

Reading Difficulties and Reading Strategies of Grade 10 Students in the New Normal



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ABSTRACT: This study utilized the descriptive research design to determine the reading difficulties of one hundred Grade 10 students who scored the least in the reading inventory in a public high school in Negros Occidental in the School Year 2021-2022 in terms of vocabulary and reading comprehension. Furthermore, their reading strategies were investigated. To solicit suggestions for building better reading skills, fifty of the selected respondents were interviewed through convenience sampling. The results reveal the following: (a) The students had difficulty understanding specialized words; (b) The students had difficulty answering critical questions; (c) The students used their background knowledge as their reading strategy; and (d) The students suggested that tutorials and spelling tests be conducted for their reading skills to improve. It was recommended that students resolve to better their reading skills and that teachers, parents, and curriculum specialists pay rapt attention to helping students gain reading proficiency.

KEYWORDS: new normal, reading difficulties, reading strategies

INTRODUCTION

Patterns of reading difficulties and students' reading strategies provide an educationally beneficial means to consider various kinds of reading problems based on experience or linked with disabilities. It is undeniably true that reading proficiency is essential for children's future academic, financial, and social success (Norton & Wolf, 2012, as cited in Al Dahhan, Kirby, & Munoz, 2016). Reading develops vocabulary, fosters communication skills, and increases general knowledge and understanding of the world. However, teaching and learning how to read during the pandemic also brings more significant challenges for teachers, students, and parents. The ongoing pandemic has twisted everyday life for more than a year now.

According to the research released by the Policy Analysis of California Education (PACE) on March 9, 2021, the oral reading fluency of students in early grades is estimated to be about 30 percent lower than the typical years, and students from lower achieving schools may be falling even farther behind.

Before the pandemic, there were already many reading difficulties, and Covid -19 made those difficulties more challenging. Learning gaps widened between those who could access a variety of learning materials and other platforms and those students who needed a means of accessing any. The World Bank asseverated that children were not highly engaged with distance learning since parents or caregivers have no education compared to countries like the Philippines and Peru, where parents have tertiary education (de Vera, 2021).

In the survey conducted by the Social Weather Stations (SWS) in March 2021, 89 percent of the Filipino families enrolled for the School Year 2020-2021 considered blended learning to be more complicated than regular face-to-face classes. Although schools provide online and modular support, it still requires students to study by themselves. Unfortunately, not all learners can adapt smoothly to the modular learning modality. The World Bank held in March 2021 that 9 out of 10 Filipino children with adults who had no education cannot read (de Vera, 2021).

In light of the initial premise, this study was conducted to determine the reading difficulties that Grade ten learners have and their reading strategies.

This study will help address the learning difficulties and foster the reading strategies of Grade ten learners. By determining the reading difficulties and strategies of the learners, the researcher will be able to develop reading innovations and interventions to improve their reading skills.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to ascertain the reading difficulties and strategies of grade 10 students in one of the public high schools in Negros Occidental during the School Year 2021-2022.

Specifically, this study sought answers to the following questions:

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1. What are the most prevalent reading difficulties of the students in terms of vocabulary and comprehension in the New Normal?
2. What are the most prevalent reading strategies that the students employ to cope with their reading difficulties in the New Normal?
3. What are the suggestions of the students to help themselves build better reading skills?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study employed the descriptive research design, which involves observing and describing the behavior of a subject without influencing it in any way. Descriptive research is research that tries to learn more about a phenomenon's current state. Additionally, the goal of this kind of research is to present a precise profile of things, people, or occasions (Rahi, 2017). Since this study intended to determine and describe the reading difficulties of Grade 10 students, the descriptive research design was deemed appropriate.

Respondents of the Study

The respondents for determining reading difficulties were 100 hundred Grade 10 students enrolled in a public secondary school in Negros Occidental during the School Year 2021-2022 who scored the least in the reading inventory conducted at the beginning of the School Year. Out of the 100 respondents, 50 were chosen through convenience sampling to identify reading strategies and suggestions for building reading skills.

Data Gathering Instrument

This study used a three-part standardized questionnaire used in a public secondary school to assess students' reading skills. The first part contained 45 questions (15 for each tier) on reading difficulties regarding vocabulary, which were based on the three-tier framework that Isabel Beck and Margaret McKeown (1985) developed. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of 40 comprehension questions (10 for each level of comprehension) based on Smith's (1969) four levels of comprehension skills. The third part contained 20 questions regarding reading strategies, based on Lai's (1997) framework of Reading Strategies, and an open-ended question about the suggestions students may give to help them build better reading skills.

Data Treatment

For problem one, which sought to determine the student's reading difficulties in terms of vocabulary and comprehension in the New Normal, frequency and percentage were used.

