

Thematic Directed Reading Lessons and Listening Comprehension among Filipino Struggling Readers in a Community-based Program

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Thematic directed reading lessons promote connected learning and student engagement. In the local context, there remains a gap in the literature on how this type of lessons can be used in improving listening comprehension skills. Thus, this exploratory multiple-case study seeks to describe the use of thematic directed reading lessons in improving struggling readers' listening comprehension skills. Four elementary students, who read below grade-level expectations, participated in the five sessions conducted in a community-based literacy center. Researcher-constructed and expert-validated thematic directed reading lesson plans and listening comprehension tests in Filipino were used. The results of the tests were examined per case. As predicted, listening comprehension skills improved after the lessons. In summary, the scores of all participants in the post-test and delayed post-test were higher than their pretest scores. Post-test gains in noting details were seen in the scores of all participants, whereas an increase in scores in sequencing events, inferring character feelings, and connecting story details to one's life was not consistently observed. This suggests that thematic directed reading lessons can be a viable option in helping children improve in listening comprehension, although this is consistently shown only in the skill of noting details.

Keywords: thematic, directed reading lesson, listening comprehension, struggling readers, Filipino readers, community-based program

Introduction

Background

"To learn to read is to light a fire; every syllable that is spelled out is a spark," the writer Victor Hugo once said. This resonates with the idea that learning to read is essential in the holistic development of children because it does not merely enable them to decipher words, but more importantly, it endows them with the ability to direct their own learning journey (International Literacy Association, 2019). However, some children face difficulties in acquiring fundamental literacy skills and are in need of additional support. Thus, reading interventions remain an integral part of reading research because of the necessity to help struggling readers overcome difficulties and perform with abilities expected of them. Based on the dismal Philippine performance in the 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) for 15-year-olds (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2019) and the 2019 South East Asia-Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) for 5th graders (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) & Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization [SEAMEO], 2020), Filipino learners are not reading at levels expected of them. Their scores in these high-stakes international tests show that most of them struggle with reading and are in need of effective intervention.

For early grades students, an important component of reading intervention is listening comprehension since it is considered one of the factors that predict reading comprehension (Foorman et al., 2015). The simple view of reading (SVR) asserts that there are only two components of reading, decoding and linguistic comprehension; and while these are both necessary for reading comprehension, they are not sufficient (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoover & Gough, 1990). Linguistic comprehension is also referred to as listening comprehension (Hogan et al., 2014). In the last few decades, interventions focused on decoding (see Berninger & Wolf, 2009; Cook et al., 2014; Shaywitz, 2005). However, evidence shows that listening comprehension is a major factor in the

development of reading comprehension even for students in the elementary level (Hogan et al., 2014). Listening comprehension can explain as much as 40% of the variance in reading comprehension (Wolf et al., 2019). Sadly, there is an increase in the number of students who do not acquire sufficient reading comprehension skills not primarily due to inadequate decoding ability but because of poor linguistic or listening comprehension skills (Hogan et al., 2014). These students understand less of what they hear and have oral language weaknesses (Hulme & Snowling, 2011). In view of this and with the aim of effectively addressing reading comprehension difficulties, educators should consider teaching oral language comprehension first. This entails focusing also on listening comprehension (Clarke et al., 2010).

In recent years, research has been conducted on listening comprehension both in first language and second language contexts. Vocabulary plays an important role in first language (L1) (Babayigit, 2014) and second language (L2) reading comprehension (Babayigit, 2014; Vafae & Suzuki, 2020). Interventions on listening comprehension which provide repeated opportunities to use strategies and skills within and across different texts and lessons can improve learners' ability to apply them (DeBruin-Parecki & Squibb, 2011). Directed reading lessons improve L1 listening comprehension (Danao & Padilla, 2021), while teaching metacognitive knowledge facilitates L2 listening comprehension (Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2010).

Research Aim

This exploratory study seeks to describe the use of thematically connected directed reading lessons in helping improve the listening comprehension skills of struggling readers, within the context of a community-based program catering to urban poor children. A survey of foreign and local studies provides a basis for the need to explore the use of the said type of lessons in the given context.

Foreign studies on listening comprehension intervention cited above were conducted in school settings (Babayigit, 2014; Vafae & Suzuki, 2020;

DeBruin-Parecki & Squibb, 2011; Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2010). Although they were not specifically intended for low-income, struggling readers except for DeBruin-Parecki and Squibb's (2011) study where the participants were prekindergarten students with low socio-economic status and at-risk for reading difficulties, and their sessions did not follow the directed reading lesson format but involved whole-group and small-group activities, their intervention involved thematically-related lessons which gave students opportunities to do a retelling, learn essential vocabulary, predict, and connect stories to their life.

Vis-à-vis local studies, the present study has a set of parameters that makes it distinct from the previous research which had participants who were preschool children not categorized as struggling readers (Danao & Padilla, 2021), involved older students (Atordido, 2016), incorporated explicit instruction (Atordido, 2016; Padilla, 2010), did not include pretest and post-test (Padilla, 2010), and focused on phonics instruction (Matibag, 2008).

In furthering the initial investigations of thematic directed reading lessons and addressing the current gap in the literature, specifically in the context of community-based programs, this study highlights the reality that “it takes a village to raise a reader” (Doiron & Lees, 2009, p. 138). In view of the poor reading performance of Filipino learners in recent international assessments, it is important to explore ways by which children's reading development can be supported beyond the four walls of the classroom. This is where the importance of the contributions of stakeholders like families and communities are made

even more apparent, especially when learners are socio-economically disadvantaged and reading-challenged. This study highlights this by showing that non-formal learning opportunities provided by community-based literacy programs/centers which support school goals and endeavors are also important in raising readers and learners.

