Personal Growth and Development of Students’ Literary Appreciation

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Abstract: This study aims to determine the personal growth and development of Grade 7 students in St. Paul College of Ilocos Sur on literary appreciation based on their prior knowledge, experiences, and feelings in valuing literary texts, and understanding of personal reading progress and outcome through a thematic approach. Results analyzed through reflections, interviews, and focused group discussions revealed that students have a background on the flow of text, content, readiness, and analysis. In previous experiences, reading literary works, accomplishing activities or assessments, using modern technology, and having parental guidance emerged. On prior feelings, they find reading pleasurable as a recreation activity while feeling the emotions dominating the text, sympathizing, and empathizing with the characters. In linking prior new knowledge, integration helps them develop proficiency, comprehension, and appreciation. Expanded knowledge leads to a satisfactory score evident in improved reading comprehension, appreciation, and enthusiasm. On comprehension based on outcome, showing good interpersonal relationships, maintaining enthusiasm, seeking more literary texts, being critical in life, and adapting to the environment emerged. This leads to a developed personal growth by seeing reading as bringing personal happiness and development, self-fulfillment, a challenge in learning, eagerness, hobby or passion, expanded knowledge, developed maturity, careful speech, and influencing others to read.

Keywords: Literary Appreciation, Personal Development, Reading Literary Text

1. Introduction

In philosophy, man is considered the highest kind of animal and rational. He thinks, understands and knows how to feel and to control himself. Therefore, there are many activities that a person can do especially if it is within the school where he can develop his skills and abilities. One of these activities is reading. A person needs to read because in the process, his knowledge expands and the information in his mind increases. Furthermore, this will greatly help him in the development of himself as an individual and as a part of society. Therefore, through reading, personal development also occurs.

According to Owusu (2014), reading helps the student to further meet the needs of his mind especially when he reads texts or literature written in his community. With this, Wilkinson (2015) emphasized that reading literary works can provide comfort to all those who read. Moreover, it serves as the mirror of a place because it talks about the culture and traditions of the people. Reading literary works also reflects the virtues that people should emulate and serves as inspiration in their daily lives.

Although there are studies regarding reading comprehension (Sterzik, 2012; De Leon et al., 2014; Balck, 2016; Bilbao et al. 2016; Elleman, 2019; Meylana, 2019; Miñoza, 2019; Suson et al., 2020; and Manaog, 2020), reading habits (Chettri et al., 2013, Davidovich et al., 2014; Erdem 2014; Cirebon 2015; Rosli, et al., 2017 and Ameyaw et al., 2018), reading skills (Bojovic 2010 and Liu Feng 2010), reading intervention (Wright, 2011; Chavez, 2013 and Tan et al., 2016), reading difficulties (Genese, 2014 and Nation, 2019), and reading success (Ecklund 2018 and Westerveld 2020) however, there are limited related studies read about the personal growth development of students in reading literary texts.

Within the classroom where literary works are studied, effective teaching is needed so that the level of understanding of the students will be fully useful and they will be able to appreciate these relevant literary works even more. Because of these observations, the researchers thought of conducting a study about the personal growth development of students in their reading of literary works.

2. Research Objectives
This research aimed to determine Personal Growth and Development in the literary appreciation of Grade 7 students of St. Paul College of Ilocos Sur, High School Department. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

2.1.1. What are the prior knowledge, experiences, and feelings of the participants in reading literary works?
2.1.2. How are the participants' prior knowledge, experiences, and feelings related to the text?
2.1.3. How did the participants understand the outcome of associating literary works with prior knowledge, experiences, and feelings?
2.1.4. What Personal Growth Developments were achieved by the participants in reading literary works?

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design: This study employed a basic qualitative study as the research design. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), if the study cannot be considered as part of any qualitative research approach, it will be called a basic qualitative study. Data were collected in the form of interviews, observations, and documents and were analyzed inductively to address the problem.

3.2 Participants: The purposive sampling technique was used to capture the study and participants. Ten (10) Grade 7 students were interviewed by the researcher. On the other hand, there were eight (8) Grade 7 students who participated in the Focused-Group Discussion (FGD). Moreover, all journals written by the Grade 7 students were used for document analysis.

