International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Publications
ISSN (Online): 2581-6187

Enhancing Reading Comprehension Through Explicit Strategy Instruction: A Focus on Higher-Order Thinking Skills

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Abstract *– The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the effectiveness of reading comprehension of grade V pupils through explicit strategy instruction with the integration of higher-order thinking skills. The subjects of the study were the 40 pupils in Isabela Bliss Elementary School, Isabela East District I, Isabela City Schools Division. This study sought to answer the following questions: 1. What is the extent of reading comprehension of Grade V pupils in pre-test for both control and experimental group? 2. What is the extent of reading comprehension skills of Grade V pupils in post-test for both the control and experiment group? 3. Are there significant differences between the experimental group with explicit strategy instruction and control group in pre-test? 4. Are there significant differences between the experimental group with the integration of explicit strategy instruction and control group in post-test? A quasi-experimental design was adopted to provide a comprehensive approach to evaluate the impact of the explicit strategy instruction with the integration of higher-order thinking skills on reading comprehension among groups of Grade V pupils. Findings revealed that: 1. Pre-test results indicated that the control group initially performed better in reading skills than the experimental group with a higher standard deviation of 3.91, suggesting more variability in their reading levels than the experimental group with 2.08. 2. The experimental group integrated explicit instruction scored significantly higher with a mean score of 12.55 and standard deviation of 4.08 than the control group with 7.50 mean score and standard deviation of 2.76 which means that experimental group showed substantial improvement after the intervention. 3. T-test results indicated that there was a significant difference between the control group and the explicit approach group in the pre-test with t:2. 176 and p-value of 0.042(significance value) which means that the two groups were not equivalent at the start of the study. 4. Post-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups with a t-value of 6.335, p-value (Sig) is 0.00 (typically meaning $p < 0.001$, meaning the improvement in the experimental group was unlikely due to chance. In conclusion, the findings of this study underscored the significant impact of explicit strategy instruction on enhancing the reading comprehension of the pupils with the integration of higher-order thinking skills were proven effective. This research emphasizes that critical thinking skills aid in navigating the demands for advanced reading and literacy skills.*

Keywords—*Explicit Strategy Instruction, Higher Order Thinking Skills, Quasi-Experimental, Reading Comprehension.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading and comprehension are fundamental skills that students rely on throughout their academic and professional lives. These skills should be taught explicitly during the early stages of education. Spaull (2015) highlights the transition from "learning to read" in the foundation phase to "reading to learn" in the intermediate phase. Students in intervention programs must be able to articulate well-reasoned arguments and confidently interpret texts. Struggles with reading and comprehension place students at an academic disadvantage, requiring them to work harder to catch up with their peers (Kirby,2007; Spaull, 2015).

Reading is a complex process that involves multiple skills simultaneously. Harvey (1998) notes that individuals continue developing strategies to improve reading proficiency well into adulthood. Comprehension is arguably the most critical aspect of reading, as metacognitive strategies for autonomous understanding develop gradually through experience. Teachers must begin strategy instruction early to achieve desired outcomes, as metacognition takes time to develop.

Reading comprehension plays a crucial role in academic success, serving as a foundational skill for acquiring other abilities (Koda, 2007). Researchers emphasize that effective comprehension requires higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), such as analysis and evaluation, beyond basic retention or literal understanding (e.g., Bartu, 2001; Beck, 1989; Luke & Freebody, 1999; Pang, 2008). Explicit instruction of critical thinking skills can enhance student's ability to engage meaningfully with texts.

The PHIL-IRI results reveal that many students nationwide struggle with reading comprehension, including those at the researcher's school. The increase in non-readers and struggling readers-exacerbated by the pandemic-has become a pressing concern. Addressing this issue requires fostering critical thinking through explicit reading strategies and developing higher-order thinking skills. Snow et al. (1991) emphasizes that even students from homes lacking support for reading comprehension can make progress if teachers employ effective instructional strategies.

Zhang (2012) advocates for starting explicit reading instruction early to prevent students from becoming overwhelmed by reading demands later on. Gooden (2012) underscores the importance of teaching comprehension strategies, noting that while educators recognize their value, implementation remains limited due to gaps between research and classroom practice (Pressley et. al., 1998). Teachers lack of awareness of their own reading strategies often hinders their ability to teach these effectively.

Lovely Winnie C. Atalad, "Enhancing Reading Comprehension Through Explicit Strategy Instruction: A Focus on Higher-Order Thinking Skills," *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Publications (IJMRAP),* Volume 8, Issue 7, pp. 79-83, 2026.