Relevant Theory and Research

The present study's use of directed reading lessons to develop listening comprehension is underpinned by the concept of reading as a meaning-making process — a dynamic activity that requires readers to be active theory builders and hypotheses testers (Ruddell & Unrau, 2013). Integral to this concept is the schema theory (Anderson, 2004) which asserts that readers activate background knowledge and draw from their inner “linguistic-experiential reservoir” (Rosenblatt, 2004, p. 1367) in order to make sense of what they are reading. Comprehension involves an interaction between old and new information (Anderson & Pearson, 1988). Readers' prior knowledge enables them to make sense of what they are reading as they use their existing schemata to understand the language, structure, and subject matter of the text (Smith, 1994). The theory implies the use of texts relevant to the students' needs and contexts, as well as directed support before, during, and after reading to activate and build (on) the students' schemata. All these facilitate comprehension (Tierney & Pearson, 1994) and are concretized in the features of a directed reading lesson summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Features of a Directed Reading Lesson (Hermosa, 2005)

Part	Description/Activity	Rationale
Pre-Reading	Preparing a context for reading <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing concepts/vocabulary • Activating prior knowledge • Developing a purpose for reading 	To establish purpose, build background, sustain motivation, and provide direction

During Reading	Responding to the text <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging response to the text • Promoting monitoring skills • Brokering engagement with the text 	To promote active response reading
Post Reading	Holding, exploring, developing, modifying, and refining the response to the text <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing comprehension skills 	To reinforce and extend ideas from the text

The features of a directed reading lesson found in Table 1 are similar to the three major phases in a reading lesson in Betts' (1946) Directed Reading Activity: the pre-reading phase (preparation for the reading of the text), the during reading phase (facilitation of text comprehension), and the post-reading phase (deepening of text comprehension and reinforcement of text ideas and related skills).

Similarly, thematic lessons, which are also based on the abovementioned theories, help readers understand texts. Aside from allowing learners to engage in active meaning-making, thematic reading lessons also promote awareness of the concept of intertextuality which maintains that a particular text can be read in relation to other texts (Armstrong & Newman, 2011; Hartman, 1992). Thus, readers are trained to utilize what they have learned in other thematically/topically-related texts when reading a particular material. They activate and build (on) their prior knowledge as they read. These are consistent with the assertions of the schema theory (Anderson, 2004). Thus, effective reading instruction, following the principles of directed reading and thematic lessons, encourages confidence and participation, especially among low-income children, because it draws connections between learning activities and students' knowledge and experiences and seeks to integrate these activities with the reading of thematically linked texts (Padilla, 2010; Walker-Dalhouse & Risko, 2008).

This type of effective instruction is important since many children from low socio-economic backgrounds do not meet grade level benchmarks;

they struggle with reading (Richards-Tutor et al., 2015; Walker-Dalhouse & Risko, 2008). On the other hand, children from higher socio-economic backgrounds generally exhibit confidence and ability in reading (Walker-Dalhouse & Risko, 2008). Moreover, if children are read to at least thrice a week, they are likely to develop important skills such as knowing their letters, counting to 20 or higher, writing their own names, and reading in school (Nord et al., 1999). Considering possible differences in home conditions based on socio-economic backgrounds, children from affluent families are more frequently read to than children living in poverty. In addition, the educational attainment of children's mothers and the income of their families are linked to home reading frequency (Yarosz & Barnett, 2001). These factors can have implications on the rate of progress in reading proficiency. By the end of grade 1, proficient readers will have seen almost 19,000 words of connected text on average, while children who struggle with reading will have only seen less than 10,000 words. Though these struggling readers still develop their skills, they fall behind their reading proficient peers in word recognition, fluency, and vocabulary, and are not quite able to catch up (Juel, 1988). The disparity in terms of skills between proficient readers and struggling readers further increases over the elementary years (Al Otaiba & Fuchs, 2002). By the time they reach high school, many struggling readers may be found to be four years behind their peers (Shaywitz, 2005). Similar observations have been noted locally, where many poor children are educationally deprived. The socio-economic limitations of their parents/families hinder

children from achieving their fullest potential as learners and individuals. Among the abilities that they fail to optimally develop is reading, which is often regarded as the most important academic skill. Reading is necessary to succeed not only in school but also beyond it (Doronila, 1996). The attendant socio-economic disparities in reading environments, behaviors, and abilities can be addressed by providing poor children with exemplary reading instruction and enabling reading experiences that they need to develop their reading skills (Walker-Dalhouse & Risko, 2008).

It is in view of this aim of providing effective literacy instruction that local studies have been conducted on directed reading and thematic lessons. Danao and Padilla (2021) used electronic books in six one-on-one directed reading lessons (DRLs) with preschool children and found that this improved listening comprehension skills. Adding the element of theme, Padilla (2010) utilized thematically connected directed reading lessons with explicit instruction of skills to teach struggling readers in a community-based literacy center; however, she did not administer pretest and post-test. Following the same framework, Atordido's (2016) study involved older students (10-13 years old) in a school context. Padilla (2010) reported that in post-lesson assessments, 85-90% of the learners achieved at least 75% mastery, while Atordido (2016) found a significant increase in the students' pretest to post-test reading comprehension scores. Lastly, Matibag (2008) found an average of 90% performance in post-lesson story-based quizzes among four seven-year-olds who were taught directed reading lessons in a community-based literacy center. As can be deduced from the varying research designs, contexts, and participants of these aforementioned studies, the present study sought to fill in the gap by exploring the use of thematic directed reading lessons to improve the listening comprehension skills of struggling readers in a community-based literacy center.

Method

Design

This exploratory study employed a multiple case study design to describe the use of thematic directed reading lessons in improving the listening comprehension skills of target participants. Multiple cases were analyzed since it focused on a small group of participants and specific listening comprehension skills (as in Danao & Padilla, 2021), which were measured in a pretest, a post-test, and a delayed post-test, as well as post-lesson assessments, using researcher-constructed and expert-validated instruments. These skills were targeted in expert-validated lesson plans (like the lessons in Atordido, 2016 and Danao & Padilla, 2021); the implementation was self-evaluated by the teacher-researcher through session reports (as in Padilla, 2010).

