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Research Article

Enhancing Grade 10 Students' Reading Comprehension of Expository Texts Through Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS)

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Abstract

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill that contributes to academic success. However, many students find it difficult, specifically with expository texts, which affects their inferential and critical thinking, and overall performance. Hence, this study evaluated the effectiveness of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) in enhancing the reading comprehension of expository text among Grade 10 students. An Embedded Mixed Methods Design was utilized with fifty participants (n=50) from a selected Grade 10 section at Fatima National High School. The quantitative strand used a one-group pretest-posttest pre-experimental approach, moreover the qualitative data was gathered through a focused group discussion. PALS sessions on expository texts were implemented four to five times a week over a six-week intervention period. The results revealed that students' pretest comprehension is at a moderate level (M=21.26, SD=4.12) which indicate that there is a sufficient but limited higher-level proficiency. After the intervention, posttest results revealed a high level of comprehension among Grade 10 students (M=31.40, SD=3.85). A Repeated Measures ANOVA confirmed statistically significant improvement across testing periods, $F(2,98) = 112.45$, $p<0.001$, $n2p=0.696$. The qualitative findings also substantiate the quantitative results by providing themes of enhanced strategic reding, collaborative comprehension, active engagement, and reading confidence. Overall, PALS proved to be an effective instructional strategy in enhancing proficiency in reading expository texts.

Keywords: Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS), Reading Comprehension, Expository Texts, Collaborative Learning

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1. Introduction

Reading is an essential foundation for academic achievement, enabling students to access curricula, acquire knowledge, express complex ideas, and engage meaningfully with society. At the core of efficient reading lies reading comprehension—the active cognitive process of constructing meaning from text by linking explicit content with schematic background knowledge (Brasell & Rasinski, 2008). However, reading comprehension remains an exceptionally difficult skill to master. Because textual demands increase significantly with academic grade levels, unresolved reading difficulties often lead to persistent learning gaps and hinder overall educational attainment (Clarke et al., 2013).

The severity of this issue is acutely evident in recent international and national evaluations. According to the 2022 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results, the Philippines ranked 77th out of 81 participating countries in reading proficiency. Although this represents a minor numerical shift from its 2018 standing (78th out of 78), performance indicators demonstrate that Filipino Grade 10 learners continue to encounter severe difficulties comprehending expository texts. Local evidence further corroborates this gap; Alpitchie-Bunda (2023) observed that Grade 10 students struggle substantially when analyzing specialized expository materials and answering critical-thinking questions. Addressing these documented reading deficiencies requires targeted, evidence-based instructional interventions.

To address reading deficits in secondary classrooms, a highly promising framework — the Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) — is crafted. PALS is a structured, whole-class instructional reading program that pairs students strategically based on reading performance to practice reciprocal teaching, phonological decoding, and targeted comprehension strategies (Fuchs et al., 2001).

Although extensive literature has demonstrated the general effectiveness of PALS in enhancing reading fluency and basic decoding skills in primary education, limited empirical evidence exists regarding its specific efficacy in enhancing the comprehension of complex expository texts among secondary-level learners, particularly within the Philippine public high school context.

Previous studies have predominantly focused on primary narrative comprehension or special education populations, leaving a gap in understanding how structured peer interaction supports high school students navigating dense informational structures.

This study addresses this gap by assessing the quantitative comprehension gains and qualitative learning experiences of Grade 10 Filipino learners undergoing a structured PALS expository reading intervention. (García et al., 2022; Orellana et al., 2024)

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Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivism and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) this theory posits that learning is a social process where cognitive development occurs through collaboration with a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). Within PALS, higher-performing peers acts as a temporary MKOs, scaffolding the learning process for lower-performing peers within their ZPD. Additionally, this study is also supported by Johnson and Johnson's (2009) Social Interdependence Theory, it posits that mutual goal interdependence in peer results to positive engagement, motivation, and shared cognitive responsibility during text analysis.

Research Questions

This study aimed to determine the use of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) in enhancing the reading comprehension of expository texts of Grade 10 students. Specifically, this study strived to answer the following questions:

1. What is the reading comprehension level of Grade 10 students before the conduct of the study?
2. What is the reading comprehension level of Grade 10 students during the conduct of the study?
3. What is the reading comprehension level of Grade 10 students after the conduct of the study?
4. Is there a significant improvement in the reading comprehension level of Grade 10 students through the use of PALS?
5. What are the experiences of Grade 10 students in using Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) to enhance their reading comprehension?

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study utilized an Embedded Mixed Methods Design, wherein a quantitative one-group pretest-posttest pre-experimental design served as the primary strand, and a qualitative descriptive strand (focus group discussions) served as a supportive component.

The quantitative strand evaluated student comprehension levels across three distinct phases (pretest, mid-intervention, and posttest) over a six-week intervention timeline. The qualitative strand was embedded to contextualize, explain, and enrich the quantitative findings by exploring the students' personal experiences and cognitive strategies during PALS sessions.

