

Analysis of the Role of Syntactic Complexity in Students' Reading Comprehension: A Teacher's Perspective

Ma. Leticia Jose C. Basilan^{1,2,3*}, Daniel Reds G. De Sagun^{3*}

¹DepEd Batangas Province, Batangas, Philippines

²Batangas State University, Batangas, Philippines

³Rizal College of Taal, Taal Batangas, Batangas, Philippines

**Corresponding authors:* Ma. Leticia Jose C. Basilan, maleticiajose.basilan@deped.gov.ph; Daniel Reds G. De Sagun, desagundaniel4@gmail.com

Copyright: © 2024 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: This study examines the role of the syntactic complexity of the text in the reading comprehension skills of students. Utilizing the qualitative method of research, this paper used structured interview questions as the main data-gathering instruments. English language teachers from Coral na Munti National High School were selected as the respondents of the study. Finding of the study suggests that the syntactic complexity of the text affects the reading comprehension of the students. Students found it challenging to understand the message that the author conveyed if he or she used a large number of phrases and clauses in one sentence. Furthermore, the complex sentence syntactic structure was deemed the most challenging for students to understand. To overcome said challenges in comprehending text, various reading intervention programs were utilized by teachers. These interventions include focused or targeted instruction and the implementation of the Project Dear, suggested by the Department of Education. These programs were proven to help students improve their comprehension as well as their knowledge in syntactical structure of sentences. This study underscores the importance of selecting appropriate reading materials and implementing suitable reading intervention programs to enhance students' comprehension skills.

Keywords: Reading comprehension; Syntactic complexity; Reading intervention program; Syntactic structure

Online publication: August 20, 2024

1. Introduction

Language and reading skills are the foundation for students' educational achievement and cognitive growth in every aspect of their academic life. Possessing proficiency in a language plays a vital role in a learner's communicative skills. Additionally, good reading skills are believed as one of the biggest factors that contribute to a learner's cognitive growth and development^[1]. Students with strong language skills flourish in all academic subjects because they are able to absorb things more easily and convey thoughts clearly. Deficits in language and reading skills, on the other hand, could impede learning, hinder academic progress, and contribute to

achievement gaps.

Reading, as one of the five macro-skills, plays a fundamental role in shaping students' minds, allowing them to unlock their imagination, improve their communication skills, convey information, and understand the world they live in ^[2]. Reading allows the readers to have the power to bring the characters that they have read into life with their imagination. At the same time, it also presents a platform for the readers to broaden their vocabulary by providing them with unfamiliar words. With the use of the newly gained vocabulary, students may improve their communication by conveying their thoughts with ease and confidence.

Developing reading skills depends on several linguistic concepts such as phoniness, morphology, semantics, and syntax. Among the following concepts, the level of comprehension of the students greatly relies on the level of syntactic complexity of the text. Research showed that a direct relationship between vocabulary and reading comprehension occurs because of the influence of word reading and syntax ^[3]. Additionally, the syntax serves as the guide on how sentences are joined to form meaning. As readers develop their ability to recognize and utilize syntax, they will be able to navigate texts more effectively and discover the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary with the use of contextual clues.

The syntactic complexity of the sentences constructed by the author plays one of the factors to consider in students' ability to comprehend the text. This study is conducted to identify how the syntactic complexity and structure affect the reading comprehension of the students. Furthermore, one of the study's objectives is to identify what syntactic structures students find most challenging to comprehend and at the same time discover different reading intervention programs that would help the students and teachers deal with the existing problem.

2. Research questions

This study aims to determine the role of syntactic complexity in the reading comprehension of students.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

- (1) How do teachers perceive the impact of syntactic complexity on their students' reading comprehension?
- (2) What specific syntactic structures do teachers find the most challenging for their students to comprehend upon observing them reading?
- (3) What intervention do teachers utilize for the students to overcome the challenges they encounter in comprehending the text?