Participants and Locale

The participants were elementary students aged 7 to 9 years old (3 males, 1 female) who went to public schools in one of the cities in Metro Manila. At the time of the intervention, they were part of an ongoing free class in a community-based learning center's literacy program designed to provide remediation to 7-12-year-old children "who are unable to read or are struggling to read but are already in grades 2 or higher or are older but have been retained in grade 1" (Weygan-Aparato, 2017, p. 22), and were at risk of dropping out of school (as in Padilla, 2010). With accessibility as one of its guiding principles, the center offers this to nearby urban poor communities, prioritizing those who need it the most, especially "children who are reported to be seen on the streets (street children) and children who have left school" (Weygan-Aparato, 2017, p. 22).

The said literacy program aims to equip these children with literacy skills, as well as critical thinking skills and love for reading (through storytelling sessions following the directed reading approach) so that they will become confident learners and regain the power to succeed at learning. In the center, a 1:5 teacher-student

ratio for beginning reading level is what's considered "manageable," with children being "served without sacrificing the quality of instruction" (Weygan-Aparato, 2017, p. 28). Though the literacy classes in this program are free, parents are expected to show interest and willingness in helping to develop their children's skills by officially enrolling them in the program, encouraging them to attend the classes regularly, and doing what is requested of them as parents, in aid of the children's learning (Weygan-Aparato, 2017).

All four participants were part of the *Level A* class where they were taught beginning reading skills in Filipino. Although they were all classified as reading below grade expectations, each one had different ability levels in various reading components/skills based on scores in the assessments administered by the program lead. These particularities are discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

Student 1

Student 1 was an 8-year-old student in the center who did not have any problems with sound identification and phonemic awareness. His assessment scores in word reading skills and reading fluency were 99% and 100%, respectively. Due to his performance in these basic reading skills, Student 1 had already been given a reading comprehension test in which he scored 74%. This showed that he still needed help in this aspect in order to perform successfully in reading tasks given to students at his age.

Student 2

Student 2 was an 8-year-old student who was still being taught beginning reading skills. His assessment scores showed that he needed support in fundamental skills in reading: sound identification (58%), word reading (40%), phonemic awareness (62%), and reading fluency (0%).

Student 3

Student 3 was a 9-year-old student who was still working on some of his beginning reading skills, especially in phonemic awareness (46%). He showed

high performance in reading fluency (94%) but still needed to improve in sound identification (83%) and word reading (75%) skills.

Student 4

Student 4 was a 7.5-year-old student who still needed additional support in acquiring beginning reading skills. She performed well in sound identification (95%) but still had to overcome difficulties in word reading (45%), phonemic awareness (42%), and reading fluency (3%).

These assessment results became an important consideration in the development of the thematic directed reading lessons. They were particularly useful in the scaffolding provided to the participants in all parts of the lessons so that they would be able to follow until the end. Guided support was given whenever necessary, especially in the reading of the texts and the administration of assessments.

Materials and Measures

Theme and Texts

The general theme of "family" was selected for the thematic directed reading lessons. This choice was based on the 3rd stage of Erikson's (1991, as cited in Slavin, 2003) theory of psychosocial development where relating with the family is considered significant in understanding the world and developing responsibility. Though the participants in the study were beyond the age range of this specific stage (3-6 years old), the aim was for the sessions to further reinforce family-related values that they already have and to provide them with alternative perspectives on how to relate with other family members. In addition, consultation with the center's program lead was done in order to ensure that the theme and texts are appropriate to the students' experiences and ability levels.

So to guide the choice of thematically-related texts for the reading lessons, two questions were considered:

- Can it be used to enable the students to identify the values that one must have as a member of a family?

- Provided that enough scaffolding is given by the teacher, can it be used to equip the participants with listening comprehension skills that they can use to appreciate narrative texts?

Since the target values were in the context of the family, the theme was articulated as *Pamilya Ko, Mahal Ko!* (I Love My Family!). The theme revolved around how one can show appreciation towards different members of the family. At the same time, it sought to present to the children various family situations, conflicts, and even struggles, and how one can navigate through these together with their loved ones. Given this theme, the following storybooks were used for the sessions:

1. *Arroz Caldo ni Lolo Waldo* (Lolo Waldo's Arroz Caldo) written by Becky Santos-Gerodias, illustrated by Bernadette Solina-Wolf, and published by Chikiting Books in 2012;
2. *Noong Nakaraang Taon* (Last Year) written by Genaro R. Gojo-Cruz, illustrated by James B. Abalos, and published by Chikiting Books in 2013;
3. *Ang Riles sa Tiyan ni Tatay* (The Tracks in My Father's Tummy) written by Eugene Y. Evasco, illustrated by Aldy Aguirre, and published by Lampara Books in 2008;
4. *May Magic Si Inay* (Mommy Knows Magic!) written by Segundo D. Matias, Jr., illustrated by Rowen Agarao, and published by Lampara Books in 2009; and
5. *Ang Beybi Naming Mamaw* (Our Monster Baby) written by Eugene Y. Evasco, illustrated by Beth Parrocha-Doctolero, and published by Lampara Books in 2014.

