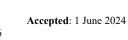# Grade three learners' reading difficulties: Inputs to the development of an intervention material

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Abstract

The context of reading instruction has been explored by various studies. This study revealed salient findings that provided implications for practice. Undoubtedly, they offer areas for further exploration. This motivated this study to investigate the reading difficulties of learners as bases in the development of an intervention material. Thematic analysis of the extended texts revealed that learners have difficulty in understanding vocabulary from the reading texts and answering comprehension questions. With these difficulties, an intervention material was developed in which local stories were used. Result of the evaluation of this material revealed that its level of validity is very high. Hence, the material is valid, useful, and acceptable. Nonetheless, using materials that are familiar to learners like the using the stories found in the community facilitates better understanding of any reading texts. The familiarity of the material allows learners to relate to it; thus, improving their vocabulary and reading comprehension. Finally, this study suggests that reading materials should be contextualized, but other materials from outside the context of the learners should be used sparingly to expose learners to various cultures and ideas.

Keywords: contextualization, indigenization, intervention material, reading difficulties, localized materials

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1. Introduction

Reading is one of most important literacy skill and it gives many benefits for the readers. Reading is the window of the world. People can learn more by reading books, periodicals, newspapers, and other types of content. Reading is the most crucial element of learning and social interaction because, in the first place, it is an essential instrument for communication in a civilized society. Second, societal context has a major impact on the reading materials generated at any given point in history. Third, there have been advances that have resulted in two quite distinct poles during the course of recorded reading history.

Additionally, reading is also the process of bringing meaning to and getting meaning from printed or written material. Through reading with comprehension, learners can widen their knowledge which will help them solve problems which they may encounter in their daily living and will make them aware of what is happening in their environment. Developing strong reading skills in students is one of the key goals of every early education program. It is through reading that students expand their vocabulary and learn about the world. Reading is also the key to success in spelling and writing. As such, various programs and initiatives are developed and implemented.

In the Philippines, Basa Pilipinas is USAID/Philippines' flagship basic education project, which supports the Philippine government's early grade reading program. Basa Pilipinas, which is implemented in close coordination with the Department of Education, helps to execute the language and literacy component of the K-12 curriculum for Grades 1 through 3. The project's approach to teacher professional development and systemic change aims to promote transformational practices at the school, division, and national levels, with a focus on classroom change in materials development and accessibility, guided reading, writing, and grouping for differentiated learning. To date, Basa Pilipinas has trained 12,854 Grades 1–3 teachers in effective reading instruction, as well as 3,465 Department of Education supervisors and school heads in Learning Action Cell facilitation and teacher training support for reading (usaid.gov, 2017). Notably, various reading programs were implemented as supported by various Department of Education orders. These include, Adopt-A-Struggling Reader Program and Brigada Pagbasa.

In the Division of Ilocos Sur, there are reading programs that adopt reading approaches and strategies in teaching reading and reading comprehension that the schools supported, adopted and implemented like the Adopt-A-Struggling Reader Program "Sa Pagbasa, Tayo ay Magkasangga", Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), CID-WIFI (Wikang Iloko at Filipino Isulong) and P.E. At Home Innovative Learning Journey in the New Normal Division Launching to address reading problems most especially in the issue of reading comprehension among the learners.

Amidst of the existence of these reading programs in the past and in the present to address the problems in reading and reading comprehension among the Filipino learners, the Philippine still belongs to a country which has a low average in reading comprehension. In a 2018 global survey called Program for International Assessment (PISA) among 600,000 students worldwide, Filipino students around the age of 15 got a rating of 340 points in reading comprehension, lower than the average of 487 points. Consequently, in the said study, the Philippines ranked last among 79 countries (The Manila Times, 2019). The same survey conducted on 2023 revealed that out of 81 countries all over the world, Philippines landed at bottom 10 when it comes to reading comprehension. In the Division of Ilocos Sur, the consolidated report of the Pre-Functional Literacy Assessment Tool (FLAT) for the S.Y 2023-2024, revealed that huge number of learners belong to the STORY LEVEL only which means few number of learners can comprehend what they are reading.

Clearly, the reading difficulties among the Grade 3 learners in the municipality of Sigay were identified and

given emphasis as they were the basis in designing and developing the appropriate reading intervention material to enhance their vocabulary for this factor is very important for a successful reading comprehension. Notably, further research is imperative and needed to identify the difficulties in reading from teachers' and learners' point of view (Meylance, 2014). With these in mind, this study was formulated to investigate the reading difficulties of Grade 3 learners.

