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Enhancing The Reading Comprehension of Grade 9 Students Through Scaffolding Strategy

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the reading comprehension levels of Grade 9 learners and assessed the effectiveness of a scaffolding strategy in improving the performance of struggling readers at Moreno Integrated School during School Year 2025-2026. Anchored in Differentiated Instruction Theory and Scaffolding Theory, the study employed a one-group pre-experimental pretest-posttest design. The participants were 79 Grade 9 learners selected through stratified sampling from three sections. Data were gathered using a teacher-made reading assessment aligned with the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory framework and a validated survey questionnaire. Percentage distribution, weighted mean, and paired-samples t-test were used to analyze the data. Before the intervention, 48.10% of learners were at the frustration level, 35.44% were at the instructional level, and 16.46% were at the independent level. After the intervention, the frustration-level proportion declined to 27.85%, while the instructional-level proportion increased to 53.16% and the independent-level proportion increased to 18.99%. The mean reading-level score increased from 1.68 (SD = 0.74) to 1.91 (SD = 0.67), and the difference was highly significant, $t(78) = -4.32$, $p < .001$. Learners also rated the scaffolding strategy as effective, with an overall weighted mean of 3.86. The findings support the use of structured and gradually reduced instructional assistance to strengthen reading comprehension. A responsive scaffolding-based differentiated reading framework was proposed for learners requiring targeted support.

Keywords: *differentiated instruction, Grade 9 learners, Phil-IRI-aligned assessment, reading comprehension, scaffolding strategy, struggling readers*

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a foundational academic skill that enables learners to interpret meaning, connect ideas, evaluate information, and respond appropriately to written texts. In diverse classrooms, learners do not develop this competence at the same pace. Some readers can work independently, while others need guided support to understand vocabulary, identify main ideas, formulate inferences, and analyze more complex passages.

Differentiated instruction responds to this variation by adapting content, learning processes, expected outputs, and the learning environment to students' readiness, interests, and profiles (Tomlinson, 2014). In reading instruction, differentiation becomes more responsive when it is combined with scaffolding. Scaffolding provides temporary assistance through modeling, guided questioning, think-alouds, vocabulary support, reciprocal teaching, and graphic organizers. As learners gain competence, the support is gradually reduced until they can perform reading tasks more independently (Wood et al., 1976).

The need for targeted reading intervention remains important among junior high school learners whose comprehension gaps may have continued from earlier grade levels. While the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) is commonly associated with elementary reading assessment, the present study used a teacher-

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made Grade 9 assessment aligned with the Phil-IRI reading-level framework to identify independent, instructional, and frustration levels. This approach provided a practical basis for designing a school-based intervention for struggling readers.

This study aimed to determine the Grade 9 learners' reading comprehension levels before and after the use of a scaffolding strategy, identify applicable scaffolding practices, assess the perceived effectiveness of the intervention, test the significance of the difference between pretest and posttest results, and develop a responsive reading framework for learners requiring additional support.

Literature Review

Differentiated Instruction and Learner Diversity

Differentiated instruction recognizes that learners vary in readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Tomlinson (2014) explains that teachers may adjust content, process, product, and the learning environment to provide meaningful access to learning. In reading instruction, this principle supports the use of leveled texts, targeted comprehension tasks, flexible grouping, and guided activities that respond to learners' actual reading needs.

Differentiated instruction is especially relevant when a class includes learners at independent, instructional, and frustration levels. A uniform task may not adequately support all learners. Responsive teaching requires teachers to identify where learners need assistance and provide appropriate support without removing opportunities for independent practice.

Scaffolding in Reading Comprehension

Scaffolding refers to temporary instructional assistance that allows learners to accomplish tasks they may not yet complete independently. Wood et al. (1976) described tutoring support as a process that enables a learner to solve a problem or perform a task beyond unassisted effort. In reading, scaffolding may include activating prior knowledge, pre-teaching vocabulary, teacher modeling, think-alouds, guided questions, reciprocal teaching, text chunking, and graphic organizers.

The gradual reduction of assistance is a defining feature of scaffolding. Support is not intended to remain permanent. Instead, it helps learners develop strategies for identifying central ideas, interpreting details, establishing connections, and responding to comprehension questions. This process can strengthen learner confidence and promote increasingly independent reading.

Reading-Level Assessment and Targeted Intervention

Reading-level assessment provides evidence for planning intervention. Learners at the instructional level typically understand parts of a text but still require guidance, while frustration-level learners experience more serious difficulty in decoding, vocabulary, fluency, or meaning-making. An intervention becomes more responsive when teachers use assessment results to match texts, activities, and scaffolds with the learner's current level.

Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by Differentiated Instruction Theory and Scaffolding Theory. Differentiated instruction establishes the need to respond to learner diversity, while scaffolding explains how temporary support can help learners move toward independence. The integration of these theories formed the basis of the responsive scaffolding-based differentiated reading framework proposed in the study.

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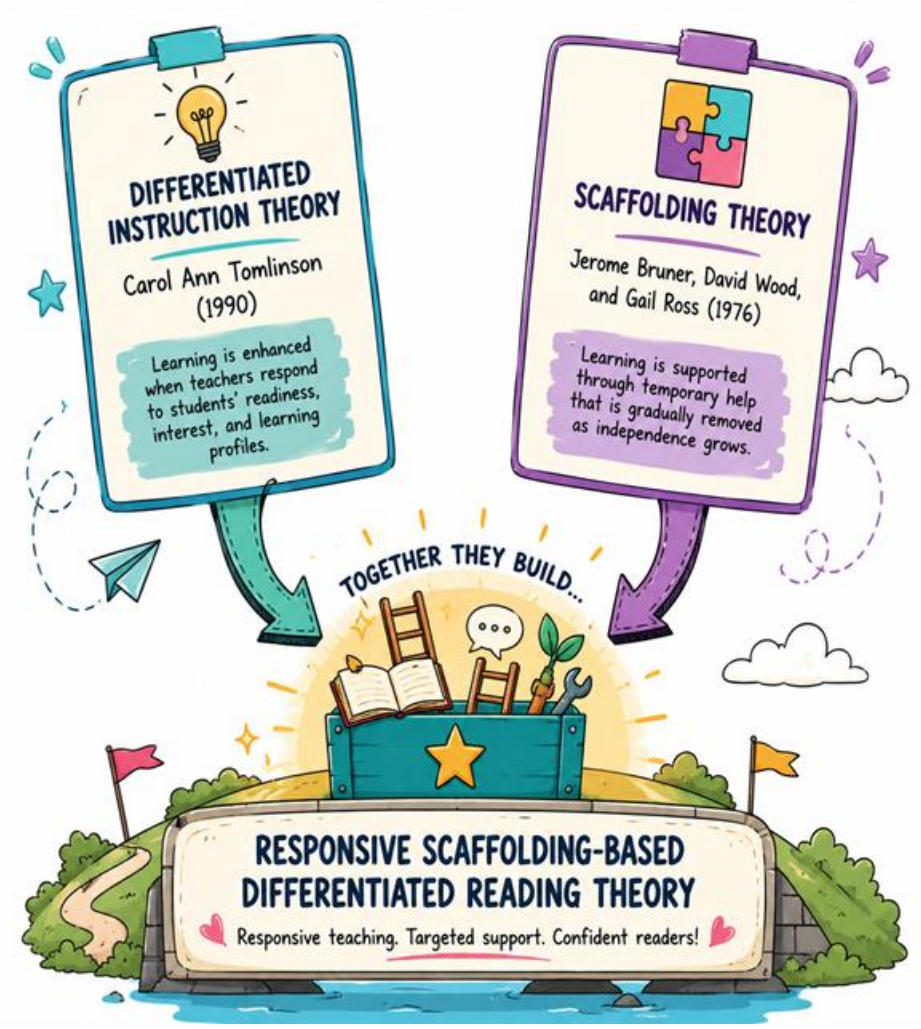

Figure 1. *Theoretical Paradigm of the Responsive Scaffolding-Based Differentiated Reading Framework*

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a one-group pre-experimental pretest-posttest design. The learners' reading comprehension levels were assessed before the intervention, a scaffolding strategy was applied, and the learners were assessed again after the intervention. This design enabled the researcher to examine changes in reading comprehension performance within the same group of participants.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at Moreno Integrated School under the Schools Division Office of Camarines Norte. The school setting was selected because it provided access to Grade 9 learners with varying reading comprehension levels and a practical context for implementing a targeted reading intervention.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The participants were 79 Grade 9 learners from three sections: 29 learners from Grade 9-Pioneering, 24 learners from Grade 9-Responsible, and 26 learners from Grade 9-Optimistic. Stratified sampling was used to ensure that learners from the three sections were represented in the study.

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Research Instruments

The study used a teacher-made reading comprehension assessment aligned with the reading-level classification framework commonly used in Phil-IRI-related school practice. The assessment included reading passages and comprehension questions designed to measure literal, inferential, and critical comprehension skills. It was administered as a pretest and posttest. A survey questionnaire was also used to gather the learners' assessment of the effectiveness of the scaffolding strategy.