The texts depict the (stereo)typical members of a Filipino family. More importantly, they contain values that learners must identify as essential to being a family member. These stories also required the students to utilize the target listening comprehension skills for

better appreciation of and engagement with these texts (and other narratives). The four skills chosen became the anchor for the following instructional objectives of every lesson:

1. To note details (*Naibibigay ang mahahalagang detalye sa kuwento*);
2. To sequence events (*Naiiaayos ang mga pangyayari sa kuwento ayon sa tamang pagkakasunod-sunod*);
3. To infer character feelings (*Nahibinuha ang naramdaman ng tauhan sa kuwento*); and
4. To connect story details to one's life (*Naiiuugnay ang detalye sa kuwento sa sariling bubay*)

Lesson Plans

For this exploratory study, five thematically-linked directed reading lesson plans were prepared. The number of lessons was informed by previous local studies, specifically Danao and Padilla's (2021) 6 DRLs using e-books, the five to six lessons per theme in Padilla (2010), and Matibag's (2008) three DRL lessons. Each lesson had a duration of approximately one hour (excluding the administration of the post-lesson assessment) and was implemented three to seven days apart. The variability in the interval between lessons was due to adjustments that needed to be done in relation to specific activities of the center.

The lessons were expert-validated and revised as needed based on the expert's feedback as well as the results of the implementation of the preceding lesson plan (i.e., based on students' performance in the post-lesson assessment and the teacher-researcher's observation notes and evaluation of the highs and lows). Table 2 presents a brief description of the different parts of each lesson and the time allotted for each part.

Table 2*Learning Activities in the Directed Reading Lessons Used in the Intervention*

Parts of Directed Reading Lesson (based on the features described on <i>Table 1</i>)	Specific Learning Activities Done in the Lessons	Time Allotted
Pre-Reading (Preparing a context for reading)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing concepts/ vocabulary • Activating prior knowledge • Developing a purpose for reading <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the aim of removing possible hurdles to understanding the story, words or concepts in the story which might be unfamiliar to the participants are defined using visual and context clues. They are prompted to think about possible definitions using clues. • A motivation question related to a concept/idea in the story and the experiences of the participants is posed. It can be answered without reading the story. • A motive question or prompt is posed. This is directly related to a specific detail or event in the story. It gives the students something to look forward to or search for in the text. It can be answered by reading the story. 	8-10 minutes
During Reading (Responding to the text)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging response to the text • Promoting monitoring skills • Brokering engagement with the text <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two main strategies are used: read aloud and the use of comprehension check questions. • The teacher reads the story aloud while showing the pictures in the book. Words and concepts that have been unlocked before reading are also reviewed if necessary. Observing how participants respond to the narrative is an important part of the read-aloud portion of each session. • Comprehension check questions are asked at certain points to ensure that students are able to follow and to encourage engagement with the events in the narrative. 	10-15 minutes

Post Reading
(Holding, exploring,
developing, modifying,
and refining the response to
the text)

- Discussion is facilitated through a series of questions following the principle of Gradual Psychological Unfolding (GPU) conceptualized by Prof. Basilia Manhit of the UP College of Education (Ocampo, 1997). This approach to questioning seeks to simulate a normal conversation where a question requires an answer which in turn becomes the basis of the succeeding question (Caluag, 2016).
- During the discussion, enlivening devices are incorporated in order to further engage the students in thinking and talking about the important details in the stories (see Figure 1).

30-35 minutes

Figure 1

Examples of Enlivening Devices



Note: The figure shows pictures of enlivening devices accomplished by the students during one of the sessions.

Assessments

To determine possible changes in the listening comprehension skills of the participants during and after the lessons, assessment tools were prepared, expert validated (and revised as needed), and individually administered to the students (as in Danao & Padilla,

2021). At the same time, these became the sources of data for necessary adjustments during the implementation of the lessons. The teacher-researcher's observation notes and evaluation of the highs and lows of each lesson also helped inform lesson preparation, adjustment, and implementation (like in Padilla, 2010). The pretest, post-test, and delayed post-test consisted of

five (5) items related to the selected family-related values and 24 items connected to the target listening comprehension skills. The pretest and post-test administered to the students were identical, while the delayed post-test used a different story but had the same number of items and types of questions.

The number of items per skill was based on the table of specifications formulated to account for the time allotted for each skill in every lesson/session and for the entire implementation of the thematic program, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Table of Specifications of the Pretest, Post-test, and Delayed Post-test (TOS)

Skills Assessed	Period Covered	Total Points	Type of Test
Noting details	42.86%	10.28	Oral Response
	75/175 minutes	10	
Inferring character's feelings	14.29%	3.42	Multiple Choice
	25/175 minutes	4	
Sequencing events	28.57 %	6.85	Arranging pictures with sentences
	50/175 minutes	7	
Connecting story details to one's life	14.29%	3.42	Oral Response
	25/175 minutes	3	
		24 points	

Based on the computation presented in Table 3, the tests each had 10 items on noting details, seven (7) for sequencing events, four (4) for inferring character feelings, and three (3) for connecting story details to one's life. It can be noted that even though inferring feelings and connecting details to one's life had the same percentage, the former was allotted four (4) items. This was based on the decision that items on inferring emotions would be multiple-choice questions, which can be considered easier to answer than the items on connecting story details with one's life which required students to enumerate specific personal experiences that are related to the story.

As a formative assessment and as a way to monitor the changes in the performance of the participants,

post-lesson assessments were given at the end of every session. From Lesson 1 to 3, each assessment consisted of 10 items that evaluated listening comprehension skills: four (4) for noting details, three (3) for sequencing events, two (2) for inferring character's feelings, and one (1) for connecting story details to one's life. For Lessons 4 and 5, the question for sequencing events was equivalent to four (4) and five (5) points, respectively. The participants took turns in answering the assessment under the guidance of the teacher; this usually lasted for 10-15 minutes per student. While waiting for their turn, the others were provided coloring and drawing materials and worksheets. Table 4 presents an example of a post-lesson assessment.

