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## **Enhancing Inferential Reading Comprehension Skills through Illustrated Reading Texts**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This action research aimed to enhance the grade 6 learners' inferential reading comprehension skills using illustrated reading text. The illustrated reading texts were used in scaffolding learners to understand the reading text. Results showed that inferential reading of the pupils was manifested in average scores across the five assessments, and showed a gradual increase, indicating an improvement in their skills over time. The pupils find the reading texts interesting, and they can easily understand the text, as shown in the qualitative data; meanwhile, the quantitative data also show that learners find the illustrated texts interesting, helpful and easy to understand because of the pictures. Teacher observers also viewed the materials helpful in enhancing the inferential reading skills of the pupils and these are interesting reading materials. It is recommended that the material should be continuously used in scaffolding the learners' development of inferential reading skills.

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### **CONTEXT AND RATIONALE**

Inferential reading, also known as inferential comprehension, is the ability to go beyond the literal meaning of a text and draw conclusions, make predictions, or interpret implicit information based on evidence presented in the text. When readers can infer, they can synthesize information, make connections, and use reasoning skills to comprehend the deeper meaning of the reading material (Cain & Barnes, 2017; Long et al., 2014). Inferential reading encourages readers to examine the text from multiple perspectives, consider alternative interpretations, and evaluate the author's intent. It fosters analytical skills by prompting readers to question, interpret, and evaluate the text critically.

For Grade 6 pupils, inferential reading should be introduced as they need the skill to analyze the texts they read and prepare them for higher level of thinking applicable in different contexts. For children to succeed in the academic, personal and professional field in the future, training them to become inferential readers is very crucial. Whether reading literature, analyzing media, or evaluating arguments, the ability to infer meaning is indispensable in today's information-rich society.

However, there are problems which arise when it comes to inferential reading. Children struggle with inferential reading comprehension, as it is a skill that develops gradually over time with practice and guidance (Barnes et al., 2021). Children may not have received explicit instruction in inferential reading strategies or had opportunities to practice making inferences in a structured setting. Without guidance and support from teachers or their parents, children may not know how to approach inferential reading tasks effectively.

In the English 6 curriculum, inferring is an essential skill to develop and to be manifested by the pupils since they need to analyze the reading materials and connect to their experiences. By making connections between the text and their own experiences, students can develop a richer understanding of the material.

The problem of underdeveloped inferential reading comprehension skill is evident in the researcher's Grade 6 class. When faced with questions that require inference, such as those asking "why" or "how," pupils may not be able to provide accurate or thoughtful responses. They also have difficulty analyzing and synthesizing information from the read text. As their English teacher, the researcher is eager to address the problem.

Utilizing illustrated reading text may be helpful for the pupils as illustrations provide visual context that can help them understand the setting, characters, and actions in the story. This visual support can make it easier for pupils to make inferences and grasp deeper meanings. Pictures can help students understand the meaning of new vocabulary words through visual representation, making it easier to infer meanings from context (Baker, 2015). Using illustrations make way for cognitive connections between text and images, which can reinforce understanding and retention of information-thus, improving learning (Bobek, & Tversky, 2016).

In this action research, the use of illustrated texts was tried to the researcher's Grade 6 pupils. This aimed to find out how the material could help develop their inferential skills.

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## ACTION RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This action research aimed to determine how the illustrated reading texts help in enhancing the inferential comprehension skills of Grade 6 pupils.

Specifically, it sought answers for the following questions:

1. What are the inferential reading abilities of the pupils based on the reading test scores?
2. What are the views of the pupils and teacher observers regarding the use of illustrated reading texts in their reading activities?
3. What are the recommendations to improve the use of illustrated reading texts?

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## THE STRATEGY

Illustrated reading text is helpful in scaffolding readers as illustrations have an essential role and is beneficial in the text comprehension; however, there is a need to consider the relationship between illustrations and text, and strategically using illustrated texts can significantly enhance learners' reading comprehension skills. (Schallert, 2017).

To facilitate the conduct of this action research, the following were done by the teacher-researcher.

*Permission from the principal.* The research discussed with the principal her intention to conduct a study related to the use of the illustrated reading materials for the inferential reading skills of the Grade 6 learners. The principal has given permission to the researcher and thus, proceeded with the study.

*Compilation of materials.* The illustrated reading materials were compiled to be used for the series of reading activities. The researcher ensured to choose only those illustrated texts that are age-appropriate and match the reading levels of her pupils; ensured the content is engaging and culturally sensitive; and the materials are varied since learners have different interests. The research only choose illustrations are that are detailed enough to support inferential thinking but not so complex that pupils may no longer learn from it.

