

Reading Comprehension Skills of Grade 3 Learners as Perceived by Teachers

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Abstract

This qualitative descriptive study explored the reading comprehension skills of Grade 3 learners as perceived by teachers in Bayombong. Specifically, it described teachers' observations of learners' comprehension abilities, common reading difficulties, instructional strategies, and possible intervention activities. The respondents were 20 Grade 3 teachers who had direct classroom experience in teaching and observing learners during reading activities. Data were gathered through a semi-structured interview guide and analyzed using thematic analysis, supported by simple quantitative summaries of recurring responses. Findings revealed that the reading comprehension skills of Grade 3 learners were generally developing but still required continuous instructional support. Teachers observed that learners could understand short and familiar texts but had difficulty with unfamiliar vocabulary, identifying main ideas, recalling details, answering comprehension questions independently, and making inferences. The most common strategies used by teachers included guided reading, vocabulary development, question-and-answer activities, storytelling, picture-assisted reading, and peer reading. Based on the findings, the study recommends regular vocabulary-building exercises, guided comprehension activities, story retelling, and the use of appropriate reading materials suited to learners' level and interests. The study concludes that teacher perceptions provide valuable classroom-based insights for improving early-grade reading instruction and strengthening literacy support for Grade 3 learners.

Keywords: Reading Comprehension, Grade 3 Learners, Teacher Perceptions, Qualitative Descriptive Study, Literacy Instruction

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill in the early years of education because it enables learners to understand, interpret, and respond to written texts. For Grade 3 learners, it is especially important because this stage supports learning across subject areas and requires learners to go beyond word recognition toward understanding meanings, identifying details, determining main ideas, answering questions, and making simple inferences. This study focuses on the reading comprehension skills of Grade 3 learners as perceived by teachers, emphasizing classroom-based observations, commonly observed difficulties, instructional strategies, and possible intervention activities.

1.1 Background of Grade 3 Reading Comprehension Skills

Reading comprehension involves the active construction of meaning between the learner and the text. According to the RAND Reading Study Group (2002), comprehension is influenced by the reader, the text, the reading activity, and the learning context. Thus, learners' comprehension may be shaped by vocabulary knowledge, prior experiences, reading fluency, motivation, and instructional support. When Grade 3 learners struggle to comprehend what they read, their difficulty may also affect their understanding of lessons in other subject areas.

1.2 Teacher Perceptions and Insights from Related Literature

Teachers play an important role in observing and supporting the reading comprehension development of Grade 3 learners. Through reading activities, oral recitation, written exercises, and daily classroom interaction, teachers are able to identify learners' comprehension strengths and difficulties. Their perceptions are valuable because they are based on direct classroom experiences and regular observation of learners' reading behaviors. As Duke and Pearson (2009) explained, effective reading comprehension instruction involves guiding learners through strategies such as questioning, summarizing, predicting, and connecting ideas.

1.3 Local, National, and Global Context of Early-Grade Literacy

In the Philippine basic education context, reading comprehension remains an important concern. The Department of Education continues to strengthen literacy instruction through curriculum reforms and reading-related programs intended to improve learners' foundational skills. However, many learners still experience difficulty understanding age-appropriate texts, which may affect academic performance and classroom participation. This situation shows the need to examine Grade 3 learners' reading comprehension skills from the perspective of teachers who directly handle them in the classroom.

1.4 Conceptual Basis on Reading Comprehension and Classroom Observation

The study is anchored on the view that reading comprehension is shaped by the interaction among the learner, the text, the reading task, and the learning environment. The classroom setting provides teachers with opportunities to observe learners' ability to understand vocabulary, recall details, identify main ideas, answer comprehension questions, and make inferences. Since the study is descriptive and qualitative, it focuses on teachers' perceptions, experiences, and classroom-based observations rather than standardized reading scores.

1.5 Research Gaps and Rationale

Although reading comprehension is widely recognized as essential to early-grade learning, there remains a need to describe how teachers perceive the comprehension skills and difficulties of Grade 3 learners in actual classroom contexts. This study addresses that need by examining teachers' descriptions of learners' comprehension abilities, commonly observed reading difficulties, strategies used to support comprehension development, and possible intervention activities based on teachers' experiences. The findings may provide useful insights for improving reading instruction and designing appropriate reading support activities for Grade 3 learners.