Explicit instruction in regarding comprehension strategies involves guiding students to use specific cognitive techniques or reason strategically when facing comprehension challenges (National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000). This approach includes purposeful teaching methods that help students monitor and improve their understanding of texts (Duffy, 2002). Research supports integrating explicit strategy instruction into regular lessons for greater effectiveness compared to implicit approaches (Cohen, 2018; Gu, 2019).

Student's mastery of various comprehension abilities-literal, interpretative, inferential, evaluative, and creative-depends significantly on explicit strategy instruction and the development of HOTS. Proficient readers excel in comprehension, making it essential for teachers to support students in understanding text content.

Statement of the Problem

This study was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of reading comprehension of grade V pupils through explicit instruction with the integration of higher-order thinking skills in Isabela BLISS Elementary School, Isabela East District I, Isabela City Schools Division.

Specifically, this study sought to answer to the following questions:

1. What is the extent of reading comprehension of grade V pupils in pre-test for both the control and experimental group?
2. What is the extent of reading comprehension skills of Grade V pupils in post-test for both the control and experimental group?
3. Are there significant differences between the experimental and with explicit strategy instruction and control group in pre-test?
4. Are there significant differences between the experimental group with the integration of explicit strategy instruction and control group in the post test?

II. Methodology

A. Research Design

This study is a quasi-experimental design to provide a comprehensive approach to evaluating the impact of explicit strategy instruction with the integration of higher order thinking skills on reading comprehension among different groups of grade V pupils. Quasi-experimental design is a research methodology that aims to establish cause-and-effect relationships between independent and dependent variables without the use of random assignment. According to Cook and Campbell (1979), quasi-experimental designs mimic experimental research but often involve naturally occurring groups or non-random processes for group assignment. This approach is particularly valuable in contexts where randomization is impractical or unethical, allowing researchers to study interventions in real-world settings while still attempting to control for confounding variables.

B. Research Respondents

The subjects of this study were the enrolled Grade- V pupils of Isabela Bliss Elementary School, Isabela East District I, Isabela City Schools Division, School – Year 2024-2025.

TABLE 1. Distribution of Students for experimental and control group

SCHOOL A	Total No. of Students in the Experimental set	Total No. of Students in the Control set	Total
Grade 5	20	20	20

C. Data Analysis

Data gathering procedure

The researcher available authorization from the Schools Division Superintendent. The approved permit was shown to the district supervisor and to the school availability of the respondents for the launching of the instruments. The two classes contained heterogenous groups of pupils as to their intellectual capabilities and backgrounds with the supervision of two different class advisers but only one class receives the treatment. It was a 4-week study with the assigned experimental and control group.

To mitigate potential biases in test administration, several measures were implemented. Both the pre-test and post-test were conducted during the morning sessions according to the school's regular schedule, but in separate classrooms. Two assistant data collectors were recruited to administer the test for each class under the researcher's supervision. Before the test commenced, participants were informed that their performance would not impact their regular class grades, allowing them to take the test without undue pressure. The purpose of the test and the allotted time were also communicated to the students. They were given a 20-item test, and both pre- and post-tests were administered, collected, and marked by the data collectors. The researcher acknowledged that using the same test for both pre and post-testing could help avoid complications related to different test forms, although the potential for a memory effect needed to be minimized.

Statistical treatment of the data

The study utilized both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The collected data were organized and analyzed to ensure accuracy in interpretation. The following statistical tools were employed to treat the data and thereby answer the research questions.

Mean Percentage Score (MPS): This determined the arithmetic mean value of students' academic performance. Percentage: This measured the percentage distribution of the respondents across the study variables. T-test: This evaluated the significant differences between the two sample groups the experimental with explicit strategy instruction and control group in pre and post-test.

III. Results and Discussion

A. Extent of reading skills of pupils in the pretest

TABLE 2. Result of the extent of reading skills of pupils in the pretest for the control and experimental group

Pre-test	Mean	Standard Deviation
Control Pre-test	9.7500	2.07745
Experimental Pre-test	8.0000	3.90512

The table 2 presents the results of a pre-test measuring the reading skills of pupils in both the control and experimental

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groups before the intervention. The results revealed that the control group had a mean score of 9.75 and the experimental group had a lower mean score of 8.00. This suggest that, before any intervention, the control group had slightly better reading skills than the experimental group. The standard deviation of control group is 2.08, indicating that their scores were more consistent and closely clustered around the mean. The experimental group had a higher standard deviation of 3.91, suggesting more variability in their reading skill levels.