3. Study significance

The researchers conducted the study to identify the impact of syntactic complexity on the reading comprehension of the students. More so, the result of this study will benefit the following stakeholders:

- (1) Teachers: The result of the study will be invaluable for the teachers in identifying how the complexity of the sentences affects the reading comprehension of the students. Understanding these dynamics can assist educators in recognizing the specific difficulties their students face when dealing with complex texts. Furthermore, these findings can be used to develop and implement tailored reading interventions, allowing teachers to better help students as they improve their comprehension skills.
- (2) Students: The study is found to be beneficial for students as it provides insights on how they might improve their reading comprehension. By understanding the influence of lexical and syntactic complexity, students can develop techniques for better understanding texts with high syntactic complexity. This understanding will allow them to approach difficult reading materials more effectively,

resulting in increased academic success.

- (3) Researchers: Researchers, particularly those who are also educators, will find these findings useful. The results can help our teachers in shaping new instructional strategies for enhancing the students' reading comprehension. Researchers can use these insights to build interventions and teaching approaches that target the specific challenges that students have while dealing with complicated texts.
- (4) Future researchers: The results of this study will serve as a valuable guide for future researchers interested in exploring similar topics. The detailed data and analysis offered can be used to plan future studies, allowing researchers to build on existing information and delve deeper into the relationship between text complexity and reading comprehension. This will contribute to the ongoing development of effective educational practices and interventions.

4. Scope and limitation

This study is mainly concerned with analyzing the role of syntactic complexity on the reading comprehension of the students. At the same time, it is conducted to identify the different reading interventions used by teachers to deal with difficulties encountered by students in comprehending texts with high syntactical complexity. To generate the findings, the researchers interviewed five English language teachers in Coral na Munti National High School who served as the respondents of the study. The data collected based on the interview were tallied, analyzed, and interpreted.

The scope of this study is specifically limited to English Language Teachers in Coral na Munti National High School in the school year 2023–2024. Consequently, the study does not include responses from teachers with different specializations, ensuring a focused examination of the issue within a particular educational context. Despite these limitations, the study aims to provide a thorough and detailed analysis of the subject matter.

5. Literature review

5.1. Role of syntactic complexity on students' reading comprehension

The syntactic complexity of the sentences plays a pivotal role in the readers' full understanding of the text. The result of the study conducted by Eslami ^[4] revealed that difficulties in comprehending the text may arise for students who can be considered with mid to low proficiency when it comes to their academic skills. He also reiterated that, for learners with high proficiency levels, the complexity of the sentences in the given text does not pose a hindrance for them to fully understand the meaning of the text and grasp the message the author wanted to convey. In addition, he also stated the importance of selecting the appropriate texts that would match the students' ability and comprehension level. With the effort of making sure that the complexity level of the text and the readers' comprehension level are matched, the success of deciphering the intended meaning of the author will be at hand.

Moreover, a study conducted by Ding ^[5] revealed that bilingual learners prefer to read a simpler and shorter sentence structure rather than a complex one, as it is for them to comprehend the meaning of those sentences. Although the reading speed of bilingual and monolingual learners does not show any significant difference in simpler passages, monolingual showed better reading speed and comprehension than complex ones. His study also mentioned that the cognitive ability and the vocabulary of the students play a vital role in transcribing what the author meant in his written text. Monolingual students with high cognitive ability presented a better performance in applying their reading knowledge in processing the text compared to bilingual students, who

on the other hand, performed less in response to text with a high level of syntactic complexity due to their first-language transfer.

Similarly, the result of the study of Karami and Salahshoor ^[6] revealed that the academic reading performance or the reading comprehension and the lexical richness of the readers are tools that can be considered valuable when it comes to processing and understanding text with complex syntactic structures. The researchers also discovered that the grammatical knowledge of the EAP learners plays an important role in measuring someone's ability to comprehend the text and his academic reading achievement, but not more important than his lexical richness and reading comprehension. Thus, it is significant for the learners to develop their understanding of the text and their lexical richness in order for them to produce and process text with a high level of syntactic structure.

