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Article

# Beyond Comprehension: Leveraging Adler's Levels to Strengthen Competency, Competitiveness, and Authority in English Language Pedagogy

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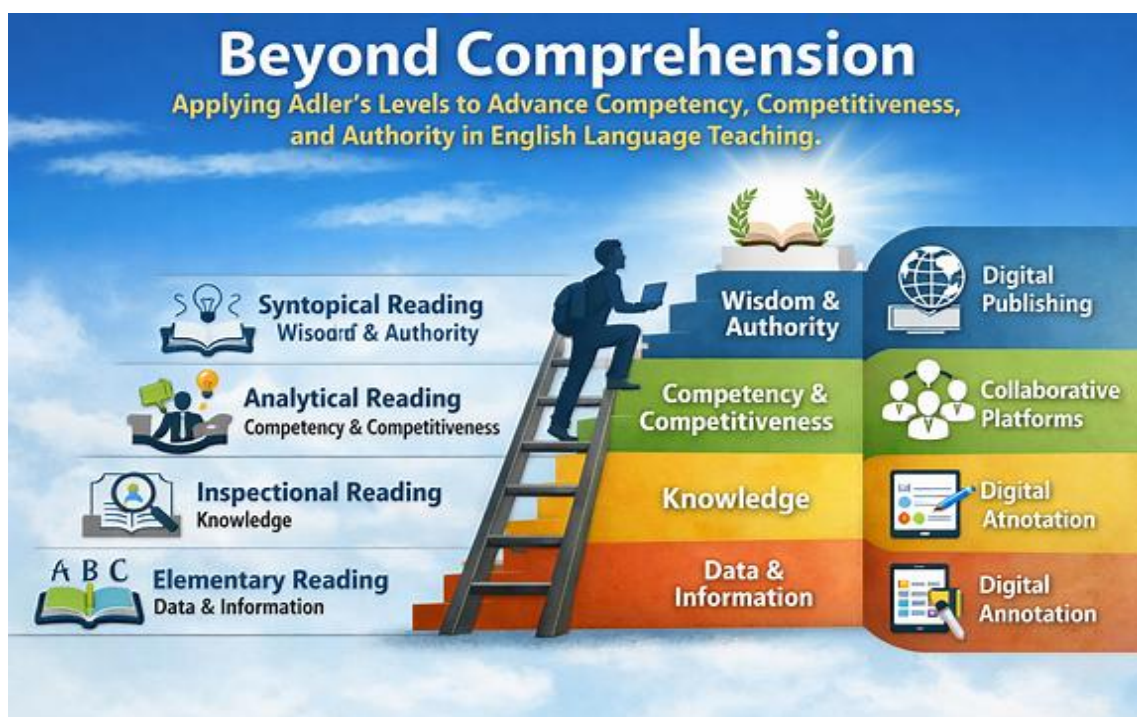
## Abstract

Reading pedagogy in English Language Teaching has often been confined to comprehension drills that reduce reading to a mechanical skill, but this study reconceptualized it as a developmental ladder that advances learners from decoding toward authority. Anchored in Adler's four levels of reading and extended through the DIKW and Bookclub frameworks, the research explored how graduating students in AB-Philosophy, AB-English Language, and BS-Psychology at St. Michael's College of Iligan, Inc. demonstrated progression from elementary decoding to syntopical synthesis, culminating in ownership of voice. Using a qualitative interpretive design, rooted in hermeneutic inquiry and critical pedagogy, data were gathered through classroom observations, learner artifacts, reflective narratives, and teacher journals, and thematic analysis revealed ten developmental themes: confidence in decoding, strategic reading awareness, critical engagement, collaborative learning, synthesis across sources, ownership of voice, technology enhanced agency, resilience in struggle, identity formation through reading, and alignment with institutional and global goals. These findings confirmed that reading is not a flat skill but a trajectory requiring intentional scaffolding, critical pedagogy, and purposeful integration of technology as an essential support. The study addressed key gaps in ELT by reframing reading as a developmental process, bridging classical theory with modern frameworks, explicitly including competency and competitiveness as outcomes, and positioning technology as structural rather than peripheral. It concludes that ELT must move beyond teaching students to decode texts and instead empower them to become authoritative voices in academic and civic discourse, calling on curriculum designers and teachers to embed this ladder into lesson planning, assessment, and digital pedagogy so learners are guided deliberately from comprehension to authority and prepared to contribute meaningfully to institutional, national, and global conversations.

