

From Deficiency to Mastery: A Strategic Program for Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension Enhancement

Brook Shields Busine¹, Charito Ong²

^{1,2}University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines

Abstract: *This research focused on building a learner - centered program aimed at improving vocabulary and reading comprehension among college students experiencing challenges in these areas. By integrating quantitative assessments and qualitative insights through a convergent parallel mixed - methods design, the study gathered a rich understanding of the program's effectiveness. Students underwent structured interventions involving explicit vocabulary instruction and guided reading practices. By integrating explicit vocabulary instruction with systematic reading strategies, the program seeks to transform students' abilities from mere deficiency to mastery. The data revealed measurable improvements in test performance and a rise in learner engagement and self - confidence. What stood out most was how peer collaboration and reflective exercises fostered deeper understanding. By integrating explicit vocabulary instruction with systematic reading strategies, the program seeks to transform students' abilities from mere deficiency to mastery. These results highlight that thoughtfully designed strategies can help shift learners from a place of struggle to one of mastery, paving the way for long - term academic growth.*

Keywords: vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, strategic intervention, college learners, language proficiency

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge are fundamental components of academic achievement, yet many college students struggle in these areas. In today's digital and information - rich environment, the ability to decode complex texts and comprehend nuanced language is more important than ever (Garcia & Thompson, 2023). A strong vocabulary not only facilitates understanding but also enhances communication, critical thinking, and overall academic performance. Despite its importance, many learners face persistent challenges that hinder their progress (Johnson & Martinez, 2023).

Reading comprehension is a crucial learning skill, involving the ability to extract and construct meaning through interaction with written language (Clarke, Truelove, Hulme, & Snowling, 2013; Wong, 2011). This includes understanding word meanings, analyzing authors' viewpoints, and gaining new vocabulary. Effective comprehension helps learners quickly locate pertinent information, exclude irrelevant details, and identify key information to focus on, which is essential for achieving educational goals and expectations.

The problem of inadequate vocabulary and poor reading comprehension is well - documented in the literature, particularly in contexts where English is taught as a foreign language. Traditional teaching methods often fail to provide the focused intervention necessary to overcome these challenges. This deficiency affects students' abilities to engage with academic content, leading to a cycle of frustration and diminished academic confidence (Nicol, 2023). Addressing this issue is critical for fostering a more equitable and effective learning environment.

Recognizing this gap, the current study proposes a strategic program aimed at enhancing both vocabulary and reading comprehension. The program is designed to be systematic and

learner - centered, incorporating explicit vocabulary exercises and targeted reading strategies. By directly addressing the underlying deficiencies, the program seeks to empower students to become more proficient readers and confident communicators. The emphasis on practical, evidence - based techniques distinguishes this approach from more traditional methods.

In addition to direct instruction, the program leverages interactive and collaborative learning strategies. Peer discussions, self - assessment activities, and guided practice sessions are integrated into the curriculum to reinforce learning outcomes. These elements provide students with multiple opportunities to practice, receive feedback, and internalize new concepts. The collaborative nature of the program further enhances engagement and accountability among learners.

Finally, the structure of the paper reflects these objectives by detailing the theoretical underpinnings, methodology, results, discussion, and recommendations. This comprehensive approach aims to offer a robust solution to the challenges of vocabulary deficiency and reading comprehension, providing a replicable model for future educational practices.

Studies have shown that vocabulary has been acknowledged as vital for success in reading and literature (Moody et al., 2018), where this improves and promotes reading comprehension among learners, with the expansion happening in both oral and written situations. Students' vocabulary is positively associated with their ability to perceive, identify, and absorb information (Harmon & Wood, 2018), assisting students in acquiring the subject more quickly. Although vocabulary is more sophisticated, it includes not only recognizing the words and their meanings.

2. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which emphasizes the importance of scaffolded learning. According to Vygotsky, learners can achieve higher levels of understanding when supported by more knowledgeable peers or educators. This principle is central to the program, as it underscores the role of guided interaction in bridging the gap between current and potential competence. By designing tasks that are just beyond the students' independent capabilities, the program promotes incremental learning and growth.

In addition to ZPD, the study draws on Constructivist Learning Theory, which posits that learners actively construct meaning through their experiences. This theory suggests that understanding is built through interaction with both content and context, making it essential for students to engage directly with reading materials and vocabulary exercises. The program encourages students to connect new words and concepts to their prior knowledge, thereby facilitating deeper comprehension. Active engagement and reflection are key outcomes of this approach.

The ASSURE instructional design model further informs the program's structure. The model's systematic approach—analyzing learners, stating objectives, selecting methods and materials, utilizing media, requiring learner participation, and evaluating progress—ensures that the program is both comprehensive and flexible. By following the ASSURE model, the program is designed to be responsive to diverse learner needs and adaptable to various instructional contexts. This alignment helps ensure that the interventions are effective and sustainable over time.

