

Effectiveness of the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy in Enhancing the Reading Skills and Engagement of Grade 7 Junior High School Learners in Alabat Island National High School, Alabat, Quezon

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Abstract. Reading difficulties among junior high school learners remain a persistent challenge, particularly for those at the frustration level of literacy development. Addressing this concern requires innovative, evidence-based interventions that not only strengthen literacy skills but also sustain learner motivation. This study investigated the effectiveness of a Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy in enhancing the reading performance of Grade 7 learners at Alabat Island National High School. A quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design was employed, with participants identified through the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory. Learners at frustration level were paired with peers at instructional and independent levels, engaging in structured peer-assisted sessions enriched with gamification elements such as points, badges, leaderboards, and quests. These features were intentionally designed to foster collaboration, healthy competition, and sustained engagement. Data were collected through standardized pretests and posttests, validated instruments, and learner questionnaires, with statistical analysis applied to measure outcomes across multiple literacy domains. Findings revealed significant improvements in reading comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary, alongside heightened learner engagement and motivation. Posttest scores demonstrated upward shifts across literacy domains, confirming the effectiveness of the intervention. Learners also reported increased confidence and enjoyment in reading activities, suggesting that gamification can positively influence attitudes toward literacy. The results highlight the potential of integrating gamification into buddy reading to strengthen literacy outcomes and foster collaborative learning environments. This approach provides educators with a practical framework for enhancing reading instruction, while also addressing motivational barriers. Further research is recommended to examine scalability, sustainability, and long-term impact across diverse educational contexts.

Introduction

Reading is widely recognized as a cornerstone of education, serving not only as a cognitive skill but also as a social and cultural practice that shapes lifelong learning, personal growth, and academic achievement. Within schools, effective reading instruction is essential to equity and success, yet many learners struggle to develop proficiency. For these students, reading difficulties often stem from challenges in decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension, which can lead to frustration, poor performance, and diminished motivation. Addressing these challenges requires pedagogical approaches that go beyond skill acquisition to cultivate genuine appreciation and enthusiasm for reading.

Research has consistently demonstrated that targeted interventions can support struggling readers. Peer-assisted strategies, such as the Reading Buddy method, have shown promise in improving literacy outcomes while reducing feelings

of isolation and fostering socio-emotional growth. Butler, Blankenship, et al. (2023) emphasize that struggling readers often resist reading and feel judged by peers, but collaborative approaches like Reading Buddies provide scaffolded support within a socio-constructivist framework, particularly Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development. At the same time, gamification—defined as the integration of game-like elements such as points, badges, and levels into learning activities—has been found to enhance motivation, persistence, and knowledge retention. Yamada-Rice, Marsh, and Burnett (2023) reported a 93% increase in children aged 2 to 15 engaging in smartphone-based games between 2020 and 2023, underscoring the strong appeal of game-like environments to young learners and their potential for classroom adaptation. Despite these promising findings, several gaps remain in the literature. Most studies on gamification in literacy focus on elementary learners, leaving junior high school students underexplored despite their unique developmental and motivational challenges. Localized research in Philippine public schools—particularly rural contexts such as Alabat Island—remains scarce, limiting the applicability of global findings to resource-constrained environments. Furthermore, existing studies often treat gamification and peer-assisted learning separately, with little exploration of how these approaches can be systematically integrated. Methodological limitations such as small sample sizes, short intervention periods, and limited attention to socio-emotional outcomes further constrain the generalizability of findings.

These gaps raise critical questions about how gamification and peer-assisted learning can be combined to address both motivational and literacy challenges in adolescent learners. Theoretically, such integration extends socio-constructivist frameworks into gamified peer contexts, offering new insights into how collaborative learning can be enhanced through digital play. Practically, findings could inform tailored interventions for rural schools, while policy implications include guiding literacy programs in diverse educational settings. This research is particularly timely given the rising digital engagement of youth, persistent literacy gaps in Philippine public schools, and the need for scalable, motivating interventions in junior high classrooms. Addressing these challenges now ensures that literacy instruction evolves alongside learners' digital habits and socio-emotional needs.