*Conduct of the reading activities and assessments.* Since this is action research, the researcher gathered data while reading was facilitated. She prepared 5 illustrated reading materials with topics focused on life and daily activities so pupils can make connection to their personal experiences as one of the skills in making inference and one of the competencies in English 6 curriculum. While the reading activity was going on, the teacher was also making logs in her observation notes; and her fellow English teacher also observed the class-these observation notes were also used for the analysis of the results.

The reading materials were printed out. These were given to the pupils during the reading activity. The teachers presented the learning material, let the children read and then questions were given in between to check understanding of the material. The materials were either read in small groups or in chorus.

The series of reading activities was done in five (5) consecutive Fridays. The materials used for this study were attached in the appendix section of this paper.

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## ACTION RESEARCH METHODS

**Participants and other sources of data and information.** The participants of the study were the Grade 6 pupils. Other sources of information for the study were the observation notes of the teacher while the reading activity was conducted; the observation notes by the teachers who observed during the conduct of the study; the interviews and assessment scores.

**Data Gathering Methods.** To answer the questions, the research instruments used in data gathering were the interview guide, the reading test scores and the observation notes of the teacher and teacher observers. The interviews were done to the pupils and to the teacher observers. Interview questions for the pupils were set in easier statements so that they can provide answers. Interviews for the teacher observers were done in order to find out how the activity works for the pupils. During the interviews, participants were allowed to speak in vernacular in answering the questions.

Other pupils who were not part of the interviews were given with checklist regarding how they feel about the reading materials and some observations they have by just checking the checklist of 6 items such as: the material is interesting, helpful, easy to understand because of pictures, not interesting, not easy to understand.

The reading test scores were collected after each reading activity. Questions are about the reading texts and allowed pupils to show their inference skills. There were 5 questions after each reading activity. The scores were compiled and were part of the data for the study.

The observation notes of the researcher and the teacher observers were also analyzed as part of the data. The observers particularly focused on how the pupils were able to draw understanding of the reading text with the use of the illustrations. They also accounted the important details about

the intervention particularly on how the use of the illustrated reading materials be improved to better facilitate the enhancement of inferential skills among the pupils.

**Ethical Considerations.** The researcher ensured that the ethical considerations were employed in the study. Participants were given informed consent. The consent specifically stated that their participation in the study is strictly voluntary and confidentiality is given priority. The names of their children were not disclosed. Means of verifications such as pictures did not display names and faces of the children participating in the study.

**Data Analysis Plan.** The gathered data from the interviews were analyzed through thematic analysis. Winnowing technique was done. The winnowing technique, often used in qualitative research, involves systematically narrowing down a large set of responses to focus on the most relevant and important data that answers the research questions. The researcher started by reading and rereading the interview transcriptions taken from the recorded interviews. The generated the codes and categorized the codes so appropriate themes can be assigned. These themes were presented and discussed in the succeeding section of this paper. Observation notes were also used to supplement the discussions. Scores were generalized through mean scores but individual scores of the pupils were also presented.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The subsequent sections present the results of the study and these findings are presented based on the research questions posed at the beginning of the study.

### Inferential reading achievement of the pupils based on the reading test scores

Table 1 shows the results of the data on the reading achievement of the pupils from the reading tests administered after each reading activity. There was a total of 5 reading activities conducted and a total of 5 reading tests administered after each reading session.

Based on the scores, it can be gleaned that that mean scores represent an above average score. The average scores across the five assessments show a gradual increase, indicating an improvement in reading comprehension skills over time. Assessment 1 has the lowest mean score (3.70), while Assessment 5 has the highest mean score (3.93). The overall mean scores suggest a consistent performance across assessments with slight improvements. Pupils like 16 and 26 consistently scored high, indicating strong comprehension skills. Pupils such as 1 and 10 show significant improvement over the assessments, indicating the potential positive impact of the reading activities.

