

Readability of Selected Literary Texts in English and Level of Mastery in Comprehension Skills of Grade 7: Basis for an Enhanced Reading Program

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Abstract

This study determined the readability of selected literary texts in English and the level of mastery in comprehension skills of Grade 7 students in Domingo Yu Chu National High School as basis for an enhanced reading program in English. Results of the analyses indicate the following findings: Four of the five selected literary texts *The Centipede*, *The Mats*, *The Wedding Dance*, *Bread of Salt* and *How My Brother Leon Brought Home A Wife* were found to be suitable for sixth graders aged 11 and 12 described as easy. Only 'Bread of Salt', however, was found to be appropriate for the 7th graders aged 12 – 13 with its Flesch Reading Ease Score of 77.05. Results revealed that out of 138 student-respondents, majority have mastered noting details in the selections: *The Centipede*, *The Mats*, *Wedding Dance*, *Bread of Salt* and *How My Brother Leon Brought Home A Wife*. For identifying meaning through context clues only few have gained mastery of the stories. As regards sequencing of events, majority of the respondents were on nearly mastered level only except in the selection 'The Mats' where they scored well, while only few of the respondents have mastered making inference.

Keywords: English Literary Texts, Level of Mastery, Comprehension Skills, Enhanced Reading Program

Introduction

Reading is an indispensable life skill. It makes people both schooled and educated. Thus, it is essential not only in school's success but even in life after schooling. As Steve Jobs describes it, reading is a tool to success. This puts one to an advantage over huge life's opportunities.

Since time immemorial, one's ability in reading has always been used as a barometer to determine how functionally literate a person is. It is because reading provides a clear venue to express oneself, understand things, and draw deeper implications. The knowledge one has acquired through reading has greatly contributed to the advancement of mankind. Truly, reading helps people learn and gain understanding from human knowledge and experiences.

In the field of education, educators agree that proficiency in the English language is the basis for success in academic pursuits. To learn English more quickly, it takes lots of reading. This is anchored on the belief that the more one reads the more inputs the brain gets about how the language works. Thus, reading in English can improve one's vocabulary, grammar, and writing skills at the same time (Sacramento County Office of Education, 2015).

Reading is a process of applying several strategies to reconstruct the meaning that the author is assumed to

have intended (Mikulecky, 2008). It includes noting details, identifying meaning through context clues, making inference and sequencing events among others. These skills laid a strong foundation to ensure that the reader gains understanding of the material. This justifies that reading is one of the rudimentary skills one should master in order to understand the texts and develop higher language and life skills.

In this light, word recognition should be viewed differently from reading. The latter is called as such if it is coupled with comprehension. Comprehension, on the other hand, is an act of or capacity for grasping with the intellect. While most students recognize some letters, words, and sounds, most of them fail to grasp the message of words they are reading. This reality calls for enhanced reading program and school-based initiatives to cater these needs.

These premises move the Department of Education (DepEd) to implement different programs specific to reading. Teachers have conducted interventions to raise reading comprehension and inculcate the value of reading among students.

However, it is sad to note that despite these efforts, problem in reading comprehension is still evident as shown in the annual results of National Achievement Tests (NATs) and Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) which provide concrete assessment references to determine the reading performance level of learners.

Along with the overall low performance in Phil-IRI and NATs are the local results in secondary schools in the Division of Oriental Mindoro. Corollary to this, DepEd intensifies the call for the strengthened policies and measures that promote reading. One of these is the reinforcement of the program called Every Child A Reader which aims to make every Filipino child in Grades I-III a successful reader at his or her appropriate level of schooling.

Educators use various teaching materials in order to increase the permanence of learning. One of these is textbooks. Textbooks are indispensable tools used in school to render educational services that have vital roles in the development of the quality of human resources and education programs. In language arts, books offer a wide array of significant human experiences as reflected on the literary pieces they contain. These can only be absorbed through reading which makes reading skills crucial in school and in ensuring life's success.

Furthermore, reading skills can be further developed if the materials provided by teachers are appropriate to the student's grade level. This was noted by Tytler (2010) when he argued that if the reading material is written in a language which the student is in the process of learning, his/her comprehension will be limited. If the knowledge of the vocabulary is only basic, it will have a negative effect on the reader's comprehension of the reading material.

Likewise, studies show that to some extent reading skills are developed when text matches with the learner's current level. This is now the concern of readability. It aids to determine the reading ease of a document based on word length, sentence structure and appearance of the text in the eyes of the readers. Readability tests have been designed as mathematical equations which correlate the features of a written document. This includes the average number of syllables in words, or number of words in sentences.

Furthermore, readability tests are designed to assess the suitability of books at particular grade levels or ages. The tests are intended to help educators, librarians and publishers make decisions about purchase and sales of books. They are likewise meant to save time because they are used in figuring out who are the appropriate reading groups.