In a study conducted by Arya *et al.* ^[7], they investigated the effects of syntactic and lexical complexity on third-grade students' comprehension of science texts. They designed 16 expository texts representing varying syntactic and lexical complexity levels across four science-related topics: Tree Frogs, Soil, Jelly Beans, and Toothpaste. External measures of reading achievement and prior vocabulary knowledge were also collected as control variables. The findings indicated that lexical complexity significantly impacted students' comprehension of two out of the four topics. However, comprehension performance was not influenced by the syntactic complexity of the texts, regardless of the topic. Additionally, no significant effects were observed for English language learners.

Furthermore, in a study conducted by De Avilla *et al.* ^[8], they investigated the effects of text simplification on the reading comprehension of students at the elementary level. It was revealed that the students who read a more simplified text showed better comprehension than those who did not. The 112 students were divided into two groups. The researchers ensured that the two groups had the same level of reading comprehension. The text was simplified through different processes that involved the separation of complex sentences, reorganization of the subject-verb order, and organization of the main clauses of the sentences. The findings of the study showed that students would benefit more in terms of understanding the text if the sentences were simplified.

According to the study conducted by Morvay ^[9], there is a relationship between the capacity to comprehend complex syntax and reading comprehension in a foreign language. Syntactic knowledge was found to be a statistically significant estimator of foreign language reading comprehension through power correlations and regression analysis. The study also revealed that reading comprehension in a foreign language is enhanced when one can manage complex syntactic patterns in that language.

5.2. Syntactical structure that students find most challenging to comprehend

According to Sedita ^[10], the full understanding of a literary text starts from comprehension at the sentence level. Sentences that contain a numerous number of ideas, and follow an unusual word order, usually present a challenge for the students to comprehend, especially to the learners whose English is considered as a second language but receive limited oral language exposure. With this, she reiterated that teaching students how they are going to efficiently process sentence structure is necessary for their overall comprehension. At the same time, the researcher also cited Scott's claim that effective readers must have basic knowledge about the composition of phrases, clauses, and even the parts of sentences.

In addition, Thanh and Ngoc ^[11] pointed out in their study the role of students' syntactic knowledge in grasping texts written in the English language with ambiguous structures. The study was conducted as an answer to the need to consider the knowledge of syntax in language for better comprehension. The result of the study revealed that Vietnamese linguistic students found it difficult to comprehend a text that uses a "transitive

and ditransitive” verb. Despite the said challenge, the learners recognized the importance of the application of their knowledge about a language syntax in analyzing and comprehending a text with ambiguous structure. Lastly, the teaching of grammar and reading skills with the incorporation of the application of syntax was seen to be necessary for the students to overcome the hurdle presented by syntactic structure ambiguity.

More so, Zipoli Jr. ^[12] conducted a study that deals with the development of students’ knowledge structure as he deemed it to be necessary for their reading comprehension. The result of his study explained that the implementation of reading programs that talk about different sentence structures can be beneficial not only for learners with high proficiency but more particularly with children with language impairments and learning disabilities. The research also unveiled the types of sentences that students find challenging to comprehend namely: (1) sentences that have passive verb construction, (2) temporal and causal conjunction in adverbial clauses, (3) relative clauses used at the center of sentences, and (4) sentences with three or more clauses.

Furthermore, the study carried out by Yu ^[13] investigated the role of structures of sentences in comprehending text and learning English. He claimed that the analysis of sentence structure plays a vital role in decoding the message that words want to convey. The findings of the study revealed that students found it difficult to comprehend sentences that were constructed with a lot of words, phrases, and clauses. Students become confused and find the said sentences ambiguous. The study also stated that students must improve their mastery of grammar and analysis of sentences, and continuously practice reading them to improve their reading comprehension skills and understand the text that they are reading with ease.

