

Rufo A. Labarrete, 2019

Volume 3 Issue 1, pp. 220-229

Date of Publication: 16th April 2019

DOI-<https://dx.doi.org/10.20319/pijtel.2019.31.220229>

This paper can be cited as: Labarrete, R. A., (2019). Reading Comprehension Level and Study Skills Competence of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) Clientele. PUPIL: International Journal of Teaching, Education and Learning, 3(1), 220-229.

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READING COMPREHENSION LEVEL AND STUDY SKILLS COMPETENCE OF THE ALTERNATIVE LEARNING SYSTEM (ALS) CLIENTELE

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Abstract

This study aimed to assess the reading comprehension level and study skills competencies of the Alternative Learning System-Accreditation and Equivalency (ALS-A&E) clientele. It utilized the descriptive-quantitative research design. Data were obtained from various adopted reading passages. Of the four reading dimensions, the clientele registered a good performance in the literal level but poorly performed in the inferential, evaluative, and creative dimensions. As to their study skills competencies, outlining and semantic mapping were their top concerns but they were nevertheless good in locating thesis statement and very good in book parts familiarization. Considering these findings, it is the imperative for the ALS implementers to revisit their pedagogic practices relative to the teaching of reading as a macro language skill especially on the areas where their clientele need instructional related interventions.

Keywords

Alternative Learning System, Reading Comprehension, Session Guide, Study Skills

1. Introduction

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) is the Philippine government's resolute response to its various international pledges to deliver and make quality education accessible to all Filipino learners who for various reasons were unable to attend or complete the formal schooling track it provides. As defined in EO 365 s. 2004, ALS is a community-based learning system comparable to the formal basic education system. It encompasses three major programs: Basic Literacy Program (BLP) Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Education and Skills Training (EST). BLP's main thrust is to eradicate illiteracy while A&E is designed to award diplomas commensurate to either elementary or secondary grade levels. Upon completion of the required number of hours, A&E completers are subjected to the A&E examinations. Equivalent diplomas such as junior or senior high school and post-secondary levels are then granted to successful

examinees. EST, on the other hand, provides both literacy and skills development to the clientele (ALS DepEd - Alternative Learning System, n.d.). This study is focused on the ALS-A&E.

Assessment plays a vital role in the teaching-learning process. Late last year, Department of Education (DepEd) Secretary, Leonor M. Briones, questioned the integrity of the assessment matrix of the A&E Test after a record low register of passers. As a result, she set 60% as its passing rate instead of 75%. Then, an analysis of the various assessment tools utilized for this purpose were conducted. Findings showed that an innumerable factor can be tied up to this concern. Amongst them is language issue. The DepEd chief suspected that the usage of English language instead of Filipino could have stymied the testees understanding of the assessments contents, which, in turn, contributed to a nationwide dismal performance of A&E completers (news article, 2018).

This national concern redounds to the grassroots level. An ALS implementer in Barugo, Leyte agreed with the observation of her bureau chief. While her findings were holistic in nature, she, however, relegated the menace to the clientele's reading skill which could have thwarted their performance in the said test. These she justified using the numerical ratings reflected in the Certificate of Rating (COR), the testees exit testimonies, and her decades long experienced in facilitating this language skill in this unique learning environment.

Undoubtedly, the magnitude of the importance of reading cannot be undermined. As contained in various literature, reading is considered a vehicle in understanding concepts across curricula and levels, and a fundamental element in the learners' ability to learn and be successful in school and beyond. In essence, it becomes a catalyst in attaining a higher education and landing into decent jobs, thus, improve the living standard of the person in particular and society in general. Henceforth, the concern mentioned above relative to the reading skill of the ALS-A&E clientele necessitates immediate empirical investigation. In this way, ALS implementers in this municipality will be provided with empirical-based insights as regards to their clientele's reading skill which, in turn, could guide them in reciting reading lessons as well as enhancing session guides or blueprints. Thus, this paper aimed to assess the comprehension level of the ALS-A&E clientele in the four reading dimensions: literal, inferential, applicative and creative levels as well as their study skills competencies specifically on: familiarizing book parts and their uses, locating thesis and support details, preparing for an outline and drawing semantic map.

2. Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to assess the reading and study skills competence of the Alternative Learning System-Accreditation and Equivalency (ALS-A&E) clientele with the end view of developing an enhanced session guide. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the level of comprehension of the ALS-A&E clientele in terms of the four reading dimensions specifically on:
 - 1.1 literal
 - 1.2 inferential
 - 1.3 evaluative
 - 1.4 creative
2. What is the level of comprehension of the ALS-A&E clientele in the study skills

competencies specifically on:

- 2.1 preparing for a sentence outline
- 2.2 drawing semantic map
- 2.3 locating thesis and support details
- 2.4 Familiarizing Book Parts

3. Based on the data gathered, and analyses made, how may a session guide be enhanced to address their concerns in reading?

3. Literature Review

Reading competence is regarded as a vital skill for academic survival and success. According to Villamin (1994) reading is a four-step process: word perception, comprehension, meaning reaction in prior knowledge and idea integration into one's background experience. Roldan (1993) likewise defined reading as the bringing of meaning to instead of the gaining of meaning from the printed page or simply the extent of the reader's knowledge or experience as the basis of comprehending the texts. By comprehension, it means, he claimed, understanding printed symbols and giving meaning to them. Polloway, Patton, Serna, et al. (2018), on the other hand, posited that comprehension, a vital learning skill, is meaning construction from a given written text anchored on a coordination of a series of interrelated data sources.

Bilbao, Donguilla, & Vasay (2016) contested that comprehension is the heart of reading for without such it becomes meaningless and that there are four levels of comprehension: literal, inferential or interpretive, evaluative, and creative. Literal is also called as factual level. It refers to the readers' ability to decode words, give meaning in a context, and determine word relationship. Learners are as well expected to identify fundamental information and follow basic instructions. Interpretive level, on the other hand, is higher order thinking as it requires the application and analysis process. Readers are expected to look into the relationships among statements in the given text, understand the implications of the reading segment through inferencing as well as determine implicit or explicit ideas contained in the reading material. Meanwhile in the evaluative or critical level requires the readers to render "their" judgments of the reading material which, in turn, make them evaluate the texts being read. Finally, the creative level. This is regarded as transcendental reading as it compels the readers to go beyond the intention of the writer such as applying gained insights to a new situation and merging the author's ideas to generate new thoughts, ideas, and concepts. As such, this level challenges the readers to create or produce novel materials as evidence of their comprehension or understanding of the reading materials.

Empirical studies relative to reading abound. These studies range from assessment of the reading comprehension, factors that impede reading comprehension and its correlation to performance in other content area such as mathematics, to testing various reading related strategies among others.

Utilizing the Philippine-Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), Cabardo (2015), for example, assessed the level of reading proficiency of the freshmen, sophomore and junior high school students as basis for crafting an intervention program. Results showed that the reading proficiency in silent reading of these group of learners can be indexed in frustration level. They, however, registered an instructional level in both silent and oral reading dimensions. Data

likewise revealed that males are rather less proficient than females in both reading types. Bilbao, Donguila, & Vasay (2016), on the other hand, profiled the level of comprehension of education students from across specializations and majors. They reported that pre-service teachers have a satisfactory reading comprehension with a descriptive level of statistically moderate. This description implies that these learners have the ability to discern challenging texts under literal, evaluative, and creative levels under minimal supervision. Sex, however, is in no way related to their performance. Meanwhile, Uychoco (2012) reported that freshmen pre-service teachers enrolled in the college of education he is teaching are unprepared for collegiate work as reflected in their reading proficiency index because language and content area faculty were unable to provide sufficient learning activities and enough training related opportunities as regards to the use of academic reading strategies as media to enrich their reading skills. An enhanced module was then developed to address this concern.

