UTILIZING COMIC-DESIGNED LESSONS (CDL) TO ENHANCED READING COMPREHENSION OF GRADE 3 LEARNERS IN FILIPINO

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Abstract

This study investigated the effectiveness of Comic-Designed Lessons (CDL) in enhancing the reading comprehension of Grade 3 learners in Filipino at Tampac Integrated School, Aguilar, Pangasinan. The study was conducted in response to recurring reading difficulties among primary pupils and aimed to: (1) determine learners' reading comprehension levels before CDL implementation, (2) assess their levels after the intervention, and (3) establish whether the improvement was statistically significant. A one-group pretest–posttest quasi-experimental design was employed. Twenty-three (23) Grade 3 learners were purposively selected to participate. Reading comprehension was measured using Phil-IRI-based passages and questions assessing literal, inferential, and critical understanding.

Results from the pretest showed that only 26.09% of pupils performed at the Independent level, 43.48% at the Instructional level, and 30.43% at the Frustration level, indicating that most learners required additional reading support. After 20 days of CDL integration in Filipino classes, posttest results revealed substantial gains: 78.26% of learners reached the Independent level, 21.74% remained at the Instructional level, and no learners were classified at the Frustration level. The mean score increased from 3.00 (SD = 0.85) to 4.09 (SD = 0.72). A paired t-test produced $t = -8.74$ and $p = 1.32 \times 10^{-8}$, confirming that the improvement was statistically significant and leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis.

The study concludes that CDL is an effective and engaging tool for improving Filipino reading comprehension. It recommends sustained CDL use, teacher capability building, and continuous monitoring to support learners who still need guidance.

Keywords: Comic-Designed Lessons, Reading Comprehension, Grade 3 Learners, Filipino, Phil-IRI, Action Research, Pretest–Posttest

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is a foundational literacy skill that enables learners to construct meaning from text, connect ideas, and use information for further learning. In the primary grades, comprehension is especially critical because students transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." The Department of Education (DepEd) has long emphasized early-grade reading mastery through national policies such as the Reading Literacy Program and the "Every Child a Reader" thrust, which expects Grade 3 learners to demonstrate basic literacy before promotion (Department of Education [DepEd], 2002). This commitment continues through the Every Child a Reader Program (ECARP), which funds and guides school-based reading interventions and assessments (DepEd, 2012). More recently, DepEd has reiterated the urgency of improving literacy outcomes in light of national survey results and academic recovery efforts, particularly for Key Stages 1–3 (DepEd, 2025a; DepEd, 2025b). These policies underscore that addressing reading gaps at Grade 3 is not optional—it is central to equitable schooling.

Despite these initiatives, many Filipino children still struggle with comprehension, including in Filipino as a mother tongue and as a subject. One reason is that comprehension difficulties often stem from weak decoding, limited vocabulary, and low engagement with print, which can make reading feel effortful and discouraging. DepEd therefore mandates the use of the Philippine

Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) as a classroom-based diagnostic tool to determine learners' independent, instructional, and frustration levels in comprehension (DepEd, 2018; Department of Education, Bureau of Learning Delivery, 2018). Phil-IRI results allow teachers to identify pupils who can read with minimal support, those who need guided instruction, and those who require intensive remediation. In many schools, Phil-IRI data consistently show clusters of learners falling at instructional and frustration levels, highlighting the need for innovations that are both pedagogically sound and child-friendly.

One promising approach is the integration of comics or lessons designed with comics. Comics are multimodal texts that combine sequential images with concise written language, enabling learners to process meaning through both visual and verbal channels. Studies in Philippine classrooms have shown that comics can significantly improve reading comprehension compared with traditional text-only materials. For example, a school-based intervention in Ifugao found notable gains in elementary pupils' comprehension when comics were used as reading materials, with learners reporting greater enjoyment and clearer understanding due to the alignment of pictures and text (Bugtong et al., 2025). Similarly, Castro (2023) reported that Grade 4 pupils who underwent comics-strip remediation improved more than those who used short stories, attributing gains to visual scaffolds that supported meaning-making. International and local evidence converges on the idea that comics help reduce reading anxiety and foster active engagement, especially for struggling readers (Verrier, 2020; WJARR, 2023).

Established learning theories can explain the effectiveness of comics. Dual Coding Theory posits that information is better learned and retained when processed through both verbal and nonverbal systems; the two pathways reinforce each other and deepen understanding (Sadoski & Paivio, 1994; see also Graphic Learners, 2024). Comics naturally enact this principle: images supply contextual clues while text provides linguistic structure, allowing young learners to infer meaning even when vocabulary is limited. In addition, multimodal texts can lower cognitive load by breaking dense narratives into manageable panels, reducing the burden on working memory, and enabling learners to focus on constructing meaning from smaller chunks of information (Bugtong et al., 2025). Through these mechanisms, comics are not mere "motivational extras"; they are structured literacy supports that can accelerate comprehension growth.