Moreover, the study conducted by Scott ^[14] focused on the role of syntactic complexity in the challenges encountered by learners in comprehending a text. The researchers divulged that there is a connection between the syntax used in a sentence and the ability of the readers to comprehend it. Sentences that are constructed with a high level of syntactic complexity can pose challenges, especially for struggling readers. Thus, the researcher highlighted the importance of choosing the appropriate reading materials for the readers. He also emphasized that the evaluation of sentences used in activities is a must.

Child and Knight ^[15] claimed that students find it challenging to comprehend the expository types of texts as these types of texts are constructed differently from narrative stories. Another text structure that poses difficulties for students is the cause-and-effect structure. The phrases and clauses that complete the cause-and-effect ideas were combined into other information making it more challenging for the students to comprehend the text. With the identified problems, the researchers reiterated the importance of teaching students different structures as these will guide them to identify what information they will get and in what part of the text they will locate it.

5.3. Reading interventions utilized by teachers for students to overcome difficulties they encountered in comprehending the text

Low reading comprehension skills usually stem from different social, psychological, and personal factors. A study conducted by Nilsson ^[16] showed that one of the major reasons why students usually struggle to comprehend the text is because of their low self-esteem and weak foundation of trust in themselves and their teachers. With this, the result of her study revealed that targeted instruction for those struggling students, accompanied by the establishment of trust and confidence between students and teachers is the perfect formula for the empowerment of students’ reading comprehension. She also added that making the students realize their potential and teaching them to take responsibility for their own learning will lead to the success of a targeted instruction intervention.

Furthermore, the implementation of Project DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) was deemed to be

effective not only in the development of reading comprehension of the students but also in increasing their reading habits in accordance with the study of Prasetyaningrum and Ruminar ^[17]. Their study revealed that although reading is considered a complex process, it is important for learners to read not only to comprehend the text but also to feel pleasure from reading. With the implementation of the said program in every school for thirty minutes a day, the burden of reading to the students will be lessened.

Similarly, Dapadap ^[18] stated that the implementation of Project DEARS or Drop Everything and Read and Share is effective not only in developing the reading comprehension of the students but also in their interest in reading, boosting their self-confidence and gaining lessons in life. Students, who acted as the respondents of the study, that belonged to the Frustration level, showed improvement based on the reflections that they presented after the implementation of the said program. Thus, the researcher claimed that Project Dear is an effective intervention program for improving the students' overall understanding of the text.

In addition, Adler ^[19] stated that there are various reading interventions that can be done by both teachers and students to comprehend a text. The said intervention includes monitoring students' comprehension. With this, the teachers will be able to identify what the students actually understood in the text and what parts they did not. Another one is listing down questions that the students must answer at the end of the reading activity. These questions will serve as a guide for the students to identify the things that they should know and treat as important ones. Lastly, is the utilization of different graphic and semantic organizers. These comprehension tools may help the students put their focus on the important concepts and ideas in the text that they have read.

Similarly, the result of the study conducted by Lan Phuong ^[20] revealed that teachers must deliver instructions to the students before asking them to read a literary text. It was also stated in the findings of her study that teachers may utilize different reading intervention strategies to help their students comprehend the message of the text. These intervention programs include asking questions to students about their background knowledge of the topic, predicting what would happen next in the story being read, retelling the entire story, and picturing what they have just read. Additionally, the importance of feedback was also highlighted as feedback about the reading performance of the students provides an ample number of ideas and tactics that they may apply to understand the text better.

Moreover, the study conducted by Dolba *et al.* ^[21] investigated the reading strategies utilized by teachers in teaching their students to read with comprehension. The result of the study revealed that teachers may teach their students different ways on how are they going to fully grasp the idea of the written text and these include finding the meaning of a word based on the context that is used, understanding the flow and sequence of events, and making inferences based on the information that were gathered. Their study also revealed that the time allocated for reading the material and answering the guided questions plays a significant role in readers' comprehension of the text.

A study carried out by Bailon *et al.* ^[22] emphasized the need to devise effective techniques for struggling readers. Their research focused on reading intervention resources to assist teachers and students in remedial programs. Furthermore, the strategic intervention reading materials used in remedial programs were made up of four components: learning content, a learning task guide, an evaluation guide, and an improvement guide. It was apparent that there was a significant improvement from the pre-test results, which indicated poor student performance, to the post-test findings, which suggested that the participants' reading skills had improved to an independent level as a result of the remedial program.