As a language teacher, the researcher believes that reading comprehension can be raised by considering the readability of the reading material. With the implementation of the K to 12 Basic Education Program through Republic Act 10533, and in response

to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals of 2015, the Department created learning materials to augment the needs and develop the competencies which are leading to the achievement of the content and performance standards. However, it can be noted that these materials include the learning modules (formerly textbooks) for English 7 with literary pieces such as short stories containing difficult words which are deemed hard to be understood due to its readability and themes.

In view of this reality, the researcher is motivated to conduct this study since he believes that it is high time to strengthen the school's commitment in producing graduates who are critical thinkers and who possess the facility of the English language. It is projected that the data gathered would determine the readability of selected literary texts in English and the level of mastery in comprehension skills of Grade 7 students in Domingo Yu Chu National High School. As a result, its output would serve as basis for an enhanced reading program of the school's English Department. It is within these premises that this study is conceptualized.

Research Questions

Generally, this study determined the readability of selected literary texts in English and the level of mastery in comprehension skills of Grade 7 students in Domingo Yu Chu National High School as basis for an enhanced reading program in English. In the light of the aforementioned objective, this study specifically aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the readability of the selected literary texts in English 7 using the Flesch Reading Ease Formula and Flesch Kincaid Grade Level Formula in terms of:
 - 1.1 average sentence length; and
 - 1.2 average number of syllables per word?
2. What is the level of mastery in reading comprehension skills of Grade 7 students in terms of:
 - 2.1 noting details;
 - 2.2 identifying meaning through context clues;
 - 2.3 sequencing events; and
 - 2.4 making inference?

Methodology

Research Design

This is quantitative research. Specifically, it will use the descriptive method of research. Quantitative research aims to determine the relationship between one thing (an independent variable) and

another (a dependent or outcome variable) in a population (Hopkins, 2008). Vizcara (2003) points out that quantitative design utilizes more statistical tests to explain the nature of the phenomena.

Descriptive research is designed to describe the nature of the situation, as it exists from the time of study and to explore the cause of a particular phenomenon. It establishes associations between variables. Viscara (2003) explains that descriptive studies are useful in obtaining the prevailing status or condition of the problem which are essential in understanding the past and future.

The Association for Educational Communications and Technology (2001) explains that descriptive studies are primarily concerned with finding out what is. This involves gathering data that described readability and the level of mastery in comprehension skills.

Research Locale

Domingo Yu Chu National High School (DYCNHS) was established in 1996. It is located in Barangay Maluanluan which is seven kilometers away from Poblacion. The site is 500 meters away from the Polasocorro National Road passing through vast hectares of rice fields. Its school ground is 2.34 hectares with mango trees surrounding the area. The manicured grass has shown an ambient aura of beauty which adds to become an ideal place for athletic meets.

Currently, DYCNHS is one of the public schools in Oriental Mindoro offering both Junior and Senior High School. Junior high school refers to Grades 7 to 10 while the latter refers to Grades 11 and 12. The additional two years are focusing on General Academic Strand (GAS), Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), and Technical-Vocational Education specializing in bread and pastry, electronics and electricity.

Alongside with these academic and physical developments that the school undertakes, it is also confronted with various problems including its institutional performance. The school, due to students' increasing population and varying needs, faces problems in raising students' reading comprehension level in particular. As a result, not only academic performance in English is affected but even in other disciplines since reading comprehension is a sine qua non in all areas of studies.

In this light, the study focused on readability and reading comprehension skills of students. This is designed to make an appraisal of selected literary texts which are believed to be affecting students' reading comprehension. The results of this study will then serve as basis for appropriate planning and formulation of programs intended for reading enhancement and advancement.

Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study were a sample of 138 from the 343 Grade 7 students of Domingo Yu Chu National High School. G-power was used to get the actual number of respondents. It is a program for power analysis and sample size calculations. It computes statistical power analyses for many different t tests, F tests, χ^2 tests, z tests and some exact tests. Moreover, G*Power can also be used to compute effect sizes and to display graphically the results of power analyses. Thus, 138 student-respondents emerged from the eight sections of Grade 7 students enrolled in the current school year.

Research Instrument

The study used questionnaire as the main instrument of the study. It was a self-made test based on a table of specification for each reading text from the learning package of English 7. It was designed to determine the level of comprehension skills of the respondents in terms of noting details, identifying context clues, sequencing events, and drawing inference. Eight questions were crafted for each comprehension skill per story.

Copies of the selected literary texts and readability formulae were also secured. Assessment of text readability was done using Flesch Reading Ease Formula and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level formula in terms of average sentence length and average number of syllables per word. The whole text was pasted on the online readability tool and the readability results were revealed. The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level is used to determine the grade of the text. It shows that the higher the result, the easier the text.

Validity of the Instrument

The questionnaire was forwarded to two (2) Master Teachers of DYCNHS and three (3) panel members who are language professors for years. Their length of service and academic qualifications made them experts whose comments and suggestions ensured the instrument's validity. Their comments and suggestions

were considered and incorporated in the instrument before the final copy was printed. When corrections were made and the suggestions were incorporated, it was submitted to them for approval. Upon approval, it was reproduced to assess its reliability.

