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Improving the Reading Comprehension of Struggling Learners Through a Strategic Reading Intervention at Don Benito Maristela Memorial High School

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ABSTRACT

This study examined changes in literal, inferential, and critical reading comprehension among struggling junior high school learners following a Strategic Reading Intervention at Don Benito Maristela Memorial High School, Monreal, Masbate. Using a quantitative, one-group pretest–posttest design and total enumeration, the study involved 36 identified struggling readers in Grades 7–10. The Philippine Informal Reading Inventory assessed comprehension before and after the intervention, while frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and a paired-samples t-test were used in the original analysis. Most participants were male (83%), and Grade 7 accounted for the largest group (42%). Reported comprehension scores increased from 17.44 to 20.39 for literal comprehension, 15.67 to 19.33 for inferential comprehension, and 10.56 to 14.86 for critical comprehension, which showed the largest numerical gain. These findings indicate improved reported performance across all three comprehension dimensions following the intervention, with continuing instructional needs in critical comprehension. The school should strengthen structured reading activities, periodic assessment, and differentiated support, particularly through the proposed 12-week Strategic Reading Enhancement Program. Interpretation is limited by the single-school sample, absence of a comparison group, and a significance test based on three domain scores rather than individual paired learner observations, requiring statistical verification. The study provides context-specific evidence for school-based literacy planning and supports Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by promoting inclusive reading support and educational sustainability.

Keywords: *Critical Comprehension, Inferential Comprehension, Junior High School, Literal Comprehension, Reading Comprehension, Strategic Reading Intervention, Struggling Learners*

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a fundamental academic competency that enables learners to understand, interpret, analyze, and critically evaluate written information. Despite its importance, many secondary school learners continue to experience difficulties in comprehending texts, particularly when identifying essential information, drawing inferences, and evaluating ideas. Research demonstrates that structured reading interventions, explicit comprehension strategies, and guided instructional activities can improve reading outcomes among struggling learners (Filderman et al., 2022; Sohn et al., 2023; Peng et al., 2024). In the Philippines, persistent reading difficulties highlight the need for targeted, evidence-based literacy interventions. Accordingly, this study examines the effectiveness of a Strategic Reading Intervention in improving the literal, inferential, and critical comprehension of struggling learners from Grades 7 to 10 at Don Benito Maristela Memorial High School.

1.1 Background and Context of the Study

Reading comprehension extends beyond recognizing written words and requires the integration of language knowledge, background information, cognitive processing, and strategic thinking. Filderman et al. (2022), through a meta-analysis of 64 studies involving struggling readers from Grades 3 to 12, established that reading comprehension interventions produce positive learning outcomes, particularly when background knowledge and explicit reading strategies are incorporated. Similarly, Sohn et al. (2023) synthesized 37 intervention studies involving adolescents with reading difficulties and found that structured instructional interventions improved reading comprehension. These findings emphasize the importance of systematic and differentiated instructional support. Effective reading instruction requires purposeful activities that help learners identify main ideas, understand textual relationships, construct meaning, and monitor comprehension. Peng et al. (2024) demonstrated that combining main-idea identification, text-structure instruction, and retelling with background knowledge development can strengthen reading comprehension among struggling learners. Meanwhile, Barnes et al. (2024) reported that tutor-led instruction improved targeted inferential comprehension skills among middle school students experiencing reading difficulties. These studies support the use of explicit, guided, and strategically organized reading activities to develop both foundational and higher-order comprehension skills. In the Philippines, reading literacy remains a major educational concern. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023), only 24% of Filipino students participating in PISA 2022 achieved at least Level 2 reading proficiency, compared with the OECD average of 74%. This performance indicates substantial difficulties in understanding written information and demonstrates the continuing need for appropriate literacy interventions. Furthermore, Mirasol (2024) found a discrepancy between junior high school learners' reported awareness of critical reading strategies and their actual reading performance, emphasizing the importance of explicit instruction and opportunities to apply comprehension strategies. Recognizing these challenges, the Department of Education (2023) adopted the National Learning Recovery Program to address learning gaps and improve literacy outcomes. Republic Act No. 12028 (2024), or the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program Act, further institutionalized academic recovery interventions. Subsequently, the Department of Education (2025), through DepEd Memorandum No. 064, s. 2025, established guidelines for ARAL-Reading, covering struggling learners in Grades 4 to 10 and identifying the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) as an assessment tool. These developments reinforce the importance of systematic assessment, targeted instruction, and continuous monitoring in improving reading proficiency. Within this context, Don Benito Maristela Memorial High School in Monreal, Masbate, provides an appropriate setting for investigating reading comprehension difficulties and evaluating a school-based Strategic Reading Intervention.

