International Journal of Educational Researchers
16(3): 47-59
ISSN: 1308-9501, Copyright © 2023

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Assessing The Impact of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy on Augmenting Reading Comprehension in Higher Education

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Ethical Statement
The researchers strictly adhered to ethical standards throughout the study. Prior to implementation, official approval was obtained, and informed consent letters were provided to both participants and the institution. Participation was voluntary, with no pressure or coercion, and individuals were informed of their right to ask questions and to withdraw at any stage. Participant information was handled with strict confidentiality, ensuring maximum privacy in processing all data..

Funding Information
This research was undertaken solely to explore the potential contributions of the study to the community. The authors carried out the work independently, with all contributions to this manuscript supported entirely by their personal funds.

Conflict of Interest
The authors declare that they have no potential conflicts of interest, whether financial or non-financial. All authors confirm that no conflict of interest exists in relation to this study

ABSTRACT

This study undertakes a comprehensive exploration of the role of reading comprehension in the academic achievement of Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSED) major in English students during the School Year 2022-2023 at Cebu Roosevelt Memorial Colleges in Bogo City, Cebu. Motivated by challenges identified across various educational levels, particularly in response to the country's 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) performance, the study seeks to contribute nuanced insights to the ongoing discourse. The central focus revolves around the implementation of the Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS) as an evidence-based and extraneous approach, strategically employed to amplify reading comprehension and foster cooperative skills. Employing a robust quasi-experimental pretest and post-test design, the research, facilitated by a faculty member, keenly observes the impact of PALS on BSED English 2 students. Participant selection follows a deliberate and systematic simple random sampling process to ensure diverse representation. Infusing a significant statistical dimension, a t-test for paired samples is incorporated to precisely ascertain the difference in average scores within individual observations before and after the implementation of PALS. The conclusive findings unveil a statistically significant difference in pretest and post-test scores, validating the efficacy of PALS in substantially enhancing student learning outcomes. This contributes valuable insights into the nuanced effectiveness of PALS and underscores its potential to consistently improve reading comprehension in the academic achievement.

Keywords: Collaborative Learning, Cooperative Learning, Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy PALS, Reading Comprehension

Received: 12/08/2025 **Accepted**: 25/09/2025

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INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension plays a pivotal role in academic achievement, serving as the cornerstone for grasping the content of various academic disciplines (Smith et al., 2021). The CMO-No.75-s.2017 sets forth essential prerequisites, expressed as a minimum set of anticipated program objectives, indicated in Article IV Section 6, encompassing the acquisition of substantial reading expertise and an exhibit of competence in oral and written communication are among the potential learning outcomes for a Bachelor of Secondary Education primary in English. Emphasizing the significance of reading comprehension as an essential ability and skill that students must possess to achieve success (Miñoza & Montero, 2019), it is necessary to note that nothing is essential. The complexity of reading comprehension presents a widespread challenge in various countries, including the Philippines, that is evident across all levels of education. Furthermore, the results released on December 5, 2023, by the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) indicate that the Philippines ranked 6th from the bottom in reading among 81 participating countries and economies, with no notable improvement compared to the previous PISA 2018 results.

Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS) is an enhanced peer-tutoring program where students work together to participate in a predetermined set of assignments. It is a peer tutoring technique that uses interference to improve the core curriculum. This approach is grounded in evidence and can be used alongside different teaching methods. It assists teachers in effectively instructing students with various types of learning disabilities, students who perform poorly but do not have learning disabilities, average students, high-achieving students, and those who are learning English as a second language (Santhanalakshmi, 2021). This entails that PALS is intended to support students' cognitive, psychomotor, and affective development (Bugaj et al., 2019) and provides social benefits, including cultivating cooperative skills and friendships (Lee, 2014). Sulistami et al. (2018) concluded that PALS effectively improves students' reading comprehension and allows them to comprehend the given text.

According to Meletiadou (2022), equitable strategies like PALS can support students' transition into higher education and improve their well-being, especially in the post-COVID context. However, its application in higher education—particularly in the Philippine setting—remains underexplored. While studies such as that of Guraya and Abdalla (2020) have demonstrated PALS's value in the medical field, there is little research on its impact among education students. Given its proven success, applying PALS strategically in higher education, especially for Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSED) English students, may enhance the achievement of learning outcomes, accommodate diverse backgrounds and learning needs, and empower students as advocates for equitable access to education.

