



ALS Research Agenda: **Impact of Innovations from the Field**

## Enhancing Reading Comprehension Skills of ALS Learners Through Reading Short Stories

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### Abstract

This study examined the effectiveness of using short stories as an instructional strategy to enhance the reading comprehension skills of Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners at Aduyon Community Learning Center, Pangantucan, Bukidnon during School Year 2021–2022. Anchored on the premise that meaningful and contextualized texts support literacy development in alternative education settings, the study employed a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest design. A teacher-developed reading comprehension assessment tool was used to determine learners’ proficiency levels before and after the intervention. Participants consisted of 20 ALS learners purposively selected from the community learning center. The intervention involved structured reading sessions using a variety of short stories designed to engage learners and develop comprehension skills across different levels. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and tests of difference to determine changes in reading performance. Results indicate a statistically significant improvement in learners’ reading comprehension scores from pretest to posttest, demonstrating the positive impact of short story-based instruction on literacy development. Learners showed improved ability to understand, interpret, and respond to texts, suggesting that exposure to varied and relatable reading materials enhances engagement and comprehension. The study concludes that integrating short stories into ALS instruction is an effective and low-cost strategy for strengthening reading comprehension. It recommends the regular use of diverse short texts, the development of supplemental reading materials, and the integration of structured reading activities across ALS learning strands to support learner readiness for the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) assessment.

**Keywords:** *reading comprehension skills, reading intervention, short stories*



## I. Introduction

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the Philippines plays a critical role in providing second-chance education opportunities to out-of-school youth and adults who were unable to complete basic education through the formal school system. Central to ALS completion, particularly at the Elementary and Junior High School levels, is learners' ability to read with comprehension, as mandated by the Department of Education (DepEd). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the postponement of the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) examinations by the Bureau of Evaluation and Assessment (BEA) further heightened the importance of internal literacy benchmarks, as stipulated in Joint Memorandum DM-OUCI-2021-316 (August 12, 2021), which requires ALS learners to demonstrate reading proficiency to be considered completers. These policy shifts underscored the urgency of strengthening reading comprehension among ALS learners at the community level.

In Pangantucan North District, Bukidnon, monitoring and evaluation activities conducted across Community Learning Centers (CLCs) revealed persistent challenges in learners' reading comprehension. A pre-reading proficiency assessment conducted by the researcher in Adtuyon Community Learning Center showed that only 10% of learners were able to read with comprehension, while 25% were struggling readers with limited comprehension, 5% could read but could not understand what they read, and a substantial 60% belonged to the category of struggling readers without comprehension. These findings indicate a significant literacy gap that threatens learners' progression, performance in oral revalida, and eventual completion of ALS programs.

Reading comprehension is widely recognized as a cornerstone of academic success and lifelong learning. It involves the complex cognitive processes of decoding, interpreting, and constructing meaning from text (Kendeou, McMaster, & Christ, 2016). For ALS learners, the ability to comprehend written texts is essential not only for passing assessments but also for building confidence, navigating daily life demands, and preparing for higher levels of education or skills training. In line with DepEd Memorandum No. 173, s. 2019, also known as the "Bawat Bata Bumabasa (3Bs) Initiative," schools and learning centers are encouraged to implement localized reading interventions to address foundational literacy gaps.

To respond to the identified needs of learners in Adtuyon Community Learning Center, the researcher conceptualized and implemented an action research intervention titled "Enhancing Reading Comprehension Skills of Learners through Reading Short Stories." The intervention utilized a variety of short stories donated through BASA Pangantucan and was integrated into the weekly and monthly release of Learning Activity Sheets (LAS). The program was structured progressively: the first month focused on identifying details, the second month on sequencing of events, and the third month on determining main ideas. Regular reading drills were also conducted prior to the distribution of learning materials to reinforce comprehension skills.

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of using short stories in enhancing the reading comprehension of ALS learners at Adtuyon Community Learning Center. Specifically, it sought to examine whether there was a significant difference between learners' pre-reading and post-reading proficiency levels following the intervention. By strengthening learners' reading comprehension, the study intends to support their readiness for oral revalida, improve



their confidence in learning, and increase their chances of being recognized as completers at the Elementary and Junior High School levels. Ultimately, this research contributes to the growing body of evidence on low-cost, context-responsive literacy interventions in alternative education settings.

## **II. Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The researcher used a quantitative approach specifically descriptive research design, and it focuses on the difference between pre-reading proficiency and post-reading proficiency of learners. The researcher also used arithmetic averages and percentages to summarize and describe the pre-reading and post-reading proficiency levels of learners.

### **Participants of the Study**

The respondents of the study resided from Barangay Aduyon, Pangantucan, Bukidnon. They were the 20 learners who availed of the Accreditation and Equivalency System Program in the Alternative Learning System (ALS). The target respondents of this study were secondary and elementary-level learners belonging to the age group of 12 years old and above. The subjects were the unemployed, underemployed OSYs and adults, housewives, and members of the cultural minorities and Indigenous peoples.