**Keywords:** epistemological authority; hermeneutic competitiveness; language pedagogy; metacognitive resilience, syntopical integration; technological mediation of agency

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## 1. Introduction



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Reading pedagogy in English Language Teaching (ELT) has frequently been reduced to comprehension drills, where the act of reading is treated as a mechanical exercise rather than a layered intellectual pursuit (Clinton-Lisell, Taylor, Carlson, Davison, & Seipel, 2022; Mariano et al., 2020). This narrowing of focus risks overlooking the deeper dimensions of reading—interpretation, analysis, and evaluation—that are essential for learners preparing to engage in graduate-level study and global discourse. To move beyond this limitation, it is necessary to revisit the nuances of reading and comprehension within the ELT context and to consider how these can be operationalized in ways that cultivate higher-order skills (Villanueva, 2022; Sweet & Snow, 2003).

Mortimer Adler's framework of reading levels provides a valuable lens for this reorientation. Adler and Van Doren (1972) distinguish between elementary, inspectional, analytical, and syntopical reading, each representing a progression from basic literacy to critical and comparative mastery. Applied to ELT, these levels highlight that comprehension is only the beginning. True intellectual growth occurs when learners are guided to analyze texts, evaluate arguments, and situate their understanding within broader conversations. Recent scholarship has reinforced the relevance of Adler's model, noting its potential to advance reading pedagogy beyond surface-level comprehension (So, 2024).

This exploration is particularly urgent in the current era of technology-enhanced and AI-driven learning environments. As digital tools reshape how students access and process information, the ability to read critically and authoritatively becomes indispensable. UNESCO's framework for Sustainable Development Goal 4 emphasizes that education must equip learners with cognitive, socio-emotional, and practical skills to navigate complex global challenges (Hanemann, 2019). Reading, when taught beyond mere comprehension, aligns directly with these objectives by fostering informed decision-making, intellectual resilience, and active participation in knowledge creation.

Within this broader context, St. Michael's College of Iligan Inc. (SMCII) plays a vital role in advancing ELT pedagogy in Northern Mindanao. Guided by Ignatian-Marian values and a commitment to community service, the institution has consistently integrated sustainability, cultural identity, and academic excellence into its teaching practices (SMCII Portal). Its initiatives demonstrate how ELT can be both locally grounded and globally responsive. By situating Adler's framework within the lived realities of SMCII's students and faculty, this study contributes to the ongoing effort

to elevate reading pedagogy from drills to discourse, preparing learners not only to comprehend texts but to stand as authoritative voices in the academic and professional spheres.

In contexts where English is not the mother tongue, English Language Teaching (ELT) carries a dual responsibility: it must equip learners with functional comprehension while also preparing them to participate in academic and professional discourse. Research on reading in English as an additional language shows that comprehension strategies alone are insufficient; learners require structured guidance to move toward higher-order skills that enable critical engagement with texts (Song, Na, & Kwon, 2020; Butterfuss, Kim, & Kendeou, 2020). The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) in the Philippines underscores this importance by embedding English proficiency requirements across Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), recognizing that reading and language mastery are essential for competitiveness in global scholarship.

Against this backdrop, the present study advances the thesis that reading should be taught as a developmental ladder. This ladder integrates Adler's four levels of reading—elementary, inspectional, analytical, and syntopical—with the DIKW (Data–Information–Knowledge–Wisdom) and Bookclub frameworks. Adler's model provides the intellectual scaffolding, while the DIKW and Bookclub ladder articulate how learners progress from raw data to authoritative knowledge (Adler & Van Doren, 1972; Releaders Bookclub, n.d.). Together, these frameworks emphasize that comprehension is not an endpoint but a gateway to deeper intellectual authority.

The niche of this inquiry lies in its emphasis on outcomes often overlooked in reading pedagogy. Unlike most studies that remain focused on comprehension as the final measure of success, this work foregrounds competency, competitiveness, and authority as the ultimate goals of reading instruction. Contemporary reviews of reading comprehension theory highlight the need for such reorientation, noting that pedagogy must evolve to address multilingual contexts and the demands of higher education (Bruggink, Swart, van der Lee, & Segers, 2022). Technology, particularly in the age of AI-enhanced learning, is positioned here not as a substitute for pedagogy but as a scaffold that supports learners in ascending the developmental ladder. In this way, the study situates ELT within a broader vision: one that prepares students to move beyond comprehension, to engage critically with texts, and to establish themselves as authoritative voices in both local and global contexts.