Table 4

Sample Post-Lesson Assessment

Specific Objectives	Questions/Tasks
<i>Nakapagbibigay ng mahahalagang detalye sa kuwento</i> (To note details)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Ano ang pangalan ng tatay ng bata sa kuwento?</i> (What is the name of the child's father?) 2. <i>Saang bayan sila nakatira?</i> (Where do they live? What town?) 3. <i>Nang lumago na ang negosyo, saan sila nagtayo ng mas malaking puwesto?</i> (When their business grew, where did they open a bigger store?) 4. <i>Tuwing kailan tumutulong sa negosyo ang bata?</i> (When does the child help in the business?)
<i>Naiiaayos ang mga pangyayari sa kuwento ayon sa tamang pagkakasunod-sunod</i> (To sequence events)	<i>Pagsunud-sunurin ang mga pangyayari ayon sa kuwento (mga larawan mula sa kuwento). Ang ikalawang pangyayari ay ibinigay na.</i> (Arrange the pictures based on what happened in the story. The second event is already given.)
<i>Nabihinuha ang naramdaman ng tauhan sa kuwento</i> (To infer character feelings)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Ano kaya ang naramdaman ni Tatay Sito nang nawalan siya ng trabaho?</i> (What do you think Tatay Sito felt when he lost his job?) 2. <i>Ano kaya ang naramdaman ni Lolo Waldo nang gumanda ang takbo ng negosyo nila?</i> (What do you think Lolo Waldo felt when they started earning through their business?)
<i>Naiiugnay ang detalye sa kuwento sa sariling buhay</i> (To connect story details to one's life)	<i>Kung ikaw ang nasa kalagayan ng bata, anong paraan/diskarte ang gagawin mo?</i> (If you were in the child's place, what would you do to help the family?)

Procedure

The data collection procedure started with consultation sessions with the center's program lead who shared pertinent information about the participants, including scores in assessments, and helped obtain permission for the students' participation from their parents/guardians.

Observations of ongoing literacy classes of the students in the community-based center were then conducted. Based on the information gathered during

these observations, the theme, texts, and specific listening comprehension skills were set. Afterward, the table of specifications was formulated in order to guide the preparation of the pretest. After expert validation and tool revision, the pretest was administered to the students. The pretest results became the basis of the design of the first directed reading lesson plan. The first lesson plan was expert validated and revised based on the feedback. It was implemented after the pretest. Every succeeding lesson

was developed taking into consideration the response and performance of the students per session. Each of these lesson plans was also expert validated and revised based on the feedback. Based on how the participants responded to each lesson, adjustments were applied in the succeeding sessions. These included formulating motivation questions with concrete objects that students can easily relate to, using graphic organizers to aid comprehension monitoring during reading, reproducing pictures from the storybook and utilizing them in both during and post-reading activities, incorporating more inferential questions during storytelling, and allowing students to draw their answers in the enlivening activities. All these adjustments were aimed at helping the students better engage with the texts and the activities while using the target listening comprehension skills. After the five thematically-linked reading lessons, the post-test was administered, and a delayed post-test was also conducted almost a month after that. All the activities in every stage discussed were also shared with the program lead in order to solicit suggestions and to update her on the developments in the intervention.

Results

Since this study explored the use of thematically-related directed reading lessons in improving the listening comprehension skills of struggling readers, increase or decrease in each student's scores in the different listening comprehension skills in the pretest, post-test, and delayed post-test, as well as in the post-lesson assessments was examined.

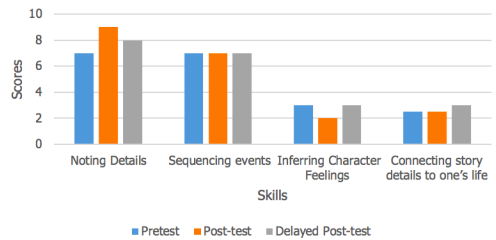
Student 1

Based on the pretest and post-test results, there was an increase in Student 1's scores – from 19.5 (81.25%) to 20.5 points (85.42%). His delayed post-test score (87.50%) was also higher than the pretest and post-test scores.

Figure 2 presents the summary of scores in the pretest, post-test, and delayed post-test of Student 1.

Figure 2

Student 1 Listening Comprehension Skills

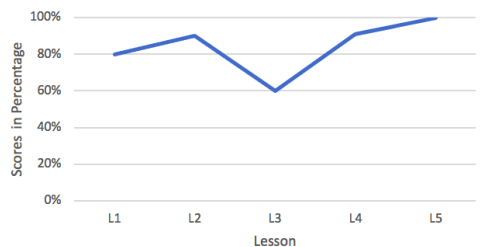


As shown in Figure 2, in terms of listening comprehension skills, Student 1's 1-point increase was due to the increase in the *Noting details part* (2 points) and decrease in the *Inferring Character Feelings* portion (1 point). His scores in *Sequencing events* and *Connecting story details to one's life* were the same in the pretest and post-test.

In the delayed post-test, Student 1 scored .5 higher than the post-test. Comparing the two results (Post and Delayed Post), he scored 1 point lower for *Noting details* and 1 point higher for *Inferring character feelings*. Figure 3 shows the trend of Student 1's post-lesson assessment scores in the five sessions.

Figure 3

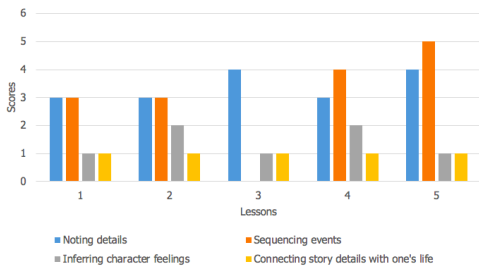
Student 1 Post-Lesson Assessment Scores



Based on Figure 3, the post-lesson assessment results showed an upward trend in the listening comprehension skills of Student 1. However, there was a noticeable decrease in Lesson 3, and this can be explained by looking at the breakdown of his scores shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Student 1 Scores in Specific Skills in Post-Lesson Assessments



Based on the information presented in Figure 4, it can be noted that the decline in scores in Lesson 3 was due to the inaccurate arrangement of events in the story. Despite this, Student 1 was able to get perfect scores in sequencing events in all the succeeding lessons.