Data Gathering Procedures

After determining the reliability of the instrument, a letter of request was forwarded to the OIC-Schools Division Superintendent of Oriental Mindoro, Dr. Maria Luisa D. Servando for approval. Upon the approval of the request, the researcher personally administered the research instrument.

To ensure the validity of the respondents' responses, he explained the purpose of the study and the implication of answering the questionnaire correctly. They were given enough time to answer the questionnaire. After the retrieval of the questionnaire, all raw scores were collated and tabulated in Microsoft Excel. The researcher consulted his statistician whether his computations were accurate. The results served as the baseline data of the researcher for the analysis and interpretation of data.

Result

This section presents the data and information gathered by the researcher about the readability of the literary texts in English and the level of mastery in comprehension skills of Grade 7 students. These are presented, analyzed, and interpreted on the succeeding pages.

Readability of the selected literary texts in English 7 using Flesch Reading Ease Formula and Flesch Kincaid Grade Level Formula

Table 1. Summary of the Readabilities of the Literary Texts

Literary Texts	No. of sentences	No. of words	No. of syllables	Average no. of words/sentence	Average no. of syllables/word	Flesch Reading Ease Score	Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	Style Description
The Centipede	114	1397	1803	12.25	1.29	85.21	6	Easy
The Mats	108	1079	1426	9.99	1.32	84.89	6	Easy
Wedding Dance	116	1405	1750	12.11	1.25	89.17	6	Easy
Bread of Salt	79	1382	1830	17.49	1.32	77.05	7	Fairly Easy
How My Brother...	81	1380	1756	17.04	1.27	81.89	6	Easy

Table 1 presents the summary of the subjected literary texts using the Flesch Reading Ease Score and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level.

Level of mastery in reading comprehension skills of Grade 7 students in terms of noting details, identifying meaning through context clues, sequencing events, and making inference

Table 2. Summary of Mean and Mean Percentage Score of the Selected Literary Texts

	Noting Details		Context clues		Sequencing Events		Making Inference		Overall Result	
	Mean	MPS	Mean	MPS	Mean	MPS	Mean	MPS	Average Mean	Average MPS
The Centipede	5.49	68.63	3.85	48.12	5.12	64	3.30	41.26	4.44	55.50
The Mats	5.67	70.94	3.72	46.57	5.88	73.51	3.95	49.45	4.80	60.06
Wedding Dance	5.20	64.95	3.21	40.13	3.50	43.79	3.27	40.90	3.76	47.44
Bread of Salt	4.85	60.57	3.23	40.41	4.70	58.71	3.39	42.35	4.04	50.53
How My Brother...	5.03	62.91	3.13	39.07	3.82	47.75	3.10	38.80	3.77	47.13

Table 2 presents the summary of mean and mean percentage score of the subjected literary texts using Flesch-Reading Ease Score and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level.

Discussion

The salient findings of the study were: Four of the five selected literary texts The Centipede, The Mats, The Wedding Dance, Bread of Salt and How My Brother Leon Brought Home A Wife were found to be suitable for sixth graders aged 11 and 12 described as easy. Only 'Bread of Salt', however, was found to be appropriate for the 7th graders aged 12 –13 with its Flesch Reading Ease Score of 77.05.

Furthermore, results revealed that out of 138 student-respondents, majority have mastered noting details in the selections: The Centipede, The Mats, Wedding Dance, Bread of Salt and How My Brother Leon Brought Home A Wife. For identifying meaning through context clues only few have gained mastery of the stories. As regards sequencing of events, majority of the respondents were on nearly mastered level only except in the selection 'The Mats' where they scored well, while only few of the respondents have mastered making inference.

Conclusion

The researcher arrived at the following conclusions based on the findings of the study:

1. All the selected literary texts are comprehensible to Grade 7 student-respondents.
2. It is only in noting details that almost half of the respondents possess mastery. However, the majority of the respondents find difficulty in identifying meaning through context clues, sequencing events, and making inferences.
3. The proposed enhanced reading program may not only help raise students' level of comprehension but it can also improve their overall academic performance in all subjects using English as the medium of instruction.

After a thorough analysis of the results of the study, the problems have been answered and the researcher has come up with the following recommendations:

1. Teachers should subject literary pieces to readability tests to match the readers and the literary texts.
2. Teachers should be skilled in employing varied teaching strategies and in designing activities and programs that uplift students' mastery level in the tested comprehension skills and in improving other skills.
3. Based on the findings of the study, an enhanced reading program is recommended. Thus, English Department should revisit its programs and consider the proposed reading program to develop students' comprehension skills.
4. Teachers should not simply rely on the literary texts provided in the module. They may alter or modify these texts provided that the competencies are still met and are aligned to the achievement of the content and performance standard.
5. It is also recommended that other variables and tests that measure readability be considered if other researchers will venture on a similar study.

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