2. Methods

Research Design - This research study employed the case study approach. A case study is a qualitative design in which the researcher delves deeply into a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals; the case(s) are time and activity bound, and researchers gather thorough information over a long period of time using a range of data gathering techniques (Creswell, 2014; Crowe & Cresswell, 2011). Since the study described the reading difficulties of Grade 3 learners, the researcher found the design appropriate for the study. After all, a case study is an in-depth exploration of a certain issue, which is reading difficulty in the case of this study.

Selection and Study Site - This study was conducted in Sigay, Ilocos Sur. The participants of this study were the Grade 3 reading teachers and Grade 3 learners of the seven schools in the municipality of Sigay, Ilocos Sur: Sto. Rosario Elementary School, Namatingan Primary School, Matallucod Primary School, Abaccan Elementary School, San Elias Elementary School, Sigay Central School and Mabileg Primary School. The participants of the study were chosen using criterion sampling in which two criteria were set. First, the teachers have taught for at least two years and are still teaching reading in classroom in any of the public elementary school in the municipality of Sigay. The learners should have been identified as having reading difficulties. Second, they are willing to be interviewed and to participate in the study. With these criteria, seven teachers were identified as main key informants of the study. Notably, 15 learners and 12 parents served as participants to triangulate the gathered data. Such number of participants provided data saturation for the study; hence, providing the justification to the number of participants for this study.

Research Instrument - In collecting pertinent data, an interview protocol was utilized. This interview guide contains *a priori* codes which served as basis in formulating the questions to be asked during the interviews. Then, the interview protocol was constructed based on the interview guide. This served as the main gathering tool. This contains questions which were asked to the participants. Finally, a questionnaire adapted from the study of Azarias (2022) was utilized in determining the validity of the developed intervention material.

Data Gathering Procedure - In the conduct of the study, the researcher asked permission to conduct the study from the respective officials of the Department of Education in the municipality of Sigay, Ilocos Sur. After securing the permit to Conduct Study, the researcher developed the interview questions based on the a *priori* codes of the study which served as basis in formulating the interview questions. After the interview questions were formulated, the researcher identified the target teacher using the set criteria. Then, observations were done by teacher participants to determine the learners that have reading difficulties in which the result of their observations were their bases in answering the interview questions. With the recommendation of the teacher and using the set criteria, the learners and the parents were identified. After identifying the target participants, the researcher secured their consent to participate in the interview.

In the conduct of the face-to-face interview, the learners and their parent were interviewed at the same time through a home visit. Simultaneously, the teachers were also interviewed to substantiate or enrich the gathered data. Notably, the whole data gathering lasted for one and half month given the availability of the participants and in consideration of the richness of data. After the face-to-face interviews were conducted, the data gathered were transcribed to arrive at extended text. Then, the member checking procedures were implemented through letting the participants the extended texts, follows up interviews, and sharing of the findings of the study. in doing so, the truthfulness, accuracy, and reliability of the gathered data were assured. After gathering all the data needed, qualitative analysis was employed using the cool and warm analysis. Next, the researcher developed the reading

intervention material based on the result of the careful analysis of the data gathered. Finally, the developed instructional material was evaluated by two English teachers, two reading coordinators, and three master teachers; the stories were validated by cultural bearers.

Analysis of Data - The oral answers of the participants were individually transcribed to come up with extended texts. Upon availability of the extended texts, cool and warm analyses were done. In performing the cool analysis, significant statements were identified and grouped. Then, themes were formulated in the warm analysis. The themes emerged in this study were further subjected to member checking procedures via correspondence technique (de Guzman & Guillermo, 2007) whereby each of the study participants was approached individually to verify the consistency of the transcription and interpretation. In this manner, the researcher is assured not only of the trustworthiness but also the truthfulness of the data reported (de Guzman & Tan, 2007). Finally, mean was used to describe the level of validity of the developed instructional material.

Categorization of Data - In the interpretation of data, the norm below was used.

Range	Statistical Limit	Descriptive Rating	Overall DR
5	4.20 – 5.00	Very High Validity (VHV)	Very High (VH)
4	3.40 – 4.19	High Validity (HV)	High (H)
3	2.60 – 3.39	Moderate Validity (MV)	Moderate (M)
2	1.80 – 2.59	Fair Validity (FV)	Fair (F)
1	1.00 – 1.79	Poor Validity (PV)	Poor (P)

Ethical Consideration - Before conducting the audio –recording interview, the researcher secured consent from the parent, learner and teacher participants asking their full participation in the research. The consent indicated that all the information that the participants provided are to be used solely in the research to provide security, privacy, and dignity to the research participants. The participants were assured that they can withdraw their participation in the study any time they want. Finally, they were assured that the results of the study and the interview transcripts shall be shown and communicated to them.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Reading Difficulties of Learners

Reading is one of the macro skills that are paramount in the development of the communication or literacy skills of every learner. Undeniably, learners from different levels face difficulties that need to be understood to maximize the goals and objectives of every reading instruction. This motivated the conduct of this study. Interestingly, the thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews divulged the two reading difficulties of the learners. These are understanding vocabulary from the reading texts and answering comprehension questions. The succeeding discussions explained the findings of the study.

