

Communicate Read Engage (CRE): Towards Reading for Understanding

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Abstract This action research determined the effectiveness of Communicate, Read, and Engage (CRE) strategy in improving the students' reading comprehension. Using the one-group pretest-posttest design, the teacher administered the reading inventory to the 31 first year college education students enrolled in developmental reading, implemented the strategy and conducted the post reading inventory. Results showed that CRE is effective in improving the reading comprehension level of struggling readers. CRE is recommended as an alternative teaching strategy for learners with comprehension difficulty.

Keywords: comprehension level, CRE, informal reading inventory, strategy

Introduction

Reading comprehension is a challenge among students across countries. Results of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2015, revealed that 20 percent of the students in 72 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries did not attain the baseline level of proficiency in reading (OECD, PISA, 2015). This proportion has remained stable since 2009 results. Furthermore, United States continues to fall in the middle of the group in reading, behind several other advanced countries (Desilver, 2017).

In the Philippines, almost 10 to 15 percent of the general school population experienced difficulty in reading (Caroll, 2009). Caroll even claimed that reading difficulties are the principal causes of failure in school. Reading experiences strongly influence a student's feeling of competency. As students go higher in the educational ladder, more reading activities are required as subjects become more difficult. This means that, if a student's reading comprehension is poor, his/her performance in other subjects could be compromised.

Students with poor comprehension pose a great challenge for state universities and colleges (SUC) in the Philippines. Cases in point were the beneficiaries of the expanded grants-in-aid program for poverty alleviation (ESGP-PA), a program that was implemented through the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) memorandum order no. 9, s 2012 and fully rolled out in the academic year 2014-2015. Observations of the researcher (as their teacher in developmental reading,) revealed that these student beneficiaries could not express themselves effectively in oral and written communication. They had difficulty understanding the written texts.

How then can the teacher-researcher improve the comprehension of the ESGP-PA beneficiaries so they could hurdle the academic demands of tertiary education? What appropriate pedagogical intervention could be used for this type of learners? Inspired by those questions, the researcher believed that the conventional reading instruction cannot help these struggling readers. The challenge of the researcher is to improve the comprehension level of the ESGP-PA beneficiaries. Taking cognizant of the scenario and the need to try out innovative strategy applicable for the ESGP-PA beneficiaries, the researcher designed and implemented the strategy called **Communicate, Read and Engage** (CRE) with the intention of improving the reading comprehension of the

student beneficiaries. This intervention strategy finds fruition in the following theoretical anchor:

Reading as Communication

Reading as a component of language arts is concerned with communication of ideas. The process of reading is incomplete until ideas are received, understood and passed on to others. In the reading act (whether silent or oral), ideas have to be communicated through reporting, analyzing, summarizing, reflecting and many more (Russell, 2013). Since reading is the communication of ideas, the first task of the teacher is to stimulate the emerging of ideas from the learners. Zhang (2009) suggested that reading must integrate speaking tasks. He even opined that the integration has many advantages, as it adds variety, encompasses students' different strengths, and creates interactive possibilities by focusing on both productive and receptive skills. Furthermore, integrating speaking and reading skills deepens students' understanding of the reading material and allows students to apply the information they have read into authentic speaking practice.

In consonance, Sadiku (2015) reiterated that when teachers use activities that have been specially designed to incorporate several language skills simultaneously (such as reading, writing, listening, and writing), they provide their students with situations that allow for well-rounded development and progress in all areas of language learning. To facilitate reading for understanding, learners' background knowledge must be enhanced. The integral schema teaching model emphasizes that reading is the positive intercommunication between the reader and the writer, and it focuses on the function of background knowledge in reading comprehension (An, 2013).

Thus, anchored on reading as communication, the research envisions the CRE strategy to allow students to

communicate with one another on issues and concerns affecting their family, community and country, leading them to enrich their background knowledge.

