

The development and utilization of reading articles for the implementation of Project REAL: boosting learners' comprehension in English 5 and 6

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Abstract: The study developed and utilized the validated reading articles for the implementation of Project REAL and to boost learners' reading comprehension in English 5 and 6. It involved 45 Grades 5 and 6 learners at Tapnigue Elementary School for the school year 2023-2024. The study employed a descriptive-evaluative research design. Results revealed that before the implementation of the developed reading articles, most of the learners had poor levels of reading skills and comprehension. After the implementation of the reading intervention, learners improved and increased their comprehension and performance from frustration to instructional level. Furthermore, t-test results found that there was a significant difference in the level of performance of Grade 5 learners (t value=2.038, p value = 0.021) and Grade 6 learners (t value= 3.075, p value= 0.006). This signifies that there are significant differences between the pre-test and post-test results of the learners. In addition, findings revealed that the learners perceived that reading articles satisfactorily met all criteria set for evaluating their validity. An intervention plan was developed based on the findings of the study. Without a doubt, these reading articles would be significant in improving the reading curriculum and instruction as an innovative strategy implementation of Project REAL.

Keywords: Comprehension, Development, Improvement, Project REAL, Reading Performance.

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INTRODUCTION

Reading is an essential skill that forms the cornerstone of education and personal development, enabling individuals to access knowledge, explore new worlds, and engage with diverse ideas and perspectives. Many individuals, across various age groups, face challenges in developing their reading abilities. In response to these challenges, reading intervention programs have emerged as crucial tools to support struggling readers on their path to literacy (Falth, 2021).

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill that goes beyond decoding words; it involves understanding, interpreting, and making meaning from text. It is the cornerstone of academic success and lifelong learning. However, a significant number of students' encounter challenges in comprehending what they read which can hinder their ability to grasp the content, engage critically with texts, and excel academically (Cain & Oakhill, 2019).

Based on the National Report of the Philippines on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results in 2022, the Philippines ranked 77th out of 81 participating countries and economies in reading. The average reading score for 15-year-old students in the Philippines was 347 points, which increased from 340 points in the 2018 assessment but remained significantly below the global average reading score of 476 points. Despite this improvement, the Philippines still scored lower than the Organization for Economic Cooperation and

Development(OECD) average in reading, reflecting the ongoing challenges in student performance in this subject area. Caraga Region was also one of the regions that did not achieve a mean score higher than the national average which is 340 points.

Furthermore, the result of Grades 5 and 6 learners at Tapnigue Elementary School, Buenavista District IV, Division of Agusan del Norte, in the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (PHIL-IRI) this school year 2023-2024 in the General Screening Test was very low. Out of 20 learners in Grade 6, 80% failed to reach the passing score, while in Grade 5, out of 25 learners, 19 or 76% also belonged to the frustration level, and they were the struggling readers identified last school year 2022-2023. A lot of pupils can read, but they cannot comprehend what they were reading.

In response to the issue of reading, the researcher planned to develop an instructional material for the implementation of the project Read Everyday and Learn (REAL). It is an intervention of Tapnigue Elementary School to strengthen the Hamon: Bawat Bata Bumabasa (3B's) initiative following DepEd Memorandum No. 173, s. 2019, and somehow answer the learners' reading problem.

Thus, the main aim of the study was to develop and validate reading articles for reading comprehension and determine whether the developed reading articles have had made an impact on the learners' reading comprehension.

Problem statement

The main aim of the study was to develop and validate reading articles for reading comprehension in English 5 and 6 through Project REAL.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of reading comprehension of the Grades 5 and 6 learners' before implementing the developed reading articles for the implementation of project REAL in terms of independent, instructional, and frustration?
2. How do experts evaluate the reading articles in terms of objectives, technical quality, instructional quality, organization, language arts contents; and alignment?

Theoretical framework of the study

The study anchored on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and his concept of the Scaffolding and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The theory explores the influence the world has on individual development. It asserts that learning is a mostly social process whereby the development occurs through interactions with people who possess more knowledge or skills than the learner. Social learning thus precedes individual development and is unique to the individual (Vygotsky, 1978).

