Reading literacy extension program and effect on the reading level: A case study

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Abstract: The paper explored how the literacy extension program provided by a state university in the Philippines has improved the reading level of Grade 4 learners. Specifically, it looked into the reading level of the Grade 4 learners in the pretest and in the posttest in terms of independent, instructional, and frustration levels and the extent of increase in the reading levels of the learners after the implementation of the literacy program. Findings support the burgeoning studies that highlight how reading interventions through community literacy programs, positively affect the reading levels of those who struggle to read, particularly learners from low-income families. The findings raise the role of collaboration between the basic and higher education sectors to improve the learners' reading ability while also providing benchmark to school divisions to launch their own initiatives to help schools raise the reading and comprehension levels of the learners. Since this study employed a small sample group, further research may be conducted with larger groups to present a general picture on how community literacy programs impact the learners in the Philippine context and to determine challenges, opportunities, and future directions.

INTRODUCTION

Capiz State University (CAPSU) is a government-funded institution tasked to provide quality education through the basic functions of research, instruction, production, and extension. Extension program is formulated and proposed to carry out the extension services of the College of Education of Roxas City Main Campus and to answer the needs of its adopted school. An integrated extension approach is needed to address multi-faceted community issues effectively and it is one of the major functions of the academic community in order to enhance the capacity of the faculty in their field of expertise by way of extending it to the partner community/communities. Issues in the community will not be solely addressed by the local government officials nor by the residents, but these need a knowledge based sector or the epistemic community and the academe for it to come up with a scientific diagnosis with regard to the occurrences of problems in the community. Community extension services respond not just to the needs of the community but to the vision and mission of the University, as well as, to the expectations to make education accessible to the poor and to "pursue an excellent and socially relevant education centered on the young, poor and the youth at risk; and promote the Filipino spirit of solidarity by upholding justice and human dignity" (Gonzales, 2009).

CAPSU has been providing community extension programs to various institutions. One of the beneficiary schools is the Don Francisco Dinglasan Memorial School where the college provides remedial reading instruction to elementary learners. Assessing what has been done and determining the impact of the programs to the pupils is the concern of the institution to further develop the programs that provide opportunity to experience learning beyond the classrooms.

Statement of the Problem
The paper explored how the literacy extension program provided by Capiz State University has improved the reading level of Grade 4 learners. Specifically, it aimed to seek answers to the following questions:

1. What is the reading level of the Grade 4 learners in the pretest and in the posttest in terms of independent, instructional, and frustration levels?

2. What is the extent of increase in the reading levels of the learners after the implementation of the literacy program?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Remedial Reading Program
Nurturing the reading skills is crucial in the elementary years (Griffin, Burns, Snow, et al., 1998) because this is the time when the child develops the ability to decodeand recognize key words, phrases and other language cues; elementary school-agedchildren need to consolidate and enhance their basic skills to become fluent andconfident readers (Slavin et al., 2009). Failure to develop these skills would have a have long-term impact that could last a lifetime (Chall et al., 2009).

Reading remediation is, therefore, necessary from fourth-grade and beyond—especially for low-income and minority children (Snow, 2002). Without remediation, the reading gap after Grade 4 and beyond may enlarge quickly and as poor readers will tend to avoidreading and engage in less self-initiated reading than good readers (Chall, Jacobs, Baldwin, and Chall, 2009). With this, disadvantaged learners are likely to lag behind throughout their lives.

Phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and language comprehension are identified as the crucial components of reading instruction and struggling readers need to their vocabulary and language comprehension (Deshler & Hock, 2007). Different types of reading programs have, thus, been introduced (Lonigan& Shanahan, 2009), such as stand-alone reading curricula and teacher training to improve reading instruction (Borman, Dowling, &Schneck, 2007; Reis,Eckert, McCoach, Jacobs, & Coyne, 2008; Van Keer&Verhaeghe, 2005).

The effective use of remedial programs to bridge the reading gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children is one of the most important pedagogical/policy issues in the field of primary education (National Reading Panel, 2000). Reading gaps need to be narrowed early in the schooling track (in elementary school). Because this has become a well-recognized phenomenon, governments, families and non-government organizations invest tremendous amounts of time, effort and financial resources to address reading difficulties (Torgesen et al., 2006). There is, however few rigorous research on the effectiveness of reading programs on student reading outcomes in developing countries (Griffin et al., 1998; Lonigan and Shanahan, 2009).

