

# Developing The Language And Reading Competence Of The First Year CBEA Students At The Cagayan State University Andrews Campus

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**Situation:** - Alleviating the low performance of the first year CBEA students (A, B, C, D, and E) in language and reading. The unsatisfactory performance of students in language and reading in both oral and written tests result during class exercises and major examinations under my class called my attention. Troubled by the problem, I contemplated to find ways on how to assist the students to improve their language reading skills. It is hoped that after undergoing various exercises in preparation to use language with ease and do difficult reading tests the students would no longer regard English as complicated subject. The mastery and adeptness of the different techniques in preparation for taking language tests and reading comprehension exams would lead to students' self-fulfillment.

**Abstract:** - The emphasis of this study is to find ways on how to assist students in improving their language skills and reading comprehension as well. The focus will be both in language and reading. This would help the students ascertain and apply the rules in the target language and be able to utilize them with ease and enjoyment. Reading is the process of identifying and understanding the meaning of characters and words in written or printed material. Reading for comprehension and study skills are emphasized for many different purposes. The developed skills, information, and attitudes are necessary for proper adjustment to the community and the society (Chall 2009). Basically the subjects taught in the lower level like reading, writing, and spelling would prepare the learners in a more challenging stage like reading for learning and earning. The difficulty of learners to attack challenging reading material would be eliminated once they develop skills in reading. The techniques used in the class would not be an overnight solution to the problem but it would serve as a stepping stone for the students to enjoy reading not only for learning but for pleasure and enjoyment. On the other hand, as students are guided to do reading with adeptness, they shall be reinforcing some basic rules in the language. In so doing, I am positive of a successful outcome. I have noted all the difficulties of my students every time we had speaking activities. One of the most difficult activities they encountered was the time they have to interview their classmates and be able to introduce at least five members of the class. I instructed them to use the target language as they mill around. To my dismay, they have taken pens and paper and silently go around (whispering to one another) writing the names of their classmates and some pieces of information about them. They admitted that they asked information using their native tongue. I also gathered their test results in reading which served as my basis of designing helpful exercises for them to develop the skill. I've started giving easy exercises that progressed to difficult types. I have integrated grammar recalls in all the reading comprehension tests that I designed. From my analysis of the test result, students performed well in the literal level of comprehension but had failed to do excellent responses from interpretative to analytical level. I did daily observations on my students' activities that motivated me to do item analyze one of their major examinations. Before I gave back their test paper, I tabulated the correct responses they have taken from all the test items. I have treated the result of the different tests using the total percentage to ascertain the level of students' learning. In the Philippines, the passing mark of a student is 75%. The CBEA students in sections A to E are the first five sections who were grouped as homogenous sections in terms of general averages ranging mostly from 85% above and some were the high school graduates who emerged with distinctive honors. Though they have shown a good rating in the grammar test, it is not a remarkable rate to say they have established a good grasp at the target language. The low ratings in the comprehension tests manifested that the students' reading skill has not been excellently developed. It is at this juncture that I recommend that students must undergo extensive reading program with integrated vocabulary and grammar reviews if the teachers aim for an outstanding result. The teachers and students must pay attention to any new words encountered by using the dictionary or thesaurus. It is also helpful to study word parts and learn how to find the meaning of a word from the context. It is further suggested that teachers in the language program should find suitable materials for students to suit their needs.

## Introduction:

The shift from learning to read to reading to learn is especially important because the student must now begin to use reading skills to learn facts and concepts in other disciplines. Making this shift is difficult for some students, and their reading scores may increase at a slower pace than in the beginning. Some educators see reading comprehension as a series of sub-skills such as undertaking word meanings in context, finding the main idea, making inferences about information implied but not stated, distinguishing between fact and opinion.

