INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE HUMANITY & MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

ISSN (print) 2833-2172, ISSN (online) 2833-2180

Volume 02 Issue 06 June 2023

DOI: 10.58806/ijsshmr.2023.v2i6n22

Page No. 454-460

Read Aloud Strategy for Reading Literacy of Elementary Pupils: Basis for Enhancing the Reading Program

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ABSTRACT: The study aimed to use the read aloud strategy in the enhancement of the Reading Literacy Program of the school. It specifically determined the reading levels of the pupils based on their Lexile scores using the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI); their mean scores in terms of comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency using the researcher-made test; their Lexile growth, and the significant difference between the mean scores from the researcher-made pre-test and post-test. A one-group pre-test and post-test design was utilized, wherein a total of 44 students in grades 4-6 were used as participants. The instruments used were the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) assessments adopted from the Reading Literacy Program and the researcher-made tests for comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. Results revealed that there is a significant difference between the mean pre-test and post-test scores from the researcher-made tests, indicating that the use of reading aloud as a strategy is effective in enhancing the Reading Program. Thus, the hypothesis "there is no significant difference between the mean percentage scores of pre-test and post-test of pupils" is not sustained.

KEYWORDS: Read Aloud Strategy, Lexile scores, Lexile growth, Scholastic Reading Inventory, Literacy

I. INTRODUCTION

The Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001 requires the Department of Education (DepEd) to adopt national educational policies to improve service delivery and basic education results. The Department of Education (DepEd) established Republic Act No. 10533 (RA No. 10533), also known as the K–12 Program, to equip Filipino students with 21st-century skills and competencies, including improved literacy skills.

Literacy is needed to attend school and participate in society, according to [1] Caroll and Breadmore (2019). Reading and writing difficulties make it hard for kids to learn anything. Teachers must help students develop literacy skills. Reading and comprehension help students succeed in other subjects. This suggests that reading literacy is crucial to completing a curriculum.

The Philippines participated in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) after implementing its new kindergarten through twelfth grade curriculum in 2018. Filipino students had an average reading literacy score of 340, compared to 487 for the [2] Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). When the reading literacy scores were announced, the nation ranked last. The PISA findings inspired [3] DepEd Memo No. 17, s. 2019, Hamon: Bawat Bata Bumabasa. This document requires schools nationwide to help students become proficient readers.

In relation to that, studies on reading literacy have remained a focus of attention, which is particularly relevant in light of the fact that the ongoing pandemic has disrupted conventional school structures over the course of the past two years. The researcher notes that now that students are beginning to physically return to school, the learning crisis in reading is evident in a certain number of students who are enrolled in classes. This is the case for some of the students, especially in the early childhood and elementary grades.

This paves the way for the researcher's interest in focusing the study on the underlying topic of reading literacy. The researcher is the Academic and reading program coordinator at the school, so this paved the way for her interest. The researcher is of the opinion that one of the best ways to measure the reading literacy of learners is by using an appropriate assessment tool that is guided by an appropriate reading strategy. In this particular instance, the "Read Aloud Strategy" was used to assist her in keeping track of the books that her students have read.

Bixby Knolls Preparatory Academy, Inc. (BKPA) is a private school that has been operating in the San Antonio, Quezon for the past six years. Scholastic Inc. has been the school's literacy partner for the past five (5) academic years. The purpose of the partnership is to foster a community of readers, improve the reading literacy skills of students in Kindergarten through Grade 10,

and develop students into either Proficient or Advanced readers by the end of the academic year (AY). With these, the school has implemented the Independent Reading Program (IRP), which was soon renamed the Reading Literacy Program (RLP). Under this program, students choose and read the books from Scholastic collection that they want to read on their own, and then they are evaluated on their reading comprehension.