The overarching aim of this study is to explore how Adler's four levels of reading—elementary, inspectional, analytical, and syntopical—can be integrated with the DIKW/Bookclub ladder to enrich English Language Teaching (ELT) pedagogy. By operationalizing these frameworks, the study seeks to scaffold learners from the initial stage of decoding texts as data toward becoming authoritative voices in English discourse. This developmental approach positions reading not as a static skill but as a progressive journey, where each stage builds upon the last to cultivate competency, competitiveness, and authority.

To achieve this objective, the study is guided by five central questions:

1. How do graduating students in Philosophy, English Language, and Psychology demonstrate movement through Adler's four levels of reading?
2. In what ways does the Bookclub ladder—progressing from data to authority—emerge in their reading practices and academic outputs?
3. How does technology support learners in advancing from comprehension to competency, competitiveness, and authority?
4. What themes surface in students' reflections and artifacts that illustrate the developmental trajectory of reading?
5. How can the integration of Adler's framework with the Bookclub ladder inform ELT curriculum design and assessment practices?

By articulating these objectives and questions, the study establishes a clear pathway for inquiry. The general objective situates reading pedagogy within a developmental framework, while the specific questions provide the structure for examining how learners progress, how frameworks manifest in practice, and how technology and curriculum can serve as scaffolds. Together, they underscore the study's distinctive niche: advancing ELT pedagogy beyond comprehension drills

toward a model that prepares learners to participate authoritatively in academic and professional discourse.

#### 4. Theoretical Background

This study draws on three complementary frameworks—Adler’s four levels of reading, the Bookclub ladder, and the DIKW model—to establish both method and outcome for English Language Teaching (ELT). Together, they provide a scaffold that moves learners from decoding texts to establishing authority in discourse.

Adler and Van Doren (1972/2014) describe reading as a developmental process that unfolds across four levels. At the elementary level, learners acquire the basic ability to decode words and sentences. Inspectional reading emphasizes skimming and structural grasp, allowing readers to quickly identify the main ideas of a text. Analytical reading requires deeper engagement, where arguments are evaluated and interpreted. Finally, syntopical reading involves comparing multiple texts to generate new insights and situate understanding within broader intellectual conversations. Applied to ELT, these levels highlight that comprehension is only the threshold; true growth occurs when learners ascend toward analytical and syntopical engagement.

The Releaders Bookclub (n.d.) extends this developmental view by articulating a ladder that begins with data and ascends through information, knowledge, competency, competitiveness, wisdom, and ultimately authority. Unlike Adler’s model, which emphasizes method, the Bookclub ladder emphasizes outcomes. It illustrates how learners transform raw textual input into authoritative participation in discourse. When aligned with Adler’s framework, the ladder shows the trajectory from decoding to contribution, situating reading as a pathway to intellectual presence.

Ackoff (1989) introduced the DIKW model—data, information, knowledge, wisdom—to describe the progression of human understanding. In this study, the framework is extended to include competency, competitiveness, and authority, reflecting the demands of ELT in multilingual and global contexts. This extension acknowledges that wisdom alone is insufficient in academic and professional spheres; learners must also demonstrate skill, position themselves competitively, and establish authority in discourse.

In this study, Adler’s model is treated as the method, guiding how learners engage with texts, while the Bookclub ladder represents the outcome, charting the developmental trajectory from data to authority. The DIKW framework serves as the conceptual bridge, linking method and outcome into a coherent pedagogical scaffold. Together, these frameworks provide a structured approach to ELT that moves beyond comprehension drills, aligning pedagogy with the competencies required in higher education and global discourse.

#### 5. Mapping the Frameworks

To operationalize reading pedagogy in ELT, it is necessary to demonstrate how Adler’s four levels of reading align with the developmental trajectory articulated in the Bookclub ladder and extended DIKW framework. Adler’s model provides the method, guiding how learners engage with texts, while the Bookclub ladder and DIKW framework articulate the outcomes, showing how learners progress from raw data to authoritative voice.

