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This study aims at improving the language skills of pupils, particularly their Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) and Critical Thinking Skills (CTS), which are two components of the Four-Pronged Approach to English language teaching. The other two components are Grammar and Oral Language Development (GOLD) and Transfer Stage (TS) but they were not included in this study. The researcher conducted the study using the pre-test—post-test quasi-experimental research design in which fifth grade pupils were divided into two groups: the control group exposed to the regular teaching approach and the experimental group exposed to the instructional strategies of the four-pronged approach for 78 sessions. Prior to the conduct of the interventions, a pre-test was administered to determine the pupils' level of GLR and CT. The researcher also prepared lessons plans that followed the instructional plan of the four-pronged approach, which were used during the 78 sessions. Results revealed that the experimental group's Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) and Critical Thinking Skills (CTS) improved significantly as compared to those in the control group. The findings suggest that the strategies of the Four-Pronged Approach help enhance in English language abilities of pupils. Relevant recommendations are forwarded in light of the outcomes of the study.

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# **Improving Pupils' Genuine Love for Reading and Critical Thinking Using the Strategies of the Four-Pronged Approach**

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## **Abstract**

*This study aims at improving the language skills of pupils, particularly their Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) and Critical Thinking Skills (CTS), which are two components of the Four-Pronged Approach to English language teaching. The other two components are Grammar and Oral Language Development (GOLD) and Transfer Stage (TS) but they were not included in this study. The researcher conducted the study using the pre-test—post-test quasi-experimental research design in which fifth grade pupils were divided into two groups: the control group exposed to the regular teaching approach and the experimental group exposed to the instructional strategies of the four-pronged approach for 78 sessions. Prior to the conduct of the interventions, a pre-test was administered to determine the pupils' level of GLR and CT. The researcher also prepared lessons plans that followed the instructional plan of the four-pronged approach, which were used during the 78 sessions. Results revealed that the experimental group's Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) and Critical Thinking Skills (CTS) improved significantly as compared to those in the control group. The findings suggest that the strategies of the Four-Pronged Approach help enhance in English language abilities of pupils. Relevant recommendations are forwarded in light of the outcomes of the study.*

**Keywords:** English as a Second Language, Language Skills, Genuine Love for Reading, Critical Thinking, Four-Pronged Approach

## **1. Introduction**

Reading is one of the most important skills a person can acquire. It is a process of getting meaning from the printed page and interpreting symbols drawn from the image, idea, passion or experience of the author. Through reading, a person can get information concerning problems or issues that affect human life. Thus, reading is the primary key to all knowledge. It offers an effective access to information, ideals, aspirations and happenings of both past and the present. By it, we can broaden our horizons from home, country and the world. It is reading that brings us closer to our surroundings, that changes our outlook, broadens our interests, gives a deeper insight of things and promotes richer and stable personality.

Obviously, one cause of dissatisfaction in school is reading failures on the part of the students. The inability of the students to read often results in their dropping out of school, hence, depriving them of the enjoyment of being fully human. A student who is not given the opportunity to read cannot function in a proper way; he cannot live a full human and social life enjoyed by those who are exposed to the world of the printed page.

Reading is considered a basic subject in the school curricula. It is a tool for learning in the other areas of the school curriculum. A student's success in all academic subjects is in a way related to effective reading. However, perennial problems of teachers in elementary schools in failures and dropouts and low achievement are often caused by reading deficiency. A good number of children today still have hardly developed their reading skills, much less their love for reading. Elementary school teachers are experiencing difficulties and problems in educating the pupils particularly in English subject due to lack of pupils' interest in reading.

There is really no approach to the teaching of reading that works absolutely for all children. Research shows that reading instruction must be balanced. Thus, we should use both phonics and whole language and teach both skills and literature, and when we find it difficult to choose which one to use or teach, the best thing to do this is think of the students. The Four-Pronged Approach is a literature-based approach to reading and language learning. This holistic approach provides adequate opportunity for developing reading and other language skills, as all the four components are implemented: Genuine Love for Reading (GLR), Critical Thinking (CT), Mastery of the Structures of the English/Filipino Language (MSE/FL) or Grammar and Oral Language Development (GOLD), and Transfer Stage (TS).

Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) aims to develop a lifetime love, habit and enjoyment of reading. It is strongly and rightly anchored on storybooks because children love stories. Corollary to the development of a love for reading is the development of the thinking mind. Age is not a barrier on the ability to think critically. There is no reason to delay emphasis on developing Critical Thinking (CT) until later grades or years in school. This aims to develop the habit of reflecting on what is read and exercising decision making, making judgments, and valuing. Mastery of the Structures of the English /Filipino Language (MSE/FL) or Grammar and Oral Language Development (GOLD) aims to develop competence in oral language, understanding, and correct use of syntax. Transfer Stage (TS) aims to develop phonemic awareness, decoding and encoding skills.

