

Effects of Peer-tutoring on the Level of Reading Comprehension of Young Learners

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Abstract

Reading and reading comprehension are interrelated skills; both of which learner need to advance in the higher educational years. However, this is not the case for many Filipino children in one barangay of Claveria, Misamis Oriental. Hence, this research measured the reading comprehension levels of learners between 8 and 14 years old, classified them into independent, instructional, and frustrated, and determined whether peer tutoring would increase their level of comprehension. The study utilized a one-group pre-test-post-test design and the standardized reading comprehension test Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI). Research findings reveal that 4 out of 29 respondents are within the "instructional" level of reading comprehension, 1 out of 29 is "independent" and the remaining 24 young learners are within the "frustrated" level of reading comprehension during the pre-test. After the intervention, 4 achieved "independent" level of reading comprehension, another 4 are "instructional" while the remaining 21 remained in the "frustrated" level. The paired-t test results show that there is no statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test; however, this does not mean peer-tutoring is ineffective. With the limitations of the study, it is suggested to have a longer period for peer-tutoring or peer-led intervention.

Keywords: *peer tutoring, peer-led intervention, reading comprehension level, independent, instructional, frustrated*

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1. Introduction

Reading is both an avenue of communication and a repository of knowledge and ideas. In fact, Estremera and Estremera (2018) reported that reading is involved in 85 percent of what people do. For instance, individuals read menus in eateries, road signs, recipes from cookbooks, prescriptions of medicine, ingredients of a product, and many more. Reading and reading comprehension are interrelated skills, and reading comprehension is the crucial outcome of the reading, as it is the most significant ongoing activity (Estremera & Estremera, 2018). Reading comprehension is a bridge between the "new and the unknown," and the importance of apprehension is essential in the reading institution. In accordance with the Department of Education's Order No. 45, series of 2022, "No Read, No Pass Policy" as reported by the SunStar Baguio (2020), for a second grade student to move up into third grade, he/she should be able to read and comprehend the Filipino language, while third grade and up learners should be able to read and comprehend both in the English and Filipino language, and they are expected to be independent readers by the end of their primary education to be able to cope with the academic competence they need in the higher years in the academy.

However, this is not the case for many Filipino children in one of the barangays of Claveria, Misamis Oriental. According to numerous observations by the locals, there are still children who cannot comprehend the English language. In one of the witnesses' accounts, numerous children who would often buy from this individual's *sari-sari* store would just point with their fingers at the product they desired to purchase, which, of course, causes a huge misunderstanding and requires an enormous amount of patience. This is because the child cannot read what is written on the packaging of the product. Another instance is the mispronunciation of the product's name. For example, instead of "Zest-Oh," the child would pronounce it as "Jest-Ow" and "Choco-Mucho" would often read as "Chomo-Choco" or "Chumo-Chomo". This phenomenon unfortunately exists in many parts of the country.

Cabalo and Cabalo (2019) identified in a study that around 58.26 percent, or 187 out of 321 students, belong to the frustration level of reading, 30.22 percent, or 97 students, belong to the instructional level, and only 37, or 11.53 percent, were considered independent readers in the Southern District of Hilongo in Leyte. Another research conducted by Estremera and Estremera (2018) in the city division of Sorsogon showed that around 5

percent, or 1444 out of 2503 learners, were considered frustrated readers in terms of silent reading, and around 30 percent belonged to the instructional type of readers, and 12 percent were considered independent readers. In terms of oral reading, 71%, or out of 2503, 1789 were frustrated, 594 were classified as instructional readers, and the residual 5%, or 120 students, were classified as independent readers. Unfortunately, this phenomenon occurs in the United Kingdom as well. According to Mulcahy et al. (2016), roughly 16% of adults in the United Kingdom are functionally illiterate, making the United Kingdom the illiteracy leader in the developed world.

It is undeniable that some are struggling with reading and understanding what they are reading. Therefore, measuring their reading comprehension is vital. According to Cagas (2022), language learning and distance learning is one of the challenges for language teachers in the Philippines. Language is one component of the total knowledge that readers use to process the information in the text, and there is a strong correlation between language and reading proficiency, making language a key component of learning comprehension skills (Lobaton, 2022). Language is both intricately complicated and constantly changing. It is intricate because it involves phonology, lexemes, pragmatics, phonetics, semantics, and other grammatical markers (Lobaton, 2022). According to Chandran and Shah (2019), problems with reading and comprehension originate from environmental, educational, and biological sources. These causes imply that the environment in which one is born and raised determines their ease of grasping new languages, in this case English (Mohammad & Hasbi, 2021). Similar to this, a person's capacity to understand reading and comprehension depends on the types of instruction they receive early in life or as they mature (Mohammad & Hasbi, 2021).