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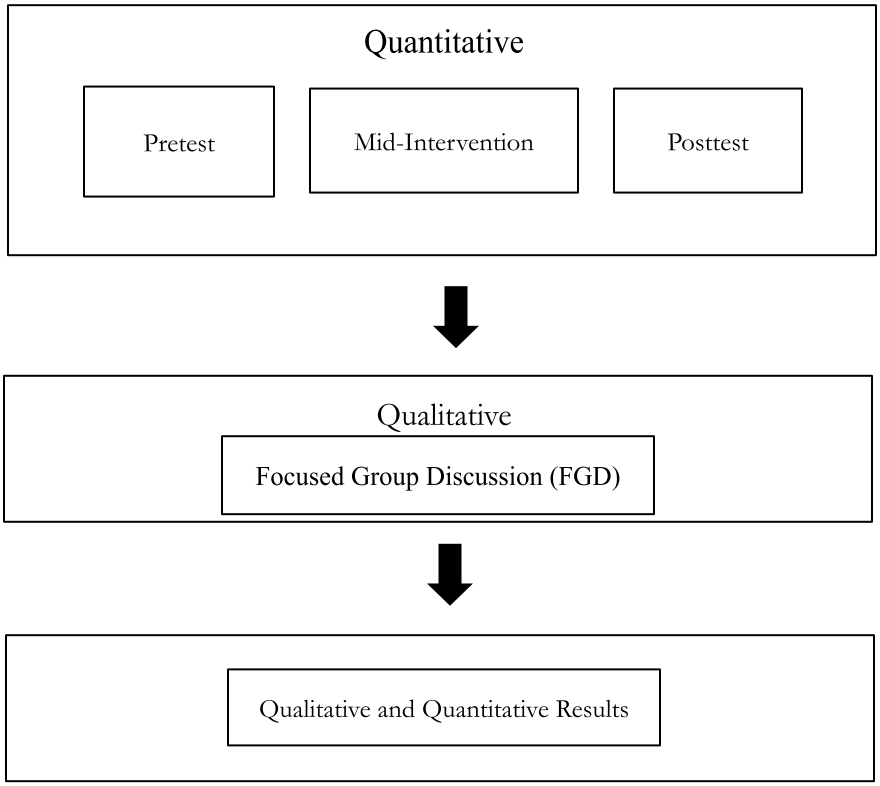


Figure 1: Conceptual Design of Embedded Mixed Method

2.2 Research Locale

This study was conducted in Fatima National High School located at Barangay Fatima, General Santos City. It is located in 6.0755˚N, 125.1146˚E latitude.

The researcher selected this school as the study location due to the school's dedication in providing quality education and its accessibility to the target respondents especially Grade 10 students. The school also has adequate learning facilities and instructional materials like classrooms, reading materials and learning spaces that were vital in the implementation of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS). Moreover, the study was smoothly conducted and data was efficiently collected due to the presence of cooperative school administrators, teachers and students. These factors made the school a relevant and practical context in which to assess the effectiveness of PALS for enhancing students' reading comprehension of expository texts.

2.3 Research Instruments

Five primary research instruments were utilized to evaluate the efficacy of the intervention and capture qualitative insights into student engagement. First, twenty-four (24) detailed session plans were developed, incorporating expository reading selections integrated with Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) protocols, specifically Partner Reading, Paragraph Shrinking, and Prediction Relay.

Second, a Table of Specifications (TOS) was constructed to ensure proportional alignment across literal, inferential, and critical comprehension domains. Third, a Comprehension Test Series consisting of six 40-item multiple-choice assessments was adapted from the Department of Education's (2018) Group Screening Test (GST) and aligned with the Grade 10 Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs). Fourth, a 10-item open-ended, semi-structured Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide was designed to explore student experiences and strategy usage. Finally, an Expert Validation Checklist was administered to five Master Teachers in English to establish instrument validity. Content validity was evaluated using the Content Validity Index (CVI), yielding an overall Scale-CVI/Average (S-CVI/Ave) of 0.94, which indicates high content validity. Internal consistency reliability was established through pilot testing with (n=30) participants, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of =0.88 demonstrating high scale reliability.

2.4 Research Procedure

The research procedure started by giving off the letter of permission to Fatima National High School. For the principal of the school and academic head who will give the authorization in conducting the research. There was one group involved in this study. This group was given a series of tests before, during and at the end of the study. The group was taught during the sessions using Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS). The teacher acted as the facilitator throughout the duration of the experiment.

Before the experiment, an orientation was done then a series of tests were given to the students who was taught using PALS. Every session thereafter covered the planned topics involving expository texts and was observed whether the students has developed their reading comprehension skills in English.