The researcher conducted this research to help English language teachers improve and to enhance the reading ability of the learners by improving their Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) and Critical Thinking (CT) using the instructional strategies of the four-pronged approach. The researcher believes that in aiming for better and effective teaching, teachers must determine which teaching approach works better for learners.

## **2. Literature Review**

There are several overlapping and sometimes conflicting theories on reading acquisition. Depending on the theory of instruction adopted by the teacher or a school, the impact of a theoretical orientation is tremendous on students, especially for second language students. Durkin (1985) addressed this issue when she discussed the various theories of language acquisition in her book, *Language Issues: Reading for Teachers*. Durkin stated that the model applied to each child to speak a primary or secondary language has an impact on the type of reading and writing instruction provided in schools. Regardless of the model adopted, reading theorists agree that extensive reading is essential for the development of reading comprehension in a pupil (Cummins, 2005).

In children's development, oral language, reading and writing are significantly and dynamically concurrent, that is, they build upon one another. Reading involves the use of language. Thus, the acquisition of oral language and reading might share similarities since language learning is integral to learning to read. Writing involves the integration of knowledge of reading with knowledge of writing. Therefore, language aids speaking, reading and writing: reading aids speaking and writing, writing aids speaking and writing, a whole language approach.

Meanwhile, Halliday (1975) described how language helps children to learn to ascertain meaning from the world around them. While Chomsky (1972) found that children who were introduced to literature at an early age tended to develop sophisticated language structures. Therefore, promoting early literacy must be significantly holistic, which utilizes functional experiences that include the use of oral language, listening, writing and reading in a continuum.

Further, Hansen (1969) reported that a literacy-rich environment correlates most highly with children's early reading. Durken (1966), Holdaway (1979), and Teale (1984) described home environments in which the ability and the desire to read develop quite naturally especially in their homes, which serve as a rich environment. Goodman (1984) asserted that literacy-rich environments can make learning to read as natural as language acquisition.

Research findings indicate that the children who experience difficulties in learning to read are likely to experience a negative cycle of low self-esteem, reduced motivation and less persistence at academic tasks, leading to further failure experiences (e.g., Carr, Borkowski, and Maxwell, 1991; Fulk and Montgomery-Grymes, 1994; Gurney, 1988; Stanovick, 1986), come as no surprise to most educators.

Although there may be many reasons why children have difficulty learning to read, research indicates that the vast majority of poor readers share a common source from their reading problem, which is failure to develop accurate and efficient (i.e., automatic) word recognition skills (Stanovick, 1996). Moreover, a large and growing body of research evidence suggests phonemic awareness of the phonemes of sounds within speech to be the root cause of the problem for most poor readers (Munro, 1992; Stanovich, 1986). Phonemic awareness refers to the initial acquisition of spelling-to-sound correspondence skills necessary for efficient reading in an alphabetic language (Munro & Munro, 1993; Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 1994). Longitudinal studies suggest that children who fail to develop efficient word recognition skills in first

grade, display ever increasing deficits in both accuracy and speed of word recognition (e.g., Juel, 1988; Snowling, Goulandris, & Defty, 1996). As they advance through the primary grades and into high school, particular problems with decoding long, polysyllabic words may be exhibited. In addition, they are likely to display an inability to generalize the ruled for pronouncing long words, and a tendency to rely on only one strategy such as “sound-out” by letter-sound correspondence or to make guesses based on only a few letters. Their lack of automatic word identification skills may also lead to a greater but far less efficient reliance on context cues than that of good readers (Stanovich, 1992).

### 3. Methods

This study employed the quasi-experimental method, particularly the pre-test-post-test design, which divided the pupils into two groups, the experimental and the control group. The experimental group was exposed to the instructional strategies adopted from the Four-Pronged Approach, while the control group continued to attend regular classes. The experimentation commenced with a pre-test given to the two groups before the application of the intervention. Subsequently, after the conduct of the experimentation, a post-test was done using the same test but with disarranged items and options.

The Mindanao State University-Integrated Laboratory School, where this study was conducted, has elementary and secondary students. Forty-four (44) fifth grade pupils were the participants of the study. The results of the pre-test as well as the pupils’ age and sex were used in grouping them into experimental group and control group. The duration of the experiment lasted for three months, which totalled to seventy-eight (78) sessions from Monday to Friday with one hour daily session. The schedule of the class was 7:30-8:30 in the morning. During the experiment, the instructional plan adopting the Four- Pronged Approach was used in different activities such as writing, group activity, Think-Pair-Share using the Survey, Question, Read, Recite and Review (SQ3R) in promoting their reading and language skills.