Benefits of Reading Literacy Program
Various studies revealed how reading literacy programs helped develop the reading levels of learner, especially in the elementary level.

- Struggling students at grade level who received the targeted reading intervention scored high in reading, letter recognition, comprehension, and spelling after undergoing literacy intervention (Gelzheiser, Scanlon, Vellutino, Hallgren-Flynn, and Schatschneider, 2011) .

- The literacy program Question Answer Relationship, a strategy which help students comprehend what they just read by using the different types of questions,has improved students' reading comprehension (Kinniburgh, and Baxter, 2012).
- A reading intervention given to 2nd to 8th grade English language learners 4 to 5 days a week resulted to improved overall reading skills (Lovett, De Palma, Frijters, Steinbach, Temple, Benson, and Acerenza, 2008)
- Teachers with deep linguistic knowledge can help prevent reading difficulties, which in turn, help to decrease writing difficulties among students. Teachers need to have knowledge in linguistics to help studentslearn reading for both struggling and non-struggling students (McCutchen, Gree, Abbott, and Sanders, 2009),
- Reading intervention given to sixth to eighth graders led to development in reading skills more growth than the control group of students although gaps were found between typical developing students and the struggling students who had received the intervention Roberts, Vaughn, Fletcher, Stuebing, and Barth, 2013).
- Students who received the self-regulation instruction as a remedial program for 11 weeks showed positive outlook on their learning, had higher standardized reading comprehension test scores, and could identify the main idea more than the students who did not receive the same instruction (Stroger, Sontag, and Ziegler, 2014). Effects were observed on the self-regulation of their own learning, in identifying the main idea, and reading comprehension skills.
- Another study on 24 different reading interventions for students in grades 4th-5th showed that reading comprehension intervention groups had the highest success scores before, during, and after regular reading curriculum. There were mixed results on reading fluency, the word recognition intervention had moderate improvement results, and there waslittle research on vocabulary intervention programs over their 20 years of study (Wanzek, Wexler, Vaughn, and Ciullo, 2010).

METHODOLOGY

This descriptive research method was conducted at a suburban elementary school in the city of Roxas in the province of Capiz, Philippines from August 2021 until January 2022. The subjects of this study were 147 learners enrolled in Grade 4 who were recipient of the reading literacy program of the College of Education of Capiz State University. The decision to consider Grade 4 students as the sample since unresolved reading gap after Grade 4 may lead learners to engage less in self-initiated reading (Chall, Jacobs, Baldwin, and Chall, 2009).

Instruments and Procedures
The researchers sought permission from the school principal to access the results of the pupils after taking the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory Test (PHIL-IRI) before and after the literacy program was implemented to determine if any change had occurred in the reading level.

A pretest data based on the Phil-IRI revealed the need for a literacy program, which served as intervention with the hopes of improving the reading performance non-reading pupils. The College of Education extension team then implemented the intervention program from August 2019 until January 2020. They conducted storytelling, read-aloud, and silent reading activities. After the six-month program, a posttest was given to determine if the reading level of the pupils improved.

Data were analyzed and findings were supported by studies which were previously conducted. Percentage was used as a quantitative instrument to determine the rate of

increase/decrease of reading level of the pupils during the pretest and posttest and how effective the literacy program was.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Learners

Table 1. General Weighted Average of Grade 4 Pupils.

	S.Y 2017-18		S.Y. 2018-19		S.Y. 2019-20	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
75-77	16	10.88	9	6.12	5	3.40
78-80	38	25.85	57	38.78	29	19.73
81-83	47	31.97	37	25.17	51	34.69
84-86	26	17.69	24	16.33	30	20.41
87-89	14	9.52	14	9.52	26	17.69
90-92	6	4.08	6	4.08	6	4.08
Total	147	100.00	147	100.00	147	100.00

Recipients of the literacy program were learners age 10-14.The sex is almost equally distributed. In terms of parent's occupation, almost half of their fathers are laborers while the rest are drivers, businessmen, security guards, among others. It can also be noted that there are some students who no longer have their fathers. Meanwhile, their mothers work as housekeepers, with the rest working on the jobs indicated on the table below. Also, a handful of the pupils no longer have mothers.

Data in Table 1 show the general weighted average of the recipients from Grades 4 to 6 in general. The average mean generally increased from 81.88 in school year 2017-18 to 83.32 in SY 2019-20, although it slightly decreased to 81.76 in SY 2018-19.