Reading as Engagement

The engagement perspective of reading is based on the achievement motivation theory. It views readers as motivated and socially interactive. Reading engagement encompasses motivation, cognitive interaction, and receptivity to the text. It is the fusion of the cognitive and motivational aspects of reading (Taboada, 2013). Engaged readers are more motivated to read. One major component of reading engagement is reading motivation, which is the set of values, beliefs, and behaviors surrounding reading (Guthrie, 2011). Motivation drives students to read. It is very important that teachers should support and sustain the motivation of students to read since it promotes engagement and comprehension.

CRE as a Strategy

CRE as a reading strategy, integrates realistic communication, background knowledge and engagement to facilitate reading for understanding among struggling readers. The strategy allows the students to communicate with one another on interesting issues that affect them. It also facilitates reading engagement, through the provision of interesting reading materials, and engaging activities.

Purpose of the Research

This action research determined the effectiveness of CRE in improving the reading comprehension of the ESGP-PA beneficiaries. Specifically, the study aimed to identify the reading miscues and the comprehension level of the respondents before and after the CRE strategy.

Methodology

Research Design

The study used the one-group pretest-posttest design to compare the comprehension level of students before and after the intervention. The researcher administered the pre-reading inventory and implemented the CRE as reading strategy for three months allotting one month per module. Afterwards, the researcher conducted the post reading inventory to determine the effectiveness of the strategy.

The researcher followed the standard procedure in conducting the reading inventory of Roe and Burns (2011). Students read orally the materials, prior to administering the comprehension questions ascertain the word recognition and level of reading comprehension.

Participants

The teacher identified the 31 ESGP-PA beneficiaries who were Education students enrolled in developmental reading for school year 2015-2016. Prior to the conduct of the study, the researcher oriented the students of the purpose of the study and secured their informed consent. The researcher withheld the names of the students to respect the confidentiality and anonymity of the research participants. These participants belong to a big family of seven to eight members. Fifty percent (50%) of the fathers were fishermen, and 90% of the mothers were housewives. The family income was from P3,000 to P5,000.00 monthly. Based on the data, the families were among the poorest in region 7.

Instrument

The researcher used the standardized Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) of Roe and Burns (2011) to determine the students' reading miscues and individual reading comprehension level. There are many reading assessment tools but IRI is the

most appropriate for this special group of ESGP-A beneficiaries who have reading difficulties. This standard IRI meets the requirements that are designed to diagnose instructional needs of students by identifying the severity of the students' reading problems and their comprehension level (Roe and Burns, 2011). The IRI consists of different reading materials ranging from elementary, high school, and college levels. The instrument identifies the comprehension levels of students which could be frustration (the level at which the material is too difficult for the student to understand), the instructional level in which the student can understand the material with the assistance of the teacher; and the independent level where the student can understand the material with ease without the assistance of the teacher (Roe & Burns, 2011).

Data Collection and Analysis

Preliminary (Plan) Stage

The teacher identified the comprehension level of the students using the informal reading inventory tool. The initial data became the bases in providing materials suited to their level of comprehension. The teacher prepared three modules with lesson designs that followed the cyclical process of (CRE) communicating, reading and engaging. Each module focused on familiar themes like appreciating the self (module 1); cultivating significance to the community (module 2); and working for the common good (module 3). The reading articles in the modules were informative, motivational and inspirational. Engaging activities and comprehension strategies were formulated to promote understanding of the text.

Intervention (ACT) Stage

Within the framework of communicate, read and engage, the teacher-researcher implemented the CRE for three months with one month duration for each module. Each month had eight sessions with an average contact time of 24 to 35 hours

a month to include off-class assistance to students. There were few students who missed some sessions but they were given make-up activities.

In the first phase of CRE, the teacher provided the students with tasks that allowed them to *communicate* to encourage them to talk and converse with one another. Communication activities revolved around focused themes. Students had the chance to share their experiences, dreams, struggles and aspirations for themselves, their family, community and country. The second phase of CRE was *read*. In this phase, the teacher-researcher presented an article for the students to read, to ask literal and higher order questions to facilitate understanding of the reading material. The third phase was *engage*. In this phase, the teacher-researcher provided students with differentiated reading materials and activities arranged from simple to complex, ranging from grade 6 level to high school level to enhance word recognition and comprehension skills.