Despite this, it would appear that the program's intended purpose has not been achieved over the course of the last few years. The pretest results in the Upper Elementary Grade Levels (Grades 4-6) the Academic Year (AY) 2022-2023, has shown that 54.41% of the pupils are still categorized as Basic and Below Basic readers. She would like to address this problem while simultaneously concentrating on the enhancement of the program by making an effort to include the read-aloud strategy in the reading program. She believes that as an Educational Management student, she must also look at the programs being implemented in the school, especially when it is for the students' academic progress.

The researcher believes that the findings of her study can be of great assistance to students in improving their post-test reading literacy levels in comparison to the results of their pretest reading literacy levels. English teachers and those in charge of implementing the program can make use of the data to conduct careful evaluations and figure out what else could be done while the program is being carried out to assist them in accomplishing their goal.

II. METHOD

The study utilized the one-group pretest-posttest research design. According to [4] Yazon, Callo, and Buenvinida (2019), it is the easiest type of experiment because it does not have a control group. In other words, researchers often only look at one group and do not compare it to a group that does not get any treatment. This design's use of a pre-test to ascertain baseline scores was an advantage because the scores in the pre-test serve as the basis for improvement.

There was a total of 44 upper elementary school students at Bixby Knolls Preparatory Academy, Inc. (BKPA) who were chosen through the complete enumeration method, which simply includes all the students in the elementary grade levels from 4 to 6 who were identified as Basic and Below Basic readers after taking the pre-test. Specifically, there were 16 students from grade 4, 20 students from grade 5, and 8 students in grade 6.

The researcher chose them as her respondents because it is one of the departments that she directly supervises. She chose this level because she believes that a strong foundation in reading and comprehension must be fully established at the early stages of children's education to prepare them for the more complex disciplines that they will encounter when they enter high school.

There were two instruments used in the study. The first instrument was the pretest and posttest through the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), adopted from the Reading Literacy Program. The researcher decided to adopt the instrument because the school is in contract with Scholastic Asia and has been using the reading platform since 2017.

The [5] Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) is a research-based reading assessment that tests and reports on students' reading comprehension using the Lexile Framework® for Reading. Its electronic edition is an online adaptive test that responds to students' responses. The difficulty levels of the questions alter depending on how well students perform once they begin the test. The exam ends when the SRI assessment software has gathered enough data to generate a Lexile score. Adaptive testing reduces test preparation time, improves test accuracy, and ensures that no two students are given the same test. It is based on passages from children's literature, including fiction and nonfiction, as well as excerpts from young adult and classic literature, newspapers, journals, and periodicals, and features a test bank of 5,119 questions. Students respond to fill-in-the-blank or cloze questions on the SRI, which are similar to those found on many standardized tests and are used to assess students' comprehension of the texts they read. To interpret the Lexile scores, the following data was used:

Table I. Interpretation of Lexile Scores and Reading Levels

Lexile Scores	Reading Levels
901-1700+	Advanced
600-900	Proficient
350-599	Basic
BR-349	Below Basic

The second instrument was the researcher-made pre- and post-test. The researcher selected books from Scholastic collections that she read to the students aloud every week during the intervention, then she formulated pre-tests and post-tests from the chosen books to test their vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. To interpret the scores, the following data was used:

Table II. Interpretation of Scores

SCORES	INTERPRETATION
15-20	Advanced
10-14	Proficient
5-9	Needs improvement
0-4	Did not meet expectation

In September, the participants took their pre-test through the online Reading Literacy Program. The pre-test results were then interpreted through the SRI, which helped generate the learners' lexical and reading levels. The results of the pre-test were interpreted by the Scholastic representative for the researcher, who is also the Reading and Academic Coordinator of the school. It was found out that there were 44 upper elementary pupils (Grades 4-6) who needed intervention and were identified as Basic and Below Basic readers.

After the results interpretation, the TOS for the pre-test and post-test focusing on comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency assessments created by the researcher have been prepared together with the tests and program matrix. The researcher-made tests were validated through pilot testing with proficient and advanced readers in grades 4 to 6. Upon retrieval of scores, the results were subjected to item analysis, and revisions were made in the needed areas.

