Read and Understand: How a Simple Strategy Transforms Pupils' Reading Skills

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ABSTRACT

This research examined the effectiveness of the READ (Read, Examine, Analyze, and Deliver) strategy in enhancing reading comprehension among Grade IV pupils. A total of 45 participants were purposively selected from Caraitan Integrated School, Nagrebcan Elementary School, Mariano Marcos Memorial Elementary School, and Garnaden Elementary School in Ilocos Norte, Philippines, based on their low pre-assessment scores. The primary objectives were to assess pupils' reading comprehension levels through a pretest and to explore their learning experiences and improvements after the strategy's implementation. A mixed-methods research design was employed. Quantitative data were collected from pretest and posttest results and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data, obtained from interviews and pupils' journals, were analyzed thematically. The findings indicated a marked improvement in reading comprehension of English stories following the application of the READ strategy. The posttest mean score (13.64) substantially exceeded the pretest mean score (5.80), resulting in a significant mean difference of 7.84. Thematic analysis revealed key insights into pupils' learning experiences, highlighting increased engagement, improved comprehension skills, and greater reading confidence. Pupils reported that the strategy's structured, step-by-step process facilitated deeper understanding of texts and fostered active participation in reading activities. In conclusion, the READ strategy proved to be a highly effective pedagogical approach for improving reading comprehension among elementary pupils, particularly those with initially low proficiency levels. The integration of quantitative gains and qualitative feedback underscores its potential applicability in broader educational contexts to promote literacy development in primary education.

Introduction

Reading is essential for learners to achieve academic success, as this serves as a primary means of acquiring knowledge that enriches their experiences and enhances their intellectual ability. While reading, knowledge is created by incorporating a range of processes such as word reading, vocabulary knowledge, and competency, which leads to the development of reading comprehension. According to McBride (2017), reading is a skill that

pupils must learn to enjoy; otherwise, it can impair their overall education. If a pupil is having problems with reading comprehension, it can affect their performance across the school curriculum, and it has a negative impact on their motivation to learn. (Cicerchia & Freeman, 2020). Hence, reading comprehension is important for every learner to develop. Reading comprehension is the ability to understand the language of the text and involves activation of prior knowledge to understand the text deeply. Papatga and Ersoy (2016) noted that reading comprehension is among the basic skills that should be taught to pupils in the first years of elementary school to allow them to understand and process information at a young age. Early reading comprehension skills are crucial for academic success, as they facilitate understanding in other subjects (Kurniaman et al., 2018). While various reading strategies have been introduced to develop early comprehension skills, previous studies such as those of Manurung et al. 2024 & Zila & Septiana 2024 indicate that pupils often lack awareness of effective teaching strategies to improve their comprehension. Thus, this research addresses this gap by exploring READ strategy to enhance early reading comprehension and to bridge the limitations identified in past studies.

Reading proficiency remains a persistent challenge among learners in the Philippines. According to the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Filipino fifteen-year-old students performed significantly below the average of their counterparts in the majority of participating countries in the domain of reading comprehension. The Philippines average reading score was 437 score points below the OECD average score of 476. After being ranked the lowest out of 79 participating countries in 2018 in reading comprehension, the Philippines was ranked 76th out of 81 countries for PISA 2022 (Servallos, 2023). Similarly, Ponce (2022) noted that Filipino students cannot comprehend what they read, even when they spend long hours in school. In relation to that, Ongpin (2022) stated that one of the problems regarding reading comprehension is language. When the text is presented in English and the student lacks sufficient proficiency in the language, comprehension becomes a significant challenge. This linguistic barrier not only impedes the development of reading comprehension skills but also undermines the child's ability to engage meaningfully with the content and to navigate the ongoing demands of personal, academic, and social development.

The above problems with reading comprehension in English, particularly in reading English stories, have been confirmed during the researchers' interviews and classroom observations among Grade IV pupils at Caraitan Integrated School, Nagrebcan, Mariano Marcos Memorial, and Garnaden Elementary Schools in Ilocos Norte, Philippines. The pupils experienced significant challenges in understanding English stories. Only a small number of pupils were able to respond to comprehension questions, prompting the teacher to recount the narrative in the mother tongue to ensure understanding. The teacher also translated the questions into the mother tongue for them to understand the story. These observations prompted the researchers to investigate and use a reading strategy to enhance pupils' reading comprehension in English stories; hence, the READ strategy was introduced.

