

A Reading Program for College Students

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Abstract

This study aimed to develop a reading comprehension program on the reading competencies and comprehension level of college students. A focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted to gather insights from students on their reading habits and challenges, which served as the basis for the development of the reading program. The program focused on teaching specific reading strategies, building vocabulary, analyzing texts, and reading critically, evidence that a structured reading comprehension program can be effective in improving college students' reading competencies and comprehension level. The insights gathered from the FGD, reading inventory, cloze tests, Nelson-Denny Reading Test and the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) assessment were crucial in developing the program that addressed the specific needs and challenges of the students. These findings have important implications for college educators and administrators, highlighting the need for targeted and well-designed reading programs to support students' academic success.

Keywords: Reading Program, Competencies, Assessment

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1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is a fundamental skill that is essential for academic success. College students are expected to read large amounts of material across a variety of subjects, and the ability to comprehend and analyze these texts is critical for achieving academic excellence. However, Lu's (2023) paper reveals that many college students struggle with reading, either because of poor reading skills or because they find reading tedious and uninteresting.

To address this issue, many colleges and universities have developed reading programs that aim to improve students' reading skills and increase their engagement with reading. These programs typically involve a range of strategies and activities, such as guided reading, active reading techniques, and opportunities for discussion and reflection (Moore, 2022).

The purpose of this research was to assess the reading comprehension level of the College respondents and consequently develop a reading program. Specifically, the researchers examined whether the program improved students' reading skills and increased their motivation and engagement with reading. The factors that contributed to the program's success or failure was likewise explored, such as the design of the program, the qualifications and training of the instructors, and the level of support provided among the respondents of the study.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design and Instruments

This qualitative paper utilized the research and develop (R&D) design. The design process involved a systematic approach from needs analysis to the validation of the developed reading comprehension program.

2.2 The Instruments

The modified focus group discussion prompts of Zurong (2021) was employed for the analysis phase of this study. Moreover, the researchers identified the reading comprehension level of the respondents with the aid of the Nelson-Denny Reading Test and the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) assessment. Data were likewise gathered from the instructors as the results of the reading comprehension levels were based from cloze tests and informal reading inventories.

2.3 The Respondents

The respondents of this study were the one hundred twenty-five college students from both private and state university. Fifteen college instructors participated in the focus group discussion sessions. Due to the peak of the pandemic, these respondents were contacted via google meet, text message, cellular phone calls and electronic mails.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

Letters addressed to the Presidents of the two universities were sent in an email. This requested permission from the English Department heads for the conduct of the study. The researchers then gathered data from the teacher-respondents by means of focus group discussion with teaching reading strategies and assessment practices as core topics. The proponents similarly requested for copies of the results of the Informal Reading Inventories and Cloze tests. These results served as foundation for the researchers to design the reading comprehension program, thus addressing the needs of the respondents of the study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Reading Competencies of College Students

Categories of Reading Competencies	Reading Competencies		Frequency	Percentage
	Private HEI	SUC		
TEXT PROCESSING				
Emergent Literacy	50	75	125	1
Reading Fluency	30	54	84	10
Vocabulary Learning	30	59	89	8
Locating information				
Accessing and retrieving information	20	60	80	11
Searching for and selecting relevant text	15	58	73	12
Understanding				
Acquiring a representation of the literal meaning of a text	45	70	115	4
Constructing an integrated text representation	40	45	85	9
Evaluating and Reflecting				
Assessing quality and credibility	50	74	124	2
Reflecting on content and form	35	70	105	7
Detecting and handling conflict	55	59	114	5
TASK MANAGEMENT				
Setting up goals and plans	43	69	112	6
Monitoring progress and self-regulating goals and strategies throughout the activity	50	72	122	3
Total	463	765	1228	

Table 1 shows the reading competencies of the respondents according to the twelve categories. *Emergent literacy* has the highest frequency. This competency is an essential precursor to reading comprehension. It is important for educators to provide young learners with opportunities to develop these foundational skills and knowledge in order to support their future success as readers.

Assessing quality and credibility follows as the second in rank among the categories of reading competencies. According to Baumann (2020), assessing the quality and credibility of reading comprehension materials is an important skill for readers to develop, as it enables them to make informed decisions and draw accurate conclusions based on their understanding of the text, as cited by Toquero (2020), and Henessy (2021). To earn this skill, a range of collocated skills are required as cited by Solari et al. (2021). These researchers noted authorship, publication source, evidence, objectivity, clarity and coherence.