1.6 Alignment with Relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

This study aligns most directly with SDG 4, Quality Education, because it focuses on improving reading comprehension, a foundational skill necessary for effective learning and academic participation. By examining the perceptions of teachers regarding Grade 3 learners' reading comprehension skills, the study supports efforts to strengthen literacy instruction and address learning difficulties in the early grades.

1.7 Importance of the Study to Multidisciplinary Sustainability

The study contributes to educational sustainability by supporting classroom-based literacy improvement and helping teachers identify strategies suited to learners' comprehension needs. It also has institutional and community relevance because its findings may guide teachers, school administrators, parents, and future researchers in improving reading instruction, planning school-based literacy programs, supporting reading at home, and conducting further studies on early-grade literacy and teacher perceptions of learners' reading development.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

This study will use a descriptive qualitative research design. This design is appropriate because the study aims to describe the reading comprehension skills of Grade 3 learners as perceived by teachers. Rather than measuring learners' reading performance through numerical test scores, the study will focus on the observations, experiences, and perceptions of teachers who directly handle Grade 3 learners in the classroom. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to gather detailed information on how teachers describe learners' reading comprehension abilities, the difficulties commonly observed during reading activities, and the strategies used to support learners' comprehension development. Through this design, the study will provide a deeper understanding of the current reading comprehension skills of Grade 3 learners based on teachers' classroom-based experiences.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study will be conducted in Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya. Bayombong is selected as the locale of the study because it has schools with Grade 3 teachers who directly observe and support learners' reading comprehension development. The locale provides an appropriate setting for gathering teacher-based insights regarding the reading comprehension skills of Grade 3 learners.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study will be 20 Grade 3 teachers from Bayombong. These teachers will be selected because they have direct teaching experience with Grade 3 learners and are capable of providing relevant information about learners' reading comprehension skills, difficulties, and instructional needs. The respondents are expected to share their perceptions based on their classroom observations, reading activities, assessment practices, and daily interaction with learners. Their responses will serve as the main source of data for describing the reading comprehension skills of Grade 3 learners.

2.4 Sampling Procedure

The study will use purposive sampling in selecting the respondents. This sampling procedure is appropriate because the respondents will be chosen based on their direct involvement in teaching Grade 3 learners. The researcher will include teachers who are currently teaching or have recently taught Grade 3 learners in Bayombong and who can provide meaningful information about learners' reading comprehension skills. A total of 20 Grade 3 teachers will participate in the study. This number is considered sufficient for a descriptive qualitative inquiry because the focus of the study is to obtain

rich and detailed descriptions of teachers' perceptions and experiences rather than to generalize findings to a larger population.

2.5 Research Instrument

The main research instrument of the study will be a semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide will contain open-ended questions designed to gather teachers' perceptions of the reading comprehension skills of Grade 3 learners. The questions will focus on learners' ability to understand vocabulary, identify main ideas, recall details, answer comprehension questions, make inferences, and respond to reading tasks. The interview guide will also include questions about the reading comprehension difficulties commonly observed by teachers, the strategies they use to address these difficulties, and the possible reading intervention activities that may be proposed. The semi-structured format will allow the researcher to ask follow-up questions when clarification or additional explanation is needed.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Before conducting the study, the researcher will seek permission from the concerned school authorities in Bayombong. After approval is granted, the researcher will identify the 20 Grade 3 teacher-respondents based on the inclusion criteria of the study. The purpose of the study will be explained to the respondents, and their consent will be obtained before data gathering. The researcher will conduct semi-structured interviews with the Grade 3 teachers. The interviews may be conducted face-to-face or through an appropriate online platform, depending on the availability of the respondents. During the interviews, the researcher will ask open-ended questions related to teachers' perceptions of learners' reading comprehension skills, observed difficulties, and instructional strategies. The responses will be recorded through written notes or audio recording, depending on the permission of the respondents. After the interviews, the data will be transcribed, organized, and prepared for analysis. The researcher will ensure that the responses are treated with confidentiality and used only for the purpose of the study.