Student 2

Comparing the pretest and post-test results, Student 2 had a 6-point increase in his scores – from 11 (45.83%) to 17 (70.83%). However, he scored only 50% in the delayed post-test which is lower than the post-test but still higher than the pretest.

Figure 5 below details the scores of Student 2 in specific listening comprehension skills.

Figure 5

Student 2 Listening Comprehension Skills

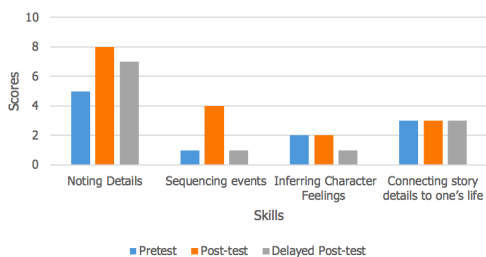


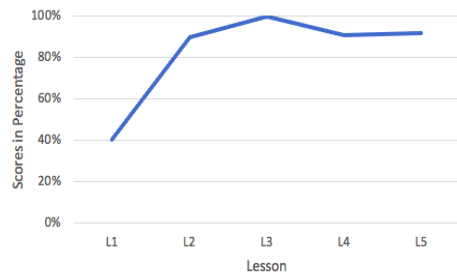
Figure 5 shows that comparing the pretest and post-test, Student 2's scores both in *Noting details* and *Sequencing events* increased by 3 points. Notably in the

post-test, he was the only student who did not get a perfect score in *Sequencing events*. There was no change in his score in *Inferring character feelings*, while he scored 3 out of 3 in *Connecting story details to one's life* in both the pretest and post-test.

In the delayed post-test, Student 2's score declined as compared with the post-test. This was also due to his score in the items on *Sequencing events*. His struggle with this skill was also observed during the post-lesson assessments. Figure 6 presents Student 2's post-lesson assessment scores.

Figure 6

Student 2 Post-Lesson Assessment Scores



In the post-lesson assessment scores in Figure 6, an increase in scores from the first session to the succeeding ones can be seen. However, this upward trend is also due to additional support given to the student in the *Sequencing events* tasks in the assessments during Lessons 4 and 5. As mentioned in the previous part, Student 2 struggled with this skill, which was evident in the decline in his delayed post-test scores. This was also observed during the administration of post-lesson assessments so additional scaffolding and repeated reading of events were done to guide the student.

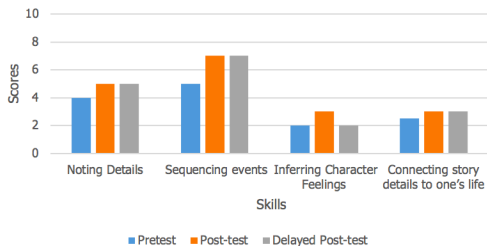
Student 3

The pretest and post-test results showed that Student 3's scores increased by 4.5 points – from 13.5 (56.75%) to 18 (75%). However, there was a decline in his scores from post-test and delayed post-test scores where he got 70.83%. It should be noted that his delayed post-test score was still higher than the pretest.

Figure 7 summarizes the scores of Student 3 in specific listening comprehension skills.

Figure 7

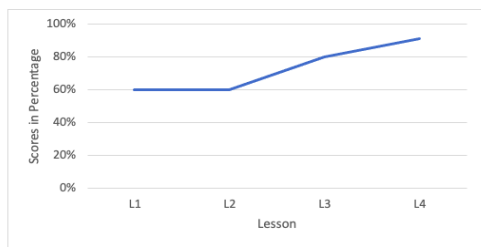
Student 3 Listening Comprehension Skills



As shown in Figure 7, Student 3 exhibited improvement in all of the listening comprehension skills: *Noting details* (1 point), *Sequencing events* (2 points), *Inferring character feelings* (1 point), and *Connecting story details to one's life* (.5 point). In relation to the last skill, the change was due to the fact that Student 3 was able to give answers that were not mentioned in the story in the post-test, contrary to how he responded in the pretest where his answers were details already given in the text. In the delayed post-test, Student 3 had a one-point decrease in score as compared with his post-test. The change was due to his mistake in *Inferring character feelings*. Generally, there was an increase in his scores from pretest to delayed post-test, and this was reflected in the post-lessons assessments as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Student 3 Post-Lesson Assessment Scores



As seen in Figure 8, Student 3's post-lesson assessment results showed a gradual increase from Lessons 1 to 4. Unfortunately, he was not able to attend the fifth session which explains the absence of score for this session.

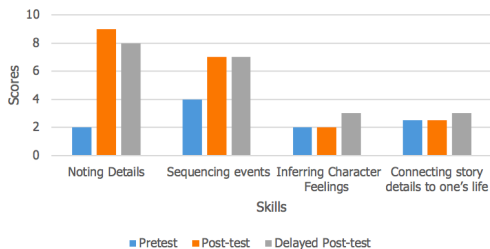
Student 4

Comparing the pretest with the post-test results, Student 4's scores showed an increase of 10 points – from 10.5 (43.75%) to 20.5 (85.42%). Her score in the delayed post-test (87.50) was even higher than her post-test score.

Figure 9 presents Student 4's scores in specific listening comprehension skills in the three tests.