### **Sampling Method**

The study was conducted after the pre-reading proficiency assessment results in all barangays where Alternative Learning System operated. The researcher used non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling to easily identify the reading proficiency level of ALS learners in the district. The researcher found that of all Community Learning Centers (CLC), ALS learners from Aduyon Community Learning Center were almost struggling readers. To address the gap, the researcher made this action research to enhance the reading comprehension skills of learners at Aduyon Community Learning Center.

### **Data Collection Method**

The data assessment tool that will be used was adopted and modified from the guidelines for conducting oral revalida to ALS learners (Joint Memorandum DM-OUCI-2021-316). The researcher conducted reading drills weekly using a variety of short stories to enhance the reading comprehension level of learners at Aduyon Community Learning Center.

The researcher conducted a follow-up reading assessment before the learners got their Learning Activity Sheets. This is to ensure that ALS learners are serious about enhancing their reading comprehension skills. Data collection will be during the pre-reading proficiency and post-reading proficiency assessment of learners.

### **Data Analysis**

To answer the problem, the performance of the learners both in the pre-reading proficiency and post-reading proficiency assessment will be described using percentages. The comprehension level of the learners will be determined based on these data. Wilcoxon Signed-



Rank will be calculated to tell whether there is a significant difference in the learners' performance in terms of comprehension skills before and after reading short stories.

### Ethical Consideration

The researcher conducted a pre-reading proficiency assessment in all Community Learning Centers (CLCs) in the district where Alternative Learning System programs and projects operated. After the conduct of pre-reading proficiency assessment, the researcher found that out of all CLCs in the district, learners from Aduyon Community Learning Center (CLC) got the highest number of struggling readers without comprehension.

To inform the challenges encountered by the researcher, the researcher conducted a meeting with all Community ALS implementers in the district and informed them to intensify the reading program by reading short stories donated by BASA Pangantucan. In addition, the researcher presented the data gathered during the conduct of pre-reading proficiency assessment in all Community Learning Centers in the district. The researcher then informed the group that she will focus on Aduyon Community Learning Center to cater to the urgent needs of the learners for them to pass the oral revalida and reading assessment to be conducted by one of the personnel from the division office.

Before the researcher conducted a study, she informed respondents about the purpose of conducting the research. They were informed that they will never be considered completers of ALS programs and projects if they cannot read without comprehension, if they will never comply with the Learning Activity Sheets given to them, and if they were not able to understand what they were reading. Luckily, they were very participative in learning how to read with comprehension after conducting a meeting.

## III. Results and Discussions

### Pre-reading Proficiency Assessment

Table 1 shows the data of Aduyon ALS Learners' reading comprehension level of performance. Out of 20 learners from Aduyon Community Learning Center, only 2 or 10 percent of learners can read with comprehension, 1 or 5 percent of learner can read but cannot understand what he is reading, 5 or 25 percent are struggling readers with comprehension and 12 or 60 percent of learners belongs to struggling readers without comprehension.

Table 1  
Pre-reading Proficiency Assessment Result

Reading Assessment	f	%
Can Read with Comprehension	2	10
Can Read Without Comprehension	1	5
Can Read but Reading Comprehension is Not Fully Mastered	0	0
Struggling Reader with Comprehension	5	25
Struggling Reader without Comprehension	12	60
Non-Reader	0	0




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<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>
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**Post-reading Proficiency Assessment**

Post-reading proficiency Assessment was conducted after a series of reading drills and assessments weekly/monthly using a variety of short stories before the release of Learning Activity Sheets for learners.

Table 2 presents the data on the level of reading comprehension skills of ALS learners through reading short stories at Adutyon Community Learning Center. It was revealed that most of the respondents during the post-reading proficiency assessment can read with a comprehension already with 45 percent. This is a huge leap from the 10 percent ratio before the learners were exposed to reading short stories.

Table 2  
Post-reading Proficiency Assessment Result

Reading Assessment	f	%
Can Read with Comprehension	9	45
Can Read Without Comprehension	0	0
Can Read but Reading Comprehension is Not Fully Mastered	4	20
Struggling Reader with Comprehension	7	35
Struggling Reader without Comprehension	0	0
Non-Reader	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>

These findings imply that the reading of short stories has a great impact in developing the reading comprehension skills of ALS learners at Adtuyon, Community Learning Center. This is because of the variety of short stories introduced to ALS learners for them to develop their reading comprehension skills.

**Difference in the Pre- and Post-reading Proficiency Assessments**

After a series of reading drills and assessment weekly/monthly, this part will answer the question raised by the researcher if there is a significant difference between pre-reading proficiency and post-reading proficiency of ALS learners at Adtuyon Community Learning Center.