This alignment illustrates that reading is not a static skill but a progressive journey. At the elementary stage, learners decode words and sentences, corresponding to the data and information levels of the ladder. Inspectional reading, which emphasizes structural grasp and skimming, aligns with the transition from information to knowledge. Analytical reading, requiring deeper engagement and evaluation, corresponds to knowledge, competency, and competitiveness. Finally, syntopical reading, which involves comparing texts and generating new insights, aligns with wisdom and authority, the highest stages of the ladder.

**Table 1.** Alignment of Adler’s Levels with the Bookclub Ladder.

Adler’s Levels of Reading	Bookclub Ladder / Extended DIKW
Elementary	Data → Information
Inspectional	Information → Knowledge
Analytical	Knowledge → Competency → Competitiveness
Syntopical	Wisdom → Authority

This mapping underscores the coherence between method and outcome. Adler’s framework structures the process of reading, while the Bookclub ladder and DIKW model articulate the developmental results. Together, they provide a scaffold for ELT pedagogy that moves learners beyond comprehension drills toward intellectual authority (Adler & Van Doren, 1972/2014; Ackoff, 1989; Releaders Bookclub, n.d.).

## 6. Participants and Sampling

To ground this inquiry in a meaningful context, the study focused on graduating students from the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) at St. Michael’s College of Iligan Inc. (SMCII). Specifically, participants were drawn from three programs: AB Philosophy, AB English Language, and BS Psychology, all of whom were enrolled in TW 1: Research Writing Methods during the first semester of Academic Year 2025–2026. This cohort represented a diverse yet academically aligned group, positioned at the threshold of graduation and thus capable of demonstrating advanced engagement with reading pedagogy.

The sample size was 30 participants, consistent with qualitative traditions that privileged depth of insight over breadth of coverage. This number allowed for rich narrative data while maintaining manageability in analysis.

Selection criteria ensured that participants were well-suited to the study’s objectives. Students demonstrated intermediate to advanced English proficiency, which enabled them to engage meaningfully with Adler’s four levels of reading. They also showed exposure to both literary and academic texts, reflecting the dual demands of ELT in higher education. Finally, participants expressed willingness to engage in technology-integrated tasks, acknowledging the role of digital scaffolds in contemporary learning environments.

Data saturation was defined conceptually as the point at which new narratives ceased to yield novel insights about progression from Adler’s levels to the Bookclub ladder. In practice, this meant that once recurring themes dominated learner reflections and artifacts, additional data were considered redundant. This approach ensured that the study remained faithful to qualitative principles while capturing the full trajectory of reading development within the chosen cohort.

## 7. Methodology

The study employed a qualitative interpretive design, rooted in hermeneutic inquiry and critical pedagogy. Hermeneutics guided the interpretation of texts and learner responses, emphasizing the dynamic movement between part and whole in the search for meaning (Gadamer, 2004; Ricoeur, 1981). At the same time, critical pedagogy framed the classroom as a site of empowerment, where reading was examined not only as comprehension but as a practice that enabled learners to claim authority in discourse. This interpretive orientation aligned with traditions in qualitative inquiry that privileged context, meaning, and participant voice over numerical measurement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Building upon this design, validity was established through three dimensions. Conceptual validity was secured by anchoring the study in Adler’s theoretical framework, ensuring coherence between design and purpose. Dialogic validity was achieved by incorporating peer and learner voices, allowing interpretations to be tested against those directly engaged in the process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Ecological validity was ensured by situating the inquiry within authentic classroom

contexts, where reading and reflection occurred as part of lived educational practice rather than under artificial constraints. These layers of validity reinforced the interpretive foundation and strengthened the credibility of the inquiry.

In parallel, reliability was maintained through transparency of procedure. All steps in data collection and analysis were documented, enabling replication and scrutiny. Triangulation further enhanced reliability by drawing from multiple sources of evidence, including classroom observations, learner artifacts, and reflective journals (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Iterative coding was employed to stabilize themes, with repeated passes through the data ensuring that findings were consistent and not the product of chance. This process reflected the emphasis on trustworthiness in qualitative research, where credibility and dependability replaced the statistical measures of quantitative traditions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Together, these measures ensured that the study's findings rested on a firm methodological foundation.