Putting more emphasis on these activities would likely lead the learners into improving their reasoning abilities (Chall 2009). In the higher level learning like the college students we have in CSU, reading materials become more abstract and contain larger, more technical vocabulary. At this stage, the students not only must acquire new information but also must critically analyze the text and achieve an optimal reading rate based on the difficulty of material and the purpose of the reading. The importance of good teaching and a strong leadership of the institution would result to the improvement of the learners' reading skill. On the other hand, it would be beneficial for students to practice skimming a passage for general meaning and scanning for specific information. The amount of time students spend in reading should be maximized in order to fulfill optimum goals of reading development. There are many concerns of educators to prioritize the moment reading comprehension problem is identified. The sub-skills in reading comprehension such as understanding word meanings in contexts, finding the main idea, making inferences about information applied but not stated, distinguishing about fact and opinion, and being able to analyze and put the concept

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into use are the teacher's main concern. Reading ability is very important for many valid reasons. Besides its essential value, the ability to read has economic consequences. Adults who have developed excellent reading ability have more chances of landing high-paying jobs. The growing technicality of society has brought increasing demands of highly competitive individuals which the schools are hard pressed to meet. A higher level of literacy is needed in business and industry, in the armed forces, and in everyday life. The reading ability is a rejoinder to comprehend materials important to daily living, such as practical manuals of equipment, income tax forms and newspapers, and all the safety warnings and prohibitions for survival. Some efforts have been made to simplify forms and manuals, but the lack of sufficient reading ability impairs a person's capacity to function in the society.

### Problem:

How to prepare students in utilizing the target language with ease and in taking reading comprehension tests successfully? Teaching English at any level of proficiency has its difficulties. In classes where students have just graduated from high school, it is sometimes frustrating to carry out lessons with unsatisfactory results. At this point, it is my goal to reinforce their past knowledge of language usage and to administer additional varied reading comprehension lessons to strengthen their skills. As a teacher I cannot assume that I am the giver of knowledge. I can only be confident in knowing that I am the facilitator of understanding, the presenter of an opportunity to explore, discover, and compile knowledge. As students show their willingness to learn and their enthusiasm for discovering knowledge and developing understanding will dictate the level of their learning. The learners need to be actively involved in their education. Their interest and enthusiasm would motivate them to become active participants in any instruction. As they become actively involved, they develop interest and enthusiasm for the content and/or the process for which they acquire the target language as their own.

### Plan of Action:

The urgency to solve the problem of students in both language usage and in taking reading comprehension tests caught my attention. The following are some of the helpful lessons to prepare the students;

1. The grammar reviews in Functional A are reinforced by giving students classroom and home activities. The following are suggested activities for students;
  - a. Utilizing the communicative competence strategy integrating linguistic competence in the class through oral activities using the grammar reviews correctly;
  - b. Assigning home work to students like writing journals about activities done during the day, plans for the next day, etc.
  - c. Requiring every student to report his output.
2. Levels of Comprehension
3. Reading Techniques
4. Vocabulary Building

5. Practical Guides for Reading Comprehension Tests
6. Sample Reading Texts (integrated with grammar application tests)

### The Study

I teach first year business students in the College of Business, Entrepreneurship and Accountancy. On the first day of class of the first semester of Academic Year 2011-2012, I have explained the goals of the course to my students. One of the goals is that they should show competency in all the macro-skills in the target language. I tried a variety of strategies in the different skills to be developed but most often I was frustrated. I was alarmed when I let them do oral activities by using the prescribed grammar reviews in class. They didn't have enough information at hand to do the activities correctly. On the one hand, I was more than alarmed when we progressed through the days to do reading activities. My students are short in terms of comprehending. True, they can read. No problem about that issue but ask them about what they have read and you get a blank-face response. I manage to design some simple reading activities that went more difficult every time we finish one activity to the other. These reading activities were integrated with simple grammar recall and usage for my students to be able to embrace the language and consider it their own. Below are tables presenting the total number of students from sections A - E who responded correctly in the questions of the reading test:

**Table 1: Table showing the scores garnered by the students in Vocabulary.**

Type of Test	A (53)	B (52)	C (55)	D (55)	E (57)	N = 272
Vocabulary						
1.	17	11	13	12	17	25.73%
2.	21	14	16	19	17	31.98%
3.	14	16	21	17	18	31.61%
4.	19	21	19	21	14	34.56%
5.	20	17	14	15	19	31.25%
6.	18	22	13	13	23	32.72%
7.	11	16	18	19	15	29.04%
8.	16	17	20	11	17	29.80%
9.	14	20	18	17	11	29.41%
10.	19	18	21	19	15	33.83%