The intervention was conducted four times per week across a six-week period during the Third Quarter of the school year. PALS was integrated into the application phase of each daily English lesson following a three-part structured peer protocol:

Partner Reading (12 minutes). The high performing student read the reading selection for five minutes, then the low performing student continued reading the part where the high performing student stopped for another five minutes. After five minutes, each student in the pair took turns retelling the main idea of the story, starting with the higher performing student. One of the members of the pair paused when the other disagrees with his/her idea, articulates their disagreement and resumed the activity as normal.

Paragraph Shrinking (10 minutes). The high performing student started where the second reader had left off in Partner Reading in five minutes, stopping at the end of each paragraph. The high performing student identified the main character (i.e. who or what) and summarized the main idea in less than 10 words. The low performing student continued to read where the high performing student stopped and repeated the process for five minutes. Both members corrected their partner whenever they fail to state the main character and main idea.

Prediction Relay (10 minutes). Both the high and low performing student took turns in making a prediction for the next half of the reading selection, read it, then determined if his/her predictions were correct. He/she then identified and summarized the main idea of the half page in less than 10 words. Each will give correction feedback just like the two processes above.

After the sessions, five (5) subjects were selected as participants in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The participants were given ten (10) questions regarding their experiences on the sessions and if they had felt that their reading comprehension has improved. The responses were recorded and transcribed by the researcher for analysis.

2.5 Data Collection and Analysis

To determine the reading comprehension level of the Grade 10 students before, during and after the conduct of the study, the mean, percentage, and frequency count were used. To describe the mean scores of the reading comprehension level of the students, the modified Robert Ebel's Criteria of Mastery of Degree of Competence was used.

A test of normality called Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test was used to determine if the data gathered was normally distributed or not.

Since the data sets turned out to be normally distributed, a parametric Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with Repeated Measures was used to determine if there was a significant improvement in the reading comprehension of students using PALS. All tests were done at $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance. Partial Eta Squared (p2) was calculated to report effect size.

Since the result in the ANOVA with Repeated Measures yield significant difference, a post-hoc analysis using Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) was conducted with a corrected α.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework was used to analyze the responses of the participants during the Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Thematic analysis is a method in qualitative research to systematically arrange and interpret the sets of data according to Dawadi (2020).

This framework comprised of familiarizing data, generalizing codes, searching, defining and naming themes, and writing a report (Ahmed et al., 2025). Therefore, the researcher familiarized the data based on the transcribed responses in order to assign codes and find the common themes that were reviewed and interpreted in the study.

However, the researcher acknowledged employing the same assessment tool during the pretest, mid-test, and posttest might introduce a practice and testing effect and memory bias.

Additionally, the limited number of participants and lack of randomness is also acknowledged as a limitation of this study.

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2.5 Ethical Considerations

The conduct of this study, "Effectiveness of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) in Expository Texts to the Reading Comprehension of Grade 10 Students", adhered strictly to national and institutional guidelines for research involving human subjects. Institutional Ethics Review approval was granted by the Mindanao State University–General Santos Institutional Ethics Review Committee (Approval No. 42-2025-MSUGSC-IERC). Written informed consent was secured from parents/guardians, alongside written assent from all student participants prior to data collection. Principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, participant autonomy, veracity, and justice were maintained throughout all research phases.

Beneficence. The principle of beneficence was upheld by ensuring that the study brought educational benefits to the students and the school community. The use of Peer- Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) aimed to enhance the students' reading comprehension on expository texts. The study sought to contribute positively to classroom instruction by introducing an effective learning strategy that promoted enhancement of reading comprehension of the students.

Non-Maleficence. The researcher ensured that no physical, emotional, or psychological harm came to any of the respondents during the conduct of the study. All activities were designed to be safe, appropriate for Grade 10 learners, and aligned with the English curriculum. Students' personal information and academic results was protected, and no respondents was subjected to stress, embarrassment, or negative consequences throughout the research process.

Autonomy. The participation in this study was entirely voluntary. The students and their parents were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and duration before giving their consent. The respondents have the right to refuse or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or academic repercussions. Their freedom to decide were respected in all stages of the research.

Veracity. The researcher remained the aspect of honesty and transparency throughout the study. All information that was provided to the respondents was accurate and truthful, ensuring they understood the objectives and expectations. The data that was gathered, including the results from series of tests and interviews, and was reported objectively without fabrication or manipulation. The researcher was also properly cited all sources and avoid plagiarism to uphold academic integrity.

Justice. The principle of justice was observed by treating all the respondents fairly and equally. Every student who participated in the study have an equal opportunity to access the Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) and benefitted from it. The selection of subjects was based solely on academic criteria, not on personal, social, or economic status. All results were used strictly for academic and research purposes and not for favoritism or bias.

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3. Results

This chapter dealt with the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the data gathered in this study. The various results were presented in the succeeding tables with corresponding discussions and explanations.