1.2 Research Problem

Despite ongoing literacy initiatives, some secondary school learners continue to experience difficulties understanding written texts, making logical inferences, and critically evaluating information. These challenges may affect their capacity to accomplish academic tasks that require comprehension and interpretation. Although reading interventions have demonstrated positive outcomes, their effectiveness may vary according to learners' initial abilities, instructional approaches, and implementation conditions (Sohn et al., 2023; Peng et al., 2024). At Don Benito Maristela Memorial High School, 36 struggling learners from Grades 7 to 10 were identified as requiring additional reading support. These comprised 15 Grade 7 learners, 12 Grade 8 learners, six Grade 9 learners, and three Grade 10 learners. Their comprehension difficulties were examined across three dimensions: literal comprehension, which involves identifying explicitly stated information; inferential comprehension, which requires interpreting implied meanings; and critical comprehension, which involves analyzing and evaluating textual information. The central research problem concerns whether implementing a Strategic Reading Intervention is associated with measurable improvements in these three comprehension dimensions. Specifically, the study investigates learners' reading comprehension levels before and after the intervention and determines whether statistically significant differences exist between their assessment results. The investigation also seeks to identify areas requiring continued instructional support.

1.3 Research Gap

Existing international research provides substantial evidence supporting structured reading interventions among learners experiencing comprehension difficulties. Filderman et al. (2022) and Sohn et al. (2023) established the overall benefits of reading interventions, while Peng et al. (2024) examined effective combinations of comprehension strategies. Barnes et al. (2024) further demonstrated the potential of targeted instruction to improve inferential comprehension among struggling middle school readers. However, these findings do not establish how a particular intervention will perform in every school setting or across different groups of learners. Within the Philippine context, Caabay et al. (2024) investigated the use of background knowledge activation, repeated reading, reading aloud, and questioning among Grade 7 learners. Requilme (2024) examined the effectiveness of interactive reading-aloud activities among junior high school students, while Mirasol (2024) identified discrepancies between learners' awareness and actual application of critical reading strategies. Although these investigations contribute important evidence, they examine different instructional approaches, learner populations, and reading outcomes. A context-specific research gap therefore remains concerning the implementation of a Strategic Reading Intervention among identified struggling learners across Grades 7 to 10 at Don Benito Maristela Memorial High School. In particular, school-based evidence is needed to determine changes in literal, inferential, and critical comprehension within the same group of learners. Addressing this gap may provide localized evidence for developing an intervention plan responsive to the school's identified literacy needs.

1.4 Purpose and Objectives of the Study

This study aims to determine the effectiveness of a Strategic Reading Intervention in improving the reading comprehension of struggling learners from Grades 7 to 10 at Don Benito Maristela Memorial High School. Guided by evidence supporting structured comprehension instruction and reading assessment (Filderman et al., 2022; Vaughn et al., 2022; Sohn et al., 2023), the investigation seeks to describe the respondents' profiles in terms of sex and grade level; assess their literal, inferential, and critical comprehension before and after the intervention using the Phil-IRI; determine whether a statistically significant difference exists between their pre-intervention and post-intervention performance; and develop a proposed reading intervention plan based on the findings.

Through a quantitative one-group pretest–posttest design, the study examines measurable changes in learners' reading comprehension and identifies areas requiring additional instructional support. Because the design does not include a separate control group, observed changes are interpreted as evidence of improvement over the study period rather than definitive proof of causation.

1.5 Significance and Practical Contribution of the Study

This study may contribute to the improvement of school-based reading instruction by providing empirical information about the comprehension difficulties and progress of struggling secondary school learners. Its findings may guide English teachers and reading intervention facilitators in designing instructional activities that address literal, inferential, and critical comprehension. Evidence-based recommendations emphasize the value of explicit comprehension instruction, vocabulary and background knowledge development, questioning, summarization, and progress monitoring in supporting learners with reading difficulties (Vaughn et al., 2022; Peng et al., 2024). For struggling learners, the intervention may provide opportunities to strengthen comprehension, interpretation, and critical evaluation skills through structured reading activities. For school administrators, the findings may inform the development of targeted literacy programs, instructional resource allocation, and monitoring procedures consistent with the Department of Education's ARAL-Reading guidelines (Department of Education, 2025). Parents and guardians may also gain greater awareness of the importance of sustained reading support, while future researchers may use the findings as contextual evidence for further investigations involving secondary learners and reading interventions. The study's primary practical contribution is the development of a proposed reading intervention plan based on identified comprehension needs and observed changes in reading performance. This approach may help strengthen instructional responsiveness, continuous assessment, and the sustainability of school-based literacy improvement initiatives.