The table shows the total number of students who responded correctly in the vocabulary test of the reading comprehension. The highest percentage of 34.56 of the five sections is the vocabulary word **performing** while the lowest which is 25.73 is the word

## preposterous.

**Table 2. Table showing the total score taken by students in the test Parts of Speech.**

Parts of Speech	A (53)	B (52)	C (55)	D (55)	E (57)	N = 272
1	29	27	25	27	24	48.52%
2	29	37	27	32	36	59.19%
3	30	45	41	29	38	67.27%
4	29	28	36	26	31	55.14%
5	30	29	26	34	28	54.04%
6	32	33	29	30	26	55.14%
7	29	34	40	28	33	60.29%
8	35	36	29	37	36	63.60%
9	38	33	32	40	29	63.23%
10	45	39	35	38	36	70.96%

The table shows the total number of students who responded correctly in the parts of speech test. The highest shown in the table is 70.92% where students got the correct answer which is **adjective** while the lowest which is 48.52% the correct answer is **adverb**.

**Table 3. Table showing the number of students who responded correctly in the Pronouns and Antecedents test.**

Pronouns and Antecedents	A (53)	B (52)	C (55)	D (55)	E (57)	N = 272
1	41	40	39	40	39	73.16%
2	45	38	43	39	36	73.89%
3	38	36	38	45	40	72.42%
4	35	39	35	38	41	69.11%
5	37	35	29	37	36	63.97%
6	43	40	37	42	36	72.79%
7	40	41	34	40	37	70.58%
8	43	38	40	35	33	69.48%
9	38	45	39	38	37	72.43%
10	45	40	41	40	41	76.10%

The table shows the total number of students who responded correctly in Pronouns and Antecedents test. The highest percentage which is 76.10 shows the students' correct answer which is **people** while the lowest percentage 63.97 shows the students who got the correct answer which is **performing marriage ceremonies**.

**Table 4. Table showing the number of students who responded correctly in the test Matching Sentence Halves**

Matching Sentence Halves	A (53)	B (52)	C (55)	D (55)	E (57)	N = 272
1	29	28	29	30	29	53.30%
2	34	33	36	28	34	60.66%
3	38	38	34	29	28	61.39%
4	29	36	33	26	28	55.88%
5	37	36	31	30	27	59.19%

Table shows the total number of students who responded correctly in the Matching Sentence Halves test. The test item number 3 got the highest percentage of 61.39 while the lowest is item number 1 with 53.30. This table shows how students could correctly find for the pair of an unfinished sentence.

**Table 5. Table showing the number of students who answered correctly in Text Analysis test**

Text Analysis	A (53)	B (52)	C (55)	D (55)	E (57)	N = 272
1	21	19	26	22	19	39.33%
2	24	25	24	25	21	43.75%
3	22	22	22	23	20	40.07%
4	26	25	19	24	24	47.05%

Table shows the total number of students who responded correctly in Text Analysis test. The highest percentage which is 47.05 shows the students ability in **making inference** while the lowest 39.33 is correctly **giving a title** to a reading material.

**Table 6. Table showing the number students who answered correctly in summarizing**

Summarizing	A (53)	B (52)	C (55)	D (55)	E (57)	N = 272
1	27	28	25	27	23	47.79%
2	29	32	28	31	27	54.04%
3	34	30	29	28	29	55.14%
4	32	29	32	27	31	55.51%
5	31	27	29	29	25	51.83%
6	26	32	26	32	24	51.47%
7	29	28	32	26	22	50.36%
8	30	27	30	28	27	52.21%
9	29	26	28	25	24	48.53%

10	25	24	22	25	27	52.22%
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Table shows the total number of students who responded correctly in Summarizing test. The number four item has the highest percentage of 55.51 while item number one has 47.79. This test shows the ability of students to use words appropriately to complete the summary of the reading material.