Accordingly, this study investigates how integrating gamification into the Reading Buddy strategy affects the reading motivation of Grade 7 students at Alabat Island National High School, examines its impact on the overall literacy outcomes, and explores its influence on learners' engagement, particularly on their perceptions, behaviors, and experiences. The primary goal is to examine the effectiveness of gamified Reading Buddy interventions in enhancing reading skills, while secondary goals include testing the impact on motivation, comparing literacy outcomes with traditional approaches, and exploring socio-emotional benefits. The methods section will outline the quasi-experimental design, participant selection, and intervention procedures; the results section will present quantitative findings on literacy outcomes and qualitative insights on motivation and peer interaction; and the discussion will interpret these findings in light of socio-constructivist theory, highlight practical implications for rural schools, and suggest directions for future research.

Research Questions

The study aims to determine the effectiveness of the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy in enhancing the reading skills of Grade 7 Junior High School learners in Alabat Island National High School.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions.

1. What is the status of learners' reading skills before and after the implementation of the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy?
2. Is there a significant difference in learners' reading skills before and after using the Gamified Reading Buddy strategy?
3. What are the learners' levels of engagement, as reflected in their perceptions, behaviors, and experiences, when participating in the gamified reading buddy strategy
4. What Program Implementation Plan for a Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy could be developed?

Methodology

Research Design

The study utilized a quasi-experimental research design, employing a pretest–posttest method to evaluate the effectiveness of the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy in enhancing reading skills among Grade 7 students.

The Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) was used to assess the learners' reading levels. The primary participants were Grade 7 students from a class identified as having the highest frustration level in reading. They were paired with peers who belonged to the instructional and independent levels. These students participated in an intervention phase that incorporated gamified reading alongside the buddy strategy. The assessments administered to the participants were carefully validated. The same learners were subsequently evaluated through a post-test, which focused on the same

reading competencies. Comparing the post-test scores with the pretest scores allowed the researchers to determine the significant differences resulting from the implementation of the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy.

Participants

The study was conducted at Alabat Island National High School (AINHS), located in the Municipality of Alabat, Province of Quezon. At the time of the research, the Grade 7 population consisted of 269 learners distributed across seven sections, ranging from 32 to 40 students each.

Among these groups, Section RMU demonstrated the strongest reading proficiency, with 84% (27 out of 32) of its students performing at the independent level and none categorized under frustration. In contrast, Section JDN exhibited the greatest literacy challenges, with 55% (22 out of 40) of its learners identified at the frustration level and only five students achieving independent reading status. This disparity highlighted Section JDN as the most critical group requiring intervention.

Given these findings, purposive sampling was employed to select participants from Section JDN, as this section represented the highest concentration of struggling readers. The selection ensured that the research focused on learners most in need of support, thereby providing a sufficient sample for assessing the effectiveness of the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy. By concentrating on this population, the study was able to evaluate the intervention's impact on learners experiencing significant reading difficulties while maintaining ecological validity within the classroom context.

Instruments of the Study

To evaluate the effectiveness of the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy, the researcher employed both standardized and self-constructed instruments. The Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) served as the primary standardized tool for assessing the reading levels of Grade 7 learners. This instrument was administered as both a pretest and a posttest, covering the same competencies—comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary development—while utilizing different materials to avoid practice effects. The Phil-IRI provided objective measures of learners' baseline literacy skills and subsequent improvements following the intervention.

Complementing the standardized assessment, the researcher developed a self-constructed questionnaire designed to capture learners' engagement with the intervention. This instrument employed a 4-point Likert scale to evaluate learners' perceptions, behaviors, and experiences related to reading. Items focused on reading interests, enjoyment, and the perceived importance of reading. To ensure validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in literacy and educational research, confirming that it comprehensively addressed the dimensions of learner engagement.