Table 1. Initial Reading Comprehension Level of the Grade 10 Students

Score Range	Level of Reading Comprehension	Interpretation	Frequency	%	SD
34-40	Very High	Excellent	0	0.00	
29-33	High	Above Average	2	4.00	
17-28	Moderate	Sufficient	45	90.00	4.12
6-16	Low	Minimal	3	6.00	
0-5	Very Low	Poor	0	0.00	
Total			50	100	
Moderate Level			**Mean Score 21.6**		

Table 1 shows the baseline student comprehension was concentrated primarily at the moderate level (90.00%, M=21.26). While students demonstrated basic literal recall, they struggled with inferential and critical analysis required by expository structures. This aligns with findings by Cain et al. (2024) and Hackemann et al. (2022), who noted that learners with average comprehension often struggle when processing dense syntactic structures and domain-specific terminology without external instructional support. Therefore, the overall data showed that a large population of the students are on a moderate or sufficient level of reading comprehension, which emphasized the need for specified reading interventions. This further justifies the PALS implementation to improve the reading comprehension skills of the students, especially in enhancing their skills to interact deeply with expository texts and take a step towards higher levels of proficiency. This statement supported that PALS has given a great promise as a reliable accompaniment to traditional teaching approaches to acclaim critical reading skills (McMaster, 2006).

Table 2. Reading Comprehension Level of Grade 10 Students During the Conduct of the Students

Score Range	Level of Reading Comprehension	Interpretation	Frequency	%	SD
34-40	Very High	Excellent	1	2.00	
29-33	High	Above Average	12	24.00	
17-28	Moderate	Sufficient	37	74.00	3.92
6-16	Low	Minimal	0	0.00	
0-5	Very Low	Poor	0	0.00	
Total			50	100	
Moderate Level			**Mean Score 26.30**		

Table 2 illustrates noticeable progress during the mid-intervention evaluation. The overall mean score increased to 26.34, with 24.00% of students moving into the high proficiency range and zero students remaining in the low category. This upward trend confirms early structural benefits of PALS scaffolding on text recall and active peer interaction (Khotimah et al., 2023; Swan, 2014).

Therefore, the aforementioned results contributed to the findings of the present study, by which the overall reading comprehension level may remain moderate, but the increase in the mean scores and better distribution showed significant progress, emphasizing that the efficient utilization of PALS can further enhance the reading comprehension of the students to higher levels of proficiency.

Table 3. Reading Comprehension Level of Grade 10 Students After the Conduct of the Study

Score Range	Level of Reading Comprehension	Interpretation	Frequency	%	SD
34-40	Very High	Excellent	16	32.00	
29-33	High	Above Average	22	44.00	
17-28	Moderate	Sufficient	12	24.00	3.85
6-16	Low	Minimal	0	0.00	
0-5	Very Low	Poor	0	0.00	
Total			50	100	
High Level			**Mean Score 31.4**		

Table 3 shows that post-intervention comprehension levels shifted to the High proficiency range (M=31.40). A combined 76.00% of participants achieved High (44.00%) or Very High (32.00%) levels, demonstrating substantial improvement in extracting main ideas, synthesizing evidence, and summarizing expository text structures independently. These posttest improvements mirror gains reported by Spörer and Brunstein (2009).

Moreover, PALS improved both the basic understanding and higher-order thinking skills of the students. PALS engaged on proactive engagement, interaction, and teamwork among students that were important in enhancing inferential and critical thinking abilities (Hertel, S. 2024). This is also evident in the study of Breadmore et al. (2024) that students under PALS have great improvements in oral fluency and comprehension by being better in summarizing and relay ideas.

Finally, Hudson (2026) implied that experimental evidence showed that PALS gave measurable improvements in reading attainment, fluency and comprehension.

Therefore, the said results supported the idea that PALS helped in enhancing the student's reading comprehension in expository texts.

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Table 4. Reading Comprehension Level of Grade 10 Students

Assessment Period		Mean	SD	Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square (MS	F-Value	P-Value	Partial Eta Square
1.	the pretest	21.26	4.12	Between Task	2568.44	2	1284.22	112.45	<0.001	0.696
2.	mid-test	26.34	3.92	Error	1119.23	92	11.42			
3.	posttest	31.40	3.85	**Total**	**3687.67**	**100**				

*Tested at 0.05 level of significance

The repeated measures ANOVA results in Table 4 demonstrate a statistically significant difference in reading comprehension performance across the three evaluation periods, $F(2,98)=112.45$, $p<.001$.

The partial eta squared ($\eta_p^2=.696$) indicates a large effect size, with 69.6% of the total variance in comprehension scores directly attributable to the PALS intervention.