6. Research design

This study used a qualitative approach, specifically a descriptive research methodology. The fundamental goal of this strategy is to accurately explain or describe a population, situation, or phenomenon in detail. By using this methodology, the researchers wanted to gain a thorough knowledge of the function of syntactic complexity in students' reading comprehension. The descriptive research approach is ideal for this study because it provides for a thorough investigation of the individual elements influencing reading comprehension. Researchers can find trends and correlations between grammatical complexity and students' understanding of issues by providing extensive descriptions and analysis.

This method allows the researchers to collect detailed, qualitative data from their interviews with English language teachers at Coral na Munti National High School. These interviews will provide useful insights into the challenges and strategies for reading comprehension in the setting of syntactically complicated texts. By focusing on descriptive research, the study hopes to provide a nuanced and extensive description of how syntactic complexity affects students' reading skills. This, in turn, will guide the development of tailored interventions and instructional strategies to help students overcome these obstacles. The descriptive aspect of the research ensures that the findings are based on real-world experiences and observations, making them extremely relevant to educational practitioners and scholars alike.

6.1. Data collection

The perspective of teachers on the role of syntactic complexity in the reading comprehension of the students was gathered through the data-gathering instrument in the form of a structured interview. With the permission granted by the respondents, the researchers sent the Google Form link that contains the interview questions. To ensure that the respondents could answer the questions clearly, the researchers provided clear and concise directions. In addition, the answers of the respondents and their personal information were treated with utmost confidentiality and anonymity. Upon collecting the responses, the data were then analyzed and interpreted.

6.2. Data analysis

The researcher used thematic analysis to interpret data because it deals with reading through a data set that includes transcripts from an interview to identify common themes and patterns through ideas and topics^[23]. The researchers believed that this method was suitable for the ongoing study, as the researchers adopted interviews derived electronically through Google Forms as the main data-gathering instrument. The respondents were given ample time to answer the questionnaires to generate more accurate and truthful responses. The researchers completely retrieved the responses. After retrieving the respondents' answers, it was carefully read, interpreted, and compiled based on their themes.

7. Discussion

The following significant findings were revealed in the study.

7.1. Teachers' perception of the impact of syntactic complexity on their students' reading comprehension

The majority of the respondents answered that the length of the sentence affects the students' understanding of the text. The respondents even presented different examples to prove their answers.

“Consider a scenario in a history textbook where a complex historical event is described in long, convoluted sentences with multiple clauses. This might confuse students still developing their reading comprehension skills or unfamiliar with the historical context. In contrast, breaking down the information into

shorter, more digestible sentences with clear transitions can enhance understanding by allowing students to focus on one idea at a time and connect it logically to the next.”—English Language Teacher

Additionally, another English teacher illustrated an example. The respondent used the word “digital literacy.” The English teacher then highlighted the critical difference between using a longer sentence and a shorter one in explaining its meaning. The teacher emphasized that shorter sentences have lower syntactic complexity, making it easier for the students to understand the meaning of digital literacy. One of the respondents expounded that “the length of a sentence can affect students’ understanding, as longer sentences with complex structures may overwhelm them, leading to confusion. For instance, a student might struggle to grasp the main idea in a lengthy, multi-clause sentence compared to a clear, concise one.”

In connection with the preceding responses, another English teacher supported the idea that longer sentences that are constructed with high syntactic complexity may create ambiguity and will eventually lead to confusion. However, a respondent pointed out that shorter sentences may provide insufficient information.

On the contrary, one respondent answered that sentence length is not an issue: “As long as it has complete parts, a complete thought, and every word in its right place, it will be easy to understand,” the respondent added.