In light of ethical considerations, the students' participation was based on their agreement with the researcher. Prior to the conduct of the study, she ensured that all data would be treated confidentially and would only be used for research purposes by sending letters of permission, consent, and assent forms. Participants were also assured that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage if they wish to do so.

The program officially took off after the approval of the proposed intervention, validation of the researcher-made tests, and securing letters of permission from the Head of School, the participants, and their parents.

The Project Read Aloud was scheduled four times a week. Students also took short, researcher-made quizzes to assess their understanding of each story. The evaluations focused on comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. She continued to monitor their reading progress through the course of the year. The Scholastic Reading program ran for eight (8) months, but the study's implemented treatment was only observed for one (1) month.

After a month-long intervention, students took their post-tests. The pupils' Lexile scores from pre-test and post-test results generated through SRI and their scores in Comprehension, Vocabulary, and Fluency tests generated through the researcher-made test were then compared and analyzed in order to identify whether the treatment is effective or not in enhancing the reading literacy of the students.

For the analysis and interpretation of the gathered data, the study employed the following:

Simple descriptive statistics was used including frequency counting and percentage in determining the reading levels of the students based on their Lexile scores in the pre-test and post-test results.

Two-tailed T-test was employed in determining the significant difference between the reading levels of the students based on the scores in the pre-test and post-test results from the researcher-made test.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table III. Distribution of the Respondents based on the Reading Proficiency Levels using Lexile Scores before using the Read Aloud Strategy

Scores	Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6		Verbal Interpretation
	f	*%*	*f*	*%*	*f*	*%*	
BR-349	8	50	11	55	4	50	Below basic
350-599	8	50	9	45	4	50	Basic
600-900	0	0	0	0	0	0	Proficient
901-1700+	0	0	0	0	0	0	Advanced
Total	16	100	20	100	8	100	

Legend: 901-1700+ - Advanced
600-900 - Proficient
350-599 - Basic
BR-349 - Below Basic

Table 3 shows the reading levels of the students based on their Lexile scores before the intervention program. From the Lexile scores in their pre-test, it was shown that the respondents were equally distributed between below basic and Basic reading levels.

The poor reading performance can be attributed to the two years of no face-to-face schooling due to the pandemic, where students' performance in the reading program was not closely monitored and they got used to reading books with low Lexile levels merely for leisure reading. When students were asked as to why they prefer to read books with a lower Lexile, they said that it is easier for them to meet the required number of books to be read as those books with low Lexiles are also usually shorter and more engaging to read.

Table IV. Distribution of the Respondents based on the Reading Proficiency Levels using Lexile Scores after using the Read Aloud Strategy

Scores	Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6		Verbal Interpretation
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	
BR-349	8	50	11	55	4	50	Below basic
350-599	8	50	9	45	4	50	Basic
600-900	0	0	0	0	0	0	Proficient
901-1700+	0	0	0	0	0	0	Advanced
Total	16	100	20	100	8	100	

Legend: 901-1700+ - Advanced
600-900 - Proficient
350-599 - Basic
BR-349 - Below Basic

Table 4 shows the distribution of reading levels among respondents after using the read-aloud strategy. It can be seen from the table that the percentage of below-basic and Basic readers decreased, and four (4) of them became proficient readers. The increase can be attributed to the read-aloud strategy that served as the intervention in the current Scholastic Reading Program at the school. A 9% increase in the proficient readers from 0% was particularly noticeable.

The read-aloud sessions have helped them be guided on how they can further understand the stories they are reading and also assisted them in decoding the meanings of the vocabulary words used in the stories, which is why the results improved during the post-test. According to Trelease (2013), interactive reading aloud makes sure that students have fun listening to the book and that their curiosity about the book is sparked. Most importantly, interactive reading aloud builds vocabulary, creates conditions for the child's brain to enjoy reading, builds on the child's prior knowledge, shows them how to read, and gets them interested in reading. With this in mind, in the read-aloud sessions during the conduct of the study, the researcher used books that were applicable to the students who took part in the study. She ensured that there was a proper matching of books according to their lexical levels so that the students could also start to gain interest in reading the books within their lexical range with or without the teacher's supervision.
Though there was an increase in the number of proficient readers, the number of below-basic and Basic readers combined is still higher. This can be rooted in the amount of time spent reading aloud. If the read-aloud strategy was implemented for a longer period of time, there might be a higher percentage of proficient readers after the post-test.