Together, these instruments provided a balanced evaluation of the intervention's impact: the Phil-IRI offered quantitative evidence of literacy gains, while the Likert-scale questionnaire yielded qualitative insights into learner attitudes and experiences. This dual approach ensured a holistic understanding of how the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy influenced both academic performance and motivational engagement.

Procedure

Prior to the conduct of the study, formal permission was secured from the Schools Division Superintendent, the District Supervisor, and the school principal to administer the assessments and implement the intervention. Grade 7 learners from Alabat Island National High School were purposively selected, specifically those identified at the frustration level of reading based on the initial Phil-IRI assessment.

To establish baseline data, a pretest was administered using Phil-IRI graded passages. This diagnostic step assessed learners' initial reading ability levels through comprehension tasks, fluency tests, and vocabulary development exercises, thereby providing a clear profile of each learner's strengths and challenges in literacy.

Following the pretest, the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy was implemented. Learners at the frustration level were paired with peers at the instructional or independent levels to ensure scaffolding, peer support, and balanced collaboration. Prior to the intervention, reading buddies were oriented and trained in the gamified learning approach, which emphasized cooperation, accountability, and enjoyment in literacy tasks.

Game elements were systematically integrated into the reading sessions. A points system rewarded learner for task completion, comprehension accuracy, and peer support. Badges and certificates were awarded for milestones such as fluency improvement or vocabulary mastery, while leaderboards tracked progress to encourage healthy competition and recognition. Reading activities were framed as quests or challenges—such as decoding unfamiliar words, summarizing

passages, or completing comprehension questions—transforming routine tasks into engaging missions. Immediate feedback loops were established through peer evaluation and teacher monitoring, reinforcing positive behaviors and guiding learners toward improvement.

Throughout the intervention, learners earned points and unlocked badges such as the *Fluency Star* for demonstrating smooth reading or the *Vocabulary Explorer* for mastering new words. Weekly leaderboards showcased top-performing pairs, inspiring healthy competition while ensuring inclusivity. These gamified elements enriched the reading buddy strategy, making literacy learning more dynamic and collaborative.

To ensure reliability and validity, a range of materials and instruments were employed, including standardized Phil-IRI graded passages, printed badges and point cards, reading logs and journals for learners to document daily activities, and teacher observation checklists to record participation, collaboration, and engagement.

The strategy was implemented across the first two quarters of the School Year 2025–2026. At the end of the intervention, a posttest was administered using Phil-IRI passages similar in format to the pretest but with different materials, covering the same competencies to measure changes in reading ability. Learners also completed a validated questionnaire to evaluate their perceptions, behaviors, and experiences toward reading.

Finally, the collected data underwent thorough statistical analysis and interpretation. Pretest and posttest scores were analyzed to determine significant improvements in reading skills, while questionnaire data were examined to evaluate learner engagement with the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy. This systematic process—from baseline assessment through intervention, documentation, and evaluation—demonstrated the effectiveness of the strategy in improving reading skills and enhancing learner motivation.

Ethical Consideration

When conducting research on the effectiveness of the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy in enhancing the reading skills of Grade 7 learners, several ethical considerations were taken into account:

1. *Informed Consent*: All participants, including students and parents, provided informed consent before participating in the study. They were fully informed about the nature of the research, its purpose, potential risks, and the use of data collected.
2. *Confidentiality*: Confidentiality of all participants was maintained by anonymizing data and ensuring that personal identifiers were not disclosed in any reports or publications. This helps protect the privacy of students and their families.
3. *Voluntary Participation*: Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Participants were made to feel free to withdraw at any time without any consequences, and they understood that they were not obligated to participate.
4. *Minimize Harm*: The research ensured that it did not cause any physical, emotional, or psychological harm to the participants. This included being sensitive to the reading abilities of students and providing support when they experienced frustration or anxiety.
5. *Beneficence*: The study aimed to provide benefits to the participants. For instance, the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy was designed to enhance learning experiences and improve reading skills, which can have positive long-term effects.
6. *Debriefing*: After the study, participants were debriefed about the research findings and the overall purpose of the study. This helps them understand the significance of their participation and the impact of the Game-Based Reading Buddy Strategy.
7. *Review by the Ethics Committee*: The research proposal was submitted to the ethics committee for approval. This process helped ensure that the research complied with ethical standards and guidelines.
8. *Fairness and Justice*: The research ensured that all students have equitable access to the resources and opportunities provided by the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy, regardless of their background or abilities.