**Table 7. Summary table on the result of the different types of tests.**

Type of Test	Percentage
Pronouns and Antecedents	71.40
Parts of Speech	59.74
Matching Sentence Halves	58.08
Summarizing	51.91
Text Analysis	42.55
Vocabulary	30.99

As shown in the table, the vocabulary test has the lowest percentage of students responding correctly to the given tests. There is a need to focus on students' exercises on developing vocabulary skills. This is the sample test I used to measure my students' performance in language and reading comprehension. This was one among the many reading exercises I administered to my students.

- A. Read the passage. Then answer the questions that follow by writing the correct answer on your answer sheet.

Let me **introduce** myself. My name is Valentine. I lived in Rome during the third century. That was **long, long ago!** At that time, Rome was ruled by an *emperor* named Claudius. I didn't like Emperor Claudius, and I wasn't the only one! A lot of **people** shared my **feelings**. Claudius **wanted** to have a big army. He expected men **to volunteer** to join. Many men just did not want to fight **in wars**. (1) They did not want to leave (2) their wives and families. As you might have guessed, not many men signed up. This made Claudius **furious**. So what happened? He had a **crazy** idea. He thought that if men were not married, (3) they would not mind joining the army. So Claudius decided not to allow any more marriages. Young people thought this law was **cruel**. I thought it was *preposterous*! I certainly wasn't going to support that law! Did I mention that I was a priest? One of my favorite activities was to marry couples. Even after Emperor Claudius passed (4) his law, I kept on *performing* marriage ceremonies – secretly, of course. (5) It was really quite *exciting*. Imagine a small candlelit room with only the bride and groom and myself. (6) We would whisper the words of the *ceremony*, listening all the while for the steps of soldiers. One night, we did hear footsteps. (7) It was scary! Thank goodness the couple I was marrying escaped in time. I was caught. (Not quite as light on my feet as I used to be, I guess). I was thrown in jail and told that my *punishment* was death. I tried to stay cheerful. And do you know what? Wonderful things happened. Many young

people came to the jail to visit me. (8) They threw flowers and notes up to my window. They wanted me to know that they, too, believed in love. One of these young people was the daughter of the prison guard. (9) Her father allowed her to visit me in cell. Sometimes we would sit and talk for hours. She helped me to keep my spirits up. She agreed that I did the right thing by ignoring the Emperor and going ahead with the secret marriages. On the day I was to die, I left my friend a little note thanking her for her *friendship* and *loyalty*. I signed it, "Love from your Valentine." I believe that note started the custom of exchanging love messages on Valentine's Day. It was written on the day I died, February 14, 269 A.D. Now, every year on this day, people remember. But most importantly, they think about love and friendship. And when (10) they think of Emperor Claudius, they remember how he tried to stand on the way of love, and they laugh – because they know that love can't be beaten!

-Eric V. Allen

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#### A. Vocabulary:

Look for the single-word meaning of the following phrases from the reading passage. Choose from the *italicized* words.

- contrary to nature or reason \_\_\_\_\_
- to make known by formal act \_\_\_\_\_
- one who exerted control, direction, or influence \_\_\_\_\_
- an act of accomplishing task \_\_\_\_\_
- a formal, series acts prescribed by rituals \_\_\_\_\_
- rapport with someone \_\_\_\_\_
- causing feeling of happiness \_\_\_\_\_
- faithful to a cause, ideal, custom \_\_\_\_\_
- a penalty inflicted on an offender \_\_\_\_\_
- deliberately causing pain or anger \_\_\_\_\_

#### B. Parts of Speech:

Identify how the words in bold letters are used in the passage.

- |                   |                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1. long, long ago | 6. introduce    |
| 2. of people      | 7. feelings     |
| 3. wanted         | 8. to volunteer |
| 4. furious        | 9. in wars      |
| 5. crazy          | 10. cruel       |

#### C. Pronouns and their Antecedents:

Write the antecedent of the underlined pronoun (1-10).

#### D. Matching Sentence Halves:

Refer to the reading text and match the halves of the given sentences together. Write the letter of the correct answer.