3.3 Research Instruments: The research instrument used is the interview method. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain data from the participants from their independent responses and interaction. In developing the guide question as an instrument for the semi-structured interview, de Guzman’s (2013) process was followed in his Interview Guide Development which includes 1) concept or layer of human experience; 2) definition; 3) Priori Codes; and 4) interview questions. Editing and analysis of the generated questions before developing the Aide Memoire are still based on de Guzman (2013).

3.4 Method of Study: The researcher wrote a consent letter to the principal for the conduct of the study. After the approval, the researcher also wrote a consent letter to the students for the interview to obtain data. The researchers explained the process and sought the approval of the students to conduct the research. In conducting the interview and focused-group discussion, Filipino language questions were used so that the participants could easily express their observations. The participants were also allowed to use the Ilocano language so that they could express their thoughts more freely. After the interview and FGD with the selected study participants, the recorded interview and FGD were transcribed. After validation of the responses, the researchers analyzed their answers by coding.

Results of the study were accepted as a moderated generalization where the research result is only for the specified study participants and not generalized.

3.5. Ethical Considerations: The following ethical considerations were considered for this study:
3.5.1. The researchers wrote a letter of consent in hiring participants.
3.5.2. The researchers communicated the purpose of the study to the participants.
3.5.3. The information and names of the participants were treated as confidential.

4. Research Results

The results were presented according to the research objectives as follows:

4.1. Prior knowledge, experiences, and feelings of the students in reading literature
4.1.1. Prior Knowledge
It was found out that students have prior knowledge of the background of the flow of text, content, readiness, and analysis.
4.1.2. Prior Experiences
Reading literary works, accomplishing activities or assessments, using modern technology, and having parental guidance emerged as the prior experiences of the students.

4.1.3. Prior Feelings

On prior feelings, the students find reading pleasurable as a recreation activity while feeling the emotions dominating the text, sympathizing, and empathizing with the characters.

4.2. Ways in relating prior knowledge, experiences, and feelings to the literary text

In linking prior knowledge to new knowledge, experiences, and feelings, integration helps them develop proficiency, comprehension, and appreciation. Expanded knowledge leads to a satisfactory score evident in improved reading comprehension, appreciation, and enthusiasm.

4.3. The students’ understanding of the outcomes in associating literary works with prior knowledge, experiences, and feelings.

On comprehension based on the outcome, showing good interpersonal relationships, maintaining enthusiasm, seeking more literary texts, being critical in life, and adapting to the environment emerged.

4.4. Personal Growth Developments occurred in reading literary works

Bringing personal happiness and development, self-fulfillment, a challenge in learning, eagerness, hobby or passion, expanded knowledge, developed maturity, careful speech and influencing others to read are the personal growth and development that occurred in the respondents.

5. Discussion

The following points based on the research results were discussed:

5.1. On Prior Knowledge

5.1.1. Students’ prior knowledge on the flow of text and content

Students were quick to process the thoughts, concepts, and content of the literary text because of the prior knowledge stored. Based on the statements of the students, it appears that they have stored knowledge in reading literary texts, particularly short stories. In general, they determine the flow of the literary works they read. This knowledge relates to the specific content (characters, setting, problems, and events) of the story they are studying.

To support this, Piaget (1952) defines a schema as a cohesive, repeatable action sequence possessing component actions that are tightly interconnected and governed by a core meaning. Moreover, Wadsworth (2004) suggests that schemata (the plural of schema) be thought of as 'index cards' filed in the brain, each one telling an individual how to react to incoming stimuli or information.

5.1.2. Students’ prior knowledge on readiness in reading

The students already have the knowledge on how to read. The manifestations of whether or not a student is ready for reading are when the students received a positive response to the reading texts (literary works) and they did not change or become bored with what they read.

According to Belvez (2002), it is important to first ensure students’ reading readiness before teaching them formal reading. The diligence and perseverance of the teacher in teaching the student to read will be irrelevant if the students are not ready.

5.1.3. Students’ prior knowledge on analysis

It was not difficult for the students to identify the superficial content of the work they read. It was quick for them to analyze the text on the following competencies: (1) characterizing the key personnel as well as the key personnel, (2) sequencing of events, (3) stating the problem and solution, (4) identifying cause and results and (5) valuing the lesson that dominates in the literary work being read.

