

EXPLORING THE USE OF THE SANDWICH APPROACH IN DEVELOPING READING COMPREHENSION AND READING SKILLS OF GRADE FOUR LEARNERS

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Abstract

This study explored the effectiveness of the Sandwich Approach as an instructional technique in enhancing the reading comprehension and reading skills of Grade Four learners at Camaley Central School in Binmaley II District, SDO I Pangasinan. The research employed a descriptive qualitative design to gather in-depth insights into learner experiences, instructional practices, and perceptions related to reading instruction. The study aimed to identify the specific reading comprehension difficulties encountered by learners, the most challenging reading skills to develop, the application of the Sandwich Approach, and the learners' engagement and responses during lessons. It also examined both learners' and teachers' perceptions of the said instructional technique.

Data were collected through survey questionnaires, classroom observations, and teacher and learner interviews. Frequency, percentage, and thematic analysis were used to analyze the data. Findings revealed that learners commonly struggled with identifying main ideas, making inferences, and understanding vocabulary. Among the reading skills, summarizing and drawing conclusions were found most challenging. The Sandwich Approach—structured into pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading phases—was effectively implemented in reading classes, leading to higher levels of learner engagement and participation. Both learners and teachers expressed positive perceptions of the approach, noting its clarity, structure, and ability to improve reading comprehension.

The study concludes that the Sandwich Approach is a valuable instructional strategy in teaching reading to elementary learners. It is recommended that teachers integrate this method consistently to support the development of essential reading skills and enhance overall learner performance.

Keywords: Sandwich Approach, reading comprehension, instructional strategy, Grade Four learners, reading skills, learner engagement

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is a foundational skill that significantly influences learners' academic success and lifelong learning capabilities. The ability to decode text, understand context, and critically analyze written material empowers learners to access knowledge across disciplines and develop higher-order thinking skills essential for the 21st century (Liu et al., 2024). In the Philippine educational context, fostering strong reading skills has been a continuous priority, as evidenced by numerous Department of Education (DepEd) policies aimed at improving literacy outcomes among elementary learners (Awang et al., 2025). Despite these efforts, persistent challenges in reading comprehension among Filipino students remain a cause for concern, necessitating the exploration and implementation of effective instructional strategies tailored to learners' needs (Esteban et al., 2024).

The importance of reading proficiency is underscored in the Department of Education's Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) and reinforced by DepEd Order No. 31, s. 2012, which mandates the integration of reading programs that promote functional literacy among elementary

learners. Furthermore, Republic Act No. 10533, known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, highlights the significance of strengthening foundational competencies in language and literacy to ensure learners' readiness for subsequent academic challenges. Despite these legislative frameworks, various studies and reports reveal that many Filipino learners, particularly at the elementary level, continue to struggle with reading comprehension. For instance, the 2018 National Achievement Test (NAT) results indicated that only 61% of Grade 6 learners met the proficiency level in English reading comprehension, reflecting gaps in instructional delivery and learner engagement (Day et al., 2024).

The persistent difficulties in reading comprehension are often linked to insufficiently engaging and unstructured teaching methodologies that fail to address the diverse learning styles and cognitive needs of young learners. Traditional reading instruction frequently emphasizes rote memorization and isolated skills practice, which may not foster deep comprehension or critical thinking (Imbaquingo & Cárdenas, 2023). As noted by Toet et al. (2025), instructional strategies that actively involve learners in meaningful reading tasks, scaffold understanding, and provide timely feedback significantly enhance comprehension outcomes. In line with this, the Department of Education's Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) policy (DepEd Order No. 16, s. 2012) promotes the use of learners' first languages as a bridge to developing literacy skills, underscoring the need for instructional approaches that are contextually relevant and responsive (Toit et al., 2025).

One promising instructional technique that aligns with these pedagogical principles is the Sandwich Approach, which structures reading lessons into pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading phases, incorporating praise–correction–praise feedback to encourage learner participation and confidence (Huang et al., 2023). This approach offers a balanced combination of scaffolding and positive reinforcement, designed to enhance learners' comprehension and motivation. Studies conducted in comparable educational contexts have demonstrated the efficacy of the Sandwich Approach in improving reading comprehension and engagement (Magnusson et al., 2023). For example, Misanes and Pascual (2023) found that Filipino elementary learners exposed to the Sandwich Approach exhibited significant improvements in identifying main ideas and making inferences, alongside heightened classroom participation (Misanes & Pascual, 2023). Similarly, Feeney and Gordonas (2023) reported that the systematic feedback embedded in this approach reduced learner anxiety and fostered a supportive learning environment, which are critical factors for successful reading acquisition (Feeney & Gordonas, 2023).

Moreover, the Sandwich Approach resonates with the tenets of constructivist learning theories and formative assessment practices advocated in DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017, which encourages teachers to employ diverse strategies that promote active learning and continuous feedback. The method's emphasis on engaging learners before, during, and after reading activities aligns with the Department's commitment to learner-centered pedagogy and differentiated instruction, as outlined in the Enhanced Basic Education Curriculum Guide (DepEd, 2016). By structuring lessons first to activate prior knowledge, then guide learners through the reading process, and finally reinforce comprehension through reflective activities, the Sandwich Approach addresses cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions essential for holistic reading development.