Background of the Study of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS)

Priestley's (2020) study describes Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS), developed in the 1990s by Fuchs and Fuchs at Vanderbilt University, as a program aimed at improving strategic reading, fluency, and comprehension in inclusive classrooms. Bene and Bergus (2015) found peer teaching benefits both instructors and learners, enhancing subject mastery and performance. Kearns et al. (2021) highlight PALS as an adaptive reading and math program fostering literacy, collaboration, and social connections (Duran, 2021). This study investigates the true impact of PALS on student outcomes and achievements, addressing the growing need to evaluate its effectiveness in higher education learning environments.

Influence of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS) on Reading Comprehension. Sulistami et al. (2018) found that PALS improves students' understanding of narrative texts, with Fitriani and Tarwana (2020) recommending its use to enhance

reading comprehension. Its adaptability in online learning gained relevance during COVID-19. Crowley and Hevers (2021) reported increased engagement and reduced anxiety among first-year law students, aligning with Bosmans et al. (2019). Budiyanto (2019) noted significant comprehension differences favoring PALS, while Zenati and Zekraoui (2023) highlighted its role in boosting motivation and participation. Collectively, these studies affirm PALS as a dynamic strategy. Havens and Williams (2019) emphasize its transformative potential in higher education, solidifying its enduring educational value.

PALS addresses reading comprehension challenges through collaboration, fostering academic and social benefits, especially for vulnerable learners (Kendeou et al., 2016; Hjetland et al., 2017; Lestari & Wahyudin, 2020; Jellison et al., 2017). By tailoring strategies to specific contexts, educators can enhance learning, promote peer support, and create supportive, effective classroom environments.

Comprehension on Student's Achievement

Reading comprehension, a core language competency (Trudell, 2019; Safaie, 2020), strongly correlates with English achievement (Menaka & Jebaraj, 2017) and overall academic success, including GPA (Barwasser et al., 2021; Talwar et al., 2022; Clinton et al., 2022). Support from teachers and families enhances performance in reading, math, and science (Akbasli et al., 2016). PALS employs peer-pairing, role-switching, and strategy practice to build comprehension (Vardy et al., 2022). Paired reading, emphasizing error correction, questioning, and metacognitive reflection, fosters deeper understanding and cognitive growth (Thurston et al., 2022). Research confirms PALS' effectiveness across cultures, ages, and educational levels in improving comprehension and engagement.

The study examines Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS) in enhancing reading comprehension among BSED English 2 students, grounded in Bandura's social learning theory. Emphasizing collaboration, peer feedback, and adaptability, PALS fosters literacy, higher-order thinking, and engagement. Research highlights its global applicability, effectiveness, and potential to improve educational outcomes in diverse contexts.

This study investigates the impact of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS) on the reading comprehension of BSED students at Cebu Roosevelt Memorial Colleges. Guided by Bandura's Social Learning Theory, Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory, and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), it examines how collaborative engagement, social interaction, and scaffolding enhance comprehension while addressing cognitive demands, potential distractions, and the need for individual effort. Using pilot testing, literature review, questionnaires, and observations, the research identifies areas where PALS strengthens reading skills. Findings aim to inform evidence-based guidelines for implementing PALS in higher education to improve teaching strategies and promote better academic performance.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to assess the influence of peer-assisted learning strategy in reading comprehension of BSED English 2 students of Cebu Roosevelt Memorial Colleges, Bogo City, and Academic Year 2023-2024.

Specifically, the study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the pretest performances of the control and experimental groups?

2. What are the posttest performances of the control and experimental groups?

3. Is there a significant difference between the pretest performances of the control and experimental group?

4. Is there a significant difference between the posttest posttest performances of the control and experimental groups?

5. Is there a significant difference between the pretest–posttest performances of the control and experimental groups?

6. Based on the study's findings, what action plan can be proposed?

Statement of Null Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant difference between the pretest performances of the control and the experimental groups.

Ho2: There is no significant difference between the posttest performances of the control groups

Ho3: There is no significant difference between the pretest and posttest of the control and experimental groups.

METHOD

Research Design

This study utilized the quasi-experimental design. A quasi-experimental design investigated the cause-and-effect relationships by manipulating an independent variable but lacked complete randomization of participants, often due to practical or ethical considerations (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This study used a quasi-experimental pretest and posttest. A pretest-posttest design with a single group was a research approach where you measured a variable of interest in a non-randomized group of participants before and after an intervention. It helped assess changes within the same group over time, but it lacked a control group for making direct comparisons to determine the intervention's impact. This study used non-randomized dyads to assess the reading comprehension level of the same group of students.