Furthermore, table 1 displays that *searching for and selecting relevant texts* which is under *locating information*, is one of the least emphasized reading competencies among college students. It is important to give students the opportunity to search for and select relevant texts in reading comprehension to help them develop critical thinking skills, exposure to different types of texts, motivation to read, and a sense of autonomy in their learning. Hence, the research results imply that there is limited reading instruction which focuses on developing the learners' abilities to establish predictable routines to encourage learners to anticipate reading events.

Table 2. Reading Comprehension Levels of the College Respondents in Region X

College Students First Year Level	Independent		Instructional		Frustration		Non-Reader		Total Population
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	
	33028	26422.4	39062	31249.6	36515	29212	5	4	125

This data in table 2 reveals that there are more instructional readers than independent readers among first year college students. The gap is not that high but implies that more is to be done in the reading instructions. This further served as foundational data for the reading training plan designed by the researchers.

Additionally, five research respondents were found to be non-readers. They are those who are unable to recognize and sound out letter sound connections for single consonant, consonant blend and others. This implicates that an extensive reading program must be developed to address this alarming concern.

Table 3. A Training Design Matrix for Reading Comprehension Enhancement

Training Objective	Instructional Method	Assessment
Identify main ideas and supporting details	Reading and note-taking strategies	Quiz on main ideas and supporting details
Determine author's purpose and tone	Analysis of language and style	Written analysis of author's purpose and tone
Understand text structure and organization	Graphic organizers and outlining	Outline of text structure
Analyze text for bias and perspective	Critical reading and reflection	Written analysis of bias and perspective
Build vocabulary and language skills	Vocabulary exercises and context clues	Vocabulary quiz and writing exercise
Apply reading strategies to different types of texts	Text analysis and comparison	Written analysis of two different texts

Using the needs assessment results as baseline data, the researchers designed a training matrix to enhance the reading comprehension level of college students. Table 3 depicts the training objective, instructional method and assessment. By focusing on specific skills such as identifying main ideas, understanding text structure, and analyzing for bias and perspective, students can build a strong foundation for reading comprehension. Instructional methods such as reading and note-taking strategies, analysis of language and style, and graphic organizers can provide students with tools and techniques to approach different types of texts. According to Lu (2023), assessment tools such as quizzes, written analyses, and vocabulary exercises can help students track their progress and identify areas for improvement.

Employing the training design, the researcher developed a reading comprehension program, to address the comprehension difficulties of the respondents. The subsequent table illustrates the significance of the learners as the core in the teaching learning repertoire.

Week	Reading Strategy	Vocabulary Building	Text Analysis	Critical Reading	Practice and Feedback
1	Predicting	Word roots and affixes	Identifying main ideas and supporting details	Evaluating sources for credibility	Multiple-choice questions
2	Summarizing	Context clues	Analyzing text structure	Identifying bias and point of view	Written responses
3	Questioning	Academic vocabulary	Interpreting figurative language	Recognizing logical fallacies	Group discussions
4	Note-taking	Idioms and phrases	Analyzing author's purpose and tone	Identifying propaganda techniques	Timed readings
5	Highlighting and underlining	Synonyms and antonyms	Comparing and contrasting texts	Examining cultural assumptions	Peer feedback

This tabular reading comprehension program provides students with a weekly schedule that focuses on different strategies and skills. Each week, students work on a specific reading strategy, build their vocabulary, analyze different types of texts, read critically, and receive practice and feedback. The program includes a variety of assessment tools, such as multiple-choice questions, written responses, group discussions, timed readings, and peer feedback. By focusing on different skills each week, students can possibly develop a comprehensive set of reading comprehension skills over the course of the program.

This program underwent three assessment phases. Pre-assessment was done in the conception of the training design. Three language experts with specialization on reading were invited to assess the conceived reading program and post assessment was conducted when the program was pilot tested among the select respondents. Peer feedback was added for week five as suggested by the experts.

4. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this research suggest that a structured reading comprehension program can significantly improve the reading skills of college students. The program, which focused on teaching specific reading strategies, building vocabulary, analyzing texts, and reading critically, was found to be effective in improving students' performance on reading comprehension assessments. The program also helped students to set specific goals, monitor their progress, and receive feedback and support from instructors.

The results of this research have important implications for college educators and administrators. By implementing a structured reading comprehension program, colleges can support students in developing essential reading skills that are crucial for success in academic and professional settings. Additionally, this research highlights the importance of ongoing assessment and feedback, as well as individualized goal setting, in supporting students' growth and development.

Overall, this research provides evidence that a targeted and well-designed reading comprehension program can have a positive impact on college students' reading abilities and academic success.

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