To generate this evidence, data were collected through several complementary methods. Classroom observations provided direct insight into learner engagement and teacher facilitation. Learner artifacts, such as essays, debates, and digital publications, offered tangible evidence of progression across Adler's levels. Reflective narratives from student journals captured personal accounts of growth and struggle, while teacher journals documented instructional choices and perceived learner responses. In addition, scholarly sources and journals published in Mendeley, ResearchGate, Google Scholar, and Scopus-indexed outlets from 2000 to the present were consulted. These sources provided significant literature and insights on comprehension and Adler's levels, enriching the study's theoretical grounding and ensuring that classroom findings were situated within broader academic discourse. Taken together, these materials created a layered picture of the classroom as a site of interpretive practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Finally, analysis followed three interrelated strategies that connected the evidence to the study's aims. Thematic analysis was used to code learner outputs for evidence of progression from data toward authority, tracing how students moved beyond comprehension into synthesis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Hermeneutic circling guided interpretation, moving between individual reflections and collective classroom discourse to uncover meaning at both the micro and macro levels (Gadamer, 2004; Ricoeur, 1981). A critical pedagogy lens was then applied to evaluate how reading practices empowered learners, positioning them not only as competent readers but as competitive and authoritative participants in global English. These strategies worked in concert, ensuring that analysis was both systematic and interpretive, and that findings reflected the transformative potential of Adler's framework in English Language Teaching.

## 8. Application in ELT Pedagogy

At the elementary level, which corresponded to the data stage, instruction emphasized foundational skills. Learners engaged in vocabulary drills, phonics exercises, and literal comprehension tasks. These activities ensured accuracy in decoding and provided the linguistic base upon which higher-order reading skills could be built. Such practices reflected the traditional emphasis on comprehension as the first step in literacy development, but they also prepared students for more complex interpretive tasks by stabilizing their command of language structures (Valdez, 2020).

Progression into the inspectional level, aligned with the information stage, required learners to develop strategies for rapid and purposeful reading. Skimming and scanning exercises were introduced to help students identify structure, intent, and key ideas within texts. Digital annotation tools further supported this process, allowing learners to highlight, comment, and organize information efficiently. These practices resonated with multiliteracies pedagogy, which emphasized the need for learners to navigate diverse textual forms and digital environments with flexibility and agency (Misa, 2023). By treating texts as navigable structures rather than static objects, learners began to see reading as an active process of information management.

At the analytical level, which advanced competency and competitiveness, instruction shifted toward critical engagement. Learners participated in structured debates, peer review sessions, and critical reading exercises. These activities required them to evaluate arguments, detect bias, and articulate reasoned positions. Such practices reflected the principles of critical pedagogy, where reading was not only about understanding but also about questioning and resisting dominant narratives (Valdez, 2020). By engaging in collaborative critique, students developed the ability to defend interpretations and challenge perspectives, skills that enhanced their competitiveness in academic and professional contexts. This stage also aligned with multiliteracies approaches that encouraged learners to engage critically with texts across cultural and technological boundaries (Misa, 2023).

The syntopical level, corresponding to wisdom and authority, demanded synthesis across multiple texts. Learners undertook comparative projects, drawing connections between diverse sources and constructing original insights. They were encouraged to publish their work digitally, whether through online platforms, collaborative blogs, or institutional repositories. This stage positioned learners as producers of knowledge, enabling them to claim authority in discourse and contribute meaningfully to the global English community. Publishing student work online reflected broader trends in ELT, where digital platforms were increasingly used to amplify learner voices and situate them within authentic audiences (Shruthi et al., 2025). By synthesizing across texts and sharing their insights publicly, learners demonstrated the intellectual authority that Adler's framework envisioned.

Throughout these stages, technology functioned as a scaffold that supported progression. AI tools assisted in vocabulary acquisition and annotation, while collaborative platforms facilitated peer review and debate. Digital publishing provided learners with authentic audiences, reinforcing the authority they developed through syntopical reading. Importantly, technology was integrated with pedagogical purpose rather than treated as an end in itself. As Riel (2025) argued, pedagogy must lead technology, ensuring that digital tools serve the broader goals of empowerment and learning. Similarly, Li and Wilson (2025) highlighted how AI-integrated scaffolding enhanced learner agency and creativity, enabling students to take ownership of their learning processes. In this study, technology extended the reach of classroom practices, connecting learners to wider intellectual networks and reinforcing their progression from comprehension to authority.