Further studies pertinent to reading such as that of Celestino (2014) claimed that freshmen students enrolled in college of information technology and computing have no concerns relative to reading but proved instead that lack of reading tools at home was strongly correlated to the gravity of both home and family related difficulties associated to reading. These findings were likewise proven by Franza's (2018) descriptive statistical analyses which revealed that the reading competence of the ninth graders students were affected by factors including their economic standing, motivational success, attitude towards learning and family support which were statistically at moderate extent. In addition, their reading skill gauged through vocabulary and comprehension as indicators were both statistically poor but was moderate in terms of speed and fluency.

In similar vein, VVelasco, Ibabao & Sevilla, et al. (2016) disclosed that the customized reading intervention they produced resulted to an improved motivation in reading. All those who underwent said intervention became more focused, engaged, and were able to integrate both real life and academic related situations that they picked from reading varied rich reading materials. Subibe (2015) also verified the effectiveness of Explicit Skill Instruction (ESI) reading strategy. This experimental study utilizing sixth graders pupils paved the way to an improved or significant increase in their reading comprehension, positive attitude towards reading, and adoption of the strategy itself. Hallorina (2009), likewise, proved that instrumental religious music can be a springboard in improving the reading comprehension skills and levels of the learners. Utilizing this music genre had resulted to an improved reading performance of students specifically on noting details, spotting of the main idea, inferencing, and outcomes prediction and had as well resulted to an increment of their reading level from low to high instructional level of comprehension. Similarly, Simbulas, Regidor, & Catulpos (2015) correlational study on the reading comprehension and mathematical problem solving skills of freshmen students proved that a significant relationship between the two exists. This means that learners can only solve mathematical related problems if able to comprehend them and if they do possess sizeable vocabulary. Finally, foreign studies conducted on this dimension such as the experimental research of Tenório, Lopes, Góis, & Junior (2018) revealed that gamification strategy used inside the Khan Academy was effective in increasing informatics student's motivation, participation, and commitment. Results proved that this academy-learning room was able to provide novel

opportunities and ways of engaging students especially with the use of built-in gamification. Teachers, however, they discovered, still played a vital role in terms of motivating students in doing beyond classroom activities in knowledge seeking. Limantoro (2018)'s action research, on the other hand, validated the effectiveness of word-card games in developing English language vocabulary and grammar for writing. Results revealed that its use were able to make learning more fun and strengthen the ability to communicate in written format.

In sum, even though a considerable number of studies relative to reading comprehension and its many dimensions such as interventions and strategies exist, none is focused on using ALS clientele as target group. Given the fact that reading is a segment of the A&E test that A&E completers need to hurdle; it is then imperative to pursue this academic undertaking. Apart from the unarguable fact or reality that reading is indeed pivotal towards academic success.

4. Methodology

4.1 Locale of the Study

This study was conducted in an ALS Learning Center located in Barugo, Leyte, Philippines.

4.2 Selection of Respondents

This study involved 15 A&E clientele. The participants' ages ranged from sixteen to twenty-one. All of them were under the tutelage of a single ALS implementer. Most of the male respondents were engaged in farm related chores and are engaged in various income generating activities available in the locality. Similarly, the female respondents are also engaged in multifarious income generating activities such as being a part-time household help, manicurists, among others. Most of them dropped either in the 7th or 8th grades in their junior high school. Both the clientele and their implementer were informed about the study and its purpose and participation was on voluntary basis.

The criterion-purposive sampling technique was specifically employed in this study. According to Babbie (1990), non-probability sampling methods such as purposive sampling technique aim to “*construct a sample that can generate the most useful insights that can be gained by the researcher into that study's particular focus*”. Additionally, Fowler (2014), emphasized that in criterion sampling, a type of purposive sampling technique, the researcher is compelled to pre-identify criteria, then, filter all cases that meet those criteria. Moreover, Fink (2003) emphasized that in using purposive sampling technique, the researcher intended to choose the size and content of the sample measures and construct for purposes of maximizing learning in the conduct of the study. Further, she stressed that this technique allows the researcher to choose: the respondents, times, venues, events, or interactions deemed important to carry out the purpose of the study. In this academic undertaking, the pre-identified respondents, that is, the A&E clientele have met the criteria set forth by the researcher.