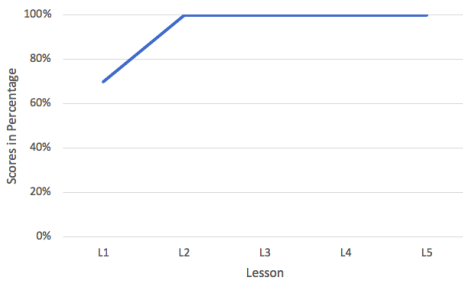
Figure 9

Student 4 Listening Comprehension Skills



Based on the pretest and post-test results shown in Figure 9, Student 4 showed improvement in two listening comprehension skills: *Noting details* (7 points) and *Sequencing events* (3 points). In *Inferring character feelings*, she was not able to answer the same items in both the pretest and post-test, which required her to infer worry and sadness. In *Connecting story details to one's life*, she received the same score for the same reason: she gave an answer mentioned in the text.

In the delayed post-test, Student 4 scored the highest, getting the same score as Student 1. Her scores increased in *Inferring character feelings* and *Connecting story details* while her score decreased by 1 point in *Noting details*. In the post-lessons assessments, Student 4 exhibited a more consistent performance, as displayed in Figure 10.

Figure 10*Student 4 Post-Lesson Assessment Scores*

It is evident in Figure 10 that in the post-lesson assessments, Student 4 showed notable improvement from Lesson 1 (70%) to Lesson 2 (100%), and then consistently got the perfect score in all the succeeding lessons. Student 4's case is the most remarkable not just because of positive changes in her performance in the tests and assessments. The teacher also noticed how Student 4's level of confidence increased as evidenced by her more active participation in class activities in the succeeding sessions.

In summary, the scores of all participants in the post-test and delayed post-test were higher than their pretest scores, with the student who had the lowest pretest score showing the highest gain. It was found that post-test gains in noting details were seen in the scores of all participants, whereas increase in scores in sequencing events, inferring character feelings, and connecting story details to one's life was not consistently observed in the results.

Discussion

As evident in the analysis of the scores in the pretest, post-test, delayed post-test, and post-lesson assessments, the students' listening comprehension skills improved after the thematic directed reading lessons. These results are consistent with the findings of Danao and Padilla (2021). They show that children from low socio-economic backgrounds benefit from interventions that are aimed at improving their comprehension skills (DeBruin-Parecki & Squibb,

2011; Walker-Dalhouse & Risko, 2008). Moreover, they support the findings in the study of Atordido (2016) where thematic directed reading lessons improved struggling readers' comprehension. Similar to the cited previous studies, the current study involved activities that allowed students to see and experience how comprehension skills were used while engaging with interesting stories.

Specifically, the five directed reading lessons provided opportunities for repeated and consistent practice of target skills before, during, and after reading each story. This is congruent with DeBruin-Parecki and Squibb's (2011) study where an improvement in listening comprehension of prekindergarten students was seen after they were given multiple opportunities to retell parts of a specific story, learn vocabulary, make predictions, and connect the story to their life in the context of thematically-linked lessons and texts.

In the present study, the pre-reading activities, which prepared the students to connect with and actively make sense of the story, could have facilitated the use of listening comprehension skills during and after the storytelling/reading. The schema theoretic view of reading implies that pre-reading activities that activate and develop students' relevant prior knowledge help them understand texts (Anderson, 2004). In the same way, the strategies employed while reading the stories (read aloud and comprehension check questions) could have helped the students practice the target listening comprehension skills as they were encouraged to monitor their understanding of important details and events in the stories. Comprehension monitoring is metacognitive in nature and metacognitive awareness supports listening comprehension (Vandergrift and Tafahodtari, 2010).

In the post-reading activities, utilization and practice of the listening comprehension skills were further reinforced since every discussion question and enlivening activity was designed to allow the students to apply the skills while they process the story. It is important to note that the GPU-oriented post-reading discussion afforded the use of the listening comprehension skills together, which meant that they

were not treated as isolated from one another. For example, being able to note details was necessary for applying the other skills, such as sequencing events, inferring feelings, and connecting story details with one's life. These activities in the directed reading lessons were repeated for five sessions using different yet thematically-linked texts. This repetition could have enhanced students' confidence and engagement because their schemata on how to approach texts had been enriched through constant exposure and application (as in DeBruin-Parecki & Squibb, 2011).

Aside from the parts and activities of the directed reading lessons, the chosen theme related to the students' life could have contributed to how they responded to the reading lessons because it enabled them to activate their background knowledge and use these to process the content of the reading materials. Thus, they became active participants in the meaning construction process while accessing their "linguistic-experiential reservoirs" (Anderson, 2004; Rosenblatt, 2004; Ruddell & Unrau, 2013). This is consistent with good reading instruction (especially among low-income children) — it encourages learners to participate in lessons by drawing connections between the activities and their own knowledge and experiences, as well as integrating these activities with reading thematically-related texts (Padilla, 2010; Walker-Dalhouse & Risko, 2008). In addition, the theme allowed the students and the teacher to make connections among the ideas, details, and even events from various texts. This concretized the concept of intertextuality where a text is not something that is isolated but rather a part of a network of other related texts (Hartman, 1992). When this view is applied in lessons, readers are trained to recognize the need for information from other related texts in order to enrich their understanding of a particular reading material (Armstrong & Newman, 2011). In this study, intertextuality could have further reinforced the students' use of schemata during the dynamic meaning-making process involved in listening to the thematically-linked texts while applying various comprehension skills.

The improvement in listening comprehension skills is particularly noteworthy in the case of Student 4

since after Lesson 1, she was able to exhibit the ability to apply all the skills as evidenced by her perfect scores in the post-lesson assessments in the second to the fifth lesson, which then supported the results of the post-test and delayed post-test vis-à-vis the pretest. As mentioned, it was observed that her confidence level increased in the succeeding sessions, enabling her to actively participate in the activities.

For Student 1, there was only a slight increase in the scores because he evidently had a high score in the pretest. Nevertheless, there was an improvement in his skills in noting details and connecting story details to one's life as shown in the post-test and delayed post-test results.