Source: Microsoft Copilot. (2026)

**Figure 1.** Application of Adler's Levels in ELT Pedagogy with Technology as Scaffold.

## 9. Summary of Findings

The study revealed how learners moved beyond surface comprehension toward deeper intellectual engagement, showing clear progression across Adler's levels and the Bookclub ladder. Their reflections and outputs highlighted confidence, critical awareness, and synthesis, while technology provided the scaffold that connected each stage. What follows are the summarized answers to the five research questions, presenting how students demonstrated progression, how the Bookclub ladder manifested in their practices, how technology supported their growth, what themes emerged from reflections and artifacts, and how the integrated framework can inform ELT curriculum design and assessment. Together, these insights offered a framework that not only advanced classroom practice but also aligned with institutional priorities and global pedagogical innovation.

1. **Progression Across Adler's Levels.** Graduating students in Philosophy, English Language, and Psychology demonstrated clear progression from elementary decoding and vocabulary control to inspectional strategies such as skimming and annotation. They advanced into analytical practices through debates, peer review, and critical reading, and ultimately reached syntopical engagement, where they synthesized multiple sources and produced original insights. This trajectory reflected growth in confidence, strategic reading awareness, and ownership of voice.
2. **Manifestation of the Bookclub Ladder.** The Bookclub ladder (data → authority) was evident in learners' outputs. At the data stage, they focused on literal comprehension and vocabulary drills. At the information stage, they organized and annotated texts. At the competency stage, they engaged in collaborative critique and critical discourse. At the authority stage, they synthesized across texts and published their work digitally, demonstrating intellectual agency and alignment with institutional and global goals.
3. **Technology as Scaffold.** Technology consistently scaffolded learners' movement across stages. AI tools supported vocabulary acquisition and annotation, collaborative platforms facilitated peer review and debates, and digital publishing amplified learner voices. Importantly, technology was integrated with pedagogical purpose, extending classroom practices and reinforcing progression from comprehension to competency, competitiveness, and authority. This integration enhanced learner agency, creativity, and resilience in struggle.
4. **Themes from Reflections and Artifacts.** Ten themes from Reflections and Artifacts:
  - a. **Confidence in Decoding** This theme reflected the elementary level in Adler's framework, where learners mastered vocabulary and phonics as the foundation of reading. As one AB Philosophy student shared: *"At first, I was intimidated by the dense texts, but once I broke down the words, I realized I could actually follow the argument."* In the Bookclub ladder, this corresponds to the data stage, where raw textual elements are first recognized and processed. Within the DIKW model, decoding transforms data into usable information, enabling progression toward higher-order skills.
  - b. **Strategic Reading Awareness** Learners' adoption of skimming, scanning, and annotation aligned with Adler's inspectional level, where readers navigate texts strategically. An AB English Language student noted: *"I don't just read everything now—I skim for the thesis and scan for keywords before I annotate."* This reflects the **information stage** of the Bookclub ladder, where learners begin organizing and structuring textual input. It shows how inspectional reading bridges raw data and meaningful knowledge.
  - c. **Critical Engagement** Students' questioning and critique embodied Adler's analytical level, where arguments are evaluated and contested. A BS Psychology student wrote: *"I realized the author's claim was biased, so I challenged it in my essay. Reading is not just agreeing—it's evaluating."* This corresponds to the competency and competitiveness stages of the Bookclub ladder, where learners sharpen their reasoning and defend positions. In DIKW terms, knowledge is tested and refined through critique, moving toward wisdom.