Specifically, in an English class context, the length of sentences can significantly impact students’ ability to understand a text. For instance, the respondent considered a passage from a classic novel with long, intricate sentences that include complex syntax and literary devices. The respondent expounded, “The lengthy and descriptive sentence might pose challenges for students who are not yet proficient in parsing complex sentence structures or who struggle with vocabulary comprehension. The abundance of descriptive elements and subordinate clauses can overwhelm readers, making it difficult for them to grasp the main idea or follow the narrative flow.” This was supported by another respondent who clearly stated that the length of sentences can indeed affect students’ understanding of the text: “If a learner reads a passage in her/his book and the sentences in this passage are very long he/she might struggle to follow the sequence of ideas.” The respondent elucidated that longer sentences make it more difficult for the learners to comprehend especially if they are complex or filled with multiple ideas.

Vocabulary is one of the main factors affecting the students’ reading comprehension. Teachers were also asked about how they think vocabulary affects their learners’ reading comprehension. All respondents agreed that vocabulary skills significantly affect reading comprehension. They all seemed to agree that pupils who have a large vocabulary have an easier time understanding and interpreting text. Vocabulary can impede comprehension, as students may struggle to understand key terms. A respondent even took the time to clarify the response: “Vocabulary skills significantly affect students’ reading comprehension. Students with a strong vocabulary can understand and interpret text more easily, as they can quickly grasp the meaning of words and phrases. Conversely, limited vocabulary can impede comprehension, as students may struggle to understand key terms, leading to confusion and misinterpretation of the text. For example, a student reading a science article with many unfamiliar terms may find it difficult to follow the content and concepts, hindering overall understanding.”

Another respondent explained when asked about how vocabulary skills affect the reading comprehension of the students, the respondent said that “If the learners are not able to unlock difficulties in some unfamiliar words, this means something is missing and may affect the reading process.” Then the respondent conceptualized that defining and increasing vocabulary skills are essential among the learners.

These results are consistent with the findings of the study conducted by Eslami ^[4], which stated that syntactic complexity may affect the reading comprehension of students, especially those who have low

proficiency in the language. Similarly, Ding ^[5] in his study also revealed that the cognitive ability and the vocabulary of the readers play a vital role in students' ability to comprehend and transcribe the message that the author wanted to convey.

7.2. Specific syntactic structures that teachers find most challenging for their students to comprehend upon observing them reading

The following specific syntactic structures were found by the teachers to be the most challenging for their students to understand. Based on the data gathered, these were encountered by them to a different degree of extent.

- (1) Simple sentence: Sentences containing one independent clause.
- (2) Compound sentences: Sentences with at least two independent clauses combined by conjunction, semi-colon, or comma.
- (3) Complex sentences: Sentences with one independent clause and one subordinate clause.
- (4) Compound-complex: Sentences having two or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses.

The majority of the English language teachers found complex sentences to be the most challenging syntactic structures for the students to comprehend. This phenomenon happened because the students found a hard time comprehending the meaning of the sentences that contained a large number of phrases and clauses. This result is in line with the study of Thanh and Ngoc ^[11], which stated that sentences with syntactic ambiguity may pose some challenges to students in fully understanding the meaning of the text. In addition, Zipoli Jr. ^[12] revealed in his study that one of the main factors that impede students' full comprehension of the text is the use of multiple clauses and phrases in a sentence.

7.3. Interventions utilized by teachers to overcome students' difficulties in comprehending the text

The English language teachers were also interviewed about the interventions they implemented once they identified the students' difficulties in reading.

An English teacher stated that "reading remediation is applied to weak and non-reader learners. Provision of reading materials and reading strategies are both employed." This implies that there is a need to conduct regular assessments of reading comprehension, which was supported by another English teacher.

"Through these assessments, I can identify several students who consistently struggle with understanding and interpreting texts. These students often demonstrate limited vocabulary, difficulty with decoding words, and challenges in making inferences from the text."—English Language Teacher

Furthermore, the responses mentioned above were also supported by another English teacher, who noted that remedial classes are implemented once reading difficulties are identified. "For instance, if a student consistently struggles with understanding grade-level texts, they may be placed in a remedial reading class where targeted instruction and strategies are provided to improve their reading skills and comprehension. This focused support helps address specific challenges and promotes better academic progress." With this, the respondents believe that remedial reading classes are designed to help students who are struggling with their reading skills. This program's specific goal was to help students to improve their reading fluency and comprehension.

