

Reading-in-Tandem: Enhancing Reading Comprehension Skills of Selected Grade 8 Instructional Readers

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Abstract: Reading comprehension serves as a fundamental aspect of literacy, exerting significant impact on both personal achievement and societal progress. In today's age of rapid information dissemination, the ability to comprehend diverse texts is more crucial than ever. This study examines the effectiveness of the Reading-in-Tandem partner reading strategy in enhancing the reading comprehension skills of selected Grade 8 instructional readers at New Cabalan National High School during the 2023-2024 school year. Utilizing a one-group experimental design, the research assessed the impact of this enhancement program. Purposive sampling was used to select eight Grade 8 students identified as instructional readers. Data collection involved pre-test and post-test assessments, as well as continuous monitoring throughout the implementation of the Reading-in-Tandem strategy. Descriptive statistics and the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test were employed for data analysis. The results indicate a statistically significant improvement in students' reading comprehension skills, with 3 out of 8 students progressing to an independent reading level. These results emphasize the effectiveness of the Reading-in-Tandem strategy in enhancing reading comprehension skills among Grade 8 students. The study concludes with recommendations for the integration and further exploration of partner reading strategies in educational contexts.

Keywords: Reading-in-Tandem; partner reading; reading comprehension; instructional readers; one-group experimental design

1. INTRODUCTION

This Reading is a fundamental skill that plays a crucial role in our daily lives, from accessing information online to understanding complex documents. Sinaga et al. (2020), reading helps in developing critical thinking skills, making it a valuable means of discovering new ideas, facts, and experiences. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the ability to read and comprehend various types of texts is more important than ever. Torres (2019) stated that being good at reading helps learners understand what they read, including text and images. With the global exchange of ideas, goods, and information, individuals need to be able to read and comprehend texts from diverse sources and in different languages. Whether it's reading a news article from a foreign country, understanding international agreements and treaties, or communicating with people from diverse backgrounds, strong reading skills are essential for navigating the complexities of our interconnected world. In 2022, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) revealed that merely one-third of 10-year-olds globally possess the skill to read and understand a basic written narrative. This statistic adds urgency to the findings of the Southeast Asia

Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) 2019, which highlighted substantial challenges in foundational education, specifically in reading proficiency, across Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Vietnam. These insights underscore the critical necessity for tailored interventions aimed at supporting struggling readers and bridging the gaps in learning outcomes. In the Philippines, reading is of utmost importance for academic success, professional development, and personal growth.

Despite a slight improvement in reading comprehension scores from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 to 2022, the Philippines still ranks significantly below the global average, placing 76th out of 81 countries in 2022 after being the lowest out of 79 participating countries in 2018. Llego (2022) highlighted that a significant factor leading to the poor reading performance among students in the Philippines is the prevalent poverty in numerous regions. A considerable number of students originate from households where English is not the primary language, and they lack access to reading materials or resources conducive to enhancing their reading proficiency. As a country that values education and knowledge, the ability to read and understand various texts is essential for students, professionals, and citizens alike.

New Cabalan National High School recently conducted its annual reading assessment to evaluate the reading comprehension levels among its students. The results indicated

that Grade 8 students are facing difficulties in attaining optimal reading proficiency. While there is already a reading program in place for students struggling with frustration-level reading, those at the instructional reading level also require support. The instructional reading level signifies the stage at which a student is capable of reading with assistance from a teacher or tutor (TeamTom Education, 2023). Typically, these students demonstrate word recognition rates between 90% and 96% and comprehension levels ranging from 59% to 79% based on Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI). Recognizing the importance of addressing this gap, the researchers emphasized the necessity of enhancing the reading comprehension skills of instructional readers across various cognitive levels—literal, inferential, evaluative, and extended. This focus is essential, especially in a country where English proficiency holds significant value and serves as a global advantage (Dariagan & Laureto, 2022). Proficiency in reading comprehension not only contributes to academic success but also fosters overall cognitive development. Banditvilai (2020) underscores the pivotal role of teachers in this endeavor, highlighting the effectiveness of purposeful reading strategies. These strategies empower students with the skills needed to effectively navigate and manage their reading materials, thus enhancing their comprehension skills.