There are four sub-skills in the Four-Pronged Approach, to wit: Genuine Love for Reading (GLR), Critical Thinking (CT), Grammar and Oral Language Development (GOLD), and Transfer Stage (TS). However, only Genuine Love for Reading and Critical Thinking were focused in this study.

### 4. Results and Discussion

Table 1. Pre-test Score Profile of the Participants in the Experimental Group

Sub-skills	No. of Items	H.M.	A.M.	SD	Description	z-Test	Interpretation
<b>GLR</b>	8	6	4	2.09	Below Average	4.49	Significant
<b>CT</b>	6	4.5	2.59	1.40	Below Average	5.00	Significant

H.M.= Hypothetical Mean

Criterion Set: 75%

Level of Significance: 0.01

A.M.= Actual Mean

SD= Standard Deviation

Critical Value: 1.96

Table 1 shows the pre-test score of the experimental group. As indicated, the participants obtained a score profile of Below Average in both sub-skills since they had greater H.M. than the A.M. Moreover, the z-

test values were greater than the critical value 1.96. Therefore, there were significant differences between the hypothetical mean and actual mean of the pre-test score profile of the participants in their Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) and Critical Thinking (CT).

Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) aims to trigger the schemata of the learners and prepares the learners for the actual reading of the text. Here the teacher establishes the proper mind set of the students. The result of the study points out that the participants were not focused and not motivated to appreciate reading.

Critical and creative thinking skills of emergent learners must be fully developed. That is to say, that the participants, as emergent learners, though young, were not yet skilled in being very inquisitive of many things around them, familiar and unfamiliar. They were not yet able to come up with the expected skill of being creative in finding answers to their questions and lacked the skill to hypothesize, experiment, and feed their curiosity.

Table 2. Pre-test Score Profile of the Participants in the Control Group

Sub-skills	No. of Items	H.M.	A.M.	SD	Description	z-Test	Interpretation
GLR	8	6	3.91	1.79	Below Average	5.50	Significant
CT	6	4.5	3.00	1.51	Below Average	4.69	Significant

H.M.= Hypothetical Mean

Criterion Set: 75%

Level of Significance: 0.01

A.M.= Actual Mean

SD=Standard Deviation

Critical Value: 1.96

As can be gleaned in Table 2, pupils were able to get Below Average in Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) and Critical Thinking. Hypothesis testing resulted in significant differences between the hypothetical means and actual means in the aforementioned sub-skills. The result signifies that the participants did not demonstrate expected mastery in Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) and Critical Thinking (CT).

Table 3. Post-test Score Profile of the Participants in the Experimental Group

Sub-skills	No. of Items	H.M.	A.M.	SD	Description	z-Test	Interpretation
GLR	8	6	7.45	0.77	Below Average	-9.01	Not Significant
CT	6	4.5	5.64	0.64	Below Average	-8.14	Not Significant

H.M.= Hypothetical Mean

Criterion Set: 75%

Level of Significance: 0.01

A.M. Actual Mean

SD=Standard Deviation

Critical Value: 1.96

Table 3 reveals the post-test score of the experimental group. As disclosed, pupils attained Above Average score in all sub-skills. When computed for significance, the Z-test values were less than the critical value. Thus, there were no significant differences between the hypothetical means and the actual means of the post-test scores of the participants in the experimental group. This finding implies that the participants were able to increase their attention span, developed their listening comprehension, developed oral language, vocabulary, and concepts; developed basic comprehension, critical and creative reading and possessed phonological or phonemic awareness, book and print knowledge and perceptual skills such as auditory and visual perception and discriminations.

Table 4. Post-test Score Profile of the Participants in the Control Group

Sub-skills	No. of Items	H.M.	A.M.	SD	Description	z-Test	Interpretation
GLR	8	6	4.86	1.66	Below Average	3.26	Significant
CT	6	4.5	3.82	1.70	Below Average	1.89	Not Significant

H.M.= Hypothetical Mean

Criterion Set: 75%

Level of Significance: 0.01

A.M. Actual Mean

SD=Standard Deviation

Critical Value: 1.96

It is found in this study that the post-test score profile of the participants in the Control Group was Below Average in the sub-skills Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) and Critical Thinking (CT). This finding is so because, as can be viewed in Table 4, the sub-skill, Genuine Love for Reading (GLR), yielded a hypothetical mean of 6, which was greater than the actual mean of 4.86. The Critical and Creative Thinking (CT) skills of the participants also were described as Below Average since the hypothetical mean of 4.5 was greater than the actual mean of 3.82.