Post Intervention

The teacher-researcher administered the post test reading inventory to determine whether there was an increase in the comprehension level of the students after the implementation of CRE. Students read the twenty graded word lists from the grade level list in the reading inventory. The highest level list on which the student made no error in reading the words became the basis in administering the graded passages. Miscues were also determined. Based on Roe and Burns (2011), the teacher-researcher classified students in the independent level if they got 99% or better word recognition (misses no more than 1 word in a hundred) and 90% or better comprehension (misses no more than one question in ten); instructional level if readers have 95% or better word recognition (misses no more than five words in a hundred) and 75% or better comprehension (misses no more than 2 questions in ten); and frustration level if students

have less than 90% word recognition (misses more than 10 words in a hundred) and have less than 50% comprehension (misses more than five of ten comprehension questions). The teacher also conducted interviews to shed light on students' experiences while participating in the different activities provided by the teacher.

Results and Discussion

The study determined the effectiveness of CRE in improving the reading comprehension of the respondents. This section is presented in two parts: the reading miscues, and the comprehension level of the students before and after CRE.

Reading Miscues

Roe and Burns (2011) describe miscues as the unexpected responses students give when they misinterpret clues in the language. Students who have difficulty decoding words usually commit miscues. Table 1 shows the reading miscues of the students before and after CRE.

Table 1. Reading Miscues

Miscues	No. of students with miscues (N= 31)		Description
	Before CRE	After CRE	
1. Substitution	29	7	The student substitutes a word that is incorrect.
2. Mispronunciation	27	7	The student pronounces the word incorrectly.
3. Repetition	27	6	The student repeats one or more words that have been read.
4. Refusal to pronounce	25	4	The student never attempts to pronounce the word.

5. Omission	25	7	The student omits a word or sequence of words.
6. Insertion	25	6	The student inserts a word.
7. Reversal	25	7	The student reverses the order of words, letters or phrases.

Before CRE, 94% (29 out of 31) of the student beneficiaries had substitution miscue. Original words in the text were substituted with incorrect words, which changed their meanings like stride to strike, winner to winter to name a few. Furthermore, due to the students' inability to recognize words in the text, they resorted to mispronunciation, repetition, refusal to pronounce, omission, and reversal.

Furthermore the respondents read very slowly and they struggled in decoding words that prevented their ability to create meaning from the text. These students are struggling readers based on the contention of Pappas (2011) in Ganeb and Morales (2018) that struggling readers experience slow and effortful reading that leads to difficulty in accessing the word meaning sourced from non- recognition and non-decoding of words. Majority of these students showed evidence of anxiety and discomfort as they read. They became fidgety and emotionally tensed when reading orally. Additional observation may reveal that these college students need assistance in word recognition and decoding to facilitate understanding of the text.

After exposure to CRE, the number of students with reading miscues significantly decreased. From 29 (94%) who had substitution miscue before CRE, only seven of the 31 (22%) had substitution miscue after CRE. The number of students who committed mispronunciation, repetition and other reading miscues also decreased. Their reading speed and word accuracy improved. They have already shown characteristics of proficient readers. Ganeb and Morales (2018) said that proficient readers can read words in a text speedier and read words in lists quicker than struggling readers.

Students' Reading Comprehension Level before and after CRE

Reading comprehension means eliciting and making meaning through interaction and involvement with the written language. Table 2 presents the reading comprehension level of the respondents before and after the implementation of CRE.

Table 2. Students' Reading Comprehension Level before and after CRE

GRADE LEVEL	READING LEVEL					
	Frustration		Instructional		Independent	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
5						
6	7					
7	18					
8			5	4	1	
9				21		6
TOTAL	25	0	5	25	1	6

Eighteen of the 31 who are within the respondents (58%) were grade 7 (first year high school) frustration level in reading comprehension before CRE. This means that most of the respondents had difficulty comprehending the reading materials for grade 7. The findings further suggested that the teacher-researcher, I could not use reading materials suited for college students since they could not even understand grade 7 materials. Their reading performance was below the expected reading proficiency of college students.