Understanding Vocabulary from the Reading Texts. In the interview with the participants, analysis revealed that the reading difficulties centered on understanding the English vocabulary found in the reading texts. Their verbalizations collectively described the learners as having poor vocabulary. Other participants mentioned that the learners lack vocabulary leading to not understanding what they are reading. To support the claims, the teachers (T) verbalized:

"Evidently, they have poor or lack vocabulary or they can't understand some of the words that they are reading." (T1)

"Their problem is they have poor English vocabulary. As a result, they can understand the words used in the text." (T2)

"Ah, I think…they have poor English vocabulary or lack understanding of the words." (T3)

"You know my problem is there lack of vocabs. They can't understand words." (T4)

"Most of the time, words are not familiar to them, so they can comprehend." (T5)

"Always and forever problem perhaps is the lack of vocabulary. That is why they need to acquire a lot of words so that they comprehend." (T6)

"My problem? Ah, the vocabulary of my pupils. It is very hard for them." (T7)

Similarly, the parents (P) and learners (L) shared that the same observations by the teachers. In fact, below are sample verbalizations that justify the claim.

"Narigat na a maawatan ti kaipapanan dagiti balikas a basbasaenna no English nga istoria ti basaenna. (He has difficulty in understanding the meaning of the words in the reading text that he is reading when it is in English." (P1)

"Nakapoy ti pannakaawatna iti kaipapanan dagiti balikas a basbasaenna no English nga istoria ti basaenna. (My daughter is poor in understanding the meaning of the words that he is reading from the story that he is reading.)" (P2)

"Kasapulan diay anak ko nga masurwan ti English words ngay ta talaga nakapuy suna. (My son needs to be taught with English words because he poor when it comes to it.)" P10

"Dagidiay English words Ma'am...Nagrigat nga awaten. (Those English words Ma'am… They are difficult to understand)" L10

"Han ko maawatan diay words nga English. Nagrigat Ma'am. (I cannot understand the English words. It is difficult Ma'am.)" "L15)

Notably, the verbalizations of the participants accentuate the poor vocabulary of the learners. Likewise, the statements of the participants imply that understanding or comprehending the reading texts is dependent on the vocabulary level of the learners. In fact, Jayanti (2016) discovered that the vocabulary knowledge of learners is among the factors that hinder the development of reading comprehension among learners. Also, Nanda & Azmy (2020) revealed that poor vocabulary is among the factors contributing to problems in reading instruction.

Finally, the finding highlights the paramount role of vocabulary in reading instruction. In fact, Silva & Cain (2015). LervAag *et al.* (2018) and Lawrence *et al.* (2019) articulated that by helping to identify semantic meaning and collaborating with inference in sentence meaning comprehension, vocabulary knowledge aids in reading comprehension. Hence, vocabulary instruction should be given emphasis in reading classes. In fact, vocabulary knowledge relates to a semantic schema on passage mental image cognition and single word or character semantic meaning identification; it is considered the smallest semantic unit in reading comprehension and a component of linguistic comprehension (Braze *et al.,* 2016; Nation, 2015).

Answering Comprehension Questions. From the sharing of the participants, comprehension questions remain one of the factors leading to the reading comprehension of the learners. They accentuated that learners have difficulty in answering the questions because they cannot understand these questions that fall under inferential, critical, and application levels. With these, translating the questions to Ilokano is needed for the learners to understand the questions. To justify the claims, below are sample verbalizations from the teachers.