1.6 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Alignment

This study primarily supports Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities. In particular, it aligns with Target 4.1, which emphasizes the acquisition of relevant and effective learning outcomes, including minimum reading proficiency, and Target 4.6, which promotes literacy and numeracy among young people and adults. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2025) emphasizes the continuing importance of improving learning outcomes and reducing educational inequalities to advance sustainable development. By examining a targeted reading intervention among struggling secondary school learners, the study contributes to educational sustainability through the generation of evidence that may support effective and continuing literacy instruction. Its proposed intervention plan may strengthen institutional sustainability by guiding school-based assessment, instructional improvement, and progress monitoring. The research also has implications for community sustainability, as improving learners' reading competencies may strengthen their capacity to access information, participate in educational activities, and pursue future learning opportunities. Through these contributions, the study supports the development of a more inclusive and responsive educational environment while advancing the broader objective of improving literacy and educational opportunities for learners experiencing academic difficulties.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative approach to evaluate the effectiveness of a Strategic Reading Intervention among 36 struggling learners from Grades 7 to 10 at Don Benito Maristela Memorial High School. Reading comprehension was assessed before and after the intervention using the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), focusing on literal, inferential, and critical

comprehension. Descriptive and inferential statistical procedures were applied to examine changes in learners' reading performance.

2.1. Research Design

The study utilized a quantitative quasi-experimental research design, specifically a one-group pretest–posttest design, to evaluate changes in learners' reading comprehension following the Strategic Reading Intervention. According to Capili and Anastasi (2024) and Reichardt et al. (2023), quasi-experimental designs allow researchers to examine intervention outcomes when random assignment or control groups are not feasible. The same respondents underwent reading assessments before and after the intervention to determine changes in literal, inferential, and critical comprehension. The design also incorporated descriptive analysis of respondents' sex and grade level. Since no control group was included, the observed improvements could not be attributed exclusively to the intervention.

2.2 Research Locale

The study was conducted at Don Benito Maristela Memorial High School, located in Barangay Togoron, Monreal, Masbate, Philippines. The school was selected because it had identified struggling learners from Grades 7 to 10 who required additional reading comprehension support. It served as the setting for administering the Phil-IRI assessments, implementing the Strategic Reading Intervention, and evaluating learners' reading performance.

2.3 Sampling Technique

The study employed total enumeration sampling, involving all 36 identified struggling learners from Grades 7 to 10 at Don Benito Maristela Memorial High School. The respondents comprised 15 Grade 7 learners, 12 Grade 8 learners, six Grade 9 learners, and three Grade 10 learners. All eligible learners were included to provide a comprehensive assessment of their reading comprehension performance before and after the intervention. Their profiles were described according to sex and grade level.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection began with the review and approval of the research proposal and the reported development and expert validation of a structured questionnaire. Formal authorization was subsequently obtained from the Schools Division Superintendent of Masbate and the school head. The researcher personally administered the Phil-IRI as the primary assessment instrument to determine the respondents' initial literal, inferential, and critical comprehension levels. Based on the identified difficulties, the Strategic Reading Intervention was implemented through structured and guided reading activities. Following the intervention, the Phil-IRI was administered again to assess changes in comprehension performance. The assessment results were collected, checked, recorded, coded, and organized for statistical analysis with assistance from an expert statistician.

2.5 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Frequencies and percentages described respondents' profiles according to sex and grade level, while weighted means summarized their pre-intervention and post-intervention performance in literal, inferential, and critical comprehension. A paired-samples t-test was employed to determine whether a statistically significant difference existed between the pretest and posttest reading comprehension results, using a 0.05 level of significance. The findings served as the basis for evaluating the Strategic Reading Intervention and developing a proposed reading intervention plan.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The researcher secured formal authorization from the Schools Division Superintendent of Masbate and the school head of Don Benito Maristela Memorial High School before conducting the study. Respondents were informed that their responses would be treated confidentially and used exclusively for research purposes. The research activities were conducted through coordination with the school administration. However, the manuscript does not explicitly document parental or guardian consent, learner assent, or approval from a research ethics committee.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

3.1.1 Sex Distribution

The findings revealed that 30 respondents (83%) were male, while six (17%) were female. Thus, male learners constituted the majority of the 36 identified struggling readers. The predominance of male respondents is consistent with broader reading literacy patterns reported by the OECD (2023), which found that Filipino female students outperformed male students by 35 points in PISA 2022 reading assessments. However, this national pattern does not establish the reasons for the sex distribution observed in the present study.