This implies that, the pre-test results indicated that the control group initially performed better in reading skills than the experimental group. However, since this is a pre-test, the real impact of the intervention can only be determined by comparing these results with the post-test scores.

B. Reading comprehension skills of Grade V pupils in post-test for both control and experimental group

TABLE 3. The result of the extent of reading skills of pupils in the post test for the control and experimental group

Post test	M	SD
Control Post test	7.5000	2.76253
Experimental Post test	12.5500	4.08431

This table 3 presents the post-test results measuring the level of reading skills of pupils in the control and experimental groups. The mean scores of the control or traditional is 7.50 and the group with implicit instruction is 12.55. The group that integrated explicit instruction scored significantly higher than the traditional group in the post-test. For the standard deviation, control group with a mean score of 2.76, scores are more consistent while the experimental group mean score is 4.08 describe as greater variation in scores.

It can be included that the experimental group showed substantial improvement after the intervention. The control group experienced a decline in performance. This suggests that the explicit approach instruction used in the experimental group had a significant positive effect on reading skills, while the control group did not benefit from the same intervention. The intervention was effective in enhancing reading skills, as established by the substantial rise in the group with explicit approach post-test scores compared to the control group.

C. Significant differences between the group with explicit strategy instruction and control group in pre-test

TABLE 4. T-test Result of the significant difference between experimental with explicit strategy instruction and the control group in pre-test.

Pre-test	Mean	N	SD	t	Sig
Control Group	9.75	20	.87	2.176	.042
Experimental Group	8.00	20	.46		

The table 4 presents the results of a t-test, which determine if there is a statistically significant difference between an experimental group (receiving explicit strategy instruction) and a control group before any intervention. Control group mean score is 9.75. This is the average score of the control group on the pre-test. The SD is 0.87. This is a measure of the spread or variability of the scores within the control group. Group applied the explicit approach gave a mean score is 8.00. This is the average score of the explicit approach on the pre-test. The standard deviation 0.46, the t: 2.176 the calculated t-statistic from the t-test. It reflected the size of the difference between the two groups relative to the variability within the groups.

This is the p- value 0.042 (significance value) associated with the t-test. It represents the probability of observing a difference as large as, or larger than, the one seen if there was truly no difference between the groups. It is concluded that the t-test results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the control group and the explicit approach group on the pre-test. This means that the two groups were not equivalent at the start of the study.

D. Significant difference between the experimental group with the integration of explicit strategy instruction and control group in the post-test

TABLE 5. T-test Result of the significant difference between experimental with explicit strategy instruction and the control group in post-test

Post test	Mean	N	SD	t	Sig
Control Group	7.50	20	2.76	6.335	.000
Experimental Group	12.55	20	4.08		

Post-test scores between a control group and explicit approach group, the control group had a mean post-test mean scores of 7.50. The experimental group had a higher mean post-test score of 12.55. This suggested that the experimental group performed better than the control group. The control group had a standard deviation of 2.76, indicating the spread of scores around the mean. The experimental group had a higher SD of 4.08, showing more variability in scores. The t-value of 6.335 suggested a significant difference between the two groups. The p-value (Sig) is .000 (typically meaning $p < 0.001$).

This indicated a statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups, meaning the improvement in the experimental group was unlikely due to chance. The explicit strategy instruction had a significant positive effect on post-test performance. The experimental group outperformed the control group with a statistically significant difference, suggesting that the instructional method was effective.

TABLE 6. T-test Result of the significant difference between experimental with explicit strategy instruction and the control group in pre- and post-tests

	Test	Mean	N	SD	t	Sig
Control Group	Pre-test	9.7500	20	3.90512	3.428	.003
	Post-test	7.5000	20	2.76253		
Experimental Group	Pre-test	8.0000	20	2.07745	5.690	.000
	Post-test	12.5500	20	4.08431		

The table 6 presents data comparing pre and post-test scores for control and experimental groups, focusing on the impact of explicit strategy instruction. The control group pre-test mean score is 9.7500, SD is 3.90512. The post means score is 7.5000, SD is 2.76253. The t-value is 3.428 and Significance (Sig): 0.003. The control group showed a drop in mean scores from pre-test to the post-test (9.7500 to 7.5000). The t-value of 3.428 and a significance level of 0.003 indicated that this difference was statistically significant, meaning the decline was unlikely due to random chance. Experimental group pre-test mean score is 8.0000, SD = 2.07745, post-test mean score is 12.5500, SD= 4.08431, the t-value: 6.690 and the Significance (Sig) is 0.0000. The experimental group showed