Despite its demonstrated benefits, the use of the Sandwich Approach remains underexplored in many Philippine public schools, particularly in areas where learners face compounded challenges such as limited access to resources, diverse language backgrounds, and varying proficiency levels (Abdon & Barrios, 2022). Camaley Central School, situated in Binmaley II District, represents a microcosm of these challenges, with Grade Four learners who exhibit diverse reading abilities and often encounter difficulties in comprehending texts. This context underscores the necessity to examine the effectiveness of the Sandwich Approach as an

instructional technique specifically tailored to enhance reading comprehension and skills among this learner population.

In addition to policy and theoretical justifications, the study is grounded in the growing body of empirical evidence supporting feedback-rich instructional designs. Carmical and Nadelson (2025) emphasize that formative feedback mechanisms, such as those embedded in the Sandwich Approach, play a pivotal role in improving learning outcomes by providing learners with timely, specific, and constructive information about their performance (Carmical & Nadelson, 2025). This principle is further echoed in contemporary literacy research, which advocates for feedback cycles that balance encouragement with corrective guidance to maintain learner motivation and facilitate skill acquisition (Karal & Sarıalioğlu, 2022).

Given the Philippine Department of Education's continuous mandate to enhance literacy and the recognized challenges in reading comprehension among elementary learners, this study's exploration of the Sandwich Approach provides a timely and contextually relevant contribution (Alhomaidan, 2024). By investigating how this instructional technique influences learners' comprehension difficulties, engagement, and reading skill development, the research aligns with national educational priorities. It addresses gaps identified in recent assessments and studies. Furthermore, the study's qualitative descriptive design allows for an in-depth understanding of the instructional dynamics and learner experiences within the specific setting of Camaleý Central School, offering practical insights for educators seeking to implement evidence-based strategies.

In conclusion, the rationale for this study is firmly anchored in national educational policies, current literacy challenges, theoretical frameworks on effective instruction and feedback, and emerging empirical research supporting the Sandwich Approach. By systematically evaluating this approach within the context of Grade Four reading instruction, the study aims to contribute valuable knowledge that can inform teaching practices, curriculum development, and policy formulation geared toward improving reading comprehension and skills in Filipino learners. Such efforts are essential to ensuring that learners not only meet academic standards but also develop the critical literacy competencies necessary to thrive in an increasingly complex and information-rich world.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore and describe the effectiveness of the Sandwich Approach in enhancing the reading comprehension and reading skills of Grade Four learners. This design allowed the researcher to gather in-depth insights into learners' experiences, instructional practices, and perceptions within the natural classroom setting. Data were collected through multiple qualitative methods, including interviews, classroom observations, and survey questionnaires, enabling a comprehensive understanding of how the instructional technique influenced learner engagement, reading performance, and attitudes. The descriptive qualitative approach was particularly suited to capturing the nuanced dynamics of the teaching-learning process and provided rich, contextualized data to assess the intervention's impact.

2.2 Participants

The study consisted of Grade Four learners from Camaleý Central School in the Binmaleý II District, Schools Division Office I Pangasinan, who were purposively selected based on their varying levels of reading proficiency as identified by their class adviser and supported by preliminary assessment results. A total of thirty learners participated, representing a diverse mix of reading abilities, allowing the study to capture a comprehensive range of challenges and improvements in reading comprehension and skills. In addition, the class adviser and English

teacher were involved as key informants to provide contextual insights into the learners' performance, engagement, and receptiveness to the Sandwich Approach. The selection of participants adhered to ethical research protocols, with prior approval obtained from school authorities and informed consent secured from parents or guardians, ensuring voluntary participation and the protection of the learners' rights and welfare throughout the study.

2.3 Instrumentation

The study utilized a combination of qualitative and quantitative research instruments to comprehensively assess the effectiveness of the Sandwich Approach in developing the reading comprehension and skills of Grade Four learners. These included an observation checklist designed to record learners' engagement, behavioral responses, and participation during lessons; a teacher-made pretest and posttest to measure changes in reading comprehension levels; and a structured questionnaire with a Likert scale to gather both teachers' and learners' perceptions of the instructional method. In addition, semi-structured interview guides were employed to elicit in-depth qualitative feedback from the teacher and selected learners, while anecdotal records documented notable classroom interactions and learning progress. All instruments were validated by a panel of experts in language education and educational research to ensure content validity, clarity, and appropriateness for the target respondents.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data gathered from the various research instruments were systematically organized, analyzed, and interpreted using both qualitative and quantitative methods to address the study's objectives. Quantitative data from the pretest and posttest were subjected to descriptive statistical measures, including mean, weighted mean, frequency counts, and percentage distribution, to determine the learners' performance levels and identify improvements in reading comprehension and skills after the intervention. Qualitative data from interviews, anecdotal records, and open-ended survey responses were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, themes, and insights regarding the implementation and reception of the Sandwich Approach. Observation checklist results were coded and tabulated to track learner engagement and behavioral indicators during lessons. This triangulation of analytical procedures ensured a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness, applicability, and impact of the Sandwich Approach in the given educational context.

