

**Using Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA)
to Improve Reading Comprehension
of Struggling Learners in Grade 4**

An Action Research Presented to the Division Research Committee

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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to investigate how the use of Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) an effective strategy in improving the reading comprehension of the struggling learners in grade 4. A quasi-experimental method was employed using the one-group pretest-posttest design. The selected pupils who participated in this study were the enrolled pupils of Luis Francisco Elementary School for the school year 2019-2020. They were the ones who were identified as having grade 3 reading level based from the Phil-IRI group screening test administered. They struggle in getting the details of the selection and in identifying the main idea. The participants went through a 20-day remedial instruction that focused on reading comprehension. Statistical tools used were mean, and paired t-test. Using the one-group pretest-posttest, the participants registered a pretest mean of 8.37 and a posttest mean of 21.14. Results of the study showed that the use of DRTA helped the learners strengthen their comprehension skill with confidence.

Based from the data gathered, a significant improvement in the learners' performance was exhibited on the respondents' posttest as compared to their pretest with a mean difference of 12.77. It also registered a computed t-value of 15.89 which is greater than the critical t-value of 2.04. This suggests that having a deeper understanding of the text greatly contributed to the improvement of the learners' reading comprehension. The researchers concluded that this strategy if consistently used, the pupils would improve their reading comprehension level. This will definitely make them appreciate the English language. For this reason, teachers across all grade levels may use the Directed Reading Thinking Activity strategy for the learners to have a better understanding of the selection because it encourages learners to be active and thoughtful readers.

Keywords: *DRTA, , main idea, reading comprehension, struggling learners, wh-questions*

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Rationale

Based on the K to 12 Curriculum, English instruction at the elementary level aimed at comprehending and/or producing oral and/or written texts realized within the four English skills; namely listening, speaking, reading and writing (K to 12 Curriculum, 2013). Consequently, to be proficient in English, learners need to master the four skills. Listening and reading skills are regarded as receptive skills because learners need not to produce language to do these, they receive and understand it. On the other hand, speaking and writing skills are considered to be productive skills or active skills because they need to produce language to do this. Among the four language skills, reading is the most important one since every aspect of life involves reading. For instance, road signs, traffic rules, menus in restaurants, printed advertisements, newspapers, magazines, insurance forms, labels on bottles and others. Therefore, the ability to read the text in any form will greatly contribute to English learners, such as gaining success at school.

Reading comprehension is the most valuable skill a pupil must acquire to attain success. It is the ability to recognize written or printed words. It can be said that reading is always associated with comprehension. In other words, no reading happens without comprehension. It is among the basic skills that should be taught to children in the early years of elementary school because they use these skills in understanding all the other subjects. It also used to efficiently function and enjoy the abundance of life. Therefore, learners are required to have good understanding abilities.

However, the researchers observed that many of the grade 4 learners did not possess adequate reading comprehension skills to do what is expected of them. During classroom instruction, the learners could hardly provide correct answers to wh-questions which are basic in gathering information. It was also found out from the one-on-one reading activity assessment that most of them can read but they lack comprehension. The researchers therefore conducted further investigation to find out the root causes of having poor comprehension skills. It was discovered that a good number of the learners lacked vocabulary and grammatical knowledge which are important to comprehend the texts. They could hardly identify the main idea and the supporting details in a selection read. They often misunderstood some of the information appeared in the text and had difficulty understanding simple English words. It seems that they had not learned to guess meaning using context or to employ their background knowledge related to the text.

The recently administered Phil-IRI group screening test confirmed the self-assessment of the researchers. It was found out that most of the grade four learners can read but their scores in the comprehension test was poor. Data revealed that forty five of the learners got a score of 13 and below which means they are reading below their grade level. Thirty-five (35) of them who scored eight (8) to thirteen (13) were reading at grade 3 level while those who scored zero to seven (7) were reading at grade 2 level and most of them have problem in decoding. Hence the

thirty-five (35) learners were the focused of the study in as much as their concern was on the reading comprehension.

Considering the importance of reading comprehension for the learners' success in English, it is necessary to overcome the stated difficulties above. Those difficulties indicate the demand to employ an appropriate intervention strategy that cannot only help improve learners' comprehension ability but that could make them actively take part in the reading class as well. In this case, the researchers then used the Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) which is one of the reading comprehension techniques that is intended to develop learners' ability to read critically and reflectively. DRTA is a strategy that guides learners in asking questions about a text, making predictions, and then reading to confirm or disprove their predictions. It also attempts to equip readers with the ability to determine the purposes of reading, the ability to extract, comprehend, and assimilate information, the ability to make predictions to examine reading materials based on the purposes of reading, the ability to pass judgments, and finally the ability to make decisions based upon information gleaned from reading (Atmini, Asiyah & Mufanti, 2017).