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) refers to the range of abilities a learner can perform with the guidance and encouragement from a skilled partner. When a learner is close to mastering a skillset required to complete a task but still needs the guidance of an expert to do so, they are considered to be in their zone of proximal development. In connection with this, teachers may use various techniques to help the learner better understand the concepts and skills required to perform a task on their own. In the classroom, scaffolding can include teaching activities, instructions, tools, and resources which are used to aid learners in the teaching-learning process.

Research design

This study employed descriptive-evaluative research design in developing and validating reading articles. A descriptive research design is used to describe the result and the data of the study. It was used in the study because it allows documentation of the current status of the reading comprehension of Grades 5 and 6 learners at Tapnigue Elementary School. Descriptive research is important in this study to establish a baseline understanding. It was used to determine the mean scores of the learners in their comprehension and their level of appreciation for the reading articles. In addition, an evaluative research design was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the developed reading articles for the implementation of Project REAL.

Research locale

The study was conducted at Tapnigue Elementary School located at Barangay Sangay, Buenavista District IV, Division of Agusan del Norte. Tapnigue Elementary School is 15 kilometers away from Buenavista proper, and it takes 30 minutes to drive to the said school. The school is composed of 8 teachers and has 139 officially enrolled learners. Tapnigue Elementary School was established in 1972. The school lot area is about 10,000 square meters, which was acquired through donations from private individuals in the early 1970s.

The school's location is characterized by mountainous areas, flat and rolling lands, and a creek that supplies the drinking water of the community. This site has only a small percentage of cultural minorities, and most of them are Higaonons. Sitio Tapnigue is rich in natural resources; they have a large tract of land available for agriculture. It is also a source of forest products in the municipality.

Participants of the study

The participants of the study were the Grades 5 and 6 learners of Tapnigue Elementary School. A total of 45 learners: 26 males and 19 females.

Research instrument

The study utilized passages and corresponding comprehension test from the PHIL-IRI (Philippine Informal Reading Inventory). The said instrument was used for the pre-test and post-test. It contained 3 passages in each grade level, with 10 items of questions for each passage. Also, an adopted questionnaire from Cubillas (2018) was used to determine the level of appreciation of the learners of the validated reading articles. Additionally, the adopted tool was divided into two parts. Part I contained information about the respondents' general demographics, including their age, gender, and grade level. Part II focused on the level of appreciation of the learners towards the reading articles.

Data gathering procedure

Before conducting the study, the researcher first sent a letter of approval to the offices of the Schools Division Superintendent of the Division of Agusan del Norte and the School Head of Tapnigue Elementary School to formally conduct the study. Also, a letter of permission was given to the parents and learners to ensure the willingness and commitment of the participants during the conduct of the study. After permission was granted, the researcher, who was also a Grade 6 teacher, conducted the pre-test in two sections. The test was done individually.

A pretest was done to determine the learners' base knowledge in reading comprehension. The responses were recorded, checked, and monitored to ensure 100% responses. After that, the researcher developed a reading article for the implementation of Project REAL. The developed

reading articles was used to boost learners' reading comprehension. Then, it was validated by the three experts in the Buenavista District. The reading articles were implemented through a series of exercises every day, and an evaluation after implementing the reading articles was conducted that served as the post-test. In addition, the learners then answered the survey questionnaire, showing their appreciation level for the developed reading articles. After the implementation stage, the data were tallied, interpreted, and presented for analysis.

Data analysis

The following statistical tools were used in analyzing the data gathered:

Percentage and Frequency was utilized to get the reading performance of the pupils before and after implementation of the developed reading articles.

Paired T-test was used to determine if there was a significant difference between the performances of the learners before and after the reading intervention.

Weighted Mean was utilized to determine the overall mean rating per item of the responses of the pupils for the level of appreciation or satisfaction towards the developed reading articles and the criteria for reading articles validation.