"They have difficulty in answering higher level of reading comprehension questions. Like the critical, inferential and application level." (T1)

"They have difficulty in answering higher level of reading comprehension questions like the critical and inferential level." (T3)

"Always, the problem is their reading comprehension. They can answer the reading comprehension questions." T6

The abovementioned statements are also supported by the sharing of the learners and their parents. As stated:

"Haan na masungbatan dagiti questions Ma'am. Masapul mamin-anum nga ipakaawat kaniana. (He cannot answer the questions Ma'am. I need to explain to him many times.)" P7

"Madam, narigat na sungbatan dagiti a saludsod maaipanggep iti binasa na nga istoria. (Madam, she has difficulty in answering the questions from the story that she read.)" (P2)

"Ma'am nagrigat met dagidiay questions nga damdamagen da ta English met gamin. Diak maawatan. (Ma'am, the questions are difficult because they are written in English. I cannot understand.)" L7

"Haan ko unay maansweran dagidiay questions Ma'am ta haan ko maawatan. Masapul mai-Ilokano. (I cannot really answer the questions Ma'am. It needs to be translated in Ilokano.)" L11

"Iyong mga questions po. Narigat ko maawatan. Masapul maiexplain kaniami ti Ilokano Ma'am. (The questions are difficult to understand. They need to be explained in Ilokano.)" L12

Clearly, the statements of the participants indicate that being unable to understand questions impedes their comprehension of reading texts. In fact, Jayanti (2016) and Kovbasko (2020) revealed that many learners had trouble finishing the reading comprehension portion of English proficiency exams. Because of their inability to pass the exams, the students had to put off their education or struggle to find suitable employment (Nanda & Azmy, 2020). Last, Danesh and Nourdad (2017) discovered that learners who struggle with problem-solving techniques would constantly struggle with reading comprehension exercises.

3.2 Developed Intervention Material

The study revealed that the learners have difficulty in understanding vocabulary from the reading texts and answering comprehension questions. The interviews also revealed that using stories or materials that are found in the community helps them understand their lesson and answer questions. In such context, an intervention material was developed to develop the vocabulary of learners, enhance their skills in answering comprehension questions, and expose them to the culture of their place through the stories used in the material. Three stories coming from the locale of the study served as the main material. These stories are told by the cultural bearers. The three stories are "How Aw-asen Falls Got Its Name?", "How Barangay Sto.Rosario Got Its Name?", and "The First Sigay Coffee Festival". The developed intervention material contains activities that are mainly focused on vocabulary enhancement and reading comprehension enhancement. Finally, this material is a 43-page booklet type instructional material.

3.3 Level of Validity of the Developed Intervention Material

Table 1

Level of validity of the developed instructional material

Indicator	Mean	DR
Objectives	4.73	VHV
Content	5.00	VH
Usability	5.00	VH
Functionality	5.00	VH
Acceptability	4.73	VH
Overall mean	4.89	VH

Legend: 4.20-5.00   Very High Validity (VHV)   Very High (VH)

Table 1 presents the level of validity of the developed instructional material in addressing the reading

difficulties of learners. As can be gleaned from the table, content, usability, and functionality got 5.0 mean rating which is described as *very high.* The findings indicate that the developed instructional material contains items that are in congruent to its intended purpose. Also, the material is usable and functional. In fact, Corpuz and Salandanan (2013) affirmed this when they highlighted the teaching materials should respond to the needs of the learners. On the other hand, both objectives and acceptability got the lowest mean rating of 4.73 which is still described as *very high*. This means that the objectives somewhat need modifications though they are considered to be of very high validity. Also, the program need full acceptance. Overall, the level of validity of the reading intervention program is *very high validity* as supported by the 4.89 overall mean rating. This means that the instructional material is valid, useful, and implementable.

4. Conclusion

The context of reading instruction is once again highlighted in this study. The findings accentuate that learners and teachers faces issues on reading instruction which mainly centered on the difficulties of learners. Similarly, lack of vocabulary and reading comprehension in English course remain the pervading difficulties of learners. With these, reading is one of the macro skills that teachers need to invest time and resources to help learners cope with their difficulties. Similarly, the findings amplify the need for synergized actions of the learners and their parents as the pertinent key actors in addressing the identified difficulties. Dealing with these difficulties should not be the sole responsibility of the teachers. Interestingly, this study underscores that using materials that are familiar to learners like the using the stories found in the community facilitates better understanding of any reading texts. The familiarity of the material allows learners to relate to it; thus, improving their vocabulary and reading comprehension. Nonetheless, the developed intervention material is valid, acceptable, implementable, and responsive to the needs of the end users.

4.1 Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, this study suggests that reading materials should be contextualized, but other materials from outside the context of the learners should be used sparingly to expose learners to various cultures and ideas. Addressing the reading difficulties of the learners may be performed by allowing teachers to use localized materials; thus, trainings on localization of teaching materials may be prioritized by inviting experts in the field. Notably, the study has limitations that offer future researchers ideas for further investigations. First, this study is limited into identifying the reading difficulties of learners. Second, the developed material was subjected only to evaluation in terms of its level of validity. In such context, future studies may be conducted to determine the degree of seriousness of the difficulties. Finally, future studies may want to test the level of effectiveness of the developed material through two-group pretest-posttest design.

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