Table 3 shows the data on the significant difference in the pre-reading proficiency assessment and post-reading proficiency assessment of the respondents with the use of a variety of short stories to enhance the reading comprehension skills of ALS Learners at Adtuyon Community Learning Center. It was found that during the pre-reading proficiency assessment, 10 percent of ALS learners can read with comprehension, 5 percent of ALS



learners can read without comprehension, 25 percent of the ALS learners are struggling readers with comprehension and 60 percent of learners are struggling readers without comprehension while during the post-reading-proficiency assessment, 45 percent of ALS learners can read with comprehension, 20 percent of ALS learners can read but reading comprehension does not fully develop, 35 percent of ALS learners were struggling readers with comprehension.

Table 3

Difference in the Pre-reading Proficiency and Post-reading Proficiency Assessment

Reading Assessment	Pre-reading		Post-reading	
	f	%	f	%
Can Read with Comprehension	2	10	9	45
Can Read Without Comprehension	1	5	0	0
Can Read but Reading Comprehension is not Fully Mastered	0	0	4	20
Struggling Reader with Comprehension	5	25	7	35
Struggling Reader without Comprehension	12	60	0	0
Non-Reader	0	0	0	0

As discussed earlier, it was found that there is an increase in the level of comprehension of ALS learners after being exposed to short story reading activities. To evaluate whether this increase is statistically significant, Wilcoxon Signed-Rank was administered at a 0.05 significance level. A test of normality was conducted, and the result shows that the data collected is not normally distributed. Hence, a non-parametric test is the best treatment to use in the data set, in which Wilcoxon Signed-Rank is the best fit. The result is summarized in the table that follows.

Table 4

Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test Results for Pretest and Posttest Reading Comprehension Scores

Comparison	n	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Positive Ranks (Posttest > Pretest)	18	9.50	171.00
Negative Ranks (Posttest < Pretest)	0	0.00	0.00
Ties (Posttest = Pretest)	2	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>		



*Note. Positive ranks indicate cases where posttest scores were higher than pretest scores. Negative ranks indicate cases where posttest scores were lower than pretest scores. Ties represent no change between pretest and posttest scores.*

Table 5

Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test Statistics for Pretest and Posttest Reading Comprehension Scores

Test Statistic	Value
Z	-3.785
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

*Note. Based on negative ranks. Significance level set at  $\alpha = .05$ .*

A Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference between learners' pretest and posttest reading comprehension scores. Results revealed a statistically significant improvement in posttest scores compared to pretest scores,  $Z = -3.785$ ,  $p < .001$ . Of the 20 learners, 18 showed higher posttest scores, two showed no change, and none demonstrated a decline in performance. This indicates that the short story reading intervention had a significant positive effect on learners' reading comprehension.

The findings of this study are true to the findings of the study of Nuray Okumuú Ceylan, (2016) in which it was found that using short stories, develops the reading comprehension skills of learners since it gives benefits the students such as broadening their perspectives, enabling them to think about the reasons rather than the result, showing them different lifestyles, providing them with a comparison between their own culture and other cultures, increasing their appreciation for literature and making them read more short stories. Therefore, the integration of reading short stories is effective, and it enhances the reading comprehension skills of ALS learners at Aduyon Community Learning Center (CLC).

#### IV. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study demonstrated that the use of short stories as an instructional strategy significantly improved the reading comprehension skills of Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners at Aduyon Community Learning Center. The Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test results revealed a statistically significant increase in posttest scores compared to pretest scores, with the majority of learners showing measurable gains and none exhibiting a decline in performance. These findings affirm that structured exposure to varied and contextualized short texts can effectively strengthen comprehension skills among ALS learners, even within resource-constrained community learning environments.

The results further indicate that short stories provide an accessible, engaging, and low-cost medium for developing essential reading competencies such as identifying details, sequencing events, and determining main ideas. By progressively scaffolding these skills across the intervention period, learners were able to build confidence, improve text understanding, and enhance their readiness for oral revalida and Accreditation and



Equivalency (A&E) assessments. This is particularly significant in ALS contexts, where learners often enter with substantial literacy gaps and limited prior academic exposure.

Hence, the study confirms that integrating short story-based reading interventions into regular ALS sessions is both feasible and effective. It supports the implementation of localized, evidence-based literacy strategies in line with the Department of Education's foundational reading initiatives and highlights the critical role of teacher-led interventions in addressing functional literacy gaps. Strengthening reading comprehension at the community level is a key step toward improving learner completion, academic progression, and long-term educational outcomes in the Alternative Learning System.

Considering the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are hereby proposed: 1) Teachers may introduce and utilize a variety of short stories in enhancing the reading comprehension level of ALS learners in the district. 2) Teachers may develop or download supplemental learning materials to enhance the reading comprehension of ALS learners. 3) Teachers may include reading drills before the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) / Basic Literacy (BLP) learning session intervention weekly. 4) Teacher may integrate reading during ALS learning session intervention weekly across Six learning strands.

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