Directed Reading Thinking Activity is a strategy formulated by Russell Stauffer (1969). It encourages learners to gather details and make predictions while they are reading. After reading section of a text, learners stop, confirm previous predictions, and make new predictions about what they will read next. However, in the current study, the researchers employed the modified DRTA to suit the needs of the struggling learners. Since the learners' reading level is below their grade level, they would be trained to read texts and answer wh-questions to improve their literal and inferential reading comprehension. This is to familiarize them with the different wh-questions. Also, the learners were directed more to identify the main idea after they have read the short stories or selections presented.

There are various ways teachers used in enhancing the reading comprehension of the learners but one of the good techniques that can be applied is engaging them to Direct Reading and Thinking Activity to sharpen the comprehension skills of the struggling learners. In the study of Sari (2017), it shows that the DRTA engages the learners to actively pay more attention at the pictures, to imagine the situation, and to look up the dictionary. It also shows a positive effect on the learners' reading performance after they were taught through DRTA, this may be attributed to the effectiveness of the activity practiced by the learners. Hence, this suggests that DRTA facilitated the improvement of learners' reading comprehension performance.

To effectively teach the learners through the DRTA, teachers must direct and stimulate learners' thinking prior to reading a passage by perusing the title, illustrations, and other explanatory materials. Then teachers should use wh-questions to direct learners as they gather the details about the content or perspective of the text. Learners should be encouraged to explain their responses and activate prior knowledge. During the reading stage, teachers should have learners read up to the first pre-selected stopping point in the text. The teacher then prompts the learners with questions to gather information about the text and asks them to get the main idea. This process should be continued until learners have read each section of the passage. At the end of the reading, teachers should have learners go back through the text and review if the main idea

generated is correct. Learners should verify main idea by finding supporting statements in the text. The teacher deepens the thinking process by asking questions repeatedly.

In the study of Erliana (2011) which aimed to describe how the Directed Reading Thinking Activity strategy could improve reading comprehension, she explained that the Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) was effective and suitable to improve reading comprehension in terms of providing the learners opportunity to utilize reading strategies, to enhance learners' self-confidence, and to produce independent learners. The result of the study reveals that the DRTA not only improves learners' comprehension but also enhances their motivation in learning.

Likewise, Sanders (2012) stated in his study that the ability to answer questions provides a window through which to view what an individual knows or does not know about a given topic. Answering questions is integrally related to the development of language, literacy, and academic success.

Thus, this study was very significant to the learners in as much as it would help them to become proficient readers which is a prerequisite to other learning areas.

Research Questions

The main objective of this action research is to improve the reading comprehension of the struggling learners by using directed reading thinking activity (DRTA). It questioned answers to the following questions:

1. What are the performance levels in reading comprehension of learners before and after the conduct of the study in terms of getting the details of the selection and identifying the main idea of the selection?
2. How significantly different is the reading performance level of learners before and after the conduct of the study?

Chapter 2 Methodology

Participants

Prior to engaging the learners in the program for improving the reading comprehension, their current reading level was established by utilizing the result of the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) group screening test which was conducted last July, 2019. This study was participated by thirty five (35) learners from Grade 4 section Compassionate, Diligent, Enthusiastic, and Faithful of Luis Francisco Elementary School for the school year 2019-2020. These learners scored 13 and below during the Phil-IRI group screening test. The result showed that the learners are reading below their grade level. Some of them were identified as having grade 3 reading level while others were classified as having grade 2 reading level. Only the learners with grade 3 reading level were chosen as participants in as much as their concern is more on the reading comprehension aspect. Those with grade two reading level have a different approach on how to address their need because most of them have difficulty in decoding. The participants have undergone a 20-day remedial instruction.

Purposive sampling was utilized in choosing the participants. Palinkas (2015) described purposive sampling as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling. It is a non-probability approach where the researchers rely on their own judgment when selecting informants to participate in the study.

Data Gathering Procedure and Instruments

The initial data collection process started first by asking permission from the school principal to conduct the study. Then, an application for permission to conduct the study was sent to the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent of the Schools Division of Valenzuela through the Research Planning Committee for its approval. Upon its approval, the researcher started to prepare the materials like the short stories/selections for getting the main idea and getting the details, and the pretest-posttest material. Short stories and selections selected were designed for grade 3 learners because the reading level of the respondents as revealed by their score in the group screening test. However, towards the end of the research process, the researchers gradually introduced simple stories and selections intended for grade 4. This is to see if the learners can cope up with the grade 4 lessons.

In this study, one-group pretest-posttest design was employed. It is quasi-experimental research design in which the same dependent variable is measured in one group of participants before (pretest) and after (posttest) a treatment is administered. Then the difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the learners will be compared. The advantage is that we can compare scores after the intervention to the scores on the same measure in the same participants before treatment is given. The disadvantage is that the one-group design does not include a no-treatment control group.