During School Year 2017-18, more than a quarter (N=47) of the respondents got an average grade ranging from 81-83, and only 6 pupils got an average grade ranging from 90-92. In School Year 2018-19, more than a quarter of the respondents (N=57) got an average grade ranging from 78-80 with still 6 students in the 90-92 rating. In School Year 2019-20, still, more than a quarter of the respondents (N=51) got an average grade ranging from 81-83.

Noticeably, the number of pupils who obtained 75-77 decreased from 16 in SY 2017-18 to 5 in SY 2019-20. Also, the number of pupils with a rating of 75-80 dropped from 38 to 29. Likewise, pupils with average rating of 84-86 increased from 26 to 30 and 87-89 from 14 to 26. However, the number of pupils who obtained grades in between 90-92 remained the same in the three consecutive school years.

Reading level in the Pretest and Posttest

Table 2. Reading level of the pupils in the pretest and in thepost test in terms of independent, instructional and frustration level.

Reading level	Pretest	Posttest

Struggling	33	12
Frustration	76	17
Instructional	22	69
Independent	11	49

Data in Table 2 show the number of students and their reading level during the pretest and after the posttest. During the pretest, there were 76 pupils who belonged in the Frustration level, 22 pupils in the Instructional level, 11 pupils in the Independent level and 33 were classified as struggling readers. It is explained that students who "were in the frustration level of reading include text for which a reader does not have adequate background level for a topic and/or cannot meet criteria for instructional levels of accuracy and rate" (University of Utah, 2017). Therefore, students in frustration levels require extensive or even moderate assistance from an educator. They were guided in learning different skills in order for them to progress into instructional. Furthermore, those in the instructional level "has adequate background knowledge for a topic, and can access text quickly and with no or few errors" (University of Utah, 2017). Providing continued to support to these readers would lead them to become independent readers.

After the posttest, the number of pupils in the frustration level decreased from 76 to 17, while pupils in the Instructional level increased from 22 to 69. Pupils from the Independent level saw their number significantly increase from 11 to 49. As for the struggling readers, the number of pupils decreased from 33 down to 12. The intervention provided lasted for 6 months before conducting the posttest, with the results indicating positive impact.

Changes in the reading levels of the learners

Table 4. Changes in the reading level of the pupils in the pretest and the posttest.

Reading Level		N	Rate of Increase/ Decrease
Frustration			
	Pretest	76	
	Posttest	17	-77.63%
Instructional			
	Pretest	22	
	Posttest	69	68.12%
Independent			
	Pretest	11	
	Posttest	49	77.55%
Struggling Readers			
	Pretest	33	
	Posttest	12	-63.64%

The results of the literacy (as shown on Table 4) indicate that the number of pupils in the frustration level decreased by 77.63%. In the Instructional level, the result of the posttest shows that the number of pupils in this level increased by 68.12%, while pupils in the independent level increased to 77.55. The number of struggling reader pupils decreased to 63.64%. All in all, the number of pupils in the pretest has an average mean of 7. 1701 which

is in the frustration level and right after the postest it increased to an average mean of 13.1565 which signifies that the pupils are in the instructional level (see Table 4).

Prior studies support the positive effects of literacy programs to the reading levels of learners (Roberts, et al., 2013; Kinniburgh and Baxter, 2012; Lovett, *et al.,* 2008; McCutchen, *et al.,* 2009). Melekoglu and Wilkerson (2013) pointed out that learners who struggled with reading, usually, had difficulty finding books to read for pleasure at their reading level. Students without disabilities that struggled in reading performed better and enjoyed reading with more exposure. More exposure to reading can help teachers plan better lessons incorporating reading for those struggling students.

CONCLUSIONS

This study confirmed the findings of prior studies that reading intervention through community literacy programs, positively affect the reading levels of those who struggle to read. In particularly, many of those who benefitted were learners from low-income families This raises awareness among the teachers on the role of conducting assessments in implementing programs that would benefit learners who are either slow readers and non-readers. While collaboration we see the role of building partnerships with teacher education institution as crucial to provide an intervention to improving the learners' reading ability, school divisions should also take this as a cue to launch their own initiatives to help schools raise the reading and comprehension levels of the learners. Since this study employed a small sample group, further research may be conducted with larger groups to present a general picture on how community literacy programs impact the learners in the Philippine context and to determine challenges, opportunities, and future directions. Teacher training programs are additionallyintended to help teachers learn: a.) ways to help students interact more during readingactivities; b.) how to motivate students to read; and c.) approaches to managingreading activities in the classroom.

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