More so, another intervention done by English Language Teachers is teaching students to find contextual clues for them to understand the meaning of the text. A respondent elucidated, "Teaching students to find contextual clues is essential for understanding the text. For example, when encountering an unfamiliar word in a story, students are guided to look at surrounding sentences or phrases to infer its meaning, enhancing their

comprehension and vocabulary skills.” This was strongly supported by another teacher, who said that contextual clues entail augmentation of understanding the text with clarity and comprehension. Another respondent stated that with the use of contextual clues, students can identify the meaning of unfamiliar words even without using dictionaries. This answer only proves that context clues are important to understanding the meaning of unknown words in a missing text. It helps the reader improve their reading comprehension skills.

In line with the Department of Education’s (DepEd) literacy program, teachers were also interviewed about their implementation and participation in Project DEAR (Drop Everything and Read). The majority of the teachers stated that they were already implementing it and found it to be useful in developing the students’ reading comprehension.

“DepEd’s DEAR project helps learners to focus on their reading skills, reading intervention if something is lacking or there is a need to improve. Meanwhile, reading enrichment is already proficient and well comprehended,” a respondent answered. This simply means that the DepEd’s DEAR project not only improves the literacy rates and comprehension skills among the students but also enhances the students’ concentration and critical thinking skills.

A respondent even answered that DEAR as a project inculcated among the students the value of reading. Through this, from the respondent’s point of view, we are shaping students who are holistically developed, ever-curious, informed, and ready to navigate the highly changing demands of society

The preceding results are in accordance with the result of the study conducted by Nilsson ^[16] which stated that targeted instruction could be used to improve the comprehension skills of students who find difficulties in understanding the text’s messages. This targeted discussion may also foster camaraderie and create an environment that builds trust among students and teachers. Moreover, Dapadap ^[18] divulged that student who underwent Project DEAR showed improvements in their reading habits and comprehension.

8. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

- (1) The syntactical complexity of a sentence plays a pivotal role in students’ reading comprehension. At the same time, the level of vocabulary of the students should also be considered by teachers in choosing a reading material.
- (2) Sentences containing multiple phrases and clauses are considered the most challenging for students to understand. Students find it challenging for them to grasp multiple ideas at the same time in one sentence.
- (3) Reading intervention programs such as targeted instruction and utilization of Project DEAR may help the students improve their reading habits and comprehension skills. Together with teaching contextual clues, these interventions may be utilized by teachers to help their students overcome the difficulties they encounter in comprehending sentences with a high level of syntactical complexity.

9. Recommendations

Based on the highlights of the findings and the conclusion drawn, the following recommendations were suggested:

- (1) The level of syntactical complexity of the reading material and reading comprehension skills of the students should be considered by teachers.
- (2) Students must broaden their vocabulary through reading various literary text with the same or one-step

higher level of complexity.

- (3) Teachers must differentiate reading interventions to help the students improve their reading comprehension skills.