Data Treatment and Analysis

The data gathered in the study were analyzed and interpreted using appropriate statistical tools. Quantitative data from the pretests and posttests were analyzed using SPSS v.27. For Statement of the Problem No. 1, the mean was computed to determine the status of learners' reading skills before and after the implementation of the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy. Reading proficiency was classified according to the standardized Phil-IRI assessment scale, which categorizes learners into independent, instructional, and frustration levels based on word reading and comprehension scores. This provided a descriptive profile of learners' literacy performance at both pretest and posttest stages.

For Statement of the Problem No. 2, a paired samples *t*-test was conducted to examine whether significant differences existed between pretest and posttest scores. This inferential analysis assessed the effectiveness of the intervention by determining whether improvements in reading skills were statistically significant. The test compared mean scores in word reading and comprehension, with the level of significance set at $p < .05$.

For Statement of the Problem No. 3, descriptive statistics such as mean and frequency distribution were utilized to analyze learners' engagement with the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy. Data were drawn from the self-constructed Likert-scale questionnaire, which measured learners' perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes toward reading. Responses were interpreted using a four-point scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* (1.00–1.75) to *Strongly Agree* (3.26–4.00). This analysis provided insights into learners' motivational and affective experiences during the intervention.

Collectively, these statistical procedures ensured a comprehensive evaluation of the intervention. The use of both descriptive and inferential methods allowed the researcher to capture not only the status of learners' reading proficiency but also the significance of observed changes and the qualitative dimensions of learner engagement. This systematic approach ensured both the reliability of findings and the validity of conclusions drawn from the study.

Results and Discussion

Part I. Status of Learners' Reading Skill Before and After the Implementation of Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy

Reading Level	No. of Respondents	Percentage	Mean Word Reading Score	Mean Comprehension Score
Independent	5	12.5 %	97.0 %	84.0 %
Instructional	13	32.5 %	91.0 %	66.9 %
Frustration	22	55.0 %	82.5 %	40.0 %

Table 1. Status of Learners' Reading Skills Before the Implementation of Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy (JDN)

Table 1 shows the pretest results that reveal a significant literacy challenge, with more than half of the students categorized at the lowest functional level. The data shows that 55% of the learners (22 out of 40) are at the Frustration level. According to the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) standards, a learner at this level finds the reading material so difficult that they cannot successfully process the information. While the Frustration group has a mean word reading of 82.5%, their comprehension scores are notably lower. This suggests a "decoding-comprehension gap." According to the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986), reading comprehension is the product of decoding and language comprehension. These students can "word call" (decode) but lack the linguistic processing to understand the text.

Meanwhile, only a small fraction of the class entered the grade with the necessary skills for autonomous learning. In the Instructional level, 32.5% (13 students) are in the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). They possess a high word recognition (91.0%) and are ready for guided instruction. Moreover, 12.5% (5 students) are at the Independent level, where they can read and comprehend Grade 7 material without assistance.

The pretest indicates that, without targeted intervention, the majority of the class faces the "Matthew Effect" (Stanovich, 1986), in which early reading failure leads to a widening academic gap. The proposed Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy, as a research-backed method, is expected to bridge this gap by leveraging social learning and motivational mechanics to improve both decoding fluency and deep comprehension.