Furthermore, the integration of peer and self - assessment strategies is central to the conceptual framework. These assessment methods are based on the understanding that feedback is most effective when it comes from multiple sources, including the learners themselves. Peer assessment allows students to learn from each other, while self - assessment fosters critical reflection and metacognitive awareness. Together, these approaches create an environment in which students are active participants in their learning process.

Finally, the conceptual framework synthesizes these theoretical perspectives into a cohesive model that guides program development and implementation. The integration of ZPD, Constructivist Theory, and the ASSURE model provides a solid foundation for the strategic intervention. This multifaceted approach not only addresses the technical aspects of vocabulary and reading comprehension but also supports the development of higher - order thinking skills. The framework is thus designed to move students from deficiency to mastery in a structured, supportive manner.

3. Methodology

In this paper, a convergent parallel mixed - methods research design was employed to evaluate the effectiveness of the vocabulary and reading comprehension enhancement

program. This design allowed for the simultaneous collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the program's impact. By integrating these two methodological approaches, the study captured not only measurable changes in performance but also insights into the students' learning experiences.

This research targeted a diverse group of respondents, comprising learners from various reading comprehension levels and backgrounds. A purposive sampling method was utilized to determine the participants' range of proficiency levels.

The quantitative component of the study involved administering standardized reading comprehension tests and vocabulary assessments as pre - tests and post - tests. These assessments were designed to measure the students' abilities before and after the program intervention. Statistical analyses, including paired t - tests and ANCOVA, were applied to the data to determine whether significant improvements are significant because of the program. This rigorous quantitative analysis provided clear evidence of the program's efficacy in enhancing language skills.

Complementing the quantitative data, the qualitative component of the research involved semi - structured interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations. These methods enabled the collection of rich, descriptive data regarding students' perceptions, challenges, and experiences with the program. The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns, offering insights into how and why the program influenced learning outcomes. This dual approach ensured that the findings were both statistically robust and contextually meaningful.

Data triangulation was a key feature of the methodology, ensuring that findings were validated across multiple sources. The convergence of quantitative improvements and qualitative insights provided a strong basis for concluding that the program was effective. The mixed methods design not only enhanced the reliability of the results but also offered a multidimensional perspective on the learning process. This comprehensive approach addressed the complexity of language acquisition and the varied factors influencing reading comprehension and vocabulary development.

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained to protect the identities of the students. The study also provided constructive feedback to ensure that the assessment process was supportive rather than punitive. By adhering to ethical research standards, the study maintained its integrity while ensuring that the learning environment remained positive and conducive to growth.

4. Results and Discussion

The quantitative results of the study revealed statistically significant improvements in both vocabulary proficiency and reading comprehension following the program's implementation. Pre - test scores indicated that many students

were operating below the expected level, particularly in tasks requiring nuanced understanding of complex texts. Post - test data, however, demonstrated marked increases in scores, confirming the effectiveness of the targeted interventions. These findings are in line with previous research and are further reinforced by recent studies (Garcia & Thompson, 2023). Analysis of the vocabulary assessments showed that students acquired a broader lexicon through focused exercises on context clues, synonyms, antonyms, and practical usage. The improvement in vocabulary directly contributed to enhanced comprehension, as students could more effectively decipher meaning in diverse texts. Recent findings by Johnson and Martinez (2023) support this relationship, noting that enriched vocabulary instruction significantly boosts reading proficiency. Additionally, Patel and Singh (2023) demonstrated that collaborative peer activities further enhance lexical acquisition.

In parallel, reading comprehension improvements were evident in students' ability to identify main ideas, infer meanings, and critically analyze passages. The program's systematic reading strategies—such as annotating texts and synthesizing information—enabled students to better process and retain complex information. These gains are consistent with the work of Patel and Singh (2023) and Garcia & Thompson (2023), who both highlight the benefits of structured reading interventions in improving comprehension outcomes.

Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups provided further insight into the program's impact. Students reported increased engagement and a heightened sense of self - confidence when tackling challenging texts. They attributed their progress to the integration of peer and self - assessment strategies, which fostered reflective learning and collaborative feedback. These observations echo recent studies (Johnson & Martinez, 2023) that emphasize the importance of interactive and learner - centered instructional practices.

Overall, the integration of explicit vocabulary instruction with targeted reading strategies produced significant improvements in language proficiency. The convergence of quantitative data and qualitative insights confirms that the strategic program successfully bridges the gap from deficiency to mastery. These results not only validate the program's design but also provide a replicable model for future educational practices aimed at enhancing both vocabulary and reading comprehension.