After implementing CRE as intervention strategy 25 students (81%) were already classified as grade 9 instructional level in their reading comprehension. This findings means that they could already comprehend reading materials suited for grade 9 or third year high school. There was an increase

in the students' comprehension level. Before the intervention, most of the ESGP-PA beneficiaries could not even understand grade 6 and 7 reading materials since they were mostly in the frustration level. After the CRE strategy, they could read grade 8 and 9 materials with ease and comprehension. It was further evident in the finding that no student was classified in the frustration level after CRE. The respondents improved their reading comprehension and became instructional and independent readers in grades 8 and 9.

Moreover, the number of independent readers in grade 9 increased. This could be attributed to the fact that CRE employs communication activities integrating speaking and reading skills that deepen students' understanding of the reading materials and allow students to apply the information they have read into authentic speaking practice that improves fluency (Zhang, 2009). Furthermore, CRE builds on background knowledge which provides anchor for the learners as they construct meaning from the written text (An, 2013). The growing body of literature indicates the value of background knowledge and reading comprehension strategies to facilitate understanding (Kissau & Hiller, 2013). Moreover, students gained confidence in conversing with one another as they discovered more about themselves and appreciated their contribution to the community and country. This affirms Guthrie's (2011) contention that students' participation in discussion and engaging activities increase understanding of the text.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Reading comprehension is the process of understanding the author's message. This research ascertained the effectiveness of CRE as a strategy in improving the reading comprehension of the beneficiaries of the expanded students' grants-in-aid program for poverty alleviation (ESGP-PA).

Students' reading miscues decreased after CRE which could be attributed to the students' exposure to varied activities and word recognition strategies that enhance reading speed and accuracy. Furthermore, CRE, as a strategy is effective in improving the reading comprehension level of the student beneficiaries. Before CRE, the beneficiaries cannot even comprehend reading materials intended for grade 6 and grade 7 students. After the intervention, they can read with understanding grade 9 or 3rd year high school reading materials. Although their comprehension level is still high school, the fact that they improved within three months of experimentation provides evidence of the effectiveness of the strategy. The reason could be that starting with the communication phase, to the reading phase, background knowledge was established when students engaged in conversation on relevant topics and read related articles that are of interest to the teachers who provided comprehension strategy instruction deeply connected within the context of subject matter learning and other relevant issues foster comprehension development. Providing the learners with reading materials that build on their background knowledge aids comprehension. This result may inform reading teachers on the importance of selecting reading texts anchored of the learners' background and experience. Another feature that probably makes the strategy effective for struggling readers is the exposure to varied reading materials and engaging activities. The provision of reading materials, and the engaging and motivating activities support the engagement theory that engaged readers use strategies to fulfill their goals and motivation to understand the text, thereby, improving reading proficiency. This implies that teachers can improve students' reading proficiency by providing differentiated and engaging tasks during their reading classes. Characterized by communication, background knowledge and engaging activities, CRE as a strategy facilitates reading for understanding among struggling readers. It has initially

leveled the playing field giving the beneficiaries a chance to succeed in their academic life as university students.

As a follow through, the teachers have used the CRE framework in implementing the remedial reading program for ESGP-PA beneficiaries to further improve their comprehension level. Teachers have prepared modules responsive to the needs of students with comprehension problems using the cycle of communicate, read and engage (CRE). Since this study was only limited to students with comprehension difficulty, it is noteworthy if future research directions could focus on the application of CRE to enhance the higher order thinking skills of the learners.

Reflection

Reading comprehension is facilitated in an atmosphere where students are given the chance to communicate, build background knowledge, and engage in meaningful activities. Opportunities for social interaction help struggling second language readers acquire background knowledge. As a researcher, my belief is affirmed that the teacher has a great role in developing reading for understanding among struggling learners by innovating and designing contextualized strategies that respond to their needs. The effectiveness of CRE contributes to the growing literature on contextualized strategies that work best for struggling readers. With an improved comprehension level of the students, the researcher is confident that these learners have greater chances to successfully hurdle the academic requirements in college as more and more activities in the different courses require reading with understanding.

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