- One of Saint Valentine's visitors to keep his spirits up was + \_\_\_\_\_
- Claudius wanted to have a big army but+ \_\_\_\_\_
- Even Emperor Claudius passed his law,+ \_\_\_\_\_
- As a priest he performed the marriage rites in a small candlelit room+ \_\_\_\_\_

5. When people think about St. Valentine, they do not cease to remember+ \_\_\_\_\_
- many men did not sign up due to their wives and families
  - emperor Claudius who cruelly tried to stand in the way of love
  - threw flowers and notes to his prison cell
  - the daughter of the prison guard
  - St. Valentine kept performing marriage ceremonies which he considered it exciting
  - with only the bride and groom who would whisper the words of ceremony who were too nervous and scared of the soldiers

### E. Text Analysis:

- Which is the best title for the passage?
  - The insistent priest
  - The Cruel Emperor
  - A Note from St. Valentine
  - The Marriage
- What is the main point of paragraph 2?
  - Claudius' crazy ideas
  - men resisted going to war
  - men should not marry
  - families and wives are of no use
- Which is the topic sentence of paragraph 1?
  - sentences 1, 2, 3
  - sentence 4
  - sentence 5
  - none of the above
- What does it mean when Valentine said, "love can't be beaten"?
  - no one can't stop the dictates of the heart
  - strong arms can forbid the heart from loving
  - the absence of lovers blocks the heart from loving
  - none of the above

### F. Summarizing:

The following is a summary of the passage. Choose words from the box below and refer to the passage to fill the gaps.

rites willingly exciting frightened sympathized tempestuous  
 captured summoned officiate admonished gratitude  
 presumed

Long time ago, Rome was ruled by an Emperor named Claudius. He wanted to have a big army. He \_\_\_\_\_ that the men in his land would join in but they didn't want to leave their families and wives. The emperor was \_\_\_\_\_. So what happened? He \_\_\_\_\_ a law prohibiting the men to marry so they could serve the army.

As a priest, one of my favorite activities is to \_\_\_\_\_ marriage. I kept performing marriage \_\_\_\_\_ secretly even if it would cause me my life. It was really quite \_\_\_\_\_ because we would whisper the words of the ceremony, listening all the while for steps of the soldiers.

On the night that I was \_\_\_\_\_, I was \_\_\_\_\_ to my jail and told that my punishment was death. I tried to stay cheerful despite the thought of death. Many young people \_\_\_\_\_ with me so they came to visit, some threw flowers and notes up to my window. I was not at all \_\_\_\_\_ because they, too, believed in love. In \_\_\_\_\_ to one of friends who was the daughter of the prison guard, I wrote her a note thanking her of her friendship. I signed it, "Love from your Valentine."

### Results:

As I watched my students' progress as we do activities both in reading and grammar, it was apparent that they were enjoying what they were doing. Some were eager to present the activities using the reviews we've been doing. Majority of the class have started writing reflections about what they've read. Some are just too eager to share what they learned especially those who can relate about what had been taken. On one of the major examinations where I administered synonymous reading comprehension test with integrated grammar test, they're able to score higher than before. I made follow-up test during the early part of second semester in their English B. My students already had shown improvements. Their enthusiasm and interest in the target language is evident.

### Follow-up Action:

Students' skills in the target language could not be developed instantly. It needs constant follow-up of activities that would demand more practice in all the macro-skills. One of the techniques to be employed is (by the teacher) to let students share a short passage from bibles, magazines, daily devotions, etc. that would entail them to explain their side about the passage. In doing this, students will also develop the courage to speak before other people and at the same time they will exercise the ability to reason out. Thus, giving them chance to be logical and excellent conversant. Some teachers could also follow-up the students' progress in other fields of discipline like management, accounting, marketing, and entrepreneurial concerns. The inter-disciplinary learning could also be a good avenue for students to apply their language skills in writing and speaking. Finally, when their reading skills are developed, the analysis of given problems in the business fields would no longer be a head-breaking activity. The ability of the students to prepare spread sheets in accounting is a proof that they're able to apply the principles learned in reading skills.

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