According to the book Reading and Writing for Research by Santos et.al (2007), it is mentioned that reading skills do not only refer to the ability to recognize and capture ideas and thoughts in printed symbols and to
recite them orally. Reading skills also include the skills of recognizing words, comprehension, analysis, and drawing conclusions.

5.1.4. Students’ prior knowledge on assessment

Before reading literary works, it is first determined how much knowledge is already stored in the mind of the students. Diagnostic tests were conducted before reading and discussing literary works as based in determining readers’ knowledge of these works.

Based on the statements of the students, it appears from this study that in each case, most of the students get a satisfactory score on the given first test or diagnostic test. This only proves that they already have the knowledge relevant to the text just read.

This is supported by the study of Lin et.al (2011) which claims that good prior knowledge is very helpful for students to carry out learning tasks properly, to understand, and to perform in any discipline.

5.2. On Prior Experiences

5.2.1. Students’ prior experiences on activities or assessments

Based on the statements of the students, it appears that students expect completion of tasks (either a short quiz or prepared activities) after reading.

This is in line with Wren's (2004) statement that forecasting is an important element of education used for instruction. This is needed to further develop lessons as well as instruction for students, even students with disabilities (Rhodes & Shanklin, 1993). Meanwhile, Yusuf (2015) argues that interactive reading activities are of great help to understand and comprehend reading texts. They also help teachers to keep track of their students in processing information gathered from texts.

5.2.3. Students’ prior experiences in using modern technology

This study found out that students used modern methods so that they could learn to read a variety of texts. Therefore, a child who uses modern technologies as a means of reading is sure that it will affect his learning. Due to the exposure of students belonging to Gen Z to this technology, it is undeniable that the technology has indeed an impact on their lives particularly in their studies and reading of literary works.

This is connected with Fox's (2014) study which found out that students who are familiar with different types of technology and those who know how to manipulate it can make a faster transition to a new way of learning. Students who have a broad foundation of using them are superior to others because of their total potential. Moreover, based on a study by Stearns (2012), he found out that these innovative technologies are beneficial to address and support reading comprehension in all students who have difficulties.

5.2.4. Students’ prior experiences in reading with parental guidance

In this study, it was found out that parents reading stories for their children also cause them to become obsessed with reading various texts, especially the stories that the students enjoy.

Stone (2016) revealed in his study that students who received parental support and involvement within their home had higher reading comprehension scores compared to their classmates who did not receive any. This is supported by Clark (2007) in his findings that the most accurate predictor of a pupil’s achievement is not parental income or social status but the extent to which parents can create a home environment that encourages learning, communicates high, yet reasonable, expectations for achievement and future careers, and where parents become involved in their children’s education at the school and in the community.

5.3. On Prior Feelings

5.3.1. Find reading pleasurable as a recreation activity

This is the most dominant emotion of the students whenever they read literary works based on the learning result. Pleasure or excitement is immediately felt by students because they have a positive experience reading works or other reading texts. This influences them to keep on reading.

According to Spagnol (2015), students who read either printed or digital books recorded a 7.44 index of their satisfaction compared to non-readers who had only a 4.20 index which creates a large gap difference.
5.3.2 Feeling the emotions dominating the text.

It turns out in this study that the emotion that also dominates the student when he/she reads literary works depends on what emotion is reflected in the text being read. These feelings normally emerge in the text are based on the reader's association with the characters and even with the events that take place in the stories.

This was also supported in the study by Kumshick et.al (2014) which proves that reading and discussing children’s literary works with emotional content helps to increase the child’s emotional competence. It was also revealed that children’s literature is highly responsive as a vehicle in supporting the development of emotional competence in mid-childhood.

5.3.3. Sympathizing with the characters

Each time the student places himself in every character of the story, he/she fully understands what is happening around him especially if the events in the work are also happening in real life.

Sund (2010) argues that sympathy is a process by which a person naturally counts himself as a member of his society. Thus literature serves as a way for a person to be patient and sensitive to the events around him.

According to the study of Koopmann and Hakemulder (2015) that sympathy is a process of expressing feelings of sadness or joy to others. It is further developed by reading fictional story readings in general.

5.3.4. Empathizing with the characters

As the reader understands the characters of the stories being read, his or her understanding of other people's feelings is truly sharpened. The students became more understanding of the feeling of their fellow because of reading literary works.