This study responds directly to the persistent comprehension gaps observed among Grade 3 pupils at Tampac Integrated School, Aguilar, Pangasinan. Classroom observations and Phil-IRI results indicated that several learners struggled to answer literal, inferential, and critical comprehension questions in Filipino texts. These difficulties often manifested as reduced participation, slow reading pace, and limited recall of details. Given DepEd's mandate to diagnose and remediate early-grade reading difficulties using context-appropriate interventions (DepEd, 2018), the researcher designed Comic-Designed Lessons aligned with Filipino curriculum competencies and learners' developmental levels. CDL materials used familiar contexts, age-appropriate vocabulary, and sequential visuals to support understanding of story structure and question answering.

Anchored in action research and employing a one-group pretest–posttest quasi-experimental design, the study aimed to determine whether CDL could significantly improve reading comprehension levels of Grade 3 learners in Filipino. Specifically, it sought to: (1) identify learners' comprehension levels before CDL implementation; (2) determine comprehension levels after the intervention; and (3) test whether any observed improvement was statistically significant. By situating comics within Filipino reading instruction—rather than treating them as separate enrichment texts—this study contributes to the growing body of evidence that multimodal, culturally resonant materials can strengthen foundational literacy. Ultimately, the findings are expected to inform classroom practice, support ECARP goals, and provide a replicable model for teachers seeking engaging, theory-grounded interventions for young readers.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a one-group pretest–posttest quasi-experimental action research design to determine the effectiveness of Comic-Designed Lessons (CDL) in improving Filipino reading comprehension among Grade 3 learners. A purposive sample of 23 pupils was assessed using Phil-IRI–based comprehension passages and questions before the intervention to establish baseline performance across literal, inferential, and critical levels. The CDL intervention was then implemented during regular Filipino classes for a defined period, integrating comics as structured instructional materials aligned with target competencies. After the intervention, the same (or parallel) comprehension test was administered as a posttest, and pretest–posttest mean scores and reading-level distributions (Independent, Instructional, Frustration) were compared. Statistical analysis—specifically a paired-samples t-test—was used to test whether the observed gains were significant, allowing the researcher to attribute changes in comprehension performance to the CDL strategy within the study's classroom context.

2.2 Participants

The participants of the study were twenty-three (23) Grade 3 learners from Tampac Integrated School, Aguilar, Pangasinan, who were purposively selected based on their identified reading comprehension needs in Filipino. The selected pupils represented varying Phil-IRI comprehension levels prior to the intervention—Independent, Instructional, and Frustration—ensuring that the strategy was tested across a realistic range of classroom abilities. They were enrolled in the same class where the researcher implemented the Comic-Designed Lessons (CDL) during regular Filipino periods, allowing the intervention to occur in an authentic instructional setting. Participation aligned with ethical standards in school-based action research, with learners included to diagnose learning gaps, provide targeted support, and evaluate measurable improvement after the CDL implementation.

2.3 Instrumentation

According to a July 2025 document, the study used a Phil-IRI–based Reading Comprehension Assessment as its primary research instrument, administered both as a pre-test and a post-test to 23 Grade 3 participants. The pre-test established baseline comprehension performance using a grade-appropriate Filipino reading passage adapted from the official Grade 3 Phil-IRI materials, along with comprehension questions that measured literal, inferential, and critical understanding. After the 20-day implementation of Comic-Designed Lessons (CDL), the post-test employed the same Phil-IRI framework and scoring metrics to ensure comparability of results. Test administration procedures and the computation of learners' comprehension levels (Independent, Instructional, Frustration) followed Phil-IRI guidelines, allowing the researcher to quantify changes in reading comprehension before and after the intervention.

2.4 Data Analysis

According to a 2025 document, the study's data analysis focused on quantifying and comparing learners' reading comprehension performance before and after the Comic-Designed Lessons (CDL) intervention, using descriptive and inferential statistics. Pre-test and post-test scores from the Phil-IRI–based comprehension assessment were first organized and summarized through frequency counts and percentages to describe how many learners fell under the Independent, Instructional, and Frustration levels at each testing phase. Means and standard deviations were computed to determine the group's average comprehension performance and score variability across the two administrations. To test whether the observed improvement after the 20-day CDL implementation was statistically meaningful, the researcher applied a paired-

samples t-test comparing the same participants' pre-test and post-test mean scores; this inferential procedure established whether the difference between the two sets of scores was significant and attributable to the intervention rather than chance. These combined statistical tools provided both a clear descriptive picture of reading-level shifts and a rigorous test of CDL effectiveness.