Abraham & MacDonald (2011) stated that quasi-experimental research is similar to experimental research in terms of manipulation of an independent variable. It varies from

experimental research because either there is no control group, no random selection, no random assignment, and/or no active manipulation.

Meanwhile, the main source of data was the pretest and posttest which is composed of a 30-item multiple-choice test. Before it was given to the respondents, the tool was validated and pilot tested to other learners who were not involved in the study. This pilot test process was meant to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the questionnaire, in terms of question variation, meaning, item difficulty, and to establish relationships among items and item responses, and to confirm item response reliability. This was done to determine what test item should be retained, rejected, and revised. The test was evaluated again by the English coordinator before it was administered to the respondents.

The validated pretest which was administered to the respondents measures their baseline learning performance about gathering details and getting the main idea in a short story or selection given. During the research process, the learners were given short stories to read. Researchers taught them how to read sentence by sentence. Some clues on how to determine the answers to wh-questions and how to identify the main idea were explained and demonstrated. These clues greatly helped the learners improve their reading comprehension performance. In the course of the remedial instruction, concurrent formative assessments were also given. All formative assessments were recorded to keep track on the progress of the learners' performance.

After the 20-day remedial instruction, the learners were given a posttest similar to the pretest to measure the learning improvement of the respondents on the topics about reading comprehension particularly getting the details and getting the main idea. The posttest result was then recorded, analyzed and interpreted.

The data gathering was done during the fourth week of August 2019 to the first week of October 2019.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the above mentioned respondents were analyzed through quantitative approach. It employed statistical tools such as mean and paired t-test. Mean was used to describe the scores of the respondents while paired t-test samples was used to compare the means of the pretest and posttest within each group to see if the means showed significantly different.

The mean scores were treated according to the Descriptive Scale in the Performance Level adopted from the study of Samson (2017).

Chapter 3 Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the interpretation of various results of the study drawn from the data being gathered and analyzed. The problems enumerated in chapter 1 were answered with the following findings:

1. What are the performance levels in reading comprehension of learners before and after the conduct of the study in terms of getting the details of the selection and identifying the main idea of the selection?

Table 1:

Performance Level in Reading Comprehension of Learners Before and After the Conduct of the Study

	Mean	Interpretation
Pretest	8.37	Below Average
Posttest	21.14	Above Average

Legend: 25-30 Excellent, 19-24 Above Average, 13-18 Average, 7-12 Below Average, 0-6 Poor

Table 1 presents the performance level in reading comprehension of the learners in getting the details and identifying the main idea of a selection read. From the table, the pretest of the learners registered a mean score of 8.37 which is interpreted as below average. Data revealed that the learners have poor mastery of the skills when it comes to getting the details and identifying the main idea of simple selections presented. It showed that they struggle in understanding short stories and selections read. Some of the reasons could be that English is not their first language. Also, they do not have rich English vocabulary or background to provide answers to wh-questions appropriately and could hardly understand simple words from the stories. Lastly, one of the observed reasons of having poor reading comprehension is the use of English language in as much as the learners were used to Mother Tongue as the medium of instruction in most of the subjects during their primary grade. Thus, the respondents are still in the adjustment period in learning the language.

Conversely, the posttest of the learners registered a mean of 21.14 which is interpreted as above average. Data revealed that learners showed improvement after the implementation of the DRTA intervention. It was observed that when the learners were exposed to listening to English language and reading English stories/selections everyday, their comprehension to the English language is gradually enhanced. The learners showed interest in reading and rereading the selection until they obtain the accurate answers. Hence, using the directed reading thinking activity is an effective strategy in strengthening the reading and critical thinking skills of the struggling learners.

2. How significantly different is the reading performance level of learners before and after the conduct of the study?

Table 2:

Test of Significant Difference in the Reading Performance Level of Learners Before and After the Conduct of the Study

N-35

	Mean	Mean Difference	df	Computed t Value	Critical t-value	Decision	Interpretation
Pretest	8.37	12.77	34	15.89	2.04	Reject Ho	Significant
Posttest	21.14						

As shown in table 2, the pretest and posttest have mean scores of 8.37 and 21.14 respectively, which are higher than the mean scores in their posttests as shown by the mean difference of 12.77. It can be seen that the obtained means are statistically significantly different because the computed t value of 15.89 is greater than the critical t value of 2.04 at 5% significance level. This evidence suggests that the learners have high retention of learned concepts after some period of time being exposed to the English language.

Results revealed that after the intervention period, the respondents obtained a high increment in the posttest. It was observed that not only the reading comprehension of the learners that was improved but the learners also displayed interest in each lesson and exhibits positive attitude towards reading comprehension activities. They developed in them confidence because they learned strategy on how to provide answers to wh-questions and in identifying the main idea. They are not scared to ask questions anymore. Likewise, the strategy gave them the opportunity to communicate using simple English like asking wh-questions.