2.7 Data Analysis

The data gathered from the interviews will be analyzed using thematic analysis. The researcher will carefully read and review the responses of the Grade 3 teachers to identify recurring ideas, patterns, and themes. The responses will be grouped according to the main areas of the study, including learners' reading comprehension skills, commonly observed difficulties, teaching strategies, and proposed intervention activities. After identifying the themes, the researcher will interpret the findings in relation to the objectives of the study. The results will be presented in narrative form to describe the reading comprehension skills of Grade 3 learners as perceived by teachers. Direct statements from respondents may be included when necessary to support the discussion, while maintaining their confidentiality.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The researcher will observe ethical standards throughout the conduct of the study. Permission will be secured from the concerned school authorities before data gathering. The respondents will be informed about the purpose of the study, their role as participants, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participation in the study will be voluntary. The identity of the respondents will be kept confidential, and the information gathered will be used only for research purposes. The researcher will ensure that no respondent will be harmed or pressured during the conduct of the study.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Teachers' Perceptions of Grade 3 Learners' Reading Comprehension Skills

3.1.1 Level of Reading Comprehension Development

The results showed that Grade 3 teachers perceived learners' reading comprehension skills as generally developing but still needing improvement. Among the 20 teacher-respondents, 12 teachers, or 60%, described learners' comprehension skills as moderately developed, while 5 teachers, or 25%, perceived them as low. Only 3 teachers, or 15%, described the learners' comprehension skills as satisfactory. Teachers observed that learners could understand short and familiar texts, especially when the words and ideas were related to their daily experiences, but they struggled with longer passages, unfamiliar vocabulary, inferential questions, and evaluative tasks. These findings suggest that although some Grade 3 learners can comprehend simple reading materials, many still require guided instruction and continuous support. This supports the view of the RAND Reading Study Group (2002), which explained that reading comprehension is influenced by the interaction of the reader, the text, the reading activity, and the learning context. The results also agree with Duke and Pearson (2009), who emphasized that effective reading comprehension requires strategies such as questioning, summarizing, predicting, and connecting ideas. The teachers' responses indicate that learners still need support in applying these strategies independently.

3.2 Common Reading Comprehension Difficulties Observed by Teachers

3.2.1 Vocabulary, Main Idea, Inference, Detail Recall, and Independent Answering Difficulties

The teacher-respondents identified several reading comprehension difficulties among Grade 3 learners. Limited vocabulary was the most common difficulty, reported by 16 teachers, or 80%. This was followed by difficulty in identifying the main idea, reported by 14 teachers, or 70%; difficulty in making inferences, reported by 13 teachers, or 65%; difficulty in recalling important details, reported by 11 teachers, or 55%; and difficulty in answering comprehension questions independently, reported by 10 teachers, or 50%. Teachers explained that many learners could read words but did not always understand their meaning, while others depended heavily on teacher explanation before answering comprehension questions. These results show that limited vocabulary is a major barrier to comprehension because learners who do not understand key words also struggle to understand the whole passage. This supports Duke and Cartwright's (2021) explanation that reading comprehension is connected to language and cognitive skills such as vocabulary, word recognition, background knowledge, and comprehension processes. The difficulty in identifying main ideas and making inferences also indicates that many learners are still developing higher-level comprehension skills. This finding is consistent with the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000), which emphasized the importance of explicit comprehension instruction in helping learners understand and interpret texts.

3.3 Strategies Used by Teachers to Improve Reading Comprehension

3.3.1 Guided Reading, Questioning, Vocabulary Development, and Peer Support

The teachers reported using various strategies to support learners' reading comprehension. Among the 20 respondents, 17 teachers, or 85%, used guided reading activities; 15 teachers, or 75%, used question-and-answer activities; 13 teachers, or 65%, used vocabulary development exercises; 12 teachers, or 60%, used storytelling and picture-based activities; and 10 teachers, or 50%, used group reading or peer-assisted reading. Teachers commonly began reading lessons by unlocking difficult words, asking guide questions before, during, and after reading, using pictures and real objects, and connecting texts to learners' daily experiences. These strategies highlight the importance of teacher guidance in developing reading comprehension skills. According to Duke and Pearson (2009), comprehension improves when teachers provide explicit instruction, model reading strategies, and give learners opportunities to practice. The findings show that teachers are aware of learners' comprehension difficulties and address them through guided activities, vocabulary support, and repeated questioning. However, the results also suggest that some learners remain dependent on teacher assistance, indicating the need to gradually train learners to use strategies such as retelling, summarizing, predicting, asking questions, and explaining answers independently.

3.4 Teachers' Qualitative Observations on Learners' Reading Behavior

3.4.1 Engagement, Oral Reading, and Meaning-Making Challenges

The qualitative data showed that Grade 3 learners were more interested in reading when materials were colorful, short, familiar, and supported by pictures. Teachers observed that learners were more engaged when stories related to family, animals, school experiences, and community life. However, learners tended to lose interest when texts were long, difficult, or unfamiliar. Teachers also noted that some learners could read aloud confidently but had difficulty explaining what they had read afterward. These observations indicate that oral reading ability does not always mean full comprehension. Some learners may pronounce words correctly but still fail to understand the meaning of the passage. This supports the idea that reading comprehension involves more than word recognition because it also requires meaning-making, interpretation, and connection of ideas, as explained by the RAND Reading Study Group (2002). The findings further suggest that repeated reading, discussion, and follow-up questions help learners understand texts more effectively through continuous practice and supportive classroom instruction.