Table V. Mean Scores of Respondents in the Comprehension, Vocabulary, and Fluency Tests before using the Read Aloud Strategy

	Mean Scores	SD	Interpretation
comprehension	8.89	3.00	Needs Improvement
Vocabulary	11.02	4.44	Proficient
Fluency	19.73	1.09	Advanced

Legend for Mean Scores Interpretation:
15-20 - Advanced
10-14 - Proficient
5-9 - Needs Improvement
0-4 - Did not meet expectation

Shown in Table 5 above are the mean scores of the respondents in the pre-test in terms of comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. The highest mean score of 19.73 with a standard deviation of 1.09 has been recorded in the fluency test, which means that the scores are not dispersed and students can read.
However, their mean score in terms of comprehension is the lowest, interpreted as needing improvement, and scores were dispersed at a 3.00 standard deviation. The results imply that although students can read, they do not fully comprehend what they are reading. The low results in comprehension and vocabulary are alarming, given the idea that poor comprehension may also result in poor academic performance.
The claim is supported by [7] San Juan (2019), who stated that reading is, without a doubt, the actual foundation of most learning. As children progress through school, more reading is normally necessary as subjects get denser and more difficult. Not the other way around; the difficulty level simply rises. If a student's reading comprehension is poor, his or her performance in other disciplines is likely to suffer as a result.
When students were asked as to why they thought they performed poorly in the pre-test, most of the answers were that they found it difficult to understand the stories they read, even if they were given a week to read them. Since some stories are long, it was also

difficult for them to comprehend the stories, mainly because they were tasked with reading them independently. Given these, an intervention should be conducted to improve the students' comprehension skills.

It is usually empirical that when students understand vocabulary terms in what they are reading, their comprehension skills are expected to be good as well, but the results presented in Table 5 do not match this idea. It can be attributed to the way the tests in different areas of literacy skills were constructed. The test for the vocabulary skill is formed through context clues. On the other hand, the test for the comprehension skill is based on their understanding of the stories they read.

Table VI. Mean Scores of Respondents in the Comprehension, Vocabulary, and Fluency Tests after using the Read Aloud Strategy

	Mean Scores	SD	
comprehension	16.89	1.54	Advanced
Vocabulary	17.25	1.53	Advanced
Fluency	19.93	0.45	Advanced

Legend for Mean Scores Interpretation:
15-20 - Advanced
10-14 - Proficient
5-9 - Needs Improvement
0-4 - Did not meet expectation

Table 6 shows the mean scores of the respondents in the pre-test in terms of comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. The mean scores and the low standard deviation in all three areas indicate that the results are better compared to the pre-test in Table 5. The mean scores became higher, and the scores were not dispersed.

It can be seen from the results that the reading comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency skills of students improved after the implementation of read-aloud.

The researcher observed that the students who attended the read-aloud were able to comprehend the content of the books that were read to them. Thus, they were able to consistently pass the short assessments or quizzes given to them after every session of read-aloud. This is mainly because the researcher was able to process and ask questions before, during, and even after the read-aloud sessions to check and ensure the students' understanding and comprehension. The process guided the students on how they could further understand the stories or texts that they were reading.

This claim is supported by a respondent in the study of Albright and [8] Ariail (2011), who stated that she reads aloud to her students for them to focus on comprehension rather than pronunciation.