Hypothesis testing proved that there was a significant difference between the hypothetical mean and the actual mean in the post-test score profile of the participants in Genuine Love for Reading (GLR). However, in all the other sub-skills, Z-test values yielded were less than the critical value of 1.96, denoting no significant difference between the hypothetical mean and actual mean in the post-test score profile of the participants in the Control group.

The data point out that the participants did not come up with the expected adequate skills in Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) and Critical Thinking (CT). This implies that for them, there is really a need to provide varied and more effective instruction in learning English.

Table 5. Mean Gain of the Participants from the Pre-test to the Post-test in the Experimental Group

Sub-skills	Mean		Mean Gain	SD	t-Test	Interpretation
	Pre-test	Post-test				
GLR	4.00	7.45	3.41	4.23	3.79	Significant
CT	2.59	5.64	3.05	3.50	4.07	Significant

Level of Significance: 0.01

Critical Value: 2.831

Table 5 presents the mean gain of the participants from the pre-test to the post-test in the Experimental Group. A mean gain of 3.41 was obtained from the pre-test to the post-test score in the sub-skill Genuine Love for Reading (GLR); a mean gain of 3.05 obtained in Critical Thinking (CT); 2.36 was the mean gain in Grammar and Oral Language Development (GOLD). When tested at 0.01 level of significance, t-test values yielded in the sub-skills Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) and Critical Thinking (CT) were greater than the critical value of 1.96. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, denoting that there were significant mean gains in the participants' Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) and Critical Thinking (CT) post-test performance after they were subjected to the Four-Pronged Approach. It is inferred that there was

an improvement from the pre-test to the post- test score profile of the participants in the Experimental Group. Learning took place since the participants manifested an Above Average mastery in the above-mentioned sub-skills. Therefore, the Four-Pronged Approach was effective in the Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) and Critical Thinking (CT) skills of the participants.

The Four-Pronged Approach is practically based on the principles of Content-Based Instruction (CBI) which covers reading in relation to other content areas; thematic approach, whereby different areas of the curriculum are related together and integrated to a central theme; and construction, which argues that humans construct meaning from current knowledge structures. In the Four-Pronged Approach, the teacher acts as the facilitator of learning (Marquez et al, 2009).

The sub-skill of Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) should be developed as it is the start of the “learning reading” process. It covers the pre-reading and during reading stage and is the vocabulary building part.

Another sub-skill of the respondents that was enhanced by the Four-Pronged Approach was critical and creative thinking or CT. Critical and creative children are identified as theory-builders and hypothesis-testers who require challenging experiences that can be achieved with sensitive adult guidance.

Finally, a significant mean gain was achieved using the Four-Pronged Approach in the Transfer Stage (TS) of the participants in the Experimental Group. According to Marquez et al (2009), the transfer stage is an indicator of children’s learning and literacy as they apply their knowledge and skills in varied literacy setting. It may be achieved by teacher’s planning of specific literacy experiences and by providing meaningful activities like story reading, story- telling, shared reading, retelling, phonemic awareness, sight-word vocabulary, games and toys, socio-dramatic play, free-play and guided play.

It must also be noted that the participants’ skill in Grammar and Oral Language Development (GOLD) did not achieve a significant mean gain with the use of the Four-Pronged Approach. It may be because they were already at the above-average level of achievement even before the use of the Four-Pronged Approach.

**Table 6. Mean Gain of the Participants from the Pre-test to the Post-test in the Control Group**

Sub-skills	Mean		Mean Gain	SD	t-Test	Interpretation
	Pre-test	Post-test				
GLR	3.91	4.86	0.95	2.28	1.94	Not Significant
CT	3.00	3.82	1.27	2.14	2.70	Not Significant

Level of Significance: 0.01

Critical Value: 2.831

As can be noted in Table 6, there were no significant mean gains of the participants from the pre-test to the post-test in the Control Group along the four (4) sub-skills, namely: Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) and Critical Thinking (CT). The participants in the Control Group were made to attend the regular class. Although there were improvements in the performance of the participants in their Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) and Critical Thinking (CT) from the pre-test to the post-test, when tested at 0.01 level of significance, t-test values, yielded no significant mean gain.

The data imply that there is really a need to use varied instructional strategies and materials in order to develop the learners’ skills in Genuine Love for reading (GLR) and Critical Thinking (CT).