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a considerate growth in mean scores from the pre to the post-test (8.0000 to 12.5500). The t-value of 5.690 and a significance level of 0.0000 showed that this enhancement was highly statistically substantial. The control group experienced a decline in performance after instruction, while the group with integration of explicit approach showed significant improvement. The explicit strategy instruction appears to have had an encouraging influence on the experimental group, as evidence by their upper post-test scores and significant statistical results. The differences in outcomes between the traditional and the groups with explicit strategy suggest that the intervention was effective for improving performance in the experimental group. This analysis highlighted the importance of explicit strategy instruction in enhancing learning outcomes for the group with explicit strategy compared to the lecture technique approach.

IV. Conclusion and recommendation

Conclusion

In, conclusion the finding of this study underscores the significant impact of explicit strategy instruction on enhancing reading comprehension, particularly concerning higher-order thinking skills. The substantial improvement observed in the explicit strategy group's post-test scores demonstrates the effectiveness of targeted instructional methods that emphasize analytical and evaluate thinking. By incorporating explicit strategies, educators can equip students with the tools necessary to comprehend and engage with complex texts more effectively.

The contrasting performance of the lecture method group, which experienced a decline in post-test scores, further emphasizes the need for innovative teaching approaches that foster cognitive development. This research highlights those traditional methods may not adequately support students in developing the critical thinking skills essential for navigating the demands of advanced reading tasks.

As educational practices evolve, it is crucial for teachers to prioritize explicit strategy instruction in their curricula. By doing so, they can not only enhance reading comprehension but also cultivate higher- order thinking skills that are vital for academic success and lifelong learning. Ultimately, this study advocates for a shift towards more interactive and strategy-focused teaching methodologies, paving the way for improved student outcomes and a deeper understanding of complex materials.

Recommendations

Based from the findings and conclusion of this study, the following has been recommended:

1. It is advisable that the explicit teaching of critical thinking and comprehension skills begins early in a learner's educational journey to mitigate potential gaps in their understanding of texts. Personalized instruction and mentoring should be provided for students who require additional support and remediation. Developing tailored intervention programs can foster optimal engagement, significantly enhancing their reading comprehension performance. Learners should be given more opportunities and strategies that enable them to achieve a deeper understanding of texts and become independent readers.
2. While progress has been made, there remains significant potential for improvement in the utilization of comprehension instructional strategies by teachers. Specifically, it is essential to address the somewhat limited range of reading comprehension strategies employed during the teaching-learning process. Educators should deliver direct, explicit instruction that incorporates higher-order thinking skills alongside various other comprehension strategies. The increase in reading comprehension instruction may be linked to the availability of numerous professional development resources and instructional materials focused on this area.
3. It is advisable that academic institutions think about of incorporating the explicit strategy instruction focusing on the incorporation of higher-order thinking skills as one of the operational strategies in teaching reading understanding. It can improve the student's comprehension in reading. The researcher recommended integrating the strategy as part of regular sessions in class for it yielded a positive impact in the language lessons. Results of the post-test test had shown substantial improvement as evidenced by their higher post-test scores and significant statistical results.
4. Based on the findings, this study was proven effective, and the researcher suggested this will benefit the teachers who will be implementing in their respective class. This study will continue to track the progress of student's reading abilities and comprehension through quarterly assessments. Future research is recommended in schools to identify solutions for the literacy challenges faced by teachers in their classroom. There is a particular need for specialized training that enhances reading comprehension skills for students in environment where English is the medium of instruction, especially for those who speak a different language at home. Furthermore, the Department of Education (DepEd) should consistently organize training sessions that equip teachers with the essential knowledge and skills to effectively teach reading comprehension strategies that meet the needs of their learners. Instruction should be carefully designed and implemented to be developmentally appropriate.
5. It is advisable that forthcoming investigations inquire into enduring consequences of incorporating some comprehension strategies that could enhance the higher-order thinking skills and provide the learners more opportunities for learning enabling them to create a deeper understanding of the text. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to the researchers to explore variety of strategies for critical thinking activities to make learning more engaging and effective. Future studies may endeavor to investigate the possible obstacles and difficulties that teachers may encounter when attempting to integrate pedagogical methodology and approaches in order to supplement findings from the current study and to devise effective solutions to these problems.

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