This strategy was first introduced by Borabo and Borabo (2015), and this was adapted by the researchers with the inclusion of different interactive and innovative activities in each phase of the strategy. By employing this strategy, learners were able to engage with the text at multiple levels reading, examining, analyzing, and articulating its implications within a collaborative group setting that encouraged interaction, critical thinking, and collective problem-solving.

This study aimed to determine if the READ strategy is effective in enhancing the reading comprehension of Grade IV pupils in reading English stories. Specifically, it determined the pupil's level of reading comprehension before and after utilizing the READ strategy; describe the learning experiences of the pupils 'using the READ strategy, and identify the pupils' improvements in their reading comprehension after the implementation of the intervention.

Method

This study employed the mixed-methods approach. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), this approach involves the collection of both qualitative data (open-ended responses) and quantitative data (closed-ended responses). The quantitative method was used to determine the pupils' level of reading comprehension before and after implementing the intervention, while the qualitative method was used to describe the learning experiences of the pupils and identify the improvements in their reading comprehension after the implementation of the strategy.

The data of the study were collected using pretest and posttest, interview protocol and pupils' reflective journals. The pretest was used to determine the level of the pupils' reading comprehension before the implementation of the intervention. The test consists of eight (8) objective questions equivalent to one (1) point for each, and four (4) open-ended questions equivalent to three (3) points each, for a total of twenty (20) points. The test was administered to all the Grade 4 pupils of the four cooperating schools of the researchers to determine their level of comprehension before the implementation of the strategy. Likewise, the results gained from the pretest determined the sample of learners who were observed in the study. The samples are those who got low scores on the test.

Table 1
Sample of the Study

School	No. of Participants
Caraitan Integrated School	17
Nagrebcan Elementary School	9
Mariano Marcos Memorial Elementary School	11
Garnaden Elementary School	8
Total	45

A posttest was also given to the pupils after the implementation of the strategy to determine if there was an improvement in their scores as compared to their pretest scores.

Likewise, an interview was conducted to determine how the pupils describe the learning experiences of the pupils with the strategy, and the pupils' reflective journals were used to determine the pupils' changes or improvements in their reading comprehension using the strategy. Prompts to guide the participants in writing their journals were provided. The quantitative data gathered were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the protocol of Braun & Clarke (2021).

Results and Discussion
        This chapter presents the results of the study. This is structured following the research problems.

Results
Pupils' Level of Reading Comprehension
        The results of the pretest and posttest are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Pupil's Level of Reading Comprehension Before and After Utilizing the READ Strategy

School	Number of Participants	Mean		Mean Difference
		Pre-test	Post-test	
Caraitan Integrated School	17	6.12	13.94	7.82
Nagrebcan Elementary School	9	4.33	12.00	7.68
Mariano Marcos Memorial Elementary School	11	6.45	13.00	6.55
Garnaden Elementary School	8	5.88	15.75	9.87
As a Whole	45	5.80	13.64	7.84

        Table 1 reveals a significant improvement in pupils' reading comprehension levels after the implementation of the READ strategy across four schools. Before using the READ strategy, the overall mean score from the 45 participants was 5.80, and after using the strategy, the mean score increased to 13.64, with a mean difference of 7.84. Each participating school shows significant change: Caraitan Integrated School improved by 7.82 points, Nagrebcan Elementary School by 7.68, Mariano Marcos Memorial Elementary School by 6.55, and Garnaden Elementary School showed the highest mean difference of 9.87. These results confirm that the READ strategy had a positive effect on students' reading comprehension in English stories. The significant increase in posttest scores in all the participating schools suggests that the intervention was effective, and this could be beneficial for improving reading comprehension when implemented in other schools and in different grade levels.

        Likewise, the open-ended questions affirm the effectiveness of the READ strategy in enhancing the reading comprehension of pupils. Most of the pupils (95.56%) noted that the READ strategy motivated them to read and helped them understand the text easier as compared to before using the strategy. The researchers also observed improvements in pupils' participation and motivation during the discussion of the reading text. This feedback

from pupils and researchers manifests a unified consensus that the strategy positively influenced the reading comprehension of pupils in English stories and generally resulted in positive learning outcomes.