Post-hoc pairwise comparisons using Tukey's HSD revealed significant performance increases between the pretest and mid-test (MD=5.08, $p<.001$), the mid-test and posttest (MD=5.06, $p<.001$), and the pretest and posttest (MD=10.14, $p<.001$).b

The results evaluated the impact of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) on improving Grade 10 students' comprehension of expository texts. Statistical testing ($p < 0.05$) successfully rejected the null hypothesis, confirming that score gains resulted from the intervention rather than random chance.

Despite pre-test and mid-study evaluations indicating a consistent moderate baseline proficiency, the overall upward shift in mean scores highlights the method's practical effectiveness.

The success of PALS is robustly attributed to structured teamwork, active engagement, and social interaction (Topping, 2005; Slavin, 2014). While the quantitative metrics are clear, a critical perspective notes that incorporating qualitative student feedback would have provided a deeper view of the learning process. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that collaborative learning models like PALS are valuable, evidence-based instructional tools for enhancing academic reading performance.

Experiences of Grade 10 Students on Utilizing Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy

The focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted to explore the participants' experiences on utilizing the peer-assisted learning strategies, which focus on enhancing their reading comprehension, specifically on expository texts.

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Table 5. Experiences of Grade 10 Students in Using Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) to Enhance Their Reading Comprehension on Expository Texts

Themes	Construct	Codes	Statements
Application of Reading Practices	Reading Approach Evolution	Title-first Reading	"Before ko nakabalo aning PALS I usually approach reading expository text the common way… Basahon ang title una, then trying to understand the whole thing just by reading the title po… Paghuman, basahon dayon ang mga words sa text, Ma'am." (P1)
			"So before sa PALS Ma'am, ang pag-approach nako sa reading expository is basahon una ang title po para makuha na nako daan kung unsa ang text all about, then after ana Ma'am is kuan... kay didto na jud ko sa mismong text to get the main ideas po..." (P3)
	Independent Exploration	External Lookup	"Kung magbasa ko tapos naa mga unfamiliar or lisod na words na ma-encounter… need pa nako siya i-search so that ma-understand nako ang context sa akong ginabasa." (P2)
			"Kung may mga words na mahirap basahin po ay inuulit ko po ng pagbasa… o i-search po sa Google para maintindihan ko po ang point nito sa text." (P4)
Collaborative Comprehension and Peer Interaction	Collaborative Learning	Collaborative Explanation and Discussion	"Sila ang naga-explain sa mga bagay-bagay na wala nimo nasabtan Ma'am and naga-share pud sa ilang ideas para mas masabtan pa namo ang text." (P1)
			"Working with peers helps me understand more about what I'm reading… And I think, effective ang working with peers since both mo maka-share og learnings gikan sa inyong gibasa." (P2)
			"Working with a peer Ma'am kay murag mas sayon siya i understand ang expository texts kay murag same lang mi og level gud ma'am... tapos mas better siya because kung nay confusing parts is naga-share mi og ideas kung unsa ra to among na bal-an po." (P3)
			"Working with a peer helps me understand kung ano ang binabasa ko ko nang maayos… because it allows for immediate clarification of concepts." (P4)

				"Halimbawa kay i-discuss namo siya Ma'am, didto nako mas nasabtan the way gi-explain sa akong pair… kay ang uban nga mga paragraph or sentences sa text kay wala nako kaayo nasabtan…"(P5)
			Partner Reading and Taking Turns	"Pinakaganahan nako Ma'am katong partner reading po kay maka-share mi og among ideas po then makahatag pud mi og corrections sa isa't-isa…" (P1)
Perceived of Strategies	Efficacy Reading	Enhanced Reading Proficiency	Accelerated comprehension and time reduction	"Feel nako ma'am akong comprehension kay naglevel-up siya… labi na'g we started using PALS po kay ma understand na nimo ang text nga gihatag in just a short time." (P1)
				"My reading comprehension has slightly improved compared to before using PALS po ma'am, because the collaborative process makes it easier for me to understand po... and dali na nako ma spot ang main ideas..." (P3)
				"Opo Ma'am… kay mas nigamay ang time nako sa pag-ulit ulit og basa sa text para masabtan nako Ma'am tungod kay naka-learn mi paano magkuha og main idea sa PALS." (P5)
		Accelerated Understanding	Enhanced confidence and vocabulary retention	"After PALS Ma'am, nag-improve ang akoang reading comprehension since may assistance man ko from other peers... Also, mas nag-widen ang akong ability to explain things based on my understandings or own words." (P2)
				"Noong madalas ko nang ginagamit ang PALS… nag-improve na yung reading comprehension ko... I feel more confident in my ability na maintindihan Ang mga nakakalitong impormasyong at pag-identify sa main arguments..." (P4)

This section presents the findings from the thematic analysis of qualitative responses regarding students' experiences, strategic evolutions, and perceived outcomes following the implementation of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) for expository text comprehension.