In some specific geographical areas around the world, the use of English language is not common. But then again, assessing their reading comprehension alone is not sufficient, there should at least efforts be exerted to aid in this problem. According to Cooc and Kim (2016), a student's performance is influenced by their peers. In this case, the research study utilizing peer-tutoring or peer-led intervention was conducted over a month. Researchers were also able to identify if intervention or peer tutoring affected the learners' reading comprehension level. Another study conducted by Robison (2022) proved the effectiveness of peer-tutoring towards the level of reading comprehension of learners. Robison further stated that peer-tutoring is proven as an effective strategy across various behavioral and academic disciplines, as it is easy to implement and ideal for filling the gaps as resources can

always be available. Moreover, Sholikhah (2018) stated that the participants (experimental group) who were given peer-tutoring assessments gained better scores in reading comprehension tests compared to those who were not (control group). Sholikhah also stated that with the proper strategy, peer-tutoring is a powerful tool in aiding learners' reading comprehension difficulties.

With all the previous findings, this study implemented peer-tutoring suited to each student's needs and used this tool as a method to discover whether it is effective for learners in a particular geographical area. Hence, this study aimed to measure the level of reading comprehension among young learners in one barangay of Claveria, Misamis Oriental, and investigate the effects of peer tutoring through their pre-test and post-test results. Explicitly it answered the following questions.

1. What is the students' reading comprehension in terms of: frustrated level, instructional level, and independent level?
2. Is there a significant difference on the levels of reading comprehension among participants during the pre-test and post-test after peer-tutoring or peer-led intervention?

2. Literature Review

Reading has a significant impact on people's lives as it introduces various life concepts. It is a complex process that includes sensory experience, thinking, comprehension, application, and incorporation. It is the method for producing and deriving meaning from printed words and symbols. It is also one of the macro-skills which learners should foster in order to thrive in their literacy and academic endeavors (Jawili-Decena, 2021). Young learners must be literate in order to communicate with one another.

Reading comprehension is crucial among students (Victoriano & Dimaano, 2023; Lope, 2023). Reading, including context decoding, is a fundamental skill that a child must practice. In the first level of education, the learner should be capable to read and comprehend a variety of texts before proceeding to the next years of education. However, a student who cannot cope with their peers is one risk of problems in success and would depend on how they participate with their peers (Miller, 2018). Individuals with reading disabilities are less likely to gain employment, particularly in skilled roles, are more susceptible to behavioral issues and delinquency, have fewer chances of earning an above-average salary, are more likely to commit crimes, be sentenced to prison, and develop a habit of lifelong offending,

less likely to achieve qualifications or receive work-based training or promotion, and less likely to have low indicators of mental well-being (Mulcahy et al., 2016).

Because of the fast-changing world and evolving technology, it is unfathomable that reading is sometimes overlooked (Estremera & Estremera, 2018). According to a report, out of 79 participating countries, the Philippines received the lowest reading score in the 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), with only one in five 15-year-old Filipino students achieving at least the minimum proficiency level in overall reading literacy. On the other hand, the 2019 Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics revealed that only 10% of the nation's Grade 5 students achieved the minimum proficiency level (Felipe, 2022). According to the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics 2019 (SEA-PLM) results as cited by Peña (2023), only 10% of students in the Philippines met the minimum reading standard while 17% met the minimum standard expected at the end of primary education as specified in SDG 4.1.1—Education Proficiency, in which only Laos was ahead of the Philippines, where students received an average reading score of 275. While the 288 indicates a Filipino Grade 5 student can read a variety of everyday texts fluently and comprehend their meaning, only 10% achieved the minimum proficiency level, which is the ability to understand texts with familiarity (Peña, 2023).