Level of reading comprehension of the Grades 5 and 6 learners' before implementing the reading articles

There was 1 or 4% of the learners are under the instructional level and 24 or 96% learners are under the frustration level in Grade 5. The results implied that learners can read but cannot comprehend what they read.

Among the Grade 6 learners, 100% were in the frustration level. The results implied that the learners had a poor performance in their pretest. This further shows that the learners have low reading comprehension skills.

When learners are not yet "grade ready," it means they have trouble understanding or doing the things expected for their grade level. This can happen for different reasons. For example, some learners might find reading hard because they struggle with understanding the words or sentences. Others might have trouble focusing or staying interested in what they're reading. When these challenges aren't addressed, it can affect their reading comprehension, which is how well they understand what they read. So, if someone is not grade ready, it means they need support to get better at reading and understanding.

Reading has received a lot of attention and importance from many nations (Ma'youf & Aburezeq, 2022). The Department of Education in the Philippines has been stepping up efforts to close literacy gaps among students and to advocate for reading proficiency by supporting the "Bawat Bata Bumabasa" (3Bs) Initiative among the nation's schools, as stated in Department of Education Memorandum No. 173, section. 2019. Unfortunately, statistics are proving to be irrefutable proof of the nation's current literacy level. According to data, one third of elementary school graduates who move on to high school are classified as "frustrated readers," while the other third as "instructional readers" (Luz, 2007). These reading levels are both below the expected and intended reading level for the students' grade and age.

Experts' evaluation of the developed and validated reading articles

In terms of objectives, technical quality and alignment, the mean rating is 5.00 which indicates that the level of validity of the developed reading materials tool was very satisfactory as rated by the experts. This implies that objectives, technical quality, and alignment in each topic of developed reading materials had exceedingly met all the criteria in enhancing learner's reading comprehension and performance.

During the implementation phase of this study, the researcher observed that the higher the skills, the lower their scores were, which means that they are not yet ready for the grade level they are now at. The researcher noticed that they have trouble with unfamiliar words, read slowly, struggle to understand the main idea, and make errors when reading.

Likewise, the grand mean for instructional quality, organization, and language arts content are 4.83, 4.92, and 4.89, respectively. This indicates that instructional quality, organization, and language arts content of the developed reading materials had exceedingly met all the criteria in enhancing learners' reading comprehension and performance.

The results support the study of Harappa (2020) who mentioned that reading can make learners better writers and speakers. Reading skills can take them a step ahead and help them achieve their objectives by customizing the way they read. If they choose the appropriate reading skill, it will enhance the reading process and help them achieve their goal.

The overall mean is 4.93 indicated that the developed reading articles had exceedingly met all the criteria in enhancing learner's reading comprehension.

Such results are suggested by Carillaga (2022) who explained that the enhancement tool for reading comprehension skills should be appealing in that it captures the students' interest to engage them in accomplishing the tasks in the learning material that will help them develop their reading comprehension skills.

Level of reading comprehension of the Grades 5 and 6 learners' after implementing the developed reading articles

There were 7 or 28% learners in the instructional level, while 18 or 72% learners were at a frustration level in Grade 5. This showed that the reading articles developed for Project REAL helped improve the performance and reading comprehension of some of the learners. While there are more learners at frustration level, it is worth noting that there are already 7 learners who have already progressed to the instructional level from pretest to posttest.

Whereas among the Grade 6 learners, there were 14 or 70% learners at the frustration level, 5 or 25 % learners at the instructional level, and one independent reader. The results showed that there was a slight increase in the number of learners at instructional level and only 1 in the independent level. Despite this poor result, there is a marked decrease in the number of learners in the frustration level.

This implies that there is an increase in the reading comprehension of about 30% of the learners in grades 5 and 6, who were using the developed reading articles to boost their reading comprehension. This highlighted that reading articles has some degree of effectiveness as an intervention in boosting their reading comprehension.

The results above can be associated with the study of Burke et al (2023) pointed out that reading interventions are a necessary component of a strong literacy program. Assessing a student's reading skills, determining areas of weakness and strength, and providing strategies help students working toward proficiency find success.