3.5 Proposed Reading Intervention Activities

3.5.1 Vocabulary-Building, Guided Reading, Retelling, and Picture-Assisted Activities

Based on the quantitative and qualitative findings, teachers suggested reading intervention activities such as vocabulary-building activities, guided reading sessions, story retelling, picture-assisted reading, peer reading, daily short reading exercises, and comprehension question drills. They also recommended the use of reading materials that are appropriate to learners' grade level, interests, and language ability. Since limited vocabulary was the most common difficulty, teachers emphasized activities such as word unlocking, picture-word matching, sentence completion, and using words in context. The proposed activities directly respond to the comprehension difficulties observed among Grade 3 learners. Vocabulary-building activities may help learners understand passages more effectively, while guided reading may support their ability to identify main ideas, recall details, and answer comprehension questions. Story retelling and summarizing may also develop deeper understanding by helping learners organize ideas and express meaning in their own words. The proposed intervention is aligned with the recommendations of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000), which identified question answering, summarization, and multiple-strategy instruction as useful in reading development. It is also consistent with Duke and Pearson's (2009) view that effective comprehension instruction requires explicit teaching, guided practice, and meaningful reading activities.

3.6 Overall Discussion of Grade 3 Reading Comprehension Development

The overall findings show that the reading comprehension skills of Grade 3 learners, as perceived by teachers, are still developing and require continuous instructional support. Quantitative data showed that most teachers rated learners' comprehension as moderately developed or low, while qualitative responses revealed difficulties in vocabulary, identifying main ideas, recalling details, making inferences, and answering questions independently. Teachers' responses also showed the need for structured, consistent, and engaging reading activities that support both literal and higher-level comprehension. The findings emphasize the important role of teachers in identifying learners' reading needs because they directly observe learners during classroom reading activities. The results are consistent with the idea that comprehension is a complex process influenced by the learner, the text, the reading task, and the classroom context. As explained by the RAND Reading Study Group (2002), comprehension does not depend on one factor alone. Learners need vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge, motivation, appropriate texts, and teacher support. Therefore, improving Grade 3 reading comprehension requires teacher-guided instruction, learner-centered activities, and appropriate reading materials. Since Grade 3 is a critical stage in reading development, addressing comprehension difficulties early may help learners become more confident, independent, and successful readers.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that the reading comprehension skills of Grade 3 learners, as perceived by the 20 Grade 3 teachers in Bayombong, are still developing and require continuous instructional support. Teachers observed that learners can understand short and familiar texts but often struggle with longer passages, unfamiliar vocabulary, main ideas, supporting details, and inferential questions. The findings show that learners' reading comprehension is affected by vocabulary knowledge, reading fluency, background knowledge, and the ability to understand meaning beyond the literal level, emphasizing the important role of teachers in identifying learners' reading needs and providing appropriate strategies to improve comprehension.

It is recommended that Grade 3 teachers strengthen reading comprehension instruction through regular vocabulary-building activities, guided reading sessions, story retelling, picture-assisted reading, peer reading, and comprehension exercises. Teachers may also provide reading materials suited to learners' level, interests, and language ability. School administrators are encouraged to support reading programs, provide instructional materials, and conduct teacher development activities focused on reading comprehension strategies, while parents may support learners at home by providing reading time and asking simple questions about what their children read.

The study is limited to the perceptions of 20 Grade 3 teachers in Bayombong; therefore, the findings may not represent the reading comprehension skills of all Grade 3 learners in other schools or districts. Since the study is descriptive and qualitative, it does not directly measure learners' reading performance through standardized reading tests. Future researchers may conduct similar studies with more participants, include direct learner assessment, or compare teacher perceptions with actual reading comprehension results to provide a broader understanding of Grade 3 learners' reading development.

Compliance with ethical standards

The researcher observed ethical standards throughout the conduct of the study. Permission was secured from the concerned school authorities before data gathering, and the information gathered was treated with confidentiality and used only for research purposes. The researcher also ensured that no respondent was harmed or pressured during the conduct of the study.

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