- d. **Collaborative Learning** Peer debates and reviews highlighted how collective discourse supported progression. An AB Philosophy student reflected: *"Her counterargument forced me to rethink mine, and that made my position stronger."* Collaboration reinforced analytical reading and positioned learners competitively. In the Bookclub ladder, this reflects the competitiveness stage, where knowledge is tested in social contexts. It also shows how knowledge becomes communal, aligning with DIKW's emphasis on shared wisdom.
- e. **Synthesis Across Sources** Learners integrated multiple texts, reaching Adler's syntopical level. An AB English Language student explained: *"When I connected three articles on language and identity, I saw a bigger picture that none of them showed alone."* This reflects the wisdom stage of the Bookclub ladder, where synthesis produces new insights. In DIKW, this is the transformation of knowledge into wisdom, as learners discern patterns across diverse sources.
- f. **Ownership of Voice** Publishing gave learners authority. A BS Psychology student reflected: *"Posting my paper online made me feel my ideas mattered beyond the classroom."* This corresponds to the authority stage of the Bookclub ladder, the ultimate pedagogical goal. Adler's syntopical reading culminates here, as learners not only synthesize but also contribute original insights. In DIKW, this extends wisdom into **authority**, positioning learners as producers of knowledge.
- g. **Technology-Enhanced Agency** Digital tools scaffolded progression across stages. An AB English Language student wrote: *"Using AI annotation made me feel in control of the text, not overwhelmed by it."* Technology supported movement from comprehension to competency and competitiveness, aligning with the Bookclub ladder's structural scaffolding. In DIKW, technology facilitated the transformation of data into information and knowledge, accelerating learners' trajectory toward wisdom and authority.
- h. **Resilience in Struggle** Struggle was reframed as growth. A Philosophy student journaled: *"I almost gave up on that reading, but pushing through taught me patience and sharpened my reasoning."* This resilience reflects the iterative movement across Adler's levels, where difficulty is part of analytical and syntopical mastery. In the Bookclub ladder, resilience sustains learners through the competency and competitiveness stages, ensuring eventual attainment of wisdom and authority.
- i. **Identity Formation Through Reading** Texts shaped personal and cultural identity. A BS Psychology student reflected: *"Reading about mental health made me confront my own experiences—it shaped how I see myself as a future counselor."* This theme shows how reading transcends comprehension, aligning with the wisdom stage of the Bookclub ladder, where knowledge informs life choices and identity. In DIKW, wisdom is not only intellectual but also existential, shaping self-understanding.
- j. **Alignment with Institutional and Global Goals** Students recognized broader educational aims. An AB English Language student wrote: *"Our projects connect to CHED's call for holistic competencies—we're not just learning English, we're preparing for global citizenship."* This reflects the authority stage, where learners situate their voices within institutional and civic frameworks. Adler's syntopical reading and the Bookclub ladder converge here, showing how personal growth aligns with institutional mandates and global priorities. In DIKW, authority is the extension of wisdom into societal impact.

**Integrative Insight:** By situating each theme within Adler's method and the Bookclub ladder's **outcome**, the analysis demonstrated how learners advanced from decoding (data) to authority. The DIKW framework provided a conceptual bridge, showing how raw textual data was transformed into information, knowledge, wisdom, and ultimately authority. Together, these theoretical lenses confirmed that the ten themes were not isolated reflections but evidence of a structured developmental trajectory, where reading became both a cognitive practice and a civic, institutional, and global act.

5. **Implications for ELT Curriculum and Assessment.** The integrated framework of Adler's levels and the Bookclub ladder informed ELT curriculum design by embedding progression into lesson planning and assessment. Curriculum could be structured to ensure learners move beyond comprehension toward synthesis and authority. Assessment practices could emphasize not only linguistic accuracy but also critical engagement, collaborative output, and published work. This alignment supported institutional goals of holistic education, competitiveness, and internationalization, while responding to national mandates for intellectual and civic competencies.

## The Niche Contribution

This study contributed a distinct pedagogical framework that moved English Language Teaching beyond the conventional emphasis on comprehension. While comprehension remained foundational, the research demonstrated that it was insufficient as a terminal goal. Instead, the study advanced a progression toward competency and competitiveness, positioning learners to engage critically with texts and articulate informed perspectives. This shift reflected the broader aims of critical pedagogy, which sought to empower students as active participants in discourse rather than passive recipients of information (Valdez, 2020). It also resonated with literacy research that emphasized the need to move learners from novice decoding toward expert-level engagement with texts (Castles, Rastle, & Nation, 2020; Shanahan & Lonigan, 2022).

More significantly, the study positioned authority as the ultimate pedagogical goal. Through syntopical reading and synthesis, learners were guided to produce original insights and share them publicly, whether through digital platforms or collaborative projects. This emphasis on authority challenged traditional models of ELT that often stopped at linguistic proficiency. By enabling learners to contribute meaningfully to global conversations, the framework aligned with multiliteracies pedagogy and affirmed the intellectual agency of students (Misa, 2023). It also reflected national and institutional priorities, such as those articulated in the Commission on Higher Education's General Education Curriculum, which emphasized holistic understanding, intellectual growth, and civic competencies (Commission on Higher Education, 2013). In this sense, the framework not only advanced classroom practice but also responded to broader educational mandates for competitiveness and internationalization (Eslit, 2023; Commission on Higher Education, 2023).