4.3 Data Collection

The biblical passage *Love from Corinthians 13: 1-7* was referred to in crafting five researcher-made questions for each of the four reading dimensions: literal, inferential, applicative and creative levels. The essay of I.V. Mallari titled *Pliant Like the Bamboo*, on the other hand, was used in gauging their skill in sentence outlining. For this segment, the clientele-respondents were asked to fill-in a skeletal frame of a sentence outline compose of five parts.

Meanwhile, the article *Religion of Our Ancestors* (Author not indicated) was utilized to gauge their skill in semantic mapping. A blank semantic map was as well provided to the respondents. Similarly, five passages were used for measuring the clientele’s skill in spotting thesis statement and support details. The informants directly answered on the given passages. Finally, five researcher-made questions were as well prepared to measure their skill in book familiarization. These assessment tools were all sourced out from a reference book for teaching English language for the 8th graders written by Gabriel and Martires (2004).

Said assessment matrices were given to the respondents during the agreed time and location. After a holistic orientation, the assessment commenced. The respondents were given an hour, and a half to answer the assessment materials. Answering over time was strictly prohibited and that the researcher monitored and supervised the entire session. After the clientele have answered all the assessment tools within the allowed time, they were then retrieved and subjected for analyses.

4.4 Data Analysis

The quantitative data obtained from reading comprehension level of the clientele in the four dimensions as well as in study skills competencies were statistically treated. Mean scores and their corresponding standard deviation were computed and results were given equivalent adjectival description.

5. Results and Discussions

Table 1: ALS-A&E Clientele’s Level of Comprehension for the Four Reading Dimensions

Reading Dimensions	n	Mean	SD	Description
Literal	15	4.07	0.60	Very Good
Inferential	15	1.33	0.49	Poor
Applicative	15	1.27	0.33	Poor
Creative	15	1.07	0.33	Poor

For a total Score of 5	Interpretation
4.51- 5.00	Excellent
3.51- 4.50	Very Good
2.51- 3.50	Good
1.51- 2.50	Fair
0.00- 1.50	Poor

Table 1 shows the reading comprehension level in the four dimensions: literal, interpretative, applicative and creative of the 15 clientele-respondents. It can be gleaned from the data contained in the table that the clientele were good in the literal reading dimension. This means all that of them were able to locate the answers from the given text. Same table likewise showed that the informants poorly performed in inferring, applicative and creative dimensions.

The clientele’s poor performance in the inferential dimension can be attributed to the fact that only skillful and efficient readers can easily draw logical inference from the text read. Cabardo (2015) posited that reading between the lines requires the readers to gather facts and ideas of the writer and combine them with his or her personal experience and knowledge to be able to arrive at a logical conclusion. As Brown (2001) puts it, a text does not by itself carry meaning instead the readers are expected to bring information, knowledge, emotion experience, and culture (schemata) to the printed word. Reading skill is highly dependent on the efficient interaction between linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world. Corinthian 13 talks about

love. The details of this biblical passage are explicit, yet, require reflective thinking to be able to relate to various hidden meanings embedded in the multifarious definitions or conditions it contains about *love*.

Similarly, the clientele-respondents' poor performance in the evaluative or critical dimension may be explained by the fact that this dimension requires them to weigh judgments as warranted for by the situation in accordance to its advantages and disadvantages and to take it as acceptable or otherwise as called for by the social norms. Donaldo (2001) argued that critical knowledge is derived from one's knowledge about the world or experiences. In this study, the items provided in the assessment tool for this dimension compel the respondents for factual analysis as mechanism to create evaluative ideas. It was highly observed though that the clientele resorted to guessing in answering this phase of the assessment. This is so as they all considered the options given as best answer. Undoubtedly, this proved that they were inexperienced enough to fully comprehend the hidden meanings in the passage read.