On the other hand, though there was an overall increase in scores from pretest to post-test, there was a decline in the post-test to delayed post-test scores of Students 2 and 3. In the case of Student 2, the decrease was connected to the skill of sequencing events. This could be explained by the greater cognitive load that this skill requires in contrast with questions that deal with noting a particular detail from the text. Being able to sequence events accurately entails thinking about two or more details from the story and arranging them correctly. For Student 3, the decrease can be traced to items that required him to infer character feelings. This could be explained by the relative difficulty of inferential questions as compared with those that require simply recalling specific details from the text. Inferring feelings demands formulating reasonable interpretations based on particular details involving characters in the texts.

In summary, the results showed that thematic directed reading lessons can serve as a viable option for improving students' ability to note details from a text. This was consistently shown in all four cases in the study. For the skill of connecting story details to one's life, the increase was not consistent, but there was no decline in the scores in this particular skill. However, analysis of the results connected to inferring character feelings and sequencing events revealed that there were instances of decline in the scores. This could mean that devoting additional sessions to the development of

these skills is necessary. As presented above, the cognitive load which the questions required coupled with the current struggles of the students in certain literacy skills could have made it difficult for them to consistently apply these skills accurately.

Conclusions and Implications

Based on the results, it can be concluded that thematic directed reading lessons can be a viable option for intervention sessions aimed at improving listening comprehension skills because they provide repeated opportunities for appropriately scaffolded practice of these skills. In addition, linking lessons through a theme can complement this consistent practice in a way that allows students to use the skills in a context meaningful to them. This involves developing a series of lessons with a coherent theme and texts that relate to the students' experiences. Establishing a theme can also facilitate learning by encouraging readers to identify connections among ideas and details across various texts. In this way, they will be trained to make use of what they have learned in the previous lessons and to make sense of what they are currently reading.

In addition, in view of the overall results and examination of specific cases, different rates of improvement in particular skills can be observed. Hence, there is a need to consider an individualized approach to interpreting assessment results and adjusting instruction/intervention depending on what a specific struggling reader needs to learn.

The results of the present study and the subsequent conclusions drawn from them have implications on the field of reading intervention as they further give support for the use of directed reading lessons which are linked thematically and are based on the students' experiences. In addition, they highlight the benefits of administering teacher/researcher-constructed pretest and post-test based on a clear table of specifications because this allows systematic monitoring of progress, both on the individual and group levels, which is integral to making informed decisions in intervention programs. Reading teachers can apply these principles in their

practice and make necessary adjustments according to the specificities of their contexts.

Limitations and Future Directions

It must be noted that this exploratory study had limitations in terms of the number of sessions (only five thematic directed reading lessons), the variability of interval between them, as well as the short interval between the pretest and post-tests due to time constraints imposed by the semester when the study was conducted. Moreover, the intervention was implemented in an already existing class of four students in a community-based literacy center. The fact that the participants were concurrently being taught beginning reading skills in Filipino could have also contributed to the improvement of the comprehension skills of the participants.

Given these limitations, it is recommended that future studies be conducted with changes in these specific aspects. Implementing the intervention in formal and non-formal literacy classes with more students or even in multiple classes can provide robust group data which can be subjected to parametric statistical analyses. In that context, following an experimental/quasi-experimental design (between subjects) to better establish the cause-effect relationship between the intervention and the improvement in skills can also be considered. In relation to this, appropriate standardized tests can be utilized to collect information from various data points. This means that future interventions can have a longer duration by implementing more than one set of thematically-related lessons and administering tests in between the sets. Through this, students can have extended application of skills, especially the ones which require more time to develop. Consequently, other listening comprehension skills and strategies can also be incorporated into the succeeding series of lessons. Aside from extending the intervention, other developmentally appropriate themes can also be explored for the series of lessons. Besides considering psychosocial theories in choosing themes, interest surveys can be conducted before the

development of the lesson plans. Finally, examining the impact of improved listening comprehension on students' word reading and reading comprehension skills can be salient in designing interventions that will help struggling readers cope with the demands of reading.

The abovementioned recommendations for further research can be explored in the context of the remote setup that is currently in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Though the abrupt shift to this new mode has posed challenges on the part of teachers and researchers, as well as students and parents, community-based literacy efforts have succeeded in helping struggling readers, and reading intervention sessions have been conducted using online platforms available to teachers and students (Padilla et al., 2021).¹

It is in view of these continuing efforts to provide literacy support under the remote setup that teachers and researchers can utilize their skills in conducting future studies in specific contexts, which can provide data that can complement findings of multiple case studies, like the present one, and enrich the development of school-based and non-school-based interventions that are intended to help struggling readers overcome difficulties and empower them to work towards the life that they want for themselves and their communities (International Literacy Association, 2019).

Recognizing the empowering role of reading in the life of Filipino struggling readers is vital to the realization of the kind of future they deserve to experience. Thus, helping them during this disruptive time when schools have been closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic has become even more urgent. Modular distance learning, the modality of choice for many public school students whose families cannot afford gadgets and internet connectivity, requires adequate reading skills. As shown in the results of recent international tests, many students do not possess these skills. Parents (who are expected to act in place of school teachers) are not necessarily ready and able to take an active role in addressing this challenge at this time. However, these struggling readers should not be left to fend for themselves. This is when and where the community can step up and provide the needed "support facilities and resources for better learning to take place" (Yeban, 2021, The community as a learning hub section, para. 2). It is in this light that the promising results of the present study's community-based intervention program for struggling readers find special significance. After all, "it takes a village to raise a reader" (Doiron & Lees, 2009, p. 138). This should be taken to heart in this pandemic and beyond.

¹ J. W. Aparato (personal communication, August 19, 2021), one of the co-authors, asserted that continuing reading interventions has been possible despite the challenges because of the efforts of the various stakeholders in the community: teachers, students, local government, parents, and all who support the advocacy.

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