Three primary themes emerged from the data: (a) Application of Reading Practices, (b) Collaborative Comprehension and Peer Interaction, and (c) Perceived Efficacy of Reading Strategies.

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Theme 1: Application of Reading Practices

This heme explores how participants approached expository texts both prior to and alongside peer intervention. Findings indicate that prior to PALS implementation, participants relied heavily on surface-level previewing strategies, primarily reading titles to infer textual context without deeper structural processing.

As Participant 1 noted:

Before ko nakabalo aning PALS I usually approach reading expository text the common way… Basahon ang title una then trying to understand the whole thing just by reading the title po… Paghuman, basahon dayon ang mga words sa text, Ma'am. [Before I learned about PALS, I usually approached reading expository text the common way... Reading the title first then trying to understand the whole thing just by reading the title... After that, I would immediately read the words in the text, Ma'am.]

Participant 3 expressed a similar reliance on title-first processing:

So before sa PALS Ma'am, ang pag-approach nako sa reading expository is basahon una ang title po para makuha na nako daan kung unsa ang text all about, then after ana Ma'am is kuan... kay didto na jud ko sa mismong text to get the main ideas po... [So before PALS, Ma'am, my approach to reading expository texts was to read the title first so I could already grasp what the text is all about, then after that, Ma'am... because that's when I actually go into the text itself to get the main ideas.]

When encountering structural barriers or unfamiliar vocabulary during independent reading, participants transitioned to external resource seeking. Participant 2 highlighted this behavior:

"Kung magbasa ko tapos naa mga unfamiliar or lisod na words na ma-encounter… need pa nako siya i-search so that ma-understand nako ang context sa akong ginabasa" [When I read and encounter unfamiliar or difficult words... I still need to search for them so that I can understand the context of what I am reading].

Participant 4 reinforced this approach to problem-solving during independent text reading:

"Kung may mga words na mahirap basahin po ay inuulit ko po ng pagbasa… o i-search po sa Google para maintindihan ko po ang point nito sa text" [If there are words that are hard to read, I repeat reading them... or search them on Google so I can understand their point in the text].

These observations reflect recent findings in literacy literature. Gegone (2026) emphasized that structured reading interventions shift students from rigid

guessing routines to active metacognitive engagement. Similarly, Lozada and Reyes-Profugo (2026) demonstrated that combining structural element activation with targeted word lookup fosters greater reading autonomy among secondary students. External lookup habits often serve as critical self-monitoring mechanisms when readers encounter high cognitive load (Dorji & Darjay, 2022; Lisan, 2022)

Theme 2: Collaborative Comprehension and Peer Interaction

The second theme addresses the social dynamics and peer mechanisms that facilitated comprehension. Transitioning from isolated reading to reciprocal peer interactions provided students with psychological safety and immediate clarification mechanisms. Participant 1 described how peer explanations bridged comprehension gaps: "Sila ang naga-explain sa mga bagay-bagay na wala nimo nasabtan Ma'am and naga-share pud sa ilang ideas para mas masabtan pa namo ang text" [They are the ones who explain the things that you didn't understand, Ma'am, and also share their ideas so that we can understand the text even better].

Participant 2 highlighted the reciprocal nature of peer-assisted learning: "Working with peers helps me understand more about what I'm reading… And I think, effective ang working with peers since both mo maka-share og learnings gikan sa inyong gibasa" [Working with peers helps me understand more about what I'm reading... And I think working with peers is effective since both of you get to share learnings from what you read].

Participants also emphasized peer equalization, noting that working with someone at a similar developmental level reduced academic anxiety. Participant 3 stated:

Working with a peer Ma'am kay murag mas sayon siya i understand ang expository texts kay murag same lang mi og level gud ma'am... tapos mas better siya because kung nay confusing parts is naga-share mi og ideas kung unsa ra to among na bal-an po. [Working with a peer, Ma'am, is like it's much easier to understand expository texts because it's like we're just on the same level, Ma'am... and it's better because if there are confusing parts, we share ideas about whatever we know.]

Participant 4 emphasized the immediacy of feedback provided during peer interactions: "Working with a peer helps me understand kung ano ang binabasa ko ko nang maayos… because it allows for immediate clarification of concepts" [Working with a peer helps me understand what I am reading properly... because it allows for immediate clarification of concepts].

Furthermore, dialogic processing allowed participants to deconstruct complex sentences and paragraphs together. Participant 5 shared: "Halimbawa kay i-discuss namo siya Ma'am, didto nako mas nasabtan the way gi-explain sa akong pair… kay ang uban nga mga paragraph or sentences sa text kay wala nako kaayo nasabtan…" [For example, when we discuss it, Ma'am, that's where I understood it better through the way my pair explained it... because I didn't quite understand some of the other paragraphs or sentences in the text...].