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at Cebu Roosevelt Memorial College (CRMC) in Bogo City, Cebu, a CHED- and DepEd-recognized institution and member of the Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities (PACU). With a total population of 4,257 students and 155 personnel, CRMC served as the setting for examining the impact of the Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS) on BSED English 2 students during the 2023–2024 school year. Participants were selected through simple random sampling using a coin-flip technique to assign them to either the experimental or control group.

Table 1. Matching of the Respondents

Variables	Range	Control Group				Experimental Group			
		F		%	Mean	*F*		%	Mean
		M	F			M	F		
Prelim Grade in Teaching and Assessment in Grammar	90-100	5	10	37.50	88.125	5	7	30	87.90
	85-89	7	13	62.50		11	16	70	
	80-84	0	0	0		0	0	0	
	75-79	0	0	0		0	0	0	
	Below 75								
	Total	**22**		**100**		**22**		**100**	

Instruments

This study adapted the AIMSweb® R-CBM Maze Passage to test the respondents' level of comprehension. The CBM Oral Reading Fluency tool uses grade-level reading passages that act as subscales, allowing teachers to look closely at students' decoding accuracy, reading speed, and overall fluency (Shinn and Shinn, 2002). Research drawing on large, nationally representative groups—such as studies of fourth-grade readers—shows solid evidence of construct validity, with reading-related correlations usually landing between .60 and .80 and reliability remaining strong across multiple uses. Taken together, this body of work shows that CBM reading probes are dependable, research-supported measures that help educators screen students, monitor their progress, and gauge the seriousness of reading difficulties (Shinn and Shinn, 2002).

Procedure. All research participants performed the Reading Maze Passage before the intervention. The Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM) Maze Passage was used for pretest and posttest assessments. The Reading Maze Passage is a multiple-choice cloze exercise students complete while reading silently. The student was given three minutes to read a passage silently and mark the missing words from a list of three possible words. One of the terms was accurate, while the other two were not. The number of correct selections made by the learner throughout three minutes of reading constituted the student's score.

They were reading Material. The students were given a carefully selected narrative section developed and evaluated with students to verify that passage levels are of comparable complexity. Thus, the researcher provided the respondents a suitable level of CBM-Maze passage.

Procedure

Pre-Data Gathering. The researcher first secured permission from the school president to conduct the study on BSED English students. A separate letter was sent to the CTE Dean. The questionnaire came with a cover letter written to the researcher that explained the research, its logic, and its objective, as well as general directions on how to fill out the form. BSED English 2 students were randomly assigned into control and experimental groups using the coin-flipping technique.

Actual Data Gathering. The questionnaire (20-item test) for pre-intervention was distributed to the two sections selected (experimental and control group) during their teaching and assessment in grammar class, with the permission of the Dean and a note of approval from the school. The questionnaire was retrieved right after the teaching and assessment in grammar class, as they were given to ensure a higher return of QTs. The researcher then implemented the study. 45 BSED English students participated in the survey. The intervention was planned in a week of lessons, using peer-assisted learning for the experimental group and the straightforward lecture method for the control group.

Post Data Gathering. After the intervention, the researcher administered a post-assessment survey to both groups, which the English grammar instructors later reviewed. The student's performance data were then collected and meticulously arranged by the researcher before undergoing analysis and encoding through the utilization of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Data Analysis

Statistical methodologies were used to address the difficulties presented in the issue specification. The data collected from the experimental and control groups were examined using the statistical software SPSS, both before and after the intervention.

First, the mean scores of the two groups' pretest performances were determined to answer the initial study question. Second, the mean scores of the two groups posttest post-test performances for the second research question were determined. Third, an independent-sample t-test was used to compare the two groups' pretest performances. Fourth, an independent-sample t-test was used to compare the two groups' post-test performances. Fifth, a paired-sample t-test was used to compare the two groups' pretest-posttest performances. Finally, the t-test for paired samples was performed to determine the difference between the average score of the same individual or observation before and after. This ensured that the data were genuine and assisted the researcher in statistically managing the original group difference.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pretest Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups

Table 2 shows pretest results where 100% of the control group and 93.33% of the experimental group failed to meet expectations. Peer-Assisted Learning (PALS), as noted by Duran (2021), fosters engagement, collaboration, and social connections, enhancing both academic performance and the educational community's social fabric. This means that before the intervention, all students in the control group and nearly all in the experimental group were performing below the expected level, highlighting a clear need for additional support. The use of Peer-Assisted Learning (PALS), which Duran (2021) describes as strengthening engagement, collaboration, and social interaction, offers a promising way to address these gaps by helping students learn from one another while building a more connected classroom environment.