**Table 7. Significant Difference Between the Experimental Group and the Control Group**

Sub-skills	Experimental		Control		Mean Difference	t-Test	Interpretation
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
GLR	7.45	0.77	4.86	1.66	2.18	6.48	Significant
CT	5.64	0.64	3.82	1.70	2.16	4.67	Significant

Level of Significance: 0.01

Critical Value: 2.704

Table 7 stresses a significant difference between the Experimental Group and the Control Group in each of the sub-skills, Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) and Critical Thinking (CT). The sub-skill Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) resulted in the highest mean difference of 2.18, with a t-test value of 6.48 at 0.01 level of significance, and Critical Thinking (CT) with a 2.16 mean difference and a t-test value of 4.67. All these were interpreted as significant mean differences.

It can be inferred that the Four-Pronged Approach was really effective in improving the participants’ skills in Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) and Critical Thinking (CT). They attained an Above Average level in the sub skills as compared with the participants in the Control Group.

The participants in the Experimental Group were able to demonstrate better skills in vocabulary, comprehension, writing, making predictions during the pre-reading activities, and while reading; and reading skills such as scanning for information, sequencing events, and paraphrasing.

As to critical and creative thinking, the participants in the Experimental Group manifested active literacy, as in making good guesses about everything around them. It was also found in this study that the grammar and language skills of the participants in the Experimental Group were better improved than the skills of the participants in the Control Group.

## 5. Conclusion

The significantly different responses of the Experimental and Control Groups show clearly that the participants of the Experimental Group learned better with the use of the Four-Pronged Approach, while the participants of the Control Group demonstrated a slight and negligible improvement in their score.

In the areas of the Four-Pronged Approach, a significant difference existed between the Experimental and Control Groups. This indicates that a reading habit and creative thinking is gradually developing among the participants. Therefore, the practice of the Four-Pronged Approach is effective.

The result that shows that there is no improvement from the pre-test to the post-test of the participants in the Control Group signifies that in teaching any subject, an approach or strategy is crucial to make teaching more effective. In most traditional teaching, learners do not manifest improvement in Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) and Critical Thinking (CT). Varied strategies, technique, and instructional materials are

essential to effect learning especially in Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) and Critical Thinking (CT), which are the skills needed in language development and literacy.

The participants in the Experimental Group exhibited significant improvement in their Genuine Love for Reading (GLR), Critical Thinking (CT), and Transfer Stage (TS) and slight improvement in Grammar and Oral Language Development (GOLD).

The Above Average post-test score profile of the participants in the Experimental Group in Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) means that they had fostered a genuine love for reading, which is a good avenue for the development of vocabulary, comprehension, and writing skills. Therefore, both teachers and parents must engage in the process of helping their children to become literate.

The result that a significant mean gain was achieved by the participants from the Experimental Group in critical and creative thinking denotes that they have been very inquisitive and very creative in finding answers to their queries. They inquired about the how's and why's and were not usually satisfied with the simple affirmative or negative response, with the simple answers to what, who and where questions. Instead they made follow-up queries which seemed infinite and they seemed unsatisfied. When children express themselves, explain their ideas, insist what they perceive to be right, and try to convince adults and playmates or classmates, they actually demonstrate critical and creative thinking.

As cited by Marquez, et al (2009) the significant adults surrounding young learners must be able to identify their quest for information, and that they must attend to these queries by providing the exact, specific, appropriate and correct information. Unfortunately, sometimes, parents and other family members have become impatient or neglectful of the repetitive and endless inquiries of their kids. In this manner, they are depriving their kids of the opportunities to develop their critical and creative thinking skills. They are stopping them from the early attempts to literacy which may be crucial to their formal learning and intelligence.

## **6. Recommendations**

In the light of the findings, conclusions, and implications, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. School administrators must formulate a language-reading program to fit the varying needs of the pupils. They should encourage professional growth among their subordinates in order to continuously improve pupil performance in language.
2. Reading teachers must continuously strive to upgrade and hone their teaching skills in order to motivate and guide the pupils properly. They are tasked to create a reading atmosphere in their classroom. They must be able to identify barriers to critical and creative thinking so that they can guide the young learners as they are exposed to challenging tasks.
3. The family must recognize its vital role in their own child's learning. It can provide and influence their child's literacy through interpersonal, interaction, physical environment, emotional and motivational climate.

4. Pupils should be motivated to master the sub-skills Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) and Critical Thinking (CT) so that they are able to balance reading and language activities, writing and language activities and, therefore, to transfer language skills to literacy activities with creativity and intellectual challenge.
5. A study on language and literacy is a must in order to develop Genuine Love for Reading (GLR) and Critical Thinking (CT).

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