The source manuscript states that the reading assessment and survey questionnaire were subjected to expert validation, reliability testing through Cronbach's alpha, and pilot administration among 20 Grade 9 learners outside the main study group. The manuscript did not report the final reliability coefficient; therefore, no unsupported coefficient is introduced in this article.

Intervention Procedure

The scaffolding intervention incorporated structured reading support. The strategies included pre-reading activation of prior knowledge, vocabulary preview, guided reading, teacher think-alouds, guided questioning, reciprocal teaching, text chunking, and the use of graphic organizers such as story maps, Venn diagrams, and cause-and-effect charts. The teacher gradually reduced support as learners developed greater competence and confidence.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before data gathering, the researcher secured the necessary school approval and obtained parental informed consent because the participants were minors. The learners were informed of the purpose of the study, their rights as participants, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidential treatment of their responses. The pretest was administered before the intervention. After the scaffolding activities, the posttest and effectiveness questionnaire were administered. The accomplished instruments were retrieved, checked, encoded, and analyzed.

Data Analysis

Frequency and percentage distribution were used to describe the learners' reading comprehension levels before and after the intervention. Weighted mean was used to summarize the learners' assessment of the effectiveness of the scaffolding strategy. A paired-samples t-test was used to determine whether the difference between the pretest and posttest reading-level scores was statistically significant at the .05 level.

Ethical Consideration

The study observed informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and data privacy. The researcher obtained parental consent for the minor participants and informed learners of their right to clarify questions, decline to answer sensitive items, and withdraw from the study. Participant identities were protected during the collection, encoding, analysis, and reporting of data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reading Comprehension Levels Before the Intervention

Table 1. *Pretest Reading Comprehension Levels of Grade 9 Learners*

Level	9-Pioneering f	%	9-Responsible f	%	9-Optimistic f	%	Total f	%
Independent	5	17.24%	7	29.17%	0	0.00%	12	15.19%
Instructional	20	68.97%	5	20.83%	3	11.54%	28	35.44%
Frustration	4	13.79%	12	50.00%	23	88.46%	39	49.37%
Total	29	100%	24	100%	26	100%	79	100%

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The source table shows that many learners required support before the intervention. Grade 9-Optimistic had the most serious concentration of frustration-level readers, with 23 of 26 learners (88.46%) classified at that level. Grade 9-Responsible also had 12 of 24 learners (50.00%) at the frustration level. Grade 9-Pioneering had a more favorable profile, with 20 of 29 learners (68.97%) at the instructional level.

Reading Comprehension Levels After the Intervention

Table 2. *Posttest Reading Comprehension Levels of Grade 9 Learners*

Level	9-Pioneering f	%	9-Responsible f	%	9-Optimistic f	%	Total f	%
Independent	8	27.59%	7	29.17%	0	0.00%	15	18.99%
Instructional	20	68.97%	16	66.67%	6	23.08%	42	53.16%
Frustration	1	3.44%	1	4.16%	20	76.92%	22	27.85%
Total	29	100%	24	100%	26	100%	79	100%

After the intervention, the instructional level became the dominant category, with 42 learners (53.16%). The frustration-level group declined to 22 learners (27.85%), while the independent level increased to 15 learners (18.99%). The most substantial shift occurred in Grade 9-Responsible: the frustration-level proportion declined from 50.00% to 4.16%, while the instructional-level proportion increased from 20.83% to 66.67%.

Section-Level Changes in Reading Comprehension

Table 3. *Changes in Reading-Level Distribution Across Sections*

Section	Reading Level	Pretest	Posttest	Change
9-Pioneering	Independent	17.24%	27.59%	+10.35 percentage points
	Instructional	68.97%	68.97%	No change
	Frustration	13.79%	3.44%	-10.35 percentage points
9-Responsible	Independent	29.17%	29.17%	No change
	Instructional	20.83%	66.67%	+45.84 percentage points
	Frustration	50.00%	4.16%	-45.84 percentage points
9-Optimistic	Independent	0.00%	0.00%	No change
	Instructional	11.54%	23.08%	+11.54 percentage points
	Frustration	88.46%	76.92%	-11.54 percentage points

The section-level analysis shows improvement across the three groups. In Grade 9-Pioneering, the independent-reader proportion increased by 10.35 percentage points. In Grade 9-Responsible, learners moved strongly from the frustration level to the instructional level. In Grade 9-Optimistic, the reduction in frustration-level readers was smaller but still visible. These findings indicate that the intervention supported upward movement in reading-level classification, although the remaining high proportion of frustration-level learners in Grade 9-Optimistic requires continued intervention.