Structural components of PALS, such as turn-taking and mutual feedback, enhanced engagement. Participant 1 observed: "Pinakaganahan nako Ma'am katong partner reading po kay maka-share mi og among ideas po then makahatag pud mi og corrections sa isa't-isa…" [What I liked most, Ma'am, was the partner reading because we could share our ideas and also give corrections to each other...].

These empirical observations align with Lisan (2022) and Gegone (2026), who noted that structured peer routines like partner reading and reciprocal tutoring enhance fluency and collaborative understanding. Furthermore, peer scaffolding mitigates instructional gaps and increases student engagement during complex reading tasks (Khusnul, 2022; Pifarre & Cobos, 2010; Lozada & Reyes-Profugo, 2026).

Theme 3: Perceived Efficacy of Reading Strategies

The third theme encapsulates the self-reported cognitive and affective benefits resulting from PALS. Participants consistently reported accelerated comprehension speeds, reduced time spent on repetitive reading, and heightened confidence in identifying central arguments. Participant 1 noted: "Feel nako ma'am akong comprehension kay naglevel-up siya… labi na'g we started using PALS po kay ma understand na nimo ang text nga gihatag in just a short time" [I feel, Ma'am, that my comprehension has leveled up... especially since we started using PALS because you can already understand the given text in just a short time].

Participant 3 corroborated this acceleration in comprehension and main idea extraction: "My reading comprehension has slightly improved compared to before using PALS po ma'am, because the collaborative process makes it easier for me to understand po... and dali na nako ma spot ang main ideas..." [My reading comprehension has slightly improved compared to before using PALS, Ma'am, because the collaborative process makes it easier for me to understand... and I can easily spot the main ideas...].

Participant 5 explicitly linked PALS strategies to reduced cognitive strain and faster execution: "Opo Ma'am… kay mas nigamay ang time nako sa pag-ulit ulit og basa sa text para masabtan nako Ma'am tungod kay naka-learn mi paano magkuha og main idea sa PALS" [Yes, Ma'am... because my time spent repeatedly reading the text just to understand it decreased, Ma'am, because we learned how to extract the main idea through PALS].

Beyond processing speed, PALS fostered expressive vocabulary expansion and self-efficacy. Participant 2 explained: "After PALS Ma'am, nag-improve ang akoang reading comprehension since may assistance man ko from other peers... Also, mas nag-widen ang akong ability to explain things based on my understandings or own words" [After PALS, Ma'am, my reading comprehension improved since I had assistance from other peers... Also, my ability to explain things based on my understandings or own words widened].

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Finally, Participant 4 detailed the positive impact of PALS on academic confidence: "Noong madalas ko nang ginagamit ang PALS… nag-improve na yung reading comprehension ko... I feel more confident in my ability na maintindihan Ang mga nakakalitong impormatory at pag-identify sa main arguments..." [When I frequently used PALS... my reading comprehension improved... I feel more confident in my ability to understand confusing information and identify main arguments...].

These perceived gains are consistent with findings by Vardy et al. (2026) and Gegone (2026), who observed significant increases in reading self-efficacy and metacognitive awareness following structured peer interventions. Regular exposure to peer feedback and reciprocal strategy modeling systematically enhances vocabulary retention and overall academic resilience (Dorji & Darjay, 2022; Camungao & Pascual, 2026; Li et al., 2025).

4. Conclusions

The findings of this mixed-methods study demonstrate that the implementation of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) yields significant improvements in Grade 10 students' reading comprehension of expository texts. Based on the statistical analyses and qualitative thematic findings, the following conclusions are drawn:

Prior to the intervention, high school learners predominantly demonstrated a moderate level of reading comprehension (M = 21.26, SD = 4.12), with 90.00% of participants clustered in the moderate range and zero students achieving very high proficiency. Qualitative data revealed that students initially relied on passive, surface-level reading strategies—such as inferring full context solely from titles or relying on external dictionary lookups when encountering dense vocabulary. This highlights that standard instructional practices leave learners struggling with the complex syntactic structures and specialized terminology typical of expository texts.

After the intervention, PALS is found to be highly effective, evidence-based instructional intervention for accelerating reading attainment. Repeated measures ANOVA established a statistically significant increase in comprehension scores across time points ($F(2, 98) = 112.45, p < .001$), accompanied by a very large effect size ($\eta_p^2 = .696$). Over the course of the intervention, student performance shifted from a moderate baseline to a high level of overall proficiency ($M = 31.40, SD = 3.85$), with 76.00% of participants achieving High (44.00%) or Very High (32.00%) performance levels by posttest. The progression confirms that PALS contributes in facilitating both literal recall and higher-order critical skills, such as main idea identification and evidence synthesis.

The quantitative gains are directly mediated by the interactive and reciprocal structure of PALS. Thematic analysis reveals that partner reading, turn-taking, and peer discussion provide immediate clarification, reduce anxiety by equalizing peer interaction levels, and decrease cognitive load.