Measuring the level of reading comprehension among young learners has been chosen as a topic by an inconceivable number of researchers, one of which is Estremera and Estremera (2018) which focused on measuring the level of reading comprehension among learners and determining which reading categories these students belong to. The researchers emphasized the importance of monitoring learners' comprehension levels in order to determine whether a learner is ready to compete in the higher years of the academy or not. The same sentiments were expressed in one of Jawili-Decena's (2021) studies on monitoring the level of reading comprehension in young learners. When a child struggles with understanding, they often mislay their aspiration to continue reading; that is why, according to them, educators should always monitor the level of reading comprehension of their students. Another research with the same emphasis conducted by Cabalo & Cabalo (2019) concluded that monitoring the level of comprehension while learners are still young is important, as this is one of the determining factors for a child's progress in their academic journey. As reading comprehension is important, Phil-IRI, a program of the Bureau of Elementary Education-Department of Education dedicated to making each Filipino

adolescent a reader, was implemented. Phil-IRI's sole goal is to enable every Filipino child to converse in both English and Filipino through effective reading instruction, based on Dep-Ed's flagship program Every Child a Reader Program (ECARP). This program has been the standard reading comprehension test kit for researchers concerned on the reading comprehension level of learners. Language is also taken into account for a learner to comprehend what he or she reads. Language is both intricately complex and ever-changing. It is difficult to understand because it involves phonology, lexemes, pragmatics, phonetics, semantics, and other grammatical indicators (Lobaton, 2022). Language is one component of total knowledge used by readers to process information in the text, and there is a significant association between language and reading proficiency, making language an essential aspect of learning comprehension skills (Lobaton, 2022).

Reading comprehension is a critical skill that allows students to recognize, analyze, and evaluate information in written texts. In the Philippine education system, reading comprehension is considered a core skill that students must master to succeed academically and in their future careers (Estremera & Estremera, 2018). It is even better if a parent or family member serves as the teacher at home. Reading and reading comprehension are important not only for advancing to the next level of education but also for the success of today's young learners and for the future. According to Chandran and Shah (2019), reading and comprehension issues stem from environmental, educational, and biological factors. These factors imply that the social setting in which a person is born and raised influences their ability to learn new languages, in this case English (Mohammad & Hasbi, 2021). Similarly, a person's capacity to understand reading and comprehension depends on the types of instruction they receive early in life or as they mature (Mohammad & Hasbi, 2021). Other obstacles included the participants' inability to identify errors such as omissions, mispronunciations, and substitutions, which adversely impacted their understanding and accuracy levels, and the need for more frequent exposure to and use of English in order to increase their understanding and accuracy levels.

Miller (2018) stated that peer tutoring, also known as peer-led intervention, is a flexible and peer-mediated strategy in which peers (6 to 8-year age gap) serve as academic tutors. According to research findings, peer tutoring or peer-led intervention in measuring the reading comprehension of young learners positively affected their performance (Moliner & Alegre, 2020; Rusli et al., 2021; Alegre et al., 2020). Conducted peer-tutoring for a total of 4

and a half weeks (5 times a week), the results presented that there is substantial progress in terms of reading fluency and comprehension among readers who are classified as "frustrated readers" after a peer tutoring or peer-led reading intervention was applied. Peer-tutoring or peer-led intervention would influence the student's score from the pre-test to the post-test. It could be beneficial for young learners, especially if the reason for their lack of reading and reading comprehension skills is due to their family's inability to teach them.

Peer tutoring is a tool and an advantage in helping young learners to develop their reading habits and increase their level of reading comprehension, as it is proven effective in raising a child's literacy rate. Studies concluded that after implementing the peer tutoring strategy, learners' reading comprehension skills at the mid-intermediate, mid-advanced, and low levels have improved. The peer tutoring strategy is highly manualized, which can give teachers the strategies they need to engage culturally and academically diverse students in enhancing language acquisition (Robison, 2022). Additionally, Robison (2022) asserts that peer tutoring can assist teachers in diagnosing the reading difficulties and struggles of students with individual differences and diverse needs and interests, which can lead to formulating an intervention to address and close these gaps specifically in reading comprehension and language. Peer tutoring is an ideal intervention to bridge the gap of academically and culturally diverse learners in a classroom where resources can always be available. When utilized properly, it can alleviate the problem surrounding low levels of reading comprehension.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study used a one-group pre-test-post-test design through an experimented reading comprehension levels of the participants when peer-tutoring or peer-led intervention is implemented. The study conducted a pre-test prior to intervention to categorize participants according to their level of reading comprehension. After which, the intervention was implemented for a total of 4 weeks, 3 hours per peer-tutoring session with a total of 30 hours, and post-test was then conducted after the peer-tutoring or peer-led intervention.

3.2. Sampling & Research Participants

Purposive sampling was utilized in identifying the participants of this study. With the assistance of the Barangay officials in the area, researchers were able to identify 29 young learners aged 8-14 years old classified as instructional and frustrated readers and cross-

examined the information gathered with the information available in the local elementary school provided with the assistance of the school principal.