In light of this, the researchers opted for one of the most effective techniques to enhance reading comprehension skills: partner reading. Partner reading involves pairing two students in a reading classroom, providing practice opportunities for both individuals (Yanti et al., 2020). As asserted by Salsabila and Nasution (2022), the Partner Reading Strategy stands out as a highly effective approach for teaching reading comprehension. This method facilitates easier text comprehension and yields numerous benefits, fostering students' eagerness to learn, refining the learning process, and kindling a deeper interest in reading. Several studies confirm the efficacy of this strategy. Ekowijayanto et al. (2022) discovered its positive impact on enhancing students' reading comprehension, while Anggeraini et al. (2020) observed significant improvements in both comprehension and reading habits among students. Furthermore, Mellinda et al. (2022) highlighted the effectiveness of the Partner Reading Strategy in English instruction, particularly in enhancing reading comprehension through collaborative reading activities. Thus, this study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the Reading-in-Tandem partner reading strategy in enhancing the reading comprehension skills of Grade 8 instructional readers at New Cabalan National High School.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a One-Group Experimental Design, which involves exposing a single group of participants to an intervention or enhancement and measuring outcomes before and after. As per Voxco (2021), the pre-test serves to assess the group's condition before treatment, while the post-test evaluates any changes within the group after the treatment.

This design enables researchers to evaluate the effectiveness of the "Reading in Tandem" strategy in enhancing students' reading comprehension skills. By serving as their own control, participants' progress can be assessed within the same group, providing insights into the impact of the enhancement.

Pretest scores refer to the initial assessments conducted before implementing the "Reading in Tandem" strategy. These scores establish a baseline measurement of students' reading comprehension skills before any intervention takes place.

The "Reading in Tandem" strategy entails pairs of students, with one serving as the instructional reader and the other as the independent reader, engaging in joint reading and discussions of texts. This method promotes active participation and peer interaction, enabling students to assist each other in comprehending and analyzing the material.

Posttest scores are assessments conducted after the implementation of the "Reading in Tandem" strategy. These scores measure the students' reading comprehension skills following the enhancement, allowing researchers to evaluate any changes or improvements. By comparing posttest scores to pretest scores, researchers can determine the effectiveness of the "Reading in Tandem" strategy in enhancing students' reading comprehension skills.



Figure 1. Paradigm of the Study

2.2 Respondents

The participants in this study were eight selected Grade 8 instructional readers from New Cabalan National High School. According to the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), an instructional reader is a student who requires support from a parent, teacher, or tutor. These students were chosen based on their demonstrated need for additional support in reading comprehension. While there is a reading program focused on frustration readers, it was acknowledged that instructional readers also need targeted interventions to enhance their reading comprehension skills. These students were identified through a pre-test, which provided the necessary data to classify them as instructional readers.

Table 1
Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Male	5	62.5
Female	3	37.5

Total	8	100
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Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of participants by gender. The table reveals that the majority of the respondents were male, accounting for 62.5% (5 participants), while females constituted 37.5% (3 participants). This distribution indicates a higher representation of males in the study sample. The total number of respondents is 8, with the percentages summing to 100%.

2.3 Sampling Method

The researchers employed purposive sampling by carefully selecting and examining particular sections that align with the research objectives. Purposive sampling is a non-random sampling method where units are selected based on specific criteria. This non-probability sampling technique involves the researcher selecting a sample (individuals, cases, or events) based on their judgment that it aligns with the study's objectives (Bisht, 2024). Crossman (2020) further explains that a purposive sample, a non-probability sampling method, is chosen according to specific characteristics of a population and the goals of the research. This method typically results in a relatively small sample size, particularly in contrast to probability sampling techniques.

In this study, the researchers chose eight (8) Grade 8 students, (5 males and 3 females) of New Cabalan National High School in Olongapo City, SY 2023-2024, as the participants. The basis for selecting these students included their demonstrated need for reading improvement, as identified through previous assessments and teacher recommendations. The selected students were those who fell within the instructional reading level, where they required additional support to enhance their reading comprehension skills. This targeted approach ensured that the enhancement program was applied to those most likely to benefit from it, thereby aligning with the research objectives of assessing the effectiveness of the partner reading strategy in improving reading comprehension skills.

2.4 Instruments

The researchers utilized a reading material from the school's reading program. This material included a reading passage tailored specifically for Grade 8 students accompanied by ten (10) comprehension questions. These questions served as both the pretest and posttest instruments throughout the study. In the posttest phase, the researchers intentionally rearranged both the questions and answer choices.

The study was conducted through face-to-face classes. Students answered the pretest before the enhancement program began and the posttest after its completion.

2.5 Data Analysis

After administering both the pre-test and post-test to the students, the data that was gathered from the participants were tallied, tabulated, and analyzed.

The researchers utilized descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and median to summarize both the pre-test and post-test results because the data was found to not be normally distributed through the Shapiro-Wilk test. The Shapiro-Wilk test is a hypothesis test designed to assess the normality of a dataset. It examines a sample's data with the null hypothesis stating that the dataset follows a normal distribution (Malato, 2023). When data is not normally distributed, traditional parametric tests like the t-test may not be appropriate as they assume normality.