Significant Difference Between Pretest and Posttest Scores

Table 4. *Paired-Samples t-Test Results*

Assessment	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t(78)	p-value	Decision
Pretest	1.68	0.74				
Posttest	1.91	0.67	-0.23	-4.32	< .001	Reject H0

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The mean reading-level score increased from 1.68 (SD = 0.74) during the pretest to 1.91 (SD = 0.67) during the posttest. The paired-samples t-test yielded $t(78) = -4.32$, $p < .001$. The null hypothesis was rejected. The result indicates a highly significant improvement in the learners' reading-level scores after the scaffolding intervention.

Learners' Assessment of the Scaffolding Strategy

Table 5. *Selected Indicators of the Effectiveness of the Scaffolding Strategy*

Indicator	Weighted Mean	Interpretation	Remark
Helps learners answer comprehension questions correctly	4.41	Effective	Highest
Helps learners understand the main idea of a text more easily	4.31	Effective	Second highest
Helps learners break down and understand texts into smaller manageable parts	3.51	Effective	Lowest reported indicator
Overall weighted mean	3.86	Effective	

The learners assessed the scaffolding strategy as effective, with an overall weighted mean of 3.86. The strongest reported indicator was its contribution to answering comprehension questions correctly (M = 4.41). Understanding the main idea of a text also received a high rating (M = 4.31). Although breaking texts into smaller manageable parts obtained the lowest reported mean (M = 3.51), it was still interpreted as effective. These results suggest that guided support helped learners focus on key information, process complex passages, and respond more accurately to reading tasks.

Responsive Scaffolding-Based Differentiated Reading Framework

Based on the reading-level assessment and the effectiveness ratings, the study proposed a responsive reading framework that combines differentiated instruction with gradually reduced scaffolding. The framework is intended to guide teachers in providing structured learning experiences while developing learner independence.

Table 6. *Proposed Responsive Scaffolding-Based Differentiated Reading Framework*

Framework Phase	Purpose	Suggested Strategies	Expected Outcome
Diagnostic Assessment	Identify independent, instructional, and frustration-level readers.	Teacher-made Phil-IRI-aligned pretest; learner grouping; baseline profiling.	Reading profile for targeted support.
Pre-Reading Scaffolds	Activate prior knowledge and reduce vocabulary barriers.	Vocabulary preview; anticipation questions; text-feature review; context-building.	Improved readiness to engage with the text.
Guided Meaning-Making	Support comprehension during reading.	Teacher modeling; think-alouds; guided questioning; chunking; graphic organizers.	Improved understanding of main ideas, details, and relationships.
Collaborative Comprehension	Provide supported practice before independent application.	Reciprocal teaching; paired reading; group discussion; clarification and summarization tasks.	Greater participation, confidence, and strategic reading.
Gradual Release	Reduce assistance as competence improves.	Shift from teacher-led to guided and independent reading tasks.	Increasing independence and improved posttest performance.
Progress Monitoring	Track learner movement and adjust intervention.	Short comprehension checks; posttest; targeted remediation for persistent frustration-level readers.	Responsive refinement of reading support.

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CONCLUSION

The Grade 9 learners demonstrated varied reading comprehension levels before the intervention, with a substantial proportion initially classified at the frustration level. After the use of the scaffolding strategy, the distribution shifted toward the instructional and independent levels, and the paired-samples t-test confirmed a highly significant improvement in reading-level scores. Learners also assessed the scaffolding strategy as effective. The findings show that structured support, including guided questions, modeling, vocabulary assistance, text chunking, and graphic organizers, can help learners process texts more effectively. Continued intervention is especially important for learners who remain at the frustration level. The proposed responsive scaffolding-based differentiated reading framework provides a practical basis for sustained school-level reading support.

Recommendation

1. Teachers may implement differentiated reading interventions based on learners' assessed reading levels, with focused assistance for those who remain at the frustration level.
2. Reading activities may incorporate vocabulary preview, teacher modeling, guided questioning, think-alouds, reciprocal teaching, text chunking, and graphic organizers.
3. Moreno Integrated School may establish regular progress monitoring using pretests, posttests, short comprehension checks, and section-specific intervention records.
4. Additional remediation may be provided to learners in Grade 9-Optimistic because a substantial proportion remained at the frustration level after the intervention.
5. Supplementary reading materials may be reviewed and validated by reading teachers and educational experts to ensure alignment with learner readiness and comprehension needs.
6. Future researchers may conduct studies using a comparison group, larger samples, longer intervention periods, and clearly reported reliability results to strengthen the evidence base for scaffolding in junior high school reading instruction.

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