3.3. Research Instrument

Phil-IRI reading test materials were utilized throughout the study. Phil-IRI is a program of the Bureau of Elementary Education-Department of Education dedicated to making each Filipino adolescent a reader. It is used also to define the learners reading performance in terms of oral, silent, and listening comprehension in Filipino and English languages (DepEd, 2018). This study made use of the Phil-IRI silent reading test materials. There are 7 items in every reading test kit. The word count and difficulty of the given material vary by their grade level and age; the higher the grade level and age, the higher word count and difficulty. To identify reading comprehension level of each participant, a score scale was used. Scores ranging from 6-7 are considered independent readers, scores ranging from 4-5 are considered instructional readers, and a score of 3 and below is categorized as a frustrated reader.

3.4. Data Gathering Procedure

Before the conduct of the study, researchers asked permission from the parents or guardians of the selected participants and informed them of the schedule and duration of the intervention and did preliminary interview of both parents and children regarding their familiarity of the language and socio-economic status. Researchers downloaded Phil-IRI reading materials and reading test kits online from the Department of Education website, printed hard copies, and distributed the questionnaires according to the age and grade level of the participants during the pre-test. After the pre-test was conducted, participants were then categorized according to their level of reading comprehension using the score scale. An intervention was done for 4 weeks. The reading materials printed for the intervention were utilized, as well as activities and quizzes. After peer tutoring, a post-test was then conducted using the same reading test kits as the pre-test, and the students were finally categorized according to their level of reading comprehension after the intervention. Data forgery and manipulation were strictly prohibited.

3.5. Statistical Analysis

This study made use of the paired t-test as it is the most suitable statistical tool to indicate whether there was a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test results after an intervention was done for four (4) weeks.

4. Results and Discussion

Based on the data gathered and reading tests results, 4 out of 29 respondents, or 14% acquired an ‘instructional’ level of reading comprehension, 1 out of 29, or 3% acquired an ‘independent’ level of reading comprehension, while the remaining 24 young learners or 83% fell on the ‘frustrated’ level of reading comprehension category during the pre-test.

Table 1

Pre-test scores on the reading comprehension

Score	Frequency	%
6-7	1	3%
4-5	4	14%
2-3	9	31%
0-1	15	52%
TOTAL	29	100%

Researchers implemented peer-tutoring for 4 weeks and utilized learning materials provided by the Phil-IRI assessment during the process. After the administration of the post-test, results found out that a total of 4 out of 29 or 14% ranked as ‘independent’ level of reading comprehension, 4 out of 29 or 14% fell on the ‘instructional’ level of reading comprehension, while the remaining 21 or approximately 72% remained in the ‘frustrated’ level of reading comprehension.

Table 2

Post-test scores on the reading comprehension

Score	Frequency	%
6-7	4	14%
4-5	4	14%
2-3	7	24%
0-1	14	48%
TOTAL	29	100%

After the analysis of the data gathered, there has been an increase in test scores of some of the learners after peer tutoring or peer-led intervention was conducted.

Table 3*Paired T-test Results Between Pre-test and Post-test Scores*

	n	Mean	SD	t	p
Pre-test	29	1.8	1.9	1.7	0.110
Post-test	29	2.2	2.2		

Results of the paired-t test indicated that there is a non-significant difference between Pre-test (M = 1.8, SD = 1.9) and Posttest (M = 2.2, SD = 2.2), $t(28) = 1.7$, $p = .110$. The average of the after population is considered to be equal to the average of the before population. In other words, the sample distinction between after and before averages is not substantial enough to be statistically significant. A non-significance result does not quite prove that H_0 is correct rather it demonstrates that the null assumption cannot be rejected. Although the paired t-test results showed that the significance of peer-tutoring cannot be defined, the results of the pre-test and post-test imply that there is an increase in reading comprehension level for some participants in the study after an intervention was initiated. The study identified several factors as to why there is a non-significant result between the pre-test and post-test scores.

- a. Peer-tutoring sessions should be longer because its relevance or effect cannot be determined directly. Although it has been proven effective by previous studies such that of Miller (2018), its effectiveness can only be determined by how long it is conducted. The longer the intervention, the higher the chances of positive effect.
- b. There is a language barrier present. Learners find it more difficult to understand the English language compared to the other two languages: Filipino and their mother tongue. Researchers observed that this community is not widely using the English language in their daily communication and children find the English language intimidating. According to Cagas (2022), language learning is one of the challenges for language teachers in the Philippines. Language is both intricately complex and ever-changing. It is difficult to understand because it involves phonology, lexemes, pragmatics, phonetics, semantics, and other grammatical indicators (Lobaton, 2022).