3 Results

According to a July 2025 document, the pre-test results showed that the Grade 3 learners initially exhibited generally low to moderate reading comprehension in Filipino. Using a 5-item Phil-IRI–based assessment, the group posted a mean score of 3.00 (SD = 0.85), indicating that many pupils answered only about three questions correctly and that performance varied across learners. Only six pupils (26.09%) were classified at the Independent level, while 10 pupils (43.48%) were at the Instructional level, and seven pupils (30.43%) were at the Frustration level. In total, 73.91% of learners required guided support or intensive intervention, clearly indicating the need for a targeted reading strategy such as CDL.

After 20 days of implementing Comic-Designed Lessons, the post-test results showed a marked improvement in comprehension. The mean increased to 4.09 (SD = 0.72), suggesting that pupils, on average, answered about 4 out of 5 questions correctly, and scores became more consistent across the class. Eighteen learners (78.26%) reached the Independent level, while only five learners (21.74%) remained at the Instructional level. Notably, no learner was classified in the Frustration level, indicating that the weakest readers in the pre-test moved up at least one comprehension category after exposure to CDL.

Comparing pre-test and post-test distributions highlights the magnitude of change. Independent readers increased from 26.09% to 78.26%, representing a gain of more than fifty percentage points, while the Frustration group dropped from 30.43% to 0%. This movement across levels implies that CDL not only improved average scores but also helped struggling readers overcome barriers that previously prevented them from comprehending Filipino texts meaningfully.

Inferential analysis confirmed that these gains were statistically significant. A paired-samples t-test comparing the same pupils' pre-test and post-test scores yielded a t-value of −8.74 and a p-value of 1.32×10^{-8}, far below the 0.05 alpha level. This result led to the rejection of the null hypothesis and supports the conclusion that the improvements were attributable to the CDL intervention rather than to chance or to routine classroom exposure alone.

Overall, the results demonstrate that Comic-Designed Lessons were highly effective in enhancing Filipino reading comprehension among Grade 3 learners in the study site. The combination of increased mean scores, the elimination of frustration-level readers, and the significant t-test outcome indicates that CDL provided engaging visual-text scaffolds that strengthened pupils' ability to understand and answer comprehension questions. While a small portion of learners still needed instructional support, the general upward shift suggests strong potential for CDL as a sustainable classroom-based reading intervention.

4. Discussion

The findings of the present study strongly corroborate with Philippine classroom-based research showing that comics or comic strips can raise comprehension scores and move learners from lower to higher reading levels. Similar to the large pretest–posttest gains found among Grade 3 pupils in Tampac Integrated School, a recent intervention for Grades 1–3 learners reported statistically significant improvement in reading proficiency after comic strips were used as remediation materials. That study emphasized that visuals paired with short, structured text helped young readers decode meaning more efficiently and sustain attention, resulting in better posttest outcomes than with traditional materials.

More specifically, the improvement pattern in this study aligns with Castro's (2023) experimental work on Grade 4 pupils, where the comics-strip group outperformed peers who used short stories. Castro noted that sequential images provided immediate context clues for vocabulary and plot, enabling pupils to answer comprehension questions more accurately and with greater confidence. The current study mirrors this mechanism: learners shifted substantially toward the Independent level after CDL exposure, suggesting that visual scaffolding likewise supported literal, inferential, and critical understanding in Filipino texts.

The results also confirm the conclusions of Bugtong et al. (2025), who found that English comics used as reading materials and intervention significantly enhanced primary pupils' comprehension, while also increasing enjoyment and classroom participation. Bugtong et al. argued that comics' blend of visuals and text reduced cognitive load and helped struggling readers build meaning without being overwhelmed by dense print. This parallels the present study's elimination of frustration-level readers after CDL, indicating that comics are beneficial across languages (English and Filipino) when adapted to learners' levels and curriculum goals.

Beyond local evidence, international research on graphic novels likewise supports the present outcome. Meuer (2018) reported that learners demonstrated better comprehension and memory of events when reading graphic-novel versions of texts compared to traditional formats, attributing gains to the same multimodal supports highlighted in CDL. This suggests that the positive impact observed in Grade 3 Filipino comprehension is consistent with broader findings that comics help learners integrate ideas through dual channels of meaning-making—visual and verbal.

Taken together, these related studies strengthen the interpretation that CDL's effectiveness is not an isolated classroom effect but part of a well-documented instructional advantage of multimodal texts. Across contexts, grade levels, and subject languages, comics consistently promote engagement, scaffold understanding, and yield measurable comprehension gains. Therefore, the present study extends the existing literature by demonstrating that comic-designed instruction can be systematically embedded in Filipino reading lessons and still yield outcomes comparable to those of prior Philippine and international interventions.

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