Table 1. Reading achievement of the pupils based on test scores

Pupil	Assessment Scores				
	No. of items: 5 per assessment				
	1	2	3	4	5
1	3	2	5	5	4
2	4	4	4	5	5
3	3	3	3	3	4
4	4	4	4	4	5
5	2	3	3	3	4
6	3	3	3	3	3
7	4	4	4	3	4
8	3	3	3	3	2
9	4	4	4	4	3
10	3	3	3	3	5
11	4	4	5	5	3
12	3	3	3	3	5
13	4	4	4	4	4
14	3	3	3	3	5
15	4	4	3	3	3
16	5	5	5	5	5
17	4	4	4	4	4
18	4	4	4	4	4
19	4	4	4	4	4
20	5	5	5	4	4
21	4	4	3	3	3
22	3	3	3	4	4
23	4	4	2	3	3
24	2	3	3	3	3
25	4	4	4	4	4
26	5	5	5	5	5
27	4	4	4	4	4
28	4	4	3	3	3
29	5	5	4	5	5
30	3	4	4	5	4
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.70</b>	<b>3.83</b>	<b>3.77</b>	<b>3.87</b>	<b>3.93</b>

### Views on the Use Illustrated Reading Texts

**Views of the Pupils.** The pupils who participated in the study have expressed various views regarding the illustrated reading texts being used in their reading activities. These views can be described in themes such as: *they find the reading texts interesting*, and *they can easily understand the text*.

Based on the responses, pupils have described the material as interesting. They also have given reasons why the material is considered interesting. Here are some of the sample responses to support this theme.

I like the pictures. Pupil 12

*Maganda po ang mga pictures sa binabasa namin.* (The pictures are nice in the text we read.) Pupil 10

*Mas gusto ko po magbasa kasi may drawing-drawing po.* (I like to read because there are drawings.) Pupil 2

*Meron po kasing mga drawing at pictures. Gusto ko po yon.* Pupil 5

*Maganda po sya. May mga larawan po.* (It is nice. It has pictures.) Pupil 1

Moreover, the pupils also find the illustrated materials helpful for them to easily understand what they are reading.

*Asa tanong ni teacher? Makasagot po kasi naintindihan po. (...can answer since I understood.) Pupil 8*

*Madali po maintindihan kasi may picture. (...can be easily understood due to the pictures.) Pupil 3*

When pupils were asked how the material helped them answer the questions (inferential questions), they also responded that the *illustration helped them understand the texts* enabling them to answer the questions.

The pupils responded that they find the reading materials interesting because of the color illustrations. They revealed that they are able to connect the story to the pictures shown and when they are asked they could answer questions because their understanding is supplemented by the illustrations. As described by pupils:

*Naay picture. Ganahan ko mag basa kay makasabot man ko dayon. Makaanswer ko. (I like to read. I can answer questions as I can easily understand.) Pupil 7*

*Makaanswer kay ara man picture. (I can answer since there are pictures.) Pupil 5*

By using the checklist, the teacher also accounted the views of other pupils. Table 2 shows the number of pupils who responded and checked the items in the checklist.

Based on the presented data, majority of pupils (15 out of 20) found the reading material interesting. Similarly, 15 pupils felt the material was helpful. majority (18 out of 20) agreed that the reading material was easy to understand because of the pictures. However, it is also noticeable that there are 5 pupils who did not find the material helpful, and the same number did not find it interesting. Only 2 pupils found the material difficult to understand despite the pictures.

The high number of positive responses (75% or higher) for interest, helpfulness, and ease of understanding indicates that the illustrated reading materials are generally well-received by the pupils. Also, 18 out of 20 pupils found the materials easier to understand because of the illustrations underscores the value of using illustrated reading text to enhance comprehension.

The negative responses suggest that while most pupils benefit from illustrated texts, there may be a need to tailor materials further to address the needs of all learners.

Table 2

Views of the Pupils on the Illustrated Reading Text

Views about the reading materials	Frequency of Response	
	n=20	
	Yes	No
The reading material is interesting.	15	5
The reading material is helpful.	15	5
The reading material is easy to understand because of pictures.	18	2
The reading materials is not helpful.	5	15
The reading material is not interesting.	5	15
The reading materials is not easy to understand.	2	18

**Views of the Teacher Observers.** In some similar aspects, the teachers also viewed the illustrated reading texts as: *helpful in enhancing the inferential reading abilities of the pupils*, and these are *interesting learning materials*.

The teacher observers believed that the materials are helpful in enhancing reading abilities of the pupils. As observed by the teacher observers:

*I noticed that pupils can easily answer the questions you posed as you elicit their understanding because the texts and the illustration complement each other. Observer 2*

I believed the materials the teachers presented to the class are helping the pupils better understand the story. In fact, as I noticed, when you asked them why they said so, they refer to the picture when they give reasons.