The statistical analysis applied in the table is *descriptive statistics*, which serve to summarize and present the learners' reading performance before the intervention. The data were analyzed using *frequency counts and percentage distribution* to classify learners into three reading levels—Independent, Instructional, and Frustration. This categorization highlights the proportion of learners at each level, thereby providing a clear picture of the overall reading profile of the group. Additionally, *measures of central tendency, specifically mean scores*, were computed for both word reading and comprehension. These averages capture the general performance of learners within each category, allowing for meaningful comparisons across levels. Taken together, these descriptive measures establish a baseline profile of learners' reading skills prior to the implementation of the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy, offering a foundation for subsequent evaluation of the intervention's effectiveness.

Reading Level	No. of Respondents	Percentage	Mean Word Reading Score	Mean Comprehension Score
Independent	10	25.0 %	98.0 %	90.0 %
Instructional	20	50.0 %	92.6 %	70.0 %
Frustration	10	25.0 %	83.0 %	40.9 %

Table 2. Status of Learners' Reading Skills After the Implementation of Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy (JDN)

Table 2 presents post-test data reflecting the Grade 7-JDN cohort's current literacy standing following the implementation of the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy.

The post-test indicates that 75% of the class (independent and instructional combined) is now capable of participating in grade-level academic activities. Half of the class sits at the Instructional level, which, according to Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the Zone of Proximal Development, is the optimal state for classroom learning where students can succeed with teacher-led scaffolding. The "Mean Comprehension" scores for the independent (90%) and Instructional (70%) groups suggest a successful recoupling of decoding and comprehension. Bardida (2024) posits that gamified "Reading Buddy" interactions are particularly effective for this age group because they transform vocabulary acquisition into a high-engagement social activity. This social-driven engagement likely provided the bridge needed for "word callers" to begin deriving meaning from the text. Even with the general progress made, 25% of students are still at the Frustration level, achieving an average comprehension score of just 40.9%. For these individuals, the decoding process, which averages 83%, may still be too demanding, draining the cognitive resources required for comprehension.

The statistical analysis employed in the table is *descriptive statistics*, which were used to summarize learners' reading performance after the implementation of the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy. The data were analyzed through *frequency counts and percentage distribution*, classifying learners into Independent, Instructional, and Frustration levels. In addition, *mean scores* for word reading and comprehension were computed to capture the average performance within each category.

The analysis reveals notable improvements compared to the pre-intervention profile. The proportion of learners at the *Independent* level doubled from 12.5% to 25%, while those at the *Instructional* level increased from 32.5% to 50%. Conversely, the *Frustration* group decreased from 55% to 25%, indicating a substantial reduction in struggling readers. Word reading scores remained consistently high across levels, with Independent learners achieving 98% accuracy, Instructional learners 92.6%, and Frustration learners 83%. More importantly, comprehension scores showed marked gains: Independent learners averaged 90%, Instructional learners 70%, and even the Frustration group improved slightly to 40.9%.

Interpreted within an academic framework, these findings suggest that the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy effectively enhanced learners' reading proficiency, particularly in comprehension—a skill often more challenging to develop than word recognition. The shift in distribution toward higher reading levels demonstrates the intervention's capacity to move learners out of the Frustration category and into more functional reading zones. This aligns with theoretical models such as the *Simple View of Reading (SVR)*, which emphasizes the interplay of decoding and comprehension, and supports the notion that gamified, peer-assisted approaches can foster motivation and scaffolded learning. Overall, the descriptive statistics provide compelling evidence of the strategy's positive impact, establishing a strong basis for further inferential testing to confirm the significance of these observed improvements.