3.1.2 Grade-Level Distribution

Of the 36 respondents, 15 (42%) were in Grade 7, 12 (33%) were in Grade 8, six (17%) were in Grade 9, and three (8%) were in Grade 10. Grade 7 represented the largest proportion of the identified struggling learners. The distribution highlights the inclusion of learners across all four junior high school grade levels. Mirasol (2024) examined critical reading strategies among Filipino students from Grades 7 to 10 and emphasized the importance of developing reading comprehension throughout secondary education. Similarly, Capin et al. (2024) underscored the need for evidence-based reading instruction responsive to the difficulties experienced by secondary school learners.

3.2 Reading Comprehension Before the Strategic Reading Intervention

3.2.1 Literal Comprehension

Before the intervention, literal comprehension recorded a total tally of 183 and a reported mean score of 17.44. Grade 7 contributed the largest aggregate score, while Grade 10 recorded the smallest. These findings established the respondents' baseline performance in identifying facts, details, and information explicitly stated in reading materials. Ainun et al. (2024) demonstrated the effectiveness of cooperative script instruction in developing literal comprehension among Grade 8 students, emphasizing the importance of structured activities in understanding textual information. Furthermore, Solis et al. (2022) identified initial reading abilities as relevant predictors of subsequent reading comprehension outcomes. These findings support the importance of assessing learners' existing reading skills before implementing targeted instructional activities.

3.2.2 Inferential Comprehension

The pre-intervention assessment of inferential comprehension recorded a total tally of 186 and a reported mean score of 15.67. Grade 8 obtained the highest aggregate score, while Grade 10 recorded the lowest. The results established the learners' initial performance in interpreting implied meanings, identifying relationships between ideas, and drawing conclusions. Barnes et al. (2024) demonstrated that explicit, tutor-led instruction improved targeted inference-making

skills among middle school learners with reading difficulties. Similarly, Vaughn et al. (2022) recommended structured comprehension-building practices, including questioning and guided engagement with texts. These findings emphasize the importance of providing instructional support that develops learners' ability to interpret information beyond explicitly stated details.

3.2.3 Critical Comprehension

Before the intervention, critical comprehension registered a total tally of 125 and a reported mean score of 10.56, the lowest among the three comprehension dimensions. Grade 7 contributed the highest aggregate score, whereas Grade 10 recorded the lowest. These results described the learners' initial performance in analyzing, evaluating, and forming judgments about written information. Al Roomy (2022) emphasized the importance of critical reading strategies in strengthening learners' ability to interpret and evaluate textual information. Similarly, Mirasol (2024) identified a discrepancy between Filipino junior high school learners' awareness of critical reading strategies and their actual reading performance. These findings highlight the importance of instructional activities that provide opportunities to practice higher-order reading comprehension skills.

3.3 Reading Comprehension After the Strategic Reading Intervention

3.3.1 Literal Comprehension

Following the intervention, literal comprehension recorded a total tally of 217 and a reported mean score of 20.39, increasing from the pre-intervention score of 17.44. The reported improvement was 2.95 points, indicating higher performance in understanding explicitly stated information after the intervention. This finding is consistent with Filderman et al. (2022), whose meta-analysis demonstrated positive effects of structured reading comprehension interventions among struggling learners. Likewise, Opatz and Kocherhans (2024) reported reading achievement improvements among seventh-grade students who participated in a supplemental, multicomponent reading intervention. These studies provide supporting evidence for the value of systematic instructional activities in strengthening reading comprehension.

3.3.2 Inferential Comprehension

After implementing the Strategic Reading Intervention, inferential comprehension recorded a total tally of 229 and a reported mean score of 19.33, compared with 15.67 before the intervention. The reported increase of 3.66 points indicated improved performance in interpreting implied meanings, recognizing relationships, and drawing conclusions from reading materials. Caabay et al. (2024) examined the use of background knowledge activation, repeated reading, reading aloud, and questioning to strengthen reading comprehension among Grade 7 learners. Similarly, Requilme (2024) reported improvements in reading literacy following interactive reading-aloud instruction among junior high school students. Sohn et al. (2023) also established positive overall effects of reading comprehension interventions among adolescents experiencing reading difficulties. These findings provide relevant support for structured instructional approaches that encourage learners to connect information, interpret textual clues, and construct meaning.