Acknowledgments

The researchers wish to express their sincere gratitude to Dr. Ma. Leticia Jose Cabaña-Basilan, for her unwavering support and guidance throughout the entire study. Without her supervision, the success of this study would not have been possible; to Secondary Teachers of Coral na Munti National High School, who served as the respondents of this study and shared their experiences and observations in relation to the research topic.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Laličić A, Dubravac V, 2021, The Role of Reading in English Language Classrooms. *MAP Social Sciences*, 1(1): 23–36.
- [2] Keyser A, 2021, Why is Reading Important? viewed July 6, 2024, <https://www.worksheetcloud.com/blog/why-is-reading-important/>
- [3] Morenno-Perez F, Rodriguez-Ortiz I, Saldaña D, et al., 2021, The Influence of Syntactic Knowledge on Reading Comprehension Varies as Function of Oral Vocabulary in Spanish-speaking Children. *Journal of Research in Reading*, (44): 695–714.
- [4] Eslami H, 2014, The Effect of Syntactic Simplicity and Complexity on the Readability of the Text. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 5(5): 1185–1191.
- [5] Ding G, 2022, Syntactic Complexity in Reading Comprehension: An Eye-Tracking Study of Text Processing Among Bilinguals and Monolinguals, dissertation, Utah State University.
- [6] Karami M, Salahshoor F, 2014, The Relative Significance of Lexical Richness and Syntactic Complexity as Predictors of Academic Reading Performance. *International Journal of Research Studies in Language Learning*, 3(2): 17–28.
- [7] Arya DJ, Hiebert EH, Pearson PD, 2017, The Effects of Syntactic and Lexical Complexity on the Comprehension of Elementary Science Texts. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 4(1): 107–125.
- [8] De Avilla CRB, De Souza Batista Kida A, Dos Santos GL, et al., 2019, Effects of Syntactic Simplification on Reading Comprehension of Elementary Students. *Audiology Communication Research*, (24): e1985.
- [9] Morvay G, 2012, The Relationship Between Syntactic Knowledge and Reading Comprehension in EFL Learners. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 2(3): 415–438.
- [10] Sedita J, 2024, Syntactic Awareness: Teaching Sentence Structure (Part 1), viewed July 6, 2024, <https://keystoliteracy.com/blog/syntactic-awareness-teaching-sentence-structure-part-1/>
- [11] Thanh MT, Ngoc NLB, 2023, Linguistics Students' Perspective on the Role of the Syntactic Knowledge in Decoding English Ambiguous Structures, dissertation, Vietnam National University.
- [12] Zipoli RP, 2017, Unraveling Difficult Sentences: Strategies to Support Reading Comprehension. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 52(4): 218–227.
- [13] Yu X, 2022, A Study on the Role of Sentence Structure Analysis in English Learning. *Open Access Library Journal*, (8):

e7859.

- [14] Scott CM, 2020, A Case for the Sentence in Reading Comprehension. *Lang Speech Hear Serv Sch*, 40(2): 184–191.
- [15] Child AR, Knight JA, 2021, Teaching Students to Comprehend Cause and Effect Text Structure. *Michigan Reading Journal*, 53(3): 6.
- [16] Nilsson R, 2021, Effective Interventions to Support Struggling Readers in Upper Elementary Grades, Master's thesis, St. Catherine University.
- [17] Prasetyanungrum DI, Ruminar H, 2020, Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) Activity as a Means of Increasing Students' Reading Habits. *Journal of English Teaching Adi Buana*, 5(2): 153–162.
- [18] Dapadap M, 2022, Dears for My Dear Students' Reading Comprehension. *Web of Semantic: Universal Journal on Innovative Education*, 1(1): 23–28.
- [19] Adler CR, 2024, Seven Strategies to Teach Students Text Comprehension. *Reading Rockets*, viewed July 6, 2024, <https://www.readingrockets.org/topics/comprehension/articles/seven-strategies-teach-students-text-comprehension>
- [20] Lan Phuong NT, 2022, Teachers' Strategies in Teaching Reading Comprehension. *International Journal of Language Instruction*, 1(1): 19–28.
- [21] Dolba S, Gula LP, Nuñez J, 2022, The Reading Teachers: Reading Strategies Employed in Teaching Reading in Grade School. *Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 2(2): 62–74.
- [22] Bailon LL, Pocaan JM, Pocaan JPT, 2022, Strategic Reading Intervention for Left-Behind Learners in the Philippines. *LLT Journal: A Journal on Language and Language Teaching*, 25(2).
- [23] Caulfield J, 2019, How to Do Thematic Analysis: Step-by-Step Guide and Examples, viewed July 6, 2024, <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/thematic-analysis/>

Publisher's note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.