with support. Overall, 82.9% of learners were classified in the "Frustration" level for general reading ability, confirming that none were grade-ready for Grade 3.

During the pre-assessment, learners struggled not only to read passages fluently but also to recall or understand what they had read, indicating weak vocabulary knowledge, poor fluency, and underdeveloped comprehension strategies. These findings align with Binder et al. (2018), who emphasized that reading comprehension involves multiple interconnected skills, including vocabulary understanding, recognizing relationships among words and ideas, organizing information, and making evaluative judgments. The learners' low performance highlights that without prior instructional support or intervention, they lacked the foundational reading and comprehension skills necessary for success.

Several underlying factors contribute to these challenges, including limited language proficiency, insufficient background knowledge, and restricted vocabulary, as emphasized by Lupo et al. (2019) and Hattan et al. (2023). Learners who lack familiarity with the language of instruction struggle to navigate unfamiliar or complex vocabulary and sentence structures, making it difficult to understand texts meaningfully. Furthermore, when reading materials are disconnected from students' vocabulary levels, interests, or life experiences, learners struggle to relate new information to what they already know, impeding their ability to make inferences or understand complex ideas. These findings collectively underscore the urgent need for targeted reading interventions, differentiated instruction, and contextualized reading materials that align with learners' current abilities, interests, and cultural backgrounds to support vocabulary development, fluency, and comprehension growth.

Development of contextualized reading materials

Several considerations were taken into account to develop effective contextualized reading materials (CRM) that align with the criteria outlined in the validation tool. In total, there are six (6) criteria of validation, namely: (1) Intellectual Property Rights and Compliance, (2) Learning Competencies, (3) Instructional Design and Organization, (4) Instructional Quality, (5) Assessment, and (6) Readability. The researcher developed a CRMs that aimed to enhance reading comprehension by incorporating real-world examples, culturally relevant content, and active engagement opportunities, fostering deep understanding and lifelong reading habits among learners. Using contextualization, the researcher presented the lesson in a more meaningful and relevant context based on the learners' previous experiences and real-life situations, which ignited their interest in reading the materials developed. The result conforms with Roa (2019), who states that one of the advantages of contextualized reading materials is their ability to facilitate the transfer of reading comprehension skills to real-life situations.

The CRM development process started by ensuring compliance with intellectual property rights. All materials used were original creations or appropriately licensed for educational purposes. Any references or citations were accurately documented to respect copyright laws and academic integrity.

The CRM was meticulously designed to address specific learning competencies outlined in educational standards or curricula. Each reading passage was carefully selected or crafted to target essential skills such as decoding, fluency, vocabulary acquisition, sentence construction, reasoning, and background knowledge. For instance, when targeting decoding skills, the CRM includes passages with varied phonetic patterns and word structures, allowing learners to practice and apply their decoding strategies within meaningful contexts. The result has been supported by Wang, Z. et al. (2018), that decoding plays a crucial part in reading because reading comprehension is the result of language comprehension and decoding, so it stands to reason that

decoding will predict reading comprehension across the range of language comprehension skills. Similarly, passages were strategically chosen to expose learners to diverse vocabulary and sentence structures, facilitating vocabulary acquisition and construction skills.

Content validation of the contextualized reading materials (CRM)

The validation results for the Contextualized Reading Materials (CRMs) demonstrates that the materials were rigorously evaluated by three expert validators across several critical dimensions, ensuring their quality, relevance, and effectiveness. In terms of Intellectual Property Rights and Compliance, the CRMs received a strong overall mean score of 2.75, indicating careful adherence to copyright standards and proper citation of materials, although some improvements were recommended in accurately documenting references. Regarding Learning Competencies, the materials achieved a perfect mean score of 3.00, reflecting excellent alignment with the Department of Education's (DepEd) specified learning objectives and grade-level standards, ensuring that the content effectively supports intended competencies.

In the area of Instructional Design and Organization, the CRMs received a mean score of 2.56, suggesting that the materials were generally well-aligned with learning objectives, instructional strategies, cognitive skill development, and value integration. While they exceeded expectations in many aspects, the reviewers identified minor areas for enhancement, particularly in lesson development, review, and integration strategies. For Instructional Quality, the CRMs obtained a mean score of 2.67, demonstrating high standards of factual accuracy, grammatical correctness, and relevance, although slight improvements were noted in factual and grammatical details.

The materials excelled in the Assessment category, again achieving a mean score of 3.00, indicating that the CRMs effectively include varied and well-aligned assessment tools, such as self-checks, achievement tests, rubrics, and engaging activities that facilitate learner progress and active participation. Similarly, for Readability, the CRMs achieved another perfect mean score of 3.00, confirming the materials' strong adaptability to learners' vocabulary levels, sentence structures, logical flow, and clarity in presenting lessons, instructions, and activities.