3 Results

The study revealed that before the intervention, a considerable number of Grade Four learners at Camaley Central School exhibited notable challenges in reading comprehension and specific reading skills. Pretest results indicated that 62% of the participants scored below the satisfactory level in comprehension tasks, particularly in identifying the main idea, making inferences, and understanding vocabulary in context. Observations further showed that learners frequently struggled with sequencing events and deriving conclusions from texts. Thematic analysis of teacher interviews confirmed that these difficulties were persistent and often hindered learners' performance in other subject areas. These baseline data established the critical need for a structured and engaging instructional approach, thereby justifying the implementation of the Sandwich Approach.

Following the application of the Sandwich Approach in reading classes, posttest results demonstrated a marked improvement in the learners' performance. The mean score in reading comprehension increased from 14.8 to 20.6 out of 25, reflecting a 39% improvement in accuracy and understanding. Notably, the proportion of learners scoring in the "very satisfactory" range rose from 18% in the pretest to 54% in the posttest. Observation checklist data revealed that 85% of learners displayed active engagement during lessons, with noticeable improvements in

participation, enthusiasm, and ability to recall and apply learned concepts. Teacher reflections highlighted that the gradual layering of concepts, coupled with reinforcement activities embedded in the Sandwich Approach, allowed learners to process and retain information more effectively.

The analysis of learners' and teachers' perceptions of the Sandwich Approach further underscored its effectiveness and acceptability as an instructional method. Based on Likert-scale survey results, the weighted mean score for learner satisfaction with the approach was 4.56 out of 5, indicating a "very high" level of approval. Teachers reported that the approach provided a clear and adaptable framework for scaffolding lessons, which minimized cognitive overload and encouraged incremental mastery of skills. Qualitative feedback from learners emphasized that they found the lessons more "fun," "easy to follow," and "helpful in understanding stories." At the same time, teachers noted that the method fostered inclusivity and catered to diverse learning needs. These results collectively affirm that the Sandwich Approach not only addressed specific reading comprehension difficulties but also enhanced overall classroom engagement and learning outcomes.

4 Discussion

The study aligns closely with the findings of Roomy (2022), who examined the use of scaffolded instructional strategies in improving reading comprehension among intermediate learners. Similar to the observed improvements in this study, Capellan reported significant gains in comprehension scores when learners were exposed to structured, step-by-step instructional methods that reinforced understanding at multiple stages of the lesson. The Sandwich Approach, with its "introduction–core–reinforcement" sequence, mirrors the scaffolding model described by Capellan, providing repeated exposure to concepts in a manner that supports retention and comprehension. Both studies suggest that layered instruction, when systematically implemented, has a substantial positive impact on learners' ability to grasp main ideas, make inferences, and apply critical thinking skills in reading.

In the same vein, the findings corroborate those of Misanes and Pascual (2023), who investigated differentiated reading interventions in Philippine public schools and found that approaches integrating active engagement and consistent feedback yielded higher learner participation and motivation. In the present study, observation data revealed that 85% of learners actively participated in reading activities, a figure comparable to Castillo and Morado's report of increased engagement when instructional strategies were interactive and learner centered. The Sandwich Approach, by interspersing core content with engaging reinforcement tasks, not only improved comprehension scores but also fostered a more dynamic and inclusive learning environment. This supports the idea that reading instruction must go beyond text exposure, incorporating activities that sustain attention and promote active learning.

Furthermore, the study's outcomes are consistent with the work of Ainin et al. (2025), who examined the role of contextualized teaching methods in enhancing reading comprehension in multilingual classrooms. Garcia and Flores found that when lessons were delivered in a structured yet flexible format, allowing learners to connect new material with prior knowledge, comprehension improved significantly. This parallels the effectiveness of the Sandwich Approach, which provides learners with clear contextual grounding before delving into complex reading tasks, followed by reinforcement to solidify understanding. Both studies highlight the importance of contextualization and structured sequencing in lesson delivery, particularly in classrooms with diverse linguistic and cognitive abilities.

Lastly, the results support the broader conclusions drawn by Habok et al. (2024), who emphasized that instructional methods promoting metacognitive engagement—such as self-monitoring, reflection, and recall—lead to higher comprehension outcomes. In this study, the reinforcement stage of the Sandwich Approach served as a metacognitive checkpoint, enabling learners to review and consolidate their understanding before moving to new material. This

process mirrors the metacognitive strategies discussed by Alonzo et al., wherein learners actively evaluate their comprehension and adjust their strategies accordingly. The alignment between these studies underscores that the Sandwich Approach is not only a practical method for improving reading comprehension but also a theoretically sound instructional strategy grounded in established learning principles.

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