Observer 3

It is also confirmed in the responses of the teacher observers that the materials have helped in the inferential ability of the children. For instance:

When you are them to relate the story to their personal experiences, they refer to the picture that they have done the same. When you asked what words could describe actions referring to a particular emotions, they can also answer..meaning...both the text and the illustration help them answer higher order questions. Observer 2

Similarly, the reading texts are also making the learners more interested to read during the reading session. As described by the observers:

*Isa sa mga pupils niingon o...yes! Naay picture.* This only means he is excited since he will be reading a text with a picture or illustration...and I also noticed that they are looking at the pictures while they read. As if they are mapping the text and the illustration. They have sustained interest too. Observer 1

From the first observation that I have until the second and the last...kasi I have observed the activity three times *lang man diba?* I observed *talaga* that the pupils are interested to read and when you ask questions they are excited to answer. Observer 2

The results are also corroborated with the data reflected in the observation notes of the teacher observers and the teacher-researcher.

The children are focused reading. ON2

The pupils ask questions about the reading texts, showing that they are interested. ON3

The pupils can answer the how questions about the text. ON5

The pupils use the illustrations to support their understanding of the text. ON6

### ***Recommendations to Improve the Use of Illustrated Reading Texts***

Based on the interview with the children, it was evident that they recommended ***continuing the use of illustrated reading materials***. The pupils answered in the interviews that they would like to have the same materials again in their reading activities.

*Sana ganon lang po palagi ang aming basahin.* Pupil 8

*Mas gusto ko po ganon pag magbasa sa Friday.* Pupil 4

*Madali po maintindihan kung ganyan ang basahin po.* Pupil 7

Similarly, the teacher observers also recommended that reading activities for the pupils should be supplemented with illustrations to aid in better understanding.

I think, this reading activity should not be stopped until the 5 sessions only. This must be continued. Observer 3

The illustrations could really help the pupils gain better understanding...so this should be continued. Observer 1

However, one of the observers also recommended that teachers may try to use the material with independence among the pupils. She should not be facilitating the reading activity. All she needs is to distribute the materials and then let the children read and then the teacher will ask questions after the allotted reading time.

You may try to just give the learning materials to them and then let them read on their own. Do not facilitate them while reading. Let us see if they could still answer inferential questions. Observer 1

On the similar account, another observer also suggested to use the illustrations to reinforce understanding but gradual removal of the illustrations must be considered since higher readings may not employ illustrations.

*Hindi kasi pwede na always nalang may illustrations.* So sana may gradual removal of these supplements in reading so they can be independent learner because as they progress, reading materials in the higher grades do not have illustrations. Observer 2

Based on the feedback from interviews and observations, it is evident that the use of illustrated reading materials significantly enhances student engagement and comprehension. However, a balanced approach should be considered, including the gradual removal of illustrations to prepare pupils for higher-level texts that may not include visuals.

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## REFLECTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conduct of this study enabled the researcher to generate various reflections from the conduct of the study, the results generated, and the future plans related to the use of the intervention.

Conducting an action research is tedious with a lot of preparations to consider. The researcher has to download the materials needed for the study, prepare for its reproduction despite the hectic schedule and plan for the implementation. The catch-up Fridays have given the researcher the opportunity to conduct the study. However, ensuring that the materials are facilitated well while trying to observe how the materials can be helpful for the development of the target skill of the children is very challenging yet fulfilling. Without the support of the researcher's fellow teachers, data adequacy may be impossible.

The results of the study enabled the researcher to gain several insights. Illustrated reading materials significantly increased student engagement and understanding. Students were more interested and invested in the reading activities. Thus, it can be drawn that the materials play a crucial role in helping students grasp complex concepts and improve their inferential reading skills.

A significant majority of students found the illustrated reading materials interesting, helpful, and easy to understand. This is also supported by the teacher observers. This underscored that illustrations contribute to a more engaging and comprehensible learning experience.

The suggestions of the learners and the observers to continue the use of the materials is also worth considering. When time permits, the researcher will continue to look and compile for illustrated texts appropriate for Grade 6 pupils. Moving forward, a balanced and phased approach will ensure that students benefit from these visual aids while gradually developing the skills necessary for higher-level text comprehension. Hence, the teacher would like to consider to continually assess and refine the use of illustrated texts for a more effective and enjoyable reading experience for the young learners.

The researcher would like to present the results of the study during the SLAC sessions so her fellow teachers will also be able to learn from the findings. Moreover, the teaching materials used for the study may also be utilized by other teachers.

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