For problem two, which aimed to determine the students' reading strategies to cope with their reading difficulties in the New Normal, frequency and percentage were used.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This section presents and delineates the results of the reading difficulties and strategies of 50 Grade 10 students from a public secondary school during the School Year 2021-2022.

Table 1.
Reading Difficulties of Students in Terms of Vocabulary and Comprehension

	F	Percentage	Rank
Vocabulary			
Specialized Words (tier 3)	20	20%	1
Common Words (tier 1)	42	42%	2
Frequently Occurring Words (tier 2)	60	60%	3
Comprehension			
Critical	39	39%	1
Inferential	44	44%	2
Literal	56	56%	3

Table 1 shows that, in general, the students needed to become more familiar with specialized words since only 20 of 100 could recognize such vocabulary words. Moreover, less than half of them knew common words, and a little over half knew concerning frequently occurring words. These results imply that the respondents could hardly recognize specialized words and needed help understanding common and frequently occurring words.

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According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (n.d.), limited vocabulary engenders difficulties with reading comprehension. Agyei (2019) found out that alphabetical coding and word recognition errors were common reading difficulties that their respondents experienced. In addition, Hassan and Dweik (2021) revealed that new words impeded reading comprehension among nine graders.

Furthermore, table 1 indicates that less than half of the students answered critical and inferential questions, and a little over half responded to literal questions. These results suggest that the respondents preferred to answer questions that have responses that are directly stated in the text to questions that aim to make them think.

de-la-Peña & Luque-Rojas (2021) found out that the literal level of comprehension was more prevalent among most university students than the inferential, critical, and organizational levels. Moreover, Sari (2015) discovered that second-year students could answer literal and creative questions more than interpretive and critical ones. Contrariwise, the critical level of comprehension was observed among EFL students in their reading classes (DaCosta & Gutierrez, 2020).

Table 2.
Reading Strategies of Students

	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Using background knowledge	50	100%	1
Having a purpose	45	90%	2
Predicting	38	76%	3
Evaluating	32	64%	4
Reading actively	30	60%	5
Inferring unknown vocabulary	21	42%	6
Avoiding bad habits	20	40%	7
Scanning	17	34%	8
Previewing	15	30%	9
Skimming	15	30%	9
Reading to present	14	28%	11
Integrating	12	24%	12
Reviewing	10	20%	13
Inferring	5	10%	14
Identifying figurative language	2	4%	15
Clustering Reading	1	2%	16
Identifying genres	0	0%	17
Identifying paragraphs	0	0%	17
Identifying sentence structures	0	0%	17
Noticing cohesive devices	0	0%	17
Identifying style	0	0%	17

Table 2 shows that 50 respondents opted to use background knowledge as their foremost reading strategy, 45 used having a purpose, 38 used predicting, 32 used evaluating, 30 used reading actively, 21 used inferring unknown vocabulary, 20 used avoiding bad habits, 17 used scanning, 15 used previewing and skimming, 14 used reading to present, 12 used integrating, ten used reviewing, 5 used inferring, two used identifying figurative language, one used clustering reading, and 0 used identifying genres, identifying paragraphs, identifying sentence structures, noticing cohesive devices, and identifying style.

These results indicate that the respondents connected the old information they knew to the new information introduced in a text to help them understand concepts.

Wang (2016) showed that using background knowledge was an effective reading strategy for EFL readers. However, McLaughlin and Allen (2002, as cited in de leon & Tarrayo, 2014) averred that previewing and evaluating are reading strategies that help students become metacognitive readers. Moreover, Susanti and Fitrawati (2020) revealed that reviewing was the topmost reading strategy that tertiary students in an English Department utilized.

To help students discover the reading strategies that befit their reading needs, teachers in the Department of Education in the Philippines may be guided by the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCS) (Guidelines on the Use of the Most Essential Learning Competencies, n.d.)

SUGGESTIONS FOR BUILDING READING SKILLS

The 50 students who were asked about their reading strategies were also requested to give suggestions about how they could build better reading skills. Reading tutorials and spelling quizzes were the most preferred means by the students to develop abilities that

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may help them read and understand what they read. Some students also held that vocabulary building might help them improve their reading skills.

CONCLUSIONS

Several factors could have contributed to the students' lack of ability to recognize domain-specific words and words that occur frequently. Additionally, they could either be unmotivated to make reading a habit or were not allowed to think critically as they were bent on answering only literal questions.

Using background knowledge was the principal reading strategy of the students employed since they would have believed that the old information they knew would help them understand the concepts they would read.

Furthermore, the students would like to have tutorials and spelling tests since they would have felt sure that such would assist them in improving their reading comprehension skills.

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