Part II. Significant Difference in Learners' Reading Skills Before and After Using the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy

				Paired Differences		95% Confidence Interval of the difference		t	D f	Sig. (2-tailed)	Interpretation
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper					
Word Reading	Pair 1	Pre-test -	0.200	0.40510	0.06405	0.32956	0.07044	3.122	39	0.003	Significant

Word Comprehensi on	Pai r 1	Post - test Pre- Test	-	0.40	0.59052	0.0933	-	-	-	3	0.000	Significant
		- Post - test	0	0		7	0.5888	0.2111	4.28	9		

Table 3. Significant Difference in Learners' Reading Skills Before and After Using the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy

Table 3 presents the paired-samples t-test results, which indicate that the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy had a significant impact on both word reading and comprehension among the learners. For word reading, the mean difference of -0.200, with a p-value of 0.003, suggests that students' decoding skills improved after the intervention. More notably, comprehension showed a larger mean difference of -0.400, with a highly significant p-value of less than 0.001, indicating that the strategy was particularly effective in enhancing learners' understanding and processing of text. These findings highlight that while decoding skills are foundational, gains in comprehension are more pronounced when learners engage in interactive, collaborative reading activities.

The observed improvements in reading comprehension align with existing literature on gamification and peer-assisted strategies, such as buddy reading. Wang et al. (2024) emphasized that gamification in reading instruction significantly increases learner motivation and engagement, which, in turn, leads to measurable gains in comprehension. This is consistent with the present study, which found that gamified elements combined with structured peer support created a dynamic learning environment that sustained student interest and facilitated deeper text processing. By embedding game mechanics into literacy tasks, learners were not only more willing to participate but also demonstrated improved comprehension outcomes, supporting Wang et al.'s (2024) conclusion that gamification acts as a catalyst for both affective and cognitive growth in reading instruction. Similarly, Matyakhon, Chaowanakritsanakul, and Santos (2024) reported that gamified reading activities significantly enhanced comprehension among EFL learners, showing that interactive elements such as points, badges, and challenges foster sustained participation. Torreon (2025) further reinforced this by demonstrating that gamified platforms like Quizizz improved both motivation and comprehension, transforming routine reading tasks into engaging, goal-oriented experiences.

The buddy reading model itself has long been recognized for its benefits. Kristin (2016) identified ten advantages of buddy reading, including modeling fluent reading, providing individualized support, and fostering positive peer influence. When gamification is layered onto this model, these benefits are amplified: younger learners gain confidence and fluency by listening to their peers, while older buddies reinforce their own skills through teaching and modeling. The gamified elements add excitement and a sense of achievement, motivating learners to remain engaged throughout the process.

Taken together, the statistical evidence and supporting literature suggest that the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy is an effective approach to literacy development. It strengthens decoding skills while fostering deeper comprehension, which is essential for long-term academic success. By combining the social support of buddy reading with the motivational influence of gamification, educators can create a dynamic learning environment in which reading is both effective and enjoyable.

The statistical analysis used in the table is a *paired sample t-test*, which is appropriate for comparing learners' reading performance before and after the implementation of the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy. This test examines whether the mean differences in scores between the two conditions (pre-test and post-test) are statistically significant.

Part III. Learners' Levels of Engagement, Reflected in Their Perceptions, Behaviors, and Experiences After Participating in the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy

Statement	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
<i>Perception</i>		
<i>The games made reading more enjoyable. (Naging kasiya-siya ang pagbabasa dahil sa mga laro)</i>	3.60	Strongly Agree
<i>The games were challenging but manageable. (Mahirap ang mga laro, pero kaya ko pa rin)</i>	3.33	Strongly Agree