This is also agreed by the study of Koopmann and Hakemulder (2015) that if the issue is the effect of reading stories on human empathy, it has a positive effect based on the various manifestations such as the ability to relate oneself to the staff, motivation for the right approach to society and having an appreciation for the society he leads.

5.4. On linking prior knowledge to new knowledge

5.4.1. Integration of the literary text to develop proficiency

In this study, it was discovered from the students that their previous knowledge, experiences, and feelings in reading literary works facilitated their understanding and comprehension of new concepts in the literary works they read.

This is confirmed by Warsnak’s (2006) study where he found out that students’ understanding increases if their prior knowledge is active. In addition, students also made progress in reading proficiency.

5.4.2. Integration of the literary text to develop reading comprehension

In the instances of reading in the classroom, it was observed that most of the students were even more enticed to practice it because of the positive effects of self-reading. The prior knowledge has greatly helped the student in achieving comprehension, appreciation, and ability in reading. This is also evident in the study of Paris et.al (1991) that readers are aware of how of what they read. This corresponds to the study by Pressley and Afferbach (1995) that these readers are active in coordinating the process of their awareness before, during, and after reading.

5.4.3. Integration of the literary text to develop a reading appreciation

Students connect their prior knowledge, experiences, and feelings to other situations to further deepen their understanding and appreciation of reading. Students were prepared for even more difficult tests to deepen their reading comprehension levels.

Because of the students’ desire to have a high understanding of the literary works they read, they tend to solve the problems they face every time they read, in the tasks assigned by teachers, and in the short assessments. Through these processes, students will be able to practice such tests which will help them with their appreciation of reading literary works (Hailikari et al., 2008).

5.4.4. Integration of the literary text to develop enthusiasm in reading
This study reveals that prior knowledge, experiences, and feelings in reading serve as effective factors in making students enthusiastic in their reading of literary works. Having zeal in reading literary works is a manifestation that the students have a high appreciation of the literature they are reading.

The results of this study agree with the statement of Ofsted (2011) that in schools that are successful in terms of pupils’ reading, the teachers read and talk with enthusiasm and recommend books. The results are seen not only in test results but also in an enthusiasm for reading which extends beyond the classroom.

5.5. On students’ understanding of the outcomes in associating literary works with prior knowledge, experiences, and feelings

5.5.1. Showing good interpersonal relationships

It is one of the manifestations that a reader understands what he is reading specifically the literary works if his relationship with his fellow men is good. It can be said that he has a broader and higher outlook in life because he is rich with previous knowledge, experiences, and feelings in reading that continues to increase.

This is in line with Prior's (2013) statement from his blog in which he cited Gregory Currie's essay entitled, "A Good Literature Will Make Us Better?" which expresses the widespread belief that reading brings about better socialization due to the development of its moral aspect. He also mentioned the study of experts that reading often makes other people better understand, empathize, and look at the world from their perspectives.

5.5.2. Maintaining enthusiasm

Based on the responses of the students, it appears that their quick understanding of the literary works they read has a big effect. Their deep understanding of these readings causes them to have more interest in reading.

This is in response to Small’s (2013) blog titled “How to Engage Relucting Readers” in which he mentioned that it is difficult for children to learn to read for themselves and personal pleasure. But if it has a positive effect for them and they also experience it, they will not be far away from maintaining their enthusiasm for reading.

5.5.3. Seeking more literary texts

Because students enjoyed the benefits of reading, they developed a desire to have more literary works for them to read. The pleasure they feel when they read arises.

This is still in line with Small’s (2013) blog where he mentions the strategies for maintaining enthusiasm in reading to let a reader choose the book he or she wants to read. It is also important for parents or teachers to support a child’s or student's choice of reading without forgetting to monitor it as appropriate.

5.5.4. Being critical in life

Students' understanding of the literary works they read and study is a great help. Connecting what they read to real-life has been effective in further deepening their understanding and appreciation of the reading texts. The association of situations or events that took place in the work is often led by readers to become more intelligent to measure and analyze life situations.

This corresponds to Prior’s (2013) blog in which, he argues that a person’s reading makes it part of his biography because all the books he has read have helped to shape the worldview into beliefs and life in general.

5.5.5. Adapting to the environment

It turns out from this study that the students became even smarter to adapt to the pleasant and rewarding events, circumstances, and situations in their lives. Because of their connection to the situations in the books they read, they were able to display this quality. It only proves that there are events in the works they read that they also experience.