Table VII. Lexile Growth of the Respondents Based on SRI after the Read Aloud Implementation

Lexile/SRI Test	Mean	SD	Mean difference
Pre-test	387.86	189.412	132.27
Post test	520.14	182.983	

Legend: 901-1700+ - Advanced
600-900 - Proficient
350-599 - Basic
BR-349 - Below Basic

As seen in Table 7 above, the computed mean difference is 132.27, which means that there is a huge increase in the scores from pre-test to post-test. This notes that the scores improved, which can be rooted in the read-aloud implementation.

The improvement in the scores due to read-aloud implementation matches the claim of [9] Kalb and Ours (2014), who considered reading out loud to be the single most important factor in the development of young children's literacy levels. This was found to be the case following the discovery that reading aloud was the most important factor in the development of children's literacy. They also stated that it has numerous benefits as a reading intervention technique, such as encouraging children to read and improving basic literacy comprehension and development. Reading aloud was defined as the shared reading experience that occurs between a child and a parent, guardian, or teacher in the context of the research.

However, even if the scores improved, it can also be seen from the table that, based on the mean of 520.14 from the post-test, the students in general are still identified as Basic readers. The range for each level is high, which makes it challenging for students to move up in terms of levels. Their scores increased, but their levels stayed at Basic.

The [10] National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2013 defined Basic and below-basic readers as those who can discern the meaning of familiar words within the same sentence or paragraph by using context; identify a specific detail to make a simple inference about a character's actions, motivations, or emotions, using a single point or multiple points in close proximity; organize or categorize the story's events; provide some support for ideas related to the plot or characters; find meaning or evidence from one of the texts when making a comparison across texts; identify explicit details from the text; and state an opinion with general support from one section of the text.

Table VIII. Test of Difference between the Mean Scores of the Pupils before and after the Read Aloud Implementation

Legend: Sig (2-tailed) ≤ .05 (Significant); Sig (2-tailed) ≥ .05 (Not significant)

The post-test and the pre-test scores showed significant differences based on t values of -18.927 and -11.388 for comprehension and vocabulary, respectively, which are all less than the critical value with a 0.05 level of significance.

	Pre-test		Post Test		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Verbal Interpretation
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Comprehension	8.89	3.00	16.89	1.54	-18.927	43	0.000	Significant
Vocabulary	11.02	4.44	17.25	1.53	-11.388	43	0.000	Significant
Fluency	19.73	1.09	19.93	0.45	-1.594	43	0.118	Not significant

Fluency, on the other hand, was found to have no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test, as it only had a minimal difference of 0.23 in their mean scores. It can be recalled that during the pre-test, students were already categorized as advanced in terms of fluency which means to say that they can read even before the read aloud implementation, but they cannot fully comprehend the stories they were reading. The slight increase in their post-test mean score indicates that there was minimal increase in their reading fluency as well.

The result shows that reading aloud is an effective intervention strategy to improve the students' reading literacy skills. It helps the children have a better understanding of the stories and texts they are reading. In the read-aloud implementation, questions before, during, and after reading have been posted before they answer the short quizzes. The process helped them recall significant events from the stories, guided them in decoding the meanings of vocabulary words, and also made them more engaged in the stories.

The statement is supported by [11] Canoy et al. (2016), who emphasized the educational benefits of reading aloud, including helping children understand the structure and norms of texts and fostering the development of linguistic requirements in other subjects, such as mathematics. In addition, reading aloud to children provides a crucial opportunity for focused interaction, thereby transforming reading into a valued social practice. During read-aloud sessions, embedded social behaviors such as inquiring skills, dialogic participation, and inquiry-based learning are instilled in children.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

A significant difference is found to exist between the pre-test and the post-test scores of the pupils in terms of comprehension and vocabulary, while there was none in fluency which means that the hypothesis "*there is no significant difference between the mean percentage scores of the pre-test and post-test of pupils*" is not sustained.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The researcher would like to express her profound gratitude to the following institutions: Laguna State Polytechnic University-SPC, for providing a high-quality education that enabled her to expand her knowledge for professional progress, and for granting permission to conduct this study. She is particularly grateful to the administration at Bixby Knolls Preparatory Academy, Inc. for all of their help.

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