<i>The games were well-designed and easy to understand. (Maayos at madaling intindihin ang mga laro)</i>	3.30	Strongly Agree
<i>I would recommend this gamified reading buddy strategy to other students. (Irerekomenda ko ang ganitong paraan ng pagbabasa gamit ang laro sa ibang mga estudyante)</i>	3.38	Strongly Agree
<i>The games were a good use of class time. (Naging mabuti ang paggamit ng oras sa klase dahil sa mga laro)</i>	3.53	Strongly Agree
<i>I felt that the games were fair and equitable for all participants. (Naramdaman kong patas at pantay ang mga laro para sa lahat ng kalahok)</i>	3.38	Strongly Agree
<i>The competition aspect of the games motivated me more. (Dahil sa kompetisyon sa mga laro, mas ginaganahan akong magbasa)</i>	3.48	Strongly Agree
<i>Behavior</i>		
<i>The games helped me improve my reading comprehension. (Nakatulong ang mga laro sa pagpapahusay ng aking pag-unawa sa pagbabasa)</i>	3.50	Strongly Agree
<i>The games helped me improve my reading speed. (Nakatulong ang mga laro upang mapabilis ang aking pagbabasa)</i>	3.60	Strongly Agree
<i>The games helped me improve my reading speed. (Nakatulong ang mga laro upang mapabilis ang aking pagbabasa)</i>	3.60	Strongly Agree
<i>The games helped me learn new vocabulary. (Natuto ako ng mga bagong salita dahil sa laro)</i>	3.35	Strongly Agree
<i>I learned new strategies for reading effectively through the games. (Natuto ako ng mga bagong paraan ng pagbabasa dahil sa mga laro)</i>	3.33	Strongly Agree
<i>Experience</i>		
<i>I feel comfortable participating in the games with my reading buddy. (Komportable ako sa pakikilahok sa mga laro kasama ang aking reading buddy)</i>	3.53	Strongly Agree
<i>I felt supported by my reading buddy during the games. (Naramdaman ko ang suporta ng aking reading buddy habang naglalaro)</i>	3.50	Strongly Agree
<i>The games helped me build a stronger relationship with my reading buddy. (Nakatulong ang mga laro upang mapatibay ang pagkakaibigan ng aking reading buddy.)</i>	3.45	Strongly Agree
Overall Mean	3.43	Strongly Agree

Table 4. Learners' Levels of Engagement, through Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy

Table 4 presents the findings of the survey, which reveal that the gamified reading buddy strategy was perceived very positively by students, with an overall mean of 3.43 interpreted as Strongly Agree. This suggests that gamification, when embedded in collaborative reading activities, can transform literacy learning into an engaging, motivating, and socially supportive experience.

Students strongly agreed that the games made reading more enjoyable and improved both comprehension and reading speed. This finding aligns with Wang et al. (2024), who reported that gamification fosters intrinsic motivation and sustained engagement in reading tasks. Similarly, Julita (2025) demonstrated that gamified approaches significantly enhanced reading comprehension among EFL learners, reinforcing the survey's outcomes. Torreon (2025) also emphasized that gamification increases both reading motivation and comprehension in high school English classes, further validating the positive perceptions expressed by the participants.

Vocabulary acquisition was another area of improvement, with students agreeing that the games helped them learn new words. Paragas et al. (2026) confirmed this effect in their study, showing that gamification enhanced vocabulary acquisition among Grade 9 students. Cigerci et al. (2025) likewise highlighted gamification's effectiveness in teaching vocabulary, noting that repeated exposure to words in meaningful contexts strengthens retention.

Beyond academic skills, the survey highlighted the social benefits of the strategy. Students reported feeling supported by their reading buddies and believed the games strengthened peer relationships. This finding resonates with Beraque and

Dioso (2023), who observed that gamified peer-assisted learning promotes collaboration and improves vocabulary retention through shared responsibility. The buddy system, therefore, not only develops literacy skills but also nurtures interpersonal bonds, creating a supportive and engaging learning environment. Students also perceived the games as fair and equitable, with clearly defined rules and structured design. Kalogiannakis et al. (2021) argued that gamification provides transparent rules and immediate feedback, fostering inclusivity and fairness. The survey results reflect this principle, showing that learners trusted the process and regarded it as equitable. Torreon (2025) further supports this by noting that motivation increases when learners perceive gamified systems as just and rewarding. Taken together, the results and supporting literature suggest that the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy is a transformative pedagogical tool. It enhances comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary while simultaneously fostering motivation, fairness, and social support. The strong agreement across all survey items demonstrates that, when thoughtfully designed and implemented, gamification can make reading both academically effective and socially enriching.