Table 2. Pretest Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups

Pretest Scores		Control Group		Experimental Group	
Score Ranges	Description	Frequency *f*	Per Cent %	Frequency *f*	Per Cent %
19-20	Outstanding	0	0.00	0	0.00
17-18	Very Satisfactory	0	0.00	0	0.00
15-16	Satisfactory	0	0.00	0	0.00
14	Fairly Satisfactory	0	0.00	1	6.67
Below 14	Did not Meet Expectation	15	100.00	14	93.33
Total		**15**	**100**	**15**	**100**
Mean:		**7.27**		**7.4**	
Standard Deviation:		**1.44**		**2.16**	

Posttest Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups

Table 3 shows a statistically significant difference in posttest performance between control and experimental groups, with the experimental group achieving a notably higher mean score and lower standard deviation, indicating greater consistency. Frequency distribution reveals more scores below 14 in the control group, suggesting variability in comprehension. Conversely, the experimental group had more scores meeting or exceeding expectations. This revealed

that after the intervention, the experimental group performed more strongly and consistently than the control group, as seen in both their higher mean score and lower standard deviation. While many students in the control group still scored below 14, the experimental group had more learners meeting or surpassing the expected level of comprehension.

Table 3. Post-test Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups

Posttest Scores		Control Group		Experimental Group	
Score Ranges	Description	Frequency	Per Cent	Frequency	Per Cent
		f	%	*f*	%
19-20	Outstanding	0	0.00	4	26.67
17-18	Very Satisfactory	0	0.00	6	40.00
15-16	Satisfactory	1	6.67	5	33.33
14	Fairly Satisfactory	2	13.33	0	0.00
Below 14	Did not Meet Expectation	12	80.00	0	0.00
Total		**15**	**100**	**15**	**100**
Mean:		**10.67**		**17.27**	
Standard Deviation:		**2.23**		**1.33**	

These results demonstrate the intervention's positive impact, supporting the effectiveness of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy in enhancing reading comprehension. Moreover, it fostered growth in vocabulary, inquiry use, and English reading competence, leading to improved outcomes surpassing established norms (Hasnani & Ismail, 2020).

Significant Difference of the Pretest Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups

Table 4 presents the pretest score analysis comparing control and experimental groups. The control group's mean was 7.27, the experimental group's 7.4, with a t-value of 7.814, df = 28, and p = 0.844, indicating no significant difference at α = 0.05. This similarity establishes baseline equivalence before intervention, ensuring post-intervention differences stem from the treatment. The finding supports the claim that Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS) effectively enhances comprehension of narrative text (Sulistami et al., 2018). It also aligns with Fitriani and Tarwana's (2020) recommendation for incorporating PALS into English pedagogy to substantially improve students' reading comprehension outcomes. This demonstrates that both groups started at nearly the same level, with no significant difference in their pretest scores, confirming that any changes seen later can be traced to the intervention itself. This supports earlier findings that the Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy helps strengthen students' understanding of narrative texts and fits well with recommendations to use PALS to improve reading comprehension in English classes.

Table 4. Significant Difference of the Pretest Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups

Groups	Mean	t	df	P-value	Decision on Ho (ά = 0.05)	Interpretation
Control	7.27	7.814	28	0.844	Failed to Reject Ho	Not Significantly Different

Significant Difference of the Posttest Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups

Table 5 shows a statistical comparison of posttest scores between control (M = 11.13) and experimental (M = 17.27) groups, with t = 9.135, df = 28, and p = 0.001, indicating significance at α = 0.05. The null hypothesis was rejected, confirming a substantial performance difference attributable to the Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS). Similarly, another posttest analysis reported the experimental group's mean (M = 19.2) exceeding the control's (M = 10.9) at p = .00, demonstrating notable gains in intellectual and social abilities. These results affirm PALS's effectiveness in enhancing

learning outcomes (Dorji & Darjay, 2022). Table 5 makes it clear that the students who received the PALS intervention performed much better on the posttest than those in the control group, showing a meaningful and statistically reliable improvement. This pattern mirrors findings from other studies, reinforcing that PALS not only boosts academic performance but also helps strengthen students' social and intellectual skills.