Technology was not treated as an add-on but as a structural scaffold that supported each stage of progression. AI tools facilitated vocabulary acquisition and annotation, collaborative platforms enabled peer review and debate, and digital publishing amplified learner voices. These integrations were purposeful and pedagogically grounded, reflecting emerging frameworks that prioritized intentional use of technology in ELT (Riel, 2025; Shruthi et al., 2025). As Li and Wilson (2025) noted, AI-integrated scaffolding enhanced learner creativity and agency, allowing students to take ownership of their learning trajectories. In this study, technology extended the reach of classroom practice and reinforced the movement from comprehension to authority. This approach echoed Eslit's (2025) findings on pedagogy in practice, where narrative inquiry and classroom observation revealed that technology, when aligned with values-driven instruction, strengthened both learner engagement and institutional impact.

## 10. Addressing Gaps

Reading in ELT has often been treated as a flat skill, measured only by comprehension or vocabulary mastery, but this study reframed it as a developmental ladder. Drawing from Adler's four levels of reading—elementary, inspectional, analytical, and syntopical (Adler, 1972)—and the Bookclub ladder (data → authority), it showed that learners move step by step rather than stopping at surface understanding. This progression confirmed that reading is not static but a trajectory toward intellectual agency, echoing the DIKW framework where raw data evolves into information,

knowledge, wisdom, and ultimately authority (Shanahan & Lonigan, 2022; Castles, Rastle, & Nation, 2020).

Classical theory, particularly Adler's model, has rarely been integrated with modern frameworks, leaving a gap between traditional methods and contemporary outcomes. This study bridged that divide by positioning Adler as the method (how learners read) and the Bookclub ladder as the outcome (what learners achieve). Inspectional reading was linked to the information stage, analytical reading to competency and competitiveness, and syntopical reading to wisdom and authority. This integration provided a holistic framework that connected classical rigor with modern literacy demands, situating Adler within contemporary ELT practice (Eslit, 2025).

Another gap addressed was the absence of competency and competitiveness outcomes in ELT. Curricula often stop at comprehension or knowledge acquisition, but this study explicitly included stages where learners defended arguments, engaged in debates, and published outputs. Embedding these outcomes aligned ELT with broader educational goals of preparing students for civic participation, global competitiveness, and intellectual authority (Commission on Higher Education, 2013; Commission on Higher Education, 2023). Extending the DIKW model beyond wisdom to include competency, competitiveness, and authority ensured that ELT outcomes matched institutional and global demands (Eslit, 2023).

Finally, technology has often been underutilized in ELT, treated as an optional add-on rather than a structural scaffold. This study positioned technology as essential, showing how AI annotation tools, collaborative platforms, and digital publishing supported learners at every stage of progression. Technology transformed data into information (annotation), facilitated knowledge through collaboration (peer review), and amplified authority through publication. By embedding technology into the framework, the study demonstrated that digital tools are central to scaffolding learners' movement from comprehension to authority, aligning pedagogy with the realities of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Riel, 2025; Shruthi et al., 2025; Li & Wilson, 2025).

In addressing these gaps, the study advanced ELT pedagogy toward a model that is developmental, integrative, outcome-driven, and technologically scaffolded—one that prepares learners not only to comprehend texts but to claim authority in academic, civic, and global contexts.

## 11. Conclusions

English Language Teaching must be reimagined as a trajectory that moves learners beyond the mechanics of decoding toward the capacity to stand as authoritative voices in academic, professional, and civic discourse. This study demonstrated how Adler's levels of reading, extended through the Bookclub ladder and the DIKW framework, provide both the methodological scaffold and the developmental outcomes necessary for such transformation. Learners progressed from surface comprehension into competency, competitiveness, wisdom, and ultimately authority, with technology serving as an indispensable scaffold at every stage. The implication is clear: curriculum designers and teachers must embed this ladder into lesson planning, assessment, and digital pedagogy, ensuring that learners are guided deliberately from decoding to ownership of voice. In doing so, ELT is redefined as a values-driven, technologically integrated practice that equips students not only to understand texts but to claim intellectual agency and contribute meaningfully to institutional, national, and global conversations.

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