Therefore, prior and new knowledge, experience, and feelings they have before and after reading literary works, they will understand the things around them. Students looked closely at their connection and how it could help them, which makes them investigative and critical of the things they see and read.

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5.5. On the Personal Growth Development of students in reading

5.5.1. Bringing personal happiness and development

It appears from this study that the students enjoy reading because they are learning to read on their own and with comprehension. They are sometimes motivated to intensify, continue, and make reading a passion because they already know how to recognize their progress.

This agrees with the BBC blog (www.bbc.co.uk) which mentions that reading for happiness supports a student’s engagement and motivation to continue reading. Reading for happiness is a critical task to ensure that its practice becomes even more subtle to be a part of daily living and it will no longer be simply seen as a task within the classroom.

5.5.2. Self-fulfillment

Students felt self-fulfillment because they were satisfied with the results of their reading of literary works. Their enthusiasm for reading has a positive effect especially on achieving satisfaction in their reading. It is still agreed from the BBC blog (www.bbc.co.uk) that there are great benefits to reading after it becomes a personal pleasure. Some of these are the sense of achievement, self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-awareness. So, all of these are generally self-fulfilling prophecies which are caused by reading.

5.5.3. Challenge in learning

In this study, it also appears that the students always follow the reading while their classmates do because they do not want to give up and cannot follow the reading done in the classroom.

This agrees with Jamandra’s blog (2013) that a teacher’s assessment and its outcome is a big factor for a student to study well. Students will be motivated to do their best in school. Reading plays an important role because it will further encourage the students to read/ study on their own.

5.5.5. Hobby or passion

A student can also practice at the right time his passion for reading which is also based on his interest and personal motivation or self-drive. This interest is the result of his efforts within the classroom. It only requires the guidance and motivation of the people around and involved in his study.

Related to the result of this study were the findings of Owusu (2014) where 62.50% of the total population of his study accepted the importance of reading and they said that it helps to express themselves better.

5.5.6. Expanded knowledge

It appears from this study to reinforce a student’s purpose why he or she is reading. A student has a motivation to read for his academics which is intensified through formal education.

This result is related to the study of Owusu (2014) which claims that in general, most students agreed with the view that reading has an impact on their academic performance. Hence, there is a direct relationship between habitual reading and academic performance.

5.5.7. Developed maturity

It refers to the change that happens within the students concerning their emotional and mental aspects. There was a change in how they responded to the things around them. Students' reading helped a lot to further develop their maturity because the situations and even the characters from the literary works impose a huge impact.

This is confirmed by Squires’ (2014) findings that a student’s reading maturity is based on the internal factors that allow him to use the information read to meet and develop his lifestyle and experience.

5.5.8. Careful speech

Also emerged as one of the personal growth developments of the students in reading literary works was their carefulness in speaking with their fellow students or to the proper way students interact with their fellow students.
Students did not forget the lessons or values that they get from what they read. They know how to have a good speech with their neighbors which is a personal development caused by reading literary works.

5.5.9. Influencing others to read

This refers to the influence of the students on his fellow in reading literary works. Due to the beautiful and positive effects of reading literary works, the students want to share them so that others will know, experience, and feel the same.

In short, students’ interest in reading greatly influence and encourage others to read. It only proves that reading literary works makes a student more obsessed with reading because it influences others.

6. Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Students already have prior knowledge, experiences, and feelings in valuing literary works;
2. Students made a connection of prior and new knowledge, experiences, and feelings in the appreciation of literary works;
3. The association of old and new knowledge, experiences, and feelings helped in gaining a better understanding and appreciation of the literary works; and
4. Personal growth developments happened to the students in their appreciation of literary works.

7. Recommendations

Based on the results and conclusions, the following are recommended:

1. Take steps in the Personal Growth Development of students in literary appreciation and other types of text;
2. Parents must guide their children in reading literary works and other meaningful literature as a foundation for reading;
3. Teachers must possess a broad knowledge of the students; background in reading literature;
4. Students’ must consider reading literary works as a hobby;
5. Administrators must implement programs and activities to enrich reading equipment and to assist students in extensive reading; and
6. Conduct other studies on the personal growth development of students by reading literary works.

8. References


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