Meanwhile, Martin & Cramond (1983) explained that creative reading requires the learners to thoroughly interact with the materials to deepen and enrich their comprehension of the text being read. Creative readers, they claimed, are also expected to be able to utilize acquired information in a new situation or environment. In addition, Mickelson & Guttman S.& C. (2018) argued that creative comprehension is the reader's response to the content of the text read; thereby, creating novel ideas from what was learned. Donaldo (2001), on the other hand, posited that this dimension requires the readers to relate the events and meanings learned in the text to his or her personal or virtual experiences. In this study, the clientele-respondent's poor performance in this dimension clearly suggest that they failed to relate or apply the many connotations pertinent to love as contained in the biblical passage and resorted instead to literal interpretation of its meaning. Their inappropriate background experience had misled them in giving answers which calls for an analysis of the statement between the lines.

5.2 ALS-A&E Clientele Study Skills Competencies

Table 2: *ALS-A&E Clientele's Level of Comprehension in Study Skills Competencies*

Study Skills	n	Mean	SD	Description
Outlining	15	1.80	0.43	Fair
Semantic Mapping	15	1.60	0.64	Fair
Thesis Statement	15	3.27	0.86	Good
Support Details	15	3.27	0.86	Good
Familiarizing Book Parts	15	4.07	0.60	Very Good

For a total Score of 5	Interpretation
4.51- 5.00	Excellent
3.51- 4.50	Very Good
2.51- 3.50	Good
1.51- 2.50	Fair
0.00- 1.50	Poor

Table 2 shows the results of the study skills competencies of the clientele-respondents. As reflected in the data contained in the table, the clientele-respondents have difficulty in skill pertinent to sentence outlining and semantic mapping. They, however, were very good as regards to knowing the different book parts as well as spotting thesis statement.

Outlining is a fundamental skill. Yet, this can be a difficult skill if the readers do not understand the purpose and the pattern of organization of ideas. In this study, the clientele-

respondents were asked to fill-in a skeletal frame of a sentence outline composed of five parts based on the essay of I.V. Mallari titled *Pliant Like the Bamboo*. Their scores show that most of them did not understand the content of the essay and failed to grasp relationships of ideas contained therein. Outlining is the last step of the prewriting stage in writing. An outline, paves the way for categorizing main points, organizing paragraphs to create meaning, and ensuring that each paragraph or idea can be developed. In addition, said article likewise claimed that an outline provides a map which give direction when writing say an essay or other forms of genres (Creating an Outline - Aims Community College, n.d.). Given these, it is then imperative that ALS clientele be well-versed in this skill as it aids them to become skillful writers.

Meanwhile, the result also proved that the clientele-respondents needs to harness their skill in semantic mapping. Evidently, the respondents failed to append the important support details to the main topic as asked for from the article *Religion of Our Ancestors*. The blank semantic maps provided to the respondents were barely answered. In a semantic map, concepts relationships are graphically or pictorially displayed to make it easy for the readers to spot important from less important concepts which makes it an important skill for comprehension. As such, it is then imperative that ALS clientele be skillful in this learning tool.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

This action research had uncovered the comprehension skill of the ALS-A&E clientele in terms of the four reading dimensions as well as their study skills competencies. Deliberate instruction is needed to augment their skill especially in the inferential, applicative, and creative dimensions of reading. Similarly, ALS implementers should as well augment their clientele's study skill particularly in outlining and semantic mapping. One of the several ways of doing this is by enhancing their session guide intended for this macro language skill. Enhancement, in this context, means contextualizing its content such as by using texts familiar to them and focusing on the skills they need mastery. In this way, their session guide or lesson blueprint it is tailored to the actual needs of the clientele. Additionally, the findings of this study further supports the claim of the ALS implementer in the identified research locale of the cognition concern as regards to the reading ability of their clientele.

6.2 Recommendations

With the findings of this study, it is recommended then that it is high time for the mobile teachers to adopt novel pedagogic styles befitting the clientele's instructional level, attuned to their learning styles and pace as well as contextualize their learning resources. A parallel study involving other district ALS program implementers and clientele and validating the suggested contextualized session guide are highly encouraged.

7. Acknowledgement

The researcher acknowledges his indebtedness to Mrs. Rebecca B. Acolos as well as to all the clientele-participants. Thank you very much for helping you fellow Barugun-on realized this academic endeavor. Kudos to you all.

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