Pupils' learning experiences on the use of the READ strategy

An interview was conducted with the participants to gain insights into their learning experiences using the READ strategy. The interview protocol consisted of five (5) open-ended questions that explored different aspects of their experiences, which included their feelings, the perceived benefits of the strategy, challenges encountered during the implementation of the strategy, and their coping mechanisms to overcome these challenges.

The themes generated based on the interview responses on the pupils' learning experiences in terms of their feelings, perceived benefits, challenges, and coping mechanisms on the use of the READ strategy are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Pupils' learning Experiences

Feelings	Benefits	Challenges	Coping Mechanisms
relief	Fosters independent reading	Difficult activities provided	Understanding alternatives
gratefulness	Enhances knowledge	Lack of academic abilities	Practicing self-management
enthusiasm	Develops fluency in reading		Asking for assistance

Pupils' Feelings. In terms of pupils' feelings, a major theme that emerged was relief, which indicates a sense of ease among the pupils. Many (93.33%) expressed that the READ strategy made them understand the story easier.

> One participant shared, *"The strategy is easy to use, and it helps me understand the story better. Another participant commented, when you use it, ma'am, I feel calm and comfortable with it, and I want to read more stories."*

These responses align with the findings of the study of Lu et al. (2022), which shows that learning in a relaxed state leads to better retention and comprehension. This implies that the pupils found the strategy convenient and helpful to them.

Another significant theme was gratefulness, characterized by feelings of happiness, appreciation, and thankfulness.

> One pupil remarked, *"I feel thankful, ma'am, because I can easily understand the story by your strategy." Another pupil said, "I am thankful because the strategy gives me opportunities to improve my comprehension skills."*

These reactions are supported by King & Cai (2023), who found out that gratitude has a positive association with academic motivation and engagement. It could mean that gratitude can enhance cognitive functioning such as attention, memory, and comprehension. The pupils' expressions of gratefulness indicate that positive emotional conditions lead to deeper engagement and improved reading outcomes.

The third theme that emerged from the interview responses is enthusiasm, which denotes feelings of excitement, enjoyment, eagerness, and motivation.

> *One of the participants stated, "Using the READ strategy in reading stories gets me motivated, and I always feel excited." Another participant admitted, "I always feel excited whenever we are having English class because I know that I can relate to the lesson, especially when there is a group activity."*

The pupils' enthusiasm about the use of the strategy coincides with Clavel's (2020) affirmation that pupils who are enthusiastic about a task are more likely to do it with a positive attitude and genuine interest. Such enthusiasm enhances emotional engagement, which leads to increased attention, active participation, and a willingness to put more effort into understanding the text.

Perceived Benefits. In terms of the perceived benefits of the READ strategy to the Grade IV pupils, the interview data revealed three major themes: (1) fostering independent reading, (2) enhancing knowledge, and (3) developing fluency in reading.

The first theme, fostering independent reading, revealed one key code which is reading without guidance.

> *One pupil shared, "I don't ask my classmates anymore for their understanding of the story as I could already understand the story which I read."*

This response aligned with the findings of Amiruddin et al. (2022) in their study which reiterates that independent reading allows learners to practice and strengthen their comprehension skills. This shows that pupils learn to become independent, no longer asking many questions about the reading text. By reading texts on their own, they learn to follow storylines, make predictions, draw inferences, and understand the plot and these contribute to improved comprehension of the pupils.

The second theme, enhancing knowledge, presents several benefits of the READ strategy which includes improved understanding of the story, the ability to retell the story, widened vocabulary, improved thinking skills, and the accurate expression of views and perspectives.

> *One pupil remarked, "READ strategy helps me to know about the words that I didn't know before and it makes me understand the story easier."*

This response aligns with the findings of the study of Mendieta et al. (2015), which noted that effective reading strategies help pupils derive meaning from unfamiliar words which lead to better comprehension of the reading text.

The third theme, developing fluency in reading, focuses on the ability to read properly and smoothly.

> *A pupil stated, "I can already read the story properly and smoothly with little difficulties."*

This response aligns with the findings of Amalia (2022) who stated that sight word recognition enhances reading fluency for it allows learners to identify words and this facilitates comprehension. When learners can recognize words effortlessly, they will be able to comprehend what they read easily and this contributes to improving overall reading fluency.

Challenges Encountered. In terms of the challenges encountered by the pupils on the use of READ strategy, two themes emerged: (1) strategy- related difficulties, and (2) lack of academic abilities.