3.3.3 Critical Comprehension

The post-intervention assessment of critical comprehension recorded a total tally of 177 and a reported mean score of 14.86, increasing from the pre-intervention score of 10.56. The reported improvement of 4.30 points was the largest numerical increase among the three comprehension

dimensions, indicating higher performance in analyzing and evaluating written information following the intervention. Gu and Kim (2024) found that metacognitive and private speech-related strategy instruction improved inferential and critical reading skills among middle school students compared with general instruction. Furthermore, Capin et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of evidence-based instructional practices in addressing secondary learners' reading difficulties. These findings support the potential contribution of purposeful strategy instruction to higher-order comprehension development.

3.4 Difference Between Pre-Intervention and Post-Intervention Reading Comprehension

The findings showed increases across all three reported comprehension scores: literal comprehension from 17.44 to 20.39, inferential comprehension from 15.67 to 19.33, and critical comprehension from 10.56 to 14.86. The corresponding differences were 2.95, 3.66, and 4.30 points, respectively. The original analysis reported an absolute computed t-value of 9.33, exceeding the critical value of 4.303 at the 0.05 significance level with two degrees of freedom. Based on this calculation, the study rejected the null hypothesis and reported a statistically significant difference between pre-intervention and post-intervention comprehension scores.

The observed upward pattern is consistent with Peng et al. (2024), who demonstrated that appropriately combined comprehension strategies, particularly when integrated with background knowledge instruction, can improve reading outcomes among struggling readers. Sohn et al. (2023) similarly found positive overall effects of structured comprehension interventions for adolescents, although intervention outcomes varied according to instructional characteristics. The present findings therefore suggest improvements in the reported comprehension measures following the Strategic Reading Intervention. However, the original significance test was calculated using the three comprehension dimensions as paired observations rather than the 36 individual learner scores. Consequently, the statistical conclusion requires verification through learner-level analysis before definitive significance claims can be made.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study examined the reading comprehension performance of 36 struggling learners from Grades 7 to 10 at Don Benito Maristela Memorial High School following the implementation of a Strategic Reading Intervention. Most respondents were male and belonged to Grade 7. Initial assessments identified difficulties in literal, inferential, and critical comprehension, with critical comprehension recording the lowest reported average score. Following the intervention, improvements were observed across all three dimensions, with critical comprehension demonstrating the largest numerical increase. The original analysis also reported a statistically significant difference between pre-intervention and post-intervention performance, although this finding requires verification using individual learner scores. Collectively, the results suggest that structured reading activities may support learners in understanding explicit information, interpreting implied meanings, and evaluating written texts. The study provides school-specific evidence that can guide the development of targeted reading activities and sustained instructional support for struggling secondary school learners.

Based on the findings, English teachers and school administrators should strengthen targeted reading interventions through regular assessment, differentiated instruction, and continuous progress monitoring. Particular attention should be given to Grades 7 and 8, which comprised most respondents, while ensuring appropriate support for struggling learners across all grade levels. Instructional activities should prioritize critical comprehension, which recorded the lowest initial performance, without neglecting literal and inferential comprehension. Teachers

should incorporate guided reading, vocabulary development, questioning, prediction, text analysis, and comprehension exercises to address identified learning difficulties. The school should consider implementing and evaluating the proposed 12-week Strategic Reading Enhancement Program (SREP), supported by appropriate instructional materials, teacher development, and periodic Phil-IRI assessments. Administrators should establish monitoring procedures to evaluate learners' progress and guide instructional adjustments. Future researchers should further examine the intervention's effectiveness through broader learner participation and improved assessment procedures to strengthen the evidence supporting school-based reading programs.

The study was limited to 36 identified struggling learners from Grades 7 to 10 at one secondary school in Monreal, Masbate, restricting the generalizability of its findings. Its one-group pretest–posttest design lacked a control group and random assignment, limiting causal interpretation. Assessment focused exclusively on literal, inferential, and critical comprehension using the Phil-IRI, while socioeconomic background, parental involvement, and individual learning differences were not examined. Furthermore, the reported significance test used three comprehension-domain scores rather than 36 learner-level pairs, requiring statistical verification. Future studies may employ larger samples, comparison groups, additional learner variables, and more rigorous analyses.

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