Chapter 4

Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary of Findings

This chapter presents the summary of findings, implications, and recommendations of the study.

1. Performance level in Reading comprehension of learners before and after the conduct of the study

The respondents obtained a computed mean of 8.37 in the pretest which is interpreted as below average. It conveys that the respondents have trouble in gathering information and in identifying the main idea of selections presented. Having this kind of difficulty affects the learners' reading comprehension. However, after the conduct of the study, the learners showed improvement in the posttest with a registered mean of 21.14. This is a good indicator that the directed reading thinking activity is an effective strategy that enhanced the reading comprehension of the struggling learners.

2. Test of Significant Difference in the Reading Performance Level of Learners Before and After the Conduct of the Study

The mean difference of 12.77 showed strong evidence that there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest mean scores of the respondents. The computed t value of 15.89 is greater than the critical t value of 2.04 at 5% significance level means that the obtained means are statistically significantly different. Data revealed that using DRTA could enhance the learners' reading comprehension because of its salient features like repeatedly asking questions to gather the details and in analyzing the main idea. Learners showed interest and enthusiasm in reading short stories.

The researchers found out that DRTA is good for all learners, especially those with learning disabilities and struggling readings, primarily due to the repetition within the strategy. Many learners with learning disabilities and or struggle need repetition within the same content in order to start to gain an understanding (Hallahan, Kauffman, and Pullen, 2015).

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The current study concluded that when the struggling learners were exposed to the English language like reading English stories daily, they could gradually increase their comprehension and vocabulary.

2. The Directed Reading Thinking Activity is a very effective strategy in teaching reading comprehension as shown by the learners' improvement in the posttest.

Reflections

During the course of the remedial classes, the researchers made observations on how the learners interact with the strategy used. At first, they showed inhibition in answering questions. Others just responded with a smile while others just remained quiet. These reactions showed that they have trouble in answering wh-questions even the simple ones. One observation was that English is not their first language. They were not exposed to the language because during their Kindergarten to grade 3 level, Mother Tongue Based was mostly used in the classroom instruction. The researchers discovered that in order for the learners to be exposed with the language, they must be used to answering simple wh-questions and at the same time asking questions. Although at first, it is a bit difficult because you had to explain and unlock some unfamiliar English words, but in time, they will learn them. At the moment, the respondents can confidently ask questions and provide correct answers to simple questions. They learned some clues on how to figure out answers to the wh-questions that will help them understand the entire selection.

The researchers also observed that the learners displayed positive attitude towards reading comprehension activities unlike before that they were so passive whenever they were asked to communicate in English. They also demonstrate interest and enthusiasm in reading short stories. This means that they developed in themselves confidence and learned techniques that helped them to improve their reading comprehension. The researchers felt confident that the struggling learners under this study will soon become proficient readers at their grade level.

Recommendations

In light of the foregoing significant findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations were formulated:

1. Teachers across all levels may use this strategy for the learners to have a better understanding of the selection because it encourages learners to be active and thoughtful readers. However, it must be used with consistency and learners must be guided so that it will be successful.
2. School Administrators also may encourage teachers to use the DRTA technique even to those with learning disabilities. As Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen (2015) stated in their study that DRTA is a good strategy even to those learners with learning disabilities. Hence, there is a need for teachers to use engaging strategy like the DRTA in order that reading comprehension will be enhanced.

Finally, the contribution of this research to knowledge would be the better way in improving the reading comprehension of diverse learners. Providing the right intervention strategy would make each of the learners competent in terms of reading comprehension.

Dissemination of Advocacy Plan

The study aimed to investigate how the use of Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) an effective strategy in improving the reading comprehension of the struggling learners in grade 4. Hence, to ensure that the outputs from the research informs practice and thereby maximize the benefit of the strategy for the learners, the following dissemination strategy has been developed for translating knowledge into practice.

Since the DRTA is an effective strategy, the researchers would like to share the findings of the study during In-service training and Learning Action Cells to discuss the results and the salient features of the DRTA. Researchers also may demonstrate how the DRTA is being utilized so that teachers could incorporate it in their teaching and learning process. By sharing also the results, teachers might realize the need and may be motivated to conduct action research to help solve classroom problems.

In addition, the researchers also need to develop a plan of action for the future. The plan should contain a workshop in conducting the Directed Reading Thinking Activity for the improvement of the teaching and learning process. The purpose is to demonstrate the DRTA cycle so that teachers will be well guided on how to do this strategy. It will be cascaded to all English teachers across grade level. Researchers may seek the assistance of the school head in implementing this technique for the succeeding school years.

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