Under the theme of *strategy-related difficulties,* two key factors were identified that contribute to the pupils' struggles: certain parts of the intervention itself and their unfamiliarity with the strategy used.

> One pupil admitted, *"The parts of the strategy which are analyzing and examining the text are challenging, especially because the story is in English and I'm not good at English and I lack comprehension skills. I keep reading the story until I understand it."* (Participant 9)

> *"I didn't know how this strategy worked at first, so I had to focus and pay close attention in class to understand it. At the beginning, I had difficulty with how to do it, but since we've been using it every day, the activities have become a little easier for me."* (Participant 32)

These responses reveal that strategies introduced to the pupils maybe confusing at first so there is a need for clear and repeated instructions for the pupils to know what to do and how to do the process. Their difficulty in understanding the strategy influenced their comprehension in doing the activities provided in each of the phases of the READ strategy. As a result, they engaged with the text without adequate comprehension skills. These findings support the claim of Caraig & Quimbo (2022), who emphasized that attempting to analyze a story without sufficient knowledge on what to do can hinder comprehension.

The second theme, *lack of academic abilities*, includes several challenges such as difficulty with the medium of instruction and unfamiliar vocabulary. These are reflected on the interview responses of the following participants:

> *"It is hard to understand the story since it is in English and in analyzing the story using the READ strategy, I find it hard because it is in English. It is not easy to understand stories in English."* (Participant 10)
> *"At first, it was not easy for me to comprehend the story using the strategy because there are difficult terms and there are words which are not familiar. I also didn't know how the strategy worked, so I had to be attentive in order to understand it better the next time."* (Participant 32)

Coping Mechanisms. Three themes emerged from the interview responses regarding the coping mechanisms pupils used to overcome the challenges they encountered in using the READ strategy and they are as follows: (1) utilizing alternative strategies, (2) practicing self-management, and (3) seeking assistance.

Under the first theme, *utilizing alternative strategies*, participants shared that they reread the story multiple times and consistently used the intervention through techniques such as retelling, self-explanation, note-taking, and identifying context clues. One pupil stated,

> *"I keep reading the story, retelling it, or sometimes I explain it to myself and try other strategies until I understand it. I keep on discovering other activities I can do to help myself."*

This finding is supported by the study of Banditvilai (2020) study, which proved that applying various reading strategies can effectively assist struggling readers in enhancing their reading comprehension.

The second theme, ***practicing self-management,*** indicates the importance of maintaining focus during reading.

> *One pupil expressed, "I focus on the story so that I will understand the main idea."*

This aligns with the findings of Loi & Thanh (2022), which confirm that focused attention leads to engagement with the text and this benefits the reading comprehension skills of the learners. This suggests that self-management and attentiveness are important in enhancing comprehension.

The third theme, *seeking assistance*, emerged as pupils acknowledged the value of teacher support in overcoming difficulties.

> *One pupil responded, "I ask for translation or assistance from the teacher."*

This is consistent with the findings of the study of Chen et al. (2019), which found that pupils who received teacher support demonstrated a better understanding of reading materials. This affirms the positive influence of teacher guidance in facilitating comprehension among learners.

Pupils' improvements in their reading comprehension after the implementation of the READ strategy

To determine the changes or improvements in pupils' reading comprehension after the implementation of the READ strategy, the pupils were asked to write journals which recorded the personal changes they experienced. Analysis of the journal data revealed nine key themes which indicate significant improvements: (1) enhanced reading abilities; (2) decreased reliance on assistance; (3) improved performance in both individual and group activities; (4) strengthened academic skills; (5) enhanced ability to identify relevant information from the text; (6) increased competence in utilizing available information; (7) improved proficiency in connecting ideas; (8) boosted self-confidence; and (9) heightened interest in reading.

Discussion

The first prominent theme, *enhanced reading abilities*, confirmed that the READ strategy helped pupils comprehend stories more easily and independently and improved their reading comprehension skills.

> *One pupil shared, "I realized that the strategy makes it easy and faster to understand stories."*

This finding aligns with Almutairi's (2018) study, which emphasized that using reading strategies can positively influence pupils' comprehension in reading stories.

The second theme, *decreased reliance on assistance*, suggests that the READ strategy enabled pupils to rely less on teachers and classmates when understanding reading texts.