- c. In order for a child to perform well in his or her academics, familial support is essential, and sufficient support from his or her family members will help a learner excel in his or her academic endeavors (Padilha et al., 2021). However, in the case of these selected learners, familial support was not sufficient in order to attain fluency in both speaking and reading the English language due to the fact that parents themselves are not fluent in terms of reading and speaking the English language compared to the Filipino language and mother tongue. Therefore, they are not able to provide their children with vital information and tutoring in terms of the English language. According to Lumacad and Namoco (2023), learning difficulties are possibly caused by low socioeconomic position, which makes it challenging for parents and guardians to provide their children with access to technology and educational resources. In relation to their study, research participants identified as frustrated readers in this study belong to low-income families. The majority of them are children of farm workers and carpenters, and some are children of fishermen according to the conducted preliminary interview with the parents while asking for their consent. With their socio-economic status, families are not able to support their education well and that they are deprived of learning materials and resources to obtain proper information and understanding regarding the English language.

Discussion

Peer-tutoring can be a powerful tool in assisting a child with his or her learning difficulties in any selected academic area. However, the method by which it is used is the determining factor for its significance. The more exposed participants are to peer-led intervention, the higher the chance their reading fluency will be alleviated (Miller, 2018). Indicated in the pre-test results is evidence of an ongoing struggle with reading comprehension among young learners, and this phenomenon is not only limited to this certain geographical area but also to other parts of the country and even in a developed world. When peer-tutoring was conducted even for a short period, an improvement was observed in few learners included in this study. Based on the post-test results, the majority of those were classified as instructional types of readers. Unfortunately, only a few of the learners classified as "frustrated readers" advanced into instructional levels in terms of reading comprehension.

Upon further analysis, the time spent on intervention was not enough. This is not surprising at all considering that the majority of these learners are intimidated by the English language. While conducting informal interview with the parents and research participants, many parents affirmed that they are not fluent in the English language, and they are not confident their child could read and comprehend even the basic components of the language, which is evident in the results of their reading comprehension level test during pre-intervention stage. Participants of the study claimed that they find the language intimidating and difficult compared to the Filipino language and Mother tongue, which they are fluent in. Despite the fact that the second language in the country is English, a lot of communities, especially in rural areas, do not use English, not even the slightest bit, in their daily communication. Additionally, familial support is insufficient. In order for a child to academically thrive, familial support is vital (Padilha et al., 2021). The families of the student-participants are unable to teach them even the basic components of the English language as they themselves are not fluent in the language. Aside from familial support, socio-economic status is also a considerable factor. It has been found by Lumacad and Namoco (2023) that learning difficulties are a possible outcome of low socio-economic status. As it is perceived as challenging by parents to provide their children with sufficient learning resources such as educational materials and access to technology, reading and comprehension issues are caused by dynamics in the environment, in education, and in biology. These reasons specify that a person's ability to learn new languages, in this case English, rests on the environment in which they are born and raised (Mohammad & Hasbi, 2021). Furthermore, the challenge of teaching young learners how to read and comprehend using this language is present. This poses a challenge in the society as English is the universally used language in order to compete and cope, whether it is in business, entertainment, politics, or most especially in education.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Language played a vital role in this study, as it is one of the factors that affected the reading comprehension skills of learners in the English language. The less an individual is exposed to a specific language, the less they gain understanding of the components of that language. With all the findings in this study, the significance of peer-tutoring on the reading comprehension levels of young learners cannot be directly determined, as the results between pre-test and post-test scores are not extensive enough to be considered statistically

significant. However, this does not mean peer-tutoring is ineffective. It only indicates that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. Despite not being able to reject the null hypothesis, it produced an effect on some participants in the study and increased their reading comprehension level particularly a few instructional readers became independent readers, and a few frustrated readers became instructional readers. Stating that peer-tutoring is ineffective disregards the effects of peer-tutoring to a few research participants in the study whose level of reading comprehension increased after a month of intervention. With this notion, peer-tutoring, when conducted for a longer period of time, will produce a significant effect on language learners and aid the problem of reading comprehension in young individuals.

The researchers in this study recommend future researchers interested in this field to establish a longer period for peer tutoring or peer-led intervention in order to signify its relevance in the terms of reading comprehension.

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