Table 1 presents the scores from different programs in testing their comprehension skills, as seen by three departments showing Instructional Reading Level also means students scaffolding to achieve successful text comprehension however students can demonstrate progress and vocabulary acquisition. However, one program obtained Frustration Reading Level implies that readers struggle to comprehend texts and have trouble in responding. Furthermore, only one department showcased Independent Reading Level. This suggests students can comprehend text on their own, with minimal support. . Different linguistic backgrounds can also affect the reading level of the students. However, a method can be done in enhancing vocabulary is through reading. Students who read more, the more they come across foreign words, the more they will look up the meaning in the dictionary for them to be able to understand what they read. Hence, if learners establish a regular reading routine, they will become more competent and efficient in terms of vocabulary and comprehension that may surpass the Frustration Reading Level. ZPD is a learning development wherein a learner can acquire knowledge with assistance by a teacher who is proficient and skillful. Altalhab, (2019). This suggests that vocabulary is an essential element in developing language skills. Learners often detect that their problem in receiving language and producing language is due to insufficient vocabulary (Alfatle, 2016). (Qian, 2002). Many researchers believe that reading improves language development, i. e., the more a learner reads different texts, the better his vocabulary knowledge and reading ability will be. Abedi (2017) found that lack of familiarity with vocabulary knowledge in test passages was an important element affecting EFL learners on a reading comprehension test.

ASSURE model was created by Heinich et al. (2002). This instructional design framework stands for Analyze learners, State objectives, Select methods, Utilize media and materials, Require learner participation, and Evaluate and Revise. Kazanci - Gül, Altun & Yabas (2020) investigated the impact of ASSURE model on learners critical thinking, technology literacy and their academic performance. Using ASSURE model teachers will know the vulnerability of the students in terms of their academic performance, what will be the objective and the execution to be done in enhancing the learners' skill, choosing the appropriate and accurate methods, what will be the materials to be used and if by any chance in what aspect or area needs to be changed in order to achieve successful academic performance.

In learning, learners must not passively receive the information but through experience. A constructivist theory. According to Discroll (2000), constructivist approach is a philosophy which enhances students' logical and conceptual growth. The underlying concept within the constructivist learning theory is the role which experiences or connections with adjoining atmosphere - play in students' education. Constructivist learning argues that people produce knowledge and form meaning based upon their experiences.

Table 1: Reading Comprehension Test Score

					Reading Proficiency Level
Reading Comprehension Test Score	CAS	20	7.4	1.31	Instructional reading level
	CBIT	20	5.1	1.89	Frustration reading level
	CCJE	20	7.45	3.86	Independent reading level
	CEA	20	6.65	3.07	Instructional reading level
	COED	20	6.85	2.64	Instructional reading level

Table 2: Vocabulary Learning Strategies for ESL Learners

Question	Mean	SD	Verbal Rating
1) When I don't know a new word in reading, I use my background knowledge of the topic to guess the meaning of the new word	3.15	0.658	Agree
2) When not knowing a word prevents me from understanding a whole sentence or even a whole paragraph, I look it up.	3.09	0.620	Agree
3) I pay attention to the examples when I look up a word in a dictionary.	3.23	0.636	Agree
4) When I want to know more about the usage of a word that I know, I look it up	3.42	0.591	Agree
5) Learners can learn vocabulary simply through reading a lot.	3.48	0.616	Agree
6) I know whether a new word is important in understanding a passage	3.25	0.606	Agree
7) When I meet a new word or phrase, I know clearly whether I need to remember it.	3.09	0.427	Agree
8) Besides textbooks, I look for other readings that fall under my interest.	3.22	0.613	Agree
9) I use common sense and knowledge of the world when guessing the meaning of a word.	3.30	0.582	Agree
10) I check my guessed meaning in the paragraph or whole text to see if it fits in.	3.13	0.582	Agree
11) I look for explanations in the reading text that support my guess about the meaning of a word.	3.34	0.502	Agree
12) When I want to have some deeper knowledge about a word that I already know, I look it up.	3.32	0.589	Agree
13) I try to use the newly learned words as much as possible in speech and writing	3.21	0.589	Agree
14) I put words in set expressions or sentences in order to remember them.	3.18	0.572	Agree
15) When I try to remember a word, I also try to remember the sentence in which the word is used.	3.22	0.700	Agree

Based on the table given, the respondents demonstrated that learners could learn vocabulary simply through reading a lot. Extensive reading significantly boosts vocabulary acquisition, especially crucial in EFL settings with limited real-world English practice. In an EFL context, one of the main sources of new vocabulary is reading English texts. Reading plays a key role in increasing learners' vocabulary, and that is according to comparisons of large corpora which showed that written texts are richer in lexis than spoken ones (Horst, 2005). It has been suggested that two activities (vocabulary learning and reading) occurring simultaneously create a 'pedagogically efficient' approach (Huckin & Coady, 1999), which could help learners achieve autonomy, motivation and pleasure to learn, while also providing them with vocabulary in context (Thornbury, 2002). The importance of vocabulary in determining the success of a reading comprehension has long been established. The knowledge of word meanings and the ability to access the knowledge efficiently are recognized as an essential factor in reading comprehension (Ali & Mohd. Ayub, 2012; Bee Eng & Abdullah, 2003).