Table 5. Significant Difference of the Posttest Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups

Groups	Mean	t	df	P-value	Decision on Ho (ά = 0.05)	Interpretation
Control	11.13	9.135	28	<0.001	Reject Ho	Significantly Different

Significant Difference of the Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups

Table 6 highlights the significant difference in pretest and posttest scores between control and experimental groups. The control group had a mean gain of 3.87 (*t* = 9.374, df = 14), while the experimental group achieved a greater mean gain of 9.87 (t = 17.373, df = 14). Both p-values were <0.001, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (Ho) at α = 0.05. This confirms the Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy's (PALS) superior effectiveness for the experimental group.

Table 6. Significant Difference of the Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups

Groups	Mean Gain	t	df	P-value	Decision on Ho (ά = 0.05)	Interpretation
Control	3.87	9.374	14	<0.001	Reject Ho	Significantly Different
Experimental	9.87	17.373	14	<0.001	Reject Ho	Significantly Different

Supporting this, Brierley et al. (2021) found that students engaged in PAL consistently showed higher mean gains and stronger academic performance. Similarly, Budiyanto (2019) reported significant differences in reading comprehension between PALS and non-PALS learners, while Zenati and Zekraoui (2023) noted increased engagement and deeper comprehension in PALS settings. These findings affirm PALS as a dynamic educational strategy, with Havens and Williams (2019) advocating its integration into higher education for substantial academic benefits. This highlights that both groups improved, but the experimental group posted a much larger gain, underscoring how strongly the PALS approach supported their progress. This trend matches the results of several other studies, which consistently report that students in PALS settings show greater improvement, stronger engagement, and deeper understanding than those taught through traditional methods.

Summary of Findings

This study assessed the effectiveness of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS) in enhancing reading comprehension among BSEd-English 2 students at Cebu Roosevelt Memorial Colleges (2023–2024). Pretest results showed no significant difference between control and experimental groups, serving as a baseline. Posttest analysis revealed significantly higher mean scores and consistency in the experimental group, confirming PALS's positive impact (Duran, 2021; Dorji & Darjay, 2022; Brierley et al., 2021). Grounded in Bandura's Social Learning Theory, Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory, and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, findings align with Meletiadou (2022) and Guraya & Abdalla (2020), emphasizing PALS's potential to improve outcomes, engagement, and equitable learning opportunities. The results suggest that implementing PALS not only enhances comprehension skills but also fosters collaborative learning among students. Additionally, the strategy encourages active participation, boosting confidence and motivation in the learning process.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study's results, obtained via thorough evaluation of both control and experimental groups, have provided vital insights into the effectiveness of the peer-assisted learning technique in improving student learning outcomes. The prevalence of lower scores in the control group emphasizes the range of differences and the need for focused educational interventions. The data collectively confirm the effectiveness of the peer-assisted learning technique applied to BSEd-English 2 students, revealing its potential to improve students' understanding and academic achievements significantly.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings and conclusions, the following recommendations were made: It includes prioritizing and refining the needs assessment process, customizing training programs for faculty and mentors, and emphasizing the significance of an iterative monitoring and evaluation structure.

First is a thorough needs assessment to identify particular challenges linked to reading comprehension in the chosen higher education context.

Simultaneously, training programs for professors or mentors will be established to provide educators with the pedagogical skills required to integrate the peer-assisted method into existing curriculum effortlessly. This includes the design of training modules, their seamless integration into existing teacher education programs, and an exploration of the subsequent influence on student outcomes.

Finally, a monitoring and evaluation framework will also be implemented to ensure long-term success, allowing for the rapid detection of difficulties and the prompt adjustment of the implementation approach.

Acknowledgments

The researchers extend their deepest gratitude and sincere appreciation to their mentors for their invaluable guidance, constructive suggestions, and unwavering moral support, which greatly contributed to the improvement and completion of this study. Heartfelt thanks are also given to the school head, teachers, and students of the institution where the research was conducted for generously sharing their time in answering the questionnaires and providing essential information that significantly aided the success of this work. Above all, the researchers offer profound thanks to Almighty God for His constant guidance, protection, and the strength bestowed to persevere throughout this journey.

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