Tomas et al (2023) mentioned also that the establishment of an enrichment learning intervention suitable for the language acquisition and cognitive development helps the learners develop their reading skills-related attitudes and behaviors. Thus, integration of intervention programs for reading difficulties in the school's curriculum are of great importance.

The findings corroborate with Falth (2021) who emphasized that comprehension is achieved when the reader builds a mental representation, an internal image, founded on a text message. Primary prerequisites like words decoding ability and word knowledge are necessary for developing a good reading ability.

Test of significant difference between the learners performance before and after the implementation of the developed reading articles

There is a significant difference (t value= 2.038, p value = 0.021) in the level performance of the Grade 5 learners before (mean = 12.5200) and after (mean = 14.6800) the implementation of the developed reading articles for the Project REAL. On the other hand, there is also a significant difference (t value= 3.075, p value = 0.006) in the level performance of the Grade 6 learners before (mean = 11.9000) and after (mean = 15.6000) the reading intervention.

This signifies that there are significant differences between the pre-test and post-test results of the learners. This further concludes that learners had better and improved performance after their exposure to the developed reading articles. This also showed that the reading intervention helped address the learning needs as well as effectively support readers enhance their reading skills.

The result obtained can be complemented in the study of Sabanal (2023) who found out that there is a significant difference in the level of reading performance of Grade 5 struggling readers, based on the result in the t –test. The increase in the pupils reading performance shows that using Balsa Para sa Pagbasa 30-minute Purok-Based program was effective in enhancing the reading performance of Grade V –pupil.

Similarly, Falth (2021) conducted an intervention targeting reading and working memory among struggling readers in primary school. She found out that children in the intervention group improved significantly better than children in the control group on eight tests: reading comprehension, word decoding, nonsense-word reading, short-term memory, working memory, visuospatial short-term memory, visuospatial working memory and working memory for words.

Moreover, Calam (2022) investigated the effect of interactive instructional reading materials to struggling readers. To determine if the interactive reading materials influence the reading ability of the learners, the Analysis of Covariance model (ANCOVA) was utilized at 0.05 level of significance. Results revealed that the Interactive Instructional Reading Materials helped learners read on their own and with comprehension.

Overall, the developed reading articles for the implementation of project REAL helped improved learners' reading comprehension sustaining their interest as teachers promote a strategy to make reading and learning gratifying, engaging, and effective.

Level of appreciation of the learners after the implementation of the developed reading articles

The indicator states that learners prefer to make use of the reading articles since it is very helpful in increasing their reading performance.

The lowest mean rating of the students were indicators 3 and 7 which stated that learners read more fluently since it is self-paced and learners can read much faster with confidence after numerous exercises, respectively. The indicator got the mean rating of 4.11, which was interpreted as moderately high.

The grand mean was 4.44 which means that the learners were satisfied with the developed reading articles as perceived by the learners, which can boost the learner's reading comprehension. Hence, they moderately appreciated the materials.

Asent the results above, van der Sande et al (2023) noted that there is an effect of motivational interventions on both reading motivation and reading comprehension. Results in their study showed that interventions had the largest effects on reading motivation and reading comprehension. This outcome can inform teachers who are committed to furthering their students' reading development, developers of educational methods, and those who make decisions about curricula for reading education.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

Most of the students of the mentioned grade levels had poor reading performance and comprehension that classified them in the frustration level and so they are not yet grade ready.

To address the said learning problem a reading articles was developed to boost the learners' reading comprehension.

After the implementation of the developed reading intervention, learners had better and improved reading performance.

It can be noted that there is a significant difference in the performance of the learners before and after the implementation of the reading articles. Similarly, the improvement in reading comprehension is evident where almost of the learners are already in the instructional level, manifesting that the developed reading articles help in boosting the reading comprehension of Grade 5 and 6 learners.

Learners expressed their high level of appreciation of the developed reading articles for the implementation of the project REAL, this further suggests that they like the exercises in the intervention materials.

Based on the results of the study, the researcher crafted an action plan that highlighted the techniques on how to construct sentences with the use of reading articles for Project REAL.

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