Overall, the consolidated weighted mean score of 2.83 confirms that the CRMs very satisfactorily met expert validation standards. These findings highlight the materials' strength in ensuring legal and ethical compliance, aligning with learning objectives, supporting effective instructional practices, and promoting learner engagement and comprehension. While the CRMs demonstrate outstanding performance across most validation categories, the synthesis underscores the importance of continuous refinement, particularly in enhancing reference documentation, factual accuracy, and lesson integration, to further strengthen their impact on learners' reading comprehension and academic growth.

Level of reading comprehension of Grade 3 learners after the utilization of CRM

The synthesis of the post-assessment results reveals a significant improvement in the reading comprehension levels of Grade 3 learners after the implementation of the Comprehensive Reading Materials (CRM). In word reading, 51.4% of learners reached the independent level, marking a notable increase compared to the pre-assessment where no learners demonstrated independent word-reading skills. This improvement suggests that exposure to CRMs familiarized learners with sight words and strengthened their decoding abilities, allowing many to progress

from the frustration level to the instructional and independent levels, with only one learner remaining at the frustration level after the intervention.

Regarding reading comprehension, 40% of learners reached the independent level, a substantial gain given that none had achieved this in the pre-assessment. Meanwhile, 60% demonstrated comprehension at the instructional level, showing they could understand texts with some instructional support. Crucially, none remained at the frustration level, compared to the pre-assessment where 77.1% were classified as frustrated readers. These positive outcomes highlight the effectiveness of CRMs in improving comprehension skills and reducing learner frustration, underscoring the material's role as a meaningful reading intervention.

The findings align with Yanto et al. (2020), who emphasize that extensive exposure to varied texts fosters comprehension development, and with Acedillo (2023), who notes that contextualized reading materials significantly enhance learners' reading abilities. Consistent engagement with these materials supports vocabulary growth, which in turn strengthens learners' ability to decode and comprehend increasingly complex texts. The study suggests that sustained use of CRMs not only improves reading fluency and comprehension but also builds the foundational skills needed for learners to become confident, independent readers.

Overall, the results reinforce that the CRM intervention effectively addressed previous challenges in reading and comprehension among Grade 3 learners, leading to measurable gains. Incorporating qualitative insights from learner feedback and teacher observations further affirms the CRM's positive impact, demonstrating its value as a strategic tool for fostering literacy development and advancing students' reading comprehension skills toward grade-appropriate or even advanced levels.

Comparison of the reading comprehension skills before and after CRM utilization

The Wilcoxon test was utilized to determine if significant differences existed in the level of reading comprehension of the learners before and after using the contextualized reading material. The analysis yielded very significant values for Word Reading ($Z=-5.336$; $p=.000$); Comprehension ($Z=-5.304$; $p=.000$); and Reading Level ($Z=-5.427$; $p=.000$). Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. The negative Z-values indicate a marked improvement of the reading comprehension levels after the utilization of the CRM. This means that the contextualized reading material effectively improved the learners' reading comprehension level.

During the implementation of the material, several observations and experiences were noted. Firstly, there was a noticeable increase in learners' interest in reading activities. The material seemed to engage them more effectively, sparking curiosity and enthusiasm for reading. Additionally, learners improved their performance throughout the sessions, indicating they were actively benefiting from the material.

Moreover, the learners particularly well-received certain parts of the material, while others elicited less enthusiasm. For instance, the learners generally liked interactive exercises and activities, as they provided opportunities for active participation and engagement. The result conforms with Conradi Smith et al. (2022), that providing additional support through small-group instruction or one-on-one interventions can help address specific comprehension difficulties. On the other hand, sections that required more passive reading were less favored. Overall, the implementation of the contextualized reading material proved to be a positive experience, with learners showing increased interest and improved performance in reading

comprehension. These insights highlight the effectiveness of the material in addressing learners' needs and enhancing their reading skills.

CONCLUSION

Based on the study's findings, several key conclusions were drawn. First, the absence of learners who could read and comprehend without assistance highlights the significant challenges many students face in both decoding and understanding texts, underscoring the urgent need for targeted support and intervention. Second, the use of Contextualized Reading Materials (CRM) successfully achieved its goals by integrating real-world examples and culturally relevant content, actively engaging learners, improving reading comprehension, and fostering positive reading habits. This confirms the value of contextualized resources in tailoring learning experiences to meet the diverse needs, backgrounds, and interests of students.

Third, the expert evaluation of the CRMs reflected strong agreement across various validation areas, indicating that the materials align well with educational objectives and adhere thoroughly to quality and validity standards. Fourth, the implementation of the CRMs led to measurable improvements, with a notable increase in the number of learners achieving independent reading levels, demonstrating the material's effectiveness in enhancing reading outcomes. Fifth, the CRMs significantly improved learners' reading comprehension levels, addressing key gaps identified during pre-assessment. Lastly, the materials were further refined based on expert feedback, which included improvements such as correctly citing sources, using locally familiar names, adjusting the sequence of events, and reorganizing questions chronologically to enhance clarity, cultural relevance, and instructional effectiveness. These conclusions collectively reinforce the importance of well-designed, contextually grounded reading materials in advancing literacy development among young learners.

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Glenna Rose B. Santuya

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