The statistical analysis used in the study is *descriptive statistics*, specifically the computation of *mean scores* and their corresponding *verbal interpretation* (e.g., *Strongly Agree*). Each statement was rated by participants, and the average (mean) was calculated to represent the overall level of agreement. This approach provides a clear summary of how learners perceived, behaved, and experienced the gamified reading buddy strategy. By translating numerical means into qualitative descriptors, the analysis makes the findings more accessible and interpretable, showing that participants consistently expressed strong positive perceptions, reported observable improvements in reading behaviors, and highlighted supportive social experiences with their reading buddies.

Part IV. Proposed Program Implementation Plan for a Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy

The Reading Buddy Strategy has proven to be an effective approach in improving learners' literacy skills by combining peer support with structured reading activities. Assessments revealed that students engaged in buddy-based reading not only enhanced their comprehension and vocabulary but also developed greater confidence and motivation. The positive outcomes, including significant gains in reading proficiency and stronger interpersonal relationships, highlight the strategy's potential as a sustainable solution for addressing literacy challenges. Recognizing its effectiveness, the researcher developed an *implementation program for the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy*, designed to provide teachers with a practical framework that integrates gamified learning and collaboration to further strengthen reading outcomes and classroom engagement. The program was designed with clear objectives: *to improve reading proficiency among students, particularly those at the frustration level; to foster collaboration and peer support; to integrate comprehension strategies into gamified tasks; and to ensure equitable access and inclusive participation for all learners*. By aligning these goals with classroom realities, the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy provides a practical framework for teachers to strengthen literacy development while cultivating a supportive and enjoyable learning environment.

The Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy Framework is presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy Framework

Conclusion and Recommendations

The present study demonstrated that the *Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy* significantly improved the reading skills of Grade 7 learners, particularly those at the frustration level. Learners progressed to higher reading levels, with notable gains in both word recognition and comprehension, as confirmed by paired samples *t*-tests. These results directly address the research questions by showing that gamified peer-assisted interventions can enhance literacy outcomes while simultaneously fostering engagement and collaboration.

This study advances literacy pedagogy by integrating *gamification with peer-assisted learning*, thereby extending existing theories of motivation and collaborative learning. The findings highlight that interactive and socially scaffolded approaches not only strengthen decoding and comprehension but also cultivate positive attitudes toward reading. By demonstrating that gamification can bridge the gap between foundational skills and higher-order comprehension, the study contributes to the growing body of evidence supporting innovative, learner-centered literacy frameworks.

The results have clear applications for *teachers, administrators, parents, and policymakers*. Teachers can adopt the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy to scaffold struggling readers while maintaining engagement through game mechanics. Administrators and policymakers are encouraged to provide training, resources, and curriculum integration to sustain the program across classrooms. Parents can reinforce reading at home by supporting gamified literacy activities. Beyond the classroom, partnerships with libraries and community organizations can expand access to resources, ensuring equity and inclusivity in literacy development.

The study was limited by its *sample size and single-school context*, which restricts generalizability. While the intervention proved effective in Section JDN, disparities between sections suggest that contextual factors may influence outcomes. Reliance on self-reported perceptions also introduces potential bias. These constraints should be viewed as opportunities for refinement rather than flaws, pointing to the need for broader implementation and triangulated data collection.

Future studies should employ *longitudinal designs* to examine the sustained impact of gamified peer-assisted strategies across grade levels and diverse contexts. Expanding the scope beyond reading to subjects such as writing, mathematics, and science could test the adaptability of the framework. Researchers are encouraged to investigate the interaction between *competition and collaboration* in gamified learning, as well as individual differences in response to competitive mechanics. Direct classroom observation should complement survey data to capture authentic engagement patterns and peer dynamics. These directions will deepen understanding of how gamification influences literacy and socio-emotional development, positioning the Gamified Reading Buddy Strategy as a versatile model for advancing holistic learning.

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Competing Interests Statement

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Data Availability Statement

The data supporting this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, as the data cannot be shared publicly.

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Appendices

No appendices are attached to this study.