Furthermore, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used to evaluate the significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. It serves as an excellent alternative for analyzing repeated measures or paired observations without necessitating that the data adhere to a normal distribution (Statistics Solutions, 2024). In this case, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test allows for a reliable assessment of whether there was a statistically significant change in reading levels from pre-test to post-test despite the non-normal distribution of the data.

Students' reading level were sorted into three groups based on their scores. Students scoring one to four indicated the frustration level, scores of five to seven represented the instructional level, and scores of eight to ten denoted the independent level.

Scale Used in the Conduct of the Reading Assessment for Junior High School

Scores	Levels
8-10	Independent
5-7	Instructional
1-4	Frustration

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2

Reading Levels of the Students in Terms of Pre-Test Scores

Score	Frequency	Percentage	Descriptive Interpretation
5	2	25.0	Instructional
6	2	25.0	Instructional
7	4	50.0	Instructional
Composite Mean Score	6.25		Instructional

Note: n = 8

Table 2 presents an overview of reading levels of the students based on their pre-test scores. Students obtained a 5 on the pre-test (n = 2, 25%), a 6 (n = 2, 25%), and a 7 (n = 4, 50%), indicating an "instructional" reading level. The composite mean score of 6.25 (n = 8) supports the assertion that the students' mean reading ability, as assessed by the pre-

test, falls within the "instructional" range. This table offers a foundational comprehension of the students' reading levels prior to introducing the enhancement program.

Table 3
Reading Levels of the Students in Terms of Post-Test Scores

Score	Frequency	Percentage	Descriptive Interpretation
6	2	25.0	Instructional
7	3	37.5	Instructional
8	1	12.5	Independent
9	2	25.0	Independent
Composite Mean Score	7.38		Instructional

Table 3 presents an overview of the reading levels of students based on their post-test scores after the integration of the reading-in-tandem strategy. The results show that the majority of students maintained their instructional level, with 25% scoring a 6 and 37.5% scoring a 7, similar to their pre-test performance. However, there was an improvement in some students' scores, as indicated by 12.5% reaching an independent reading level with a score of 8, and another 25% achieving an independent level with a score of 9. The composite mean score of 7.38 supports the interpretation that, on average, students' reading levels remained within the instructional range. However, it also indicates an improvement compared to the pre-test mean score of 6.25, suggesting that the reading-in-tandem strategy may have had a positive impact on overall performance. Zulianti and Hastomo (2022) confirmed the effectiveness of the Partner Reading Strategy in improving students' reading comprehension, a finding that aligns with Sumarsono et al.'s (2020) observation. They noted that the strategy not only boosted comprehension but also fostered an enjoyable classroom environment where students felt at ease expressing their prior knowledge without fear of errors. This suggests a consistent positive impact of the Partner Reading Strategy on both comprehension and student engagement across studies.

Table 4
Difference Between the Pre- and Post-Test Scores After the Integration of Reading-In-Tandem Strategy

Test	n	Median	W	z	Asym p. Sig	Conclusion
Pre-test	8	6.50				Significant
Post-test	8	7.00	21.00	-2.264	.024	

Table 4 reveals the difference between the pre- and post-test scores after the integration of reading-in-tandem strategy using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test. The results indicated that there is a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-test scores [$W = 21.00$, $z = -2.264$, and $p = .024$] at the 5% significance level, with a large effect

size ($d = .57$) (Cohen, 1988). The results show that the median score on the pre-test ($Mdn = 6.5$) subsequently increased in the post-test ($Mdn = 7$). The study's results confirm that the reading-in-tandem strategy significantly improved student performance, as evidenced by the substantial effect size ($d = .57$), indicating a marked improvement in scores. This implies that the gains observed can be attributed to the implementation of the reading-in-tandem strategy. These results align with Maulidina and Rita's (2021) study, which demonstrated the effectiveness of the Partner Reading Strategy in enhancing reading comprehension among eighth-grade students. Similarly, Indha's (2022) research found that Partner Reading Strategies not only boost students' proficiency in understanding texts but also make the reading experience more active and enjoyable. Collectively, these studies emphasize the benefits of partner reading strategy in improving reading comprehension skills and engagement.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study concluded that the majority of Grade 8 learners at New Cabalan National High School were at an "instructional" reading level initially, with pre-test scores ranging from 5 to 7. Following the implementation of the Reading-in-Tandem strategy, most students maintained this level, while some improved to an "independent" reading level. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test confirmed a statistically significant improvement between pre- and post-test scores, demonstrating the strategy's effectiveness in enhancing reading comprehension skills. Consequently, the study recommends continuing the Reading-in-Tandem strategy within the Grade 8 English curriculum. It also suggests providing tailored instructional support to students based on their reading levels, offering professional development for teachers on effective reading strategies, and conducting future research on the long-term impacts and comparative effectiveness of various reading strategies in different educational contexts.

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