> *One pupil stated, "I realized that it was easier for me to understand what was being read and I didn't need to ask my classmates and our teacher anymore to help me understand the story."*

This behaviour was consistently observed during the implementation of the intervention and this confirms that the strategy reduced pupils' dependence on the help of their teacher and classmates during reading activities.

The third theme that emerged from the analysis is that the READ strategy *improved pupils' performance in both individual and group activities.* This theme is categorized into two areas such as the ability to answer questions and complete tasks without prompting, and active participation in group work.

A representative response from one pupil was,

"READ strategy helps me to answer the questions given correctly and easily."

This reflects our classroom observation that pupils were more capable to complete tasks independently and participate actively in both individual and group activities during the implementation of the intervention.

The fourth theme reveals that the READ strategy *strengthened pupils' academic skills.* Pupils noted that the strategy expanded their English vocabulary and broadened their overall knowledge.

One pupil stated, "I learned a lot of English words which are unfamiliar to me."

This aligns with the findings of Rasonable & Velasco (2023) who noted that the use of effective reading strategies can enhance academic competencies which includes acquisition of vocabulary and content knowledge.

The fifth theme centers on how the READ strategy *enhanced pupils' ability to identify relevant information from the text.* This includes skills to note key details, differentiate between main ideas and supporting details, recognize characters, settings, and plot elements, and understand the structure of the story.

One participant shared, "READ strategy helps me to identify the important details and events of the story."

This insight is supported by Brandon (2021), who emphasized that the ability to distinguish significant from insignificant information is crucial for effective comprehension. This helps the readers to focus on essential details and better understand the story.

The sixth theme underscores how the READ strategy *increased pupils' competence in utilizing available information.* This includes the ability to retell a story, infer meaning, determine the message or moral lesson, predict outcomes, and interpret characters' feelings.

A pupil stated, "READ strategy helps me to retell the story and answer the questions and activities easily."

This supports Cao & Kim (2021) claim that retelling is used widely as a measure of reading comprehensions skills. Other reading skills such as noting details, sequencing events, predicting, summarizing and inferring meaning are essential in developing reading comprehension.

The seventh theme is that the READ strategy leads to improved proficiency in connecting ideas among the pupils. Pupils demonstrated improved abilities in sequencing events, establishing links between the story and its title, and applying story lessons to real-life situations.

One pupil noted, "READ strategy helps me to know how the story starts, what happens in the middle, and how it ends and also how the main character solves the problem and connect the story to real life situations."

This response is consistent with the findings of Brandon (2021) which noted that making connections between texts and real-life experiences enhance comprehension. This

will become more meaningful and relevant to the pupils. These findings affirm that the READ strategy helps pupils internalize information which leads to   deeper and comprehensive understanding of the story.

The eighth theme that emerged from the analysis of the pupils' journals is that the READ *boosted pupils' confidence*. This theme reflects the pupils' increased confidence in expressing their thoughts, ideas, opinions, and in answering questions about the story.

> *One pupil shared, "I realized that the READ strategy gives me confidence in answering questions because I already understand the story."*

This response aligns with the findings of Lesaux (2019), who emphasized that when pupils gain confidence in their reading abilities, they are more likely to participate actively and motivated to engage in reading activities.

The final theme identified in the thematic analysis is that the READ strategy *heightened interest in reading*. Pupils revealed that the strategy helped them develop a genuine enjoyment of reading.

> *One pupil expressed, "I am starting to like reading stories because I can understand it already."*

This response is consistent with the findings of Adinugraha et al. (2024), who found out that when pupils develop a love for reading, they will voluntarily engage in reading and this leads to improved comprehension skills.

Conclusion

The READ strategy is effective in enhancing the reading comprehension of the Grade IV pupils in English stories at Caraitan Integrated School, Nagrebcan Elementary School, Mariano Marcos memorial Elementary School and Garnaden Elementary School in Ilocos Norte, Philippines. It is a reading strategy that allows pupils to understand and interpret reading texts easily and comprehensively.

The significant mean difference of 7.84 in the pretest and posttest scores of pupils confirms the effectiveness of the strategy. Likewise, the pupils' positive learning experiences and the identified improvements in their reading abilities signified the potential of the READ strategy in enhancing the reading comprehension of the pupils in English stories. Thus, this strategy is recommended for use not only for Grade IV pupils but also to the different grade levels to solve the problem of reading comprehension of the pupils in English stories.

Declarations

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