Peer explanations bridge gaps in understanding more effectively than isolated independent reading, allowing students to deconstruct complex expository passages collaboratively.

Additionally, engaging in structured peer tutoring fosters positive metacognitive and affective shifts. Students report enhanced reading efficiency—specifically spending less time on repetitive re-reading—and improved spot-identification of core arguments. Furthermore, PALS contributes to enhancing learners' confidence in articulating concepts in their own words and expands their active working vocabulary.

Therefore, integrating Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) into secondary language arts instruction bridges the gap between basic literal recall and advanced expository comprehension. By replacing passive independent reading routines with structured peer interaction and reciprocal feedback, PALS optimizes processing efficiency, boosts student self-efficacy, and produces sustained, statistically significant academic gains.

5. Recommendation

Based on the findings, the following are recommended:

1. The teachers may apply the Peer-Assisssted Learning Strategy (PALS) in their lessons to enhance the reading comprehension of the students that encourages active participation, collaboration, confidence, and critical thinking. Additionally, the teachers may monitor the progress of the students regularly and facilitate the PALS sessions so that it still aligns with the learning objectives.
2. The school administrators may support the use of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) in classes through organizing professional trainings and providing instructional materials that make the teachers ready in using peer-assisted instruction. Furthermore, they may also encourage the use of PALS in the school reading programs and monitor its implementation to keep its effectiveness across grade levels.
3. The curriculum planners may enhance the implementation of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) in the curriculum by designing enrichment plans, implementing organized reading activities, and student-centered instructional frameworks to facilitate active engagement and higher-order thinking skills. Additionally, they may also consider incorporating PALS as a collaborative and interactive reading method in instructional guides and learning modules.
4. The researchers may replicate and extend this study by exploring additional variables and research methodologies associated with reading comprehension and Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS). Furthermore, future studies can be conducted in larger samples, different grade levels or different academic settings to obtain wider and more comprehensive findings about the effects of PALS on students' reading comprehension performance.

6. Limitations of the Study

This study measured the use of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) in enhancing the reading comprehension of expository texts of Grade 10 students.

The researcher conducted the study at Fatima National High School, General Santos City, wherein the school showcases a standard curriculum, facilities and equipment.

The subjects of this study came from one (1) section of Grade 10 that have fifty (50) students. The researcher administered on the group a series of test questions adapted from the standardized Group Screening Test (GST) developed by the Department of Education (2018). The subjects encountered five (5) sessions a week that was related to the expository texts used in the test. After the sessions, five (5) subjects would have a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) that involved on sharing their experience on the said sessions. The research was conducted for six (6) weeks during the academic year 2025-2026, Third Quarter Period.

Additionally, the limited number of participants and lack of randomness is also acknowledged as a limitation of this study.

Supplementary Details

Supplementary Materials & Data availability statement:

The primary data were derived from raw scores from series of tests and responses from focus group discussions conducted among selected Grade 10 students in Fatima National High School, General Santos City. These data served as the basis for analyzing the reading comprehension level of the students before, during and after using Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) on expository texts. To ensure transparency and academic integrity, selected anonymized data (e.g. raw test scores, interview guides, coded responses, and thematic summaries) may be available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author. All data were collected and handled in accordance with ethical research standards.

Author Contributions: All authors contributed significantly to the development and completion of this study.

- *Renaizza Sheen D. Fuentebella, LPT* – Student researcher; led the conceptualization of the study, conducted data collection and analysis, and drafted the manuscript.
- *Elloiza Mae L. Palapar, MAEd, Assistant Professor IV* – Research adviser, supervised the implementation of the study, and reviewd the manuscript for language, coherence, and academic rigor, particularly in the field of language and literacy education.
- *Jay D. Buscano, PhD, Professor VI* – Dean of College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics; provided guidance of the research framework, contributed to the statistical data collection, and validated analytical

procedures, and enhanced the overall presentation and scholarly quality of the manuscript.

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Institutional Review Board Statement:

The Mindanao State University- General Santos Institutional Ethics Review Committee (MSU-General Santos IERC) has recently reviewed the responses to the conditions placed upon the ethical approval for the research/project. The proposal is now deemed to meet the requirements of the PHREB (2017) and full ethical approval has been granted (Approval No. 42-2025-MSUGSC-IERC).

Informed Consent Statement:
Informed consent was obtained from all subjects prior to data collection. Participants were assured of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. No personal or sensitive identifying information was disclosed in the research.

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Conflicts of Interest:

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Disclosure Statement:

The authors utilized artificial intelligence (AI) tools in the preparation of the manuscript, specifically for paraphrasing, drafting, and language editing. The authors ensured that all AI-generated content has been reviewed and validated, taking full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the work.

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