Moghadam, Zainal and Ghaderpour (2012) state that when a reader does not know many words in a text, such condition would hinder the effectiveness and efficiency of text processing, which leads to difficulties in the reader comprehending the text. Since word recognition and lexical access often prevent comprehension, providing vocabulary instruction may help improve students' reading comprehension skills (Curtis & Longo, 2001).

Secondly, learners who don't know a word that prevents them from understanding they look it up. Consequently, several strategies for processing unknown words have also been identified in reading comprehension, such as the lexical ignoring strategy, the lexical inferencing strategy, and so on. For instance, Fraser (1999) found that inferencing was the primary strategy that learners used to deal with unfamiliar words in reading comprehension.

5. Conclusion

The study confirms that a strategically designed program can effectively enhance both vocabulary acquisition and reading

comprehension among college students. The significant improvements observed in both pre - test and post - test assessments demonstrate that targeted interventions can bridge the gap between deficiency and mastery. This finding has profound implications for language instruction, particularly in contexts where traditional teaching methods have fallen short.

The program's success is largely attributed to its dual focus on explicit vocabulary instruction and structured reading strategies. By integrating these components, the program addresses the underlying issues that contribute to poor comprehension and limited lexical knowledge. The results indicate that when students are provided with clear, scaffolded support and opportunities for active engagement, their ability to process and understand complex texts improves dramatically.

Furthermore, the qualitative insights from interviews and focus groups underscore the value of a learner - centered approach. Students reported increased confidence, enhanced engagement, and a greater sense of ownership over their learning. These subjective improvements are critical, and are vital because they contribute to their academic success and promote a positive attitude toward learning. The collaborative nature of the program further reinforces these outcomes by fostering a supportive educational environment.

While the study presents strong evidence for the effectiveness of the program, it also highlights areas for further research. Future studies could explore the long - term impacts of such interventions and their applicability across different educational contexts and disciplines. Continued investigation will help refine these strategies and ensure that they are adaptable to a wide range of learning environments.

In totality, this research provides compelling evidence that targeted vocabulary and reading comprehension interventions can significantly improve language proficiency. The study not only validates the strategic program but also offers a model for future educational practices. By moving students from deficiency to mastery, educators can empower learners to achieve greater academic success and become more confident, self - regulated readers.

6. Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations are proposed for educators and curriculum developers seeking to enhance vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. First, integrating explicit vocabulary instruction into daily classroom routines is essential. Teachers should design activities that focus on context clues, word relationships, and usage in various contexts to expand students' lexical repertoire. Regular vocabulary exercises and assessments can help monitor progress and adjust instruction as needed.

Second, incorporating structured reading strategies into the curriculum can significantly improve comprehension. Instruction should include techniques such as skimming for main ideas, annotating texts, and synthesizing information from multiple sources. These strategies should be taught explicitly and reinforced through guided practice and peer discussion. By embedding these techniques into everyday lessons, educators can help students develop more effective reading habits.

Third, promoting active engagement through peers and self-assessment is highly beneficial. Educators are encouraged to implement assessment strategies that allow students to critique their own work as well as that of their peers. This collaborative approach not only improves comprehension skills but also fosters a sense of accountability and self-reflection. Structured guidelines and training on how to provide constructive feedback are critical to maximizing the benefits of these assessment methods.

Fourth, continuous monitoring and evaluation of the program are necessary to ensure its effectiveness. Regular pre- and post-assessments should be conducted to track improvements in vocabulary and reading comprehension. The data gathered can inform instructional adjustments and provide insights into areas where students may require additional support. An iterative approach to program evaluation will help sustain long-term improvements and adapt to changing student needs.

Finally, the results of this study emphasize the effectiveness of these interventions in addressing literacy leading to ameliorate educational results and increased social advancements within this community a more equitable society. This study also highlights that purposeful investment in explicit vocabulary instruction, structured reading strategies, and student-centered engagement practices can lead to substantial educational gains. These improvements not only enhance learners' academic performance but also contribute to the broader societal and economic benefits associated with a more literate and informed population. Professional development for educators is crucial for the successful implementation of such programs. Teachers should receive training on the latest instructional strategies, assessment techniques, and digital tools that support vocabulary and reading comprehension enhancement. By investing in ongoing professional development, institutions can ensure that educators are well-equipped to implement innovative, evidence-based practices that drive student success.

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