

Enhancing early grade literacy through project MMK and *tindahan ng karunungan*: a reading intervention for Grades 1 to 3

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Abstract: This study investigated the effectiveness of two integrated literacy initiatives—Project MMK (Mag-aral Magbasa, Handa sa Kinabukasan) Reading Intervention and *Tindahan ng Karunungan* incentive program—in improving reading performance and motivation among struggling primary grade pupils at Imelda Elementary School. Using a descriptive and qualitative research method, data were gathered through pre- and post-assessments, involving 72 struggling readers (29 from Grade 1, 19 from Grade 2, and 24 from Grade 3) identified through the Beginning of School Year Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA), classroom observations, and focus group discussions combining structured reading instruction with a motivational point system where learners earned rewards exchangeable for school supplies. Post-intervention assessments revealed significant improvements: Grade Ready students increased from 42% to 58% in Grade 1, 22% to 74% in Grade 2, and 27% to 70% in Grade 3, while students requiring Full Refresher decreased to nearly zero. Findings demonstrate that combining structured reading intervention with incentive-based motivation effectively addresses reading deficiencies in resource-constrained Philippine public schools, particularly following pandemic-related learning losses. Success factors included regular monitoring, stakeholder involvement, and personalized reading materials. Recommendations include sustaining comprehensive assessments, strengthening parental involvement, maintaining motivational incentives, and providing ongoing professional development for teachers to ensure long-term impact.

Keywords: Literacy, Reading Intervention, Motivation, Primary, Education, Remedial Program

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INTRODUCTION

Literacy serves as the foundation for academic success and lifelong learning, with far-reaching implications for personal development and socioeconomic mobility (UNESCO, 2022). In the Philippine educational context, a concerning literacy crisis has emerged, particularly following the learning losses brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent assessments reveal that Filipino learners, especially those in public primary schools, face significant challenges in developing adequate reading and comprehension skills. According to the World Bank (2022), learning poverty in the Philippines—defined as the inability to read and understand a simple text by age 10—was estimated at 90.9%, one of the highest in the East Asia and Pacific region. Similarly, the Department of Education (DepEd, 2023) acknowledged the decline in learners' reading proficiency and emphasized the need for urgent learning recovery interventions. The MATATAG Agenda introduced in the Basic Education Report outlines four key components to address these challenges, including curriculum improvements focusing on foundational skills, building resilient educational infrastructure, strengthening inclusive education programs, and enhancing teacher welfare and professional development. These comprehensive initiatives underscore the urgency of strengthening foundational literacy to prevent long-term academic setbacks and inequality.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Education had already implemented various literacy initiatives to support early grade learners. These included the Early Language, Literacy, and Numeracy (ELLN) Program (DepEd Order No. 18, s. 2017) and the Every Child a Reader Program (ECARP) (DepEd Order No. 14, s. 2018), which focused on developing foundational skills such as phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension. In response to the learning crisis caused by the pandemic, DepEd Regional Office V introduced the 8-Week Learning Recovery Curriculum (DepEd Regional Memorandum No. 104, s. 2022). This program serves as a targeted remediation and intervention effort to address learning losses and help learners regain essential literacy and numeracy skills.

At Imelda Elementary School, this national problem manifests in the increasing number of struggling readers in early grades. Classroom observations, formative assessments, and Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) results indicated a notable percentage of students requiring intensive reading intervention. The school launched targeted reading interventions to bolster literacy skills among students who struggled with reading.

Despite these research findings and national initiatives, a significant gap exists in understanding how to effectively implement and integrate multiple literacy approaches at the school level, particularly in resource-constrained Philippine public schools. While separate studies have examined either instructional interventions or motivational programs, limited research has investigated the synergistic effects of simultaneously implementing structured reading intervention with incentive-based literacy programs. Additionally, most existing research has been conducted in well-resourced educational settings, with fewer studies examining effective literacy interventions in challenging educational environments like many Philippine public schools.

Moreover, there is insufficient documentation and evaluation of school-based innovations that adapt national literacy frameworks to address specific local needs. This gap is particularly problematic as the Philippine education system seeks evidence-based, contextually appropriate, and sustainable approaches to address the literacy crisis.

Recognizing these gaps, Imelda Elementary School responded by implementing two innovative literacy initiatives in early grades: (1) Project MMK (Mag-aral Magbasa handa sa Kinabukasan), This project is anchored on “Every Child A Reader Program of the Department of Education and “Bawat Batang Bikolano, Bihasang Magbasa at Magbilang, Imelda (2021) and (2) "Tindahan ng Karunungan," a school-based incentive program where learners earn points from their literacy tasks and academic achievements, which they can exchange for items such as school supplies and snacks in a learning store. Reward systems in schools, including tangible incentives like stickers and behavioral charts and intangible rewards such as positive relationships, impact student development across ages by encouraging good behavior and motivation (Chen, 2023).

Statement of the problem

This study determine the effectiveness of Project MMK "Mag-aral Magbasa, Handa sa Kinabukasan" (MMK) Reading Intervention and Tindahan ng Karunungan programs for primary pupils in Imelda Elementary School.

Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the performance level of pupils before the implementation of the reading intervention programs as measured by the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA)?

2. What are the effects of the integrated Project MMK (Mag-aral Magbasa, Handa sa Kinabukasan) Reading Intervention and Tindakan ng Karunungan programs on primary pupils' reading performance and motivation?
3. What are the causes of reading difficulties among struggling readers in the primary grades?
4. What challenges and best practices were identified during the implementation of the integrated literacy programs?
5. What recommendations can be proposed to enhance the effectiveness of these integrated literacy intervention programs for future implementation?

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study employed a descriptive and qualitative research design to investigate the effectiveness of Project MMK (Mag-aral Magbasa, Handa sa Kinabukasan) and the Tindakan ng Karunungan incentive program in enhancing early grade literacy among struggling readers. It combined pre- and post-assessments to determine reading proficiency improvements with qualitative inputs from classroom observations and focus group discussions to evaluate student motivation and engagement. This integrated approach allowed for both numerical evaluation of learners' progress and contextual insights into behavioral and motivational changes, providing a comprehensive understanding of the interventions' impacts within a resource-constrained public school setting.

Respondents and locale of the study

The population consisted of learners from Imelda Elementary School who were identified as struggling readers based on the Beginning of School Year Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) for SY 2022-2023. A total of 72 learners were selected as the sample, comprising 29 from Grade 1, 19 from Grade 2, and 24 from Grade 3. These learners were identified as in need of remedial reading interventions due to low assessment scores.

Research instrument

The primary research instruments used in the study included the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) as a standardized tool to identify struggling readers and measure their progress before and after the intervention. Supplementary instructional materials such as phonics charts, reading flashcards, leveled reading books, and remedial worksheets in both Filipino and English supported targeted literacy instruction. In addition, qualitative data were collected through structured classroom observations and teacher feedback during the remedial reading sessions, providing insight into the learners' engagement and the effectiveness of the incentive-based reading program.

Data analyses procedure

The data analysis procedure involved a comparative descriptive approach, wherein pre- and post-intervention CRLA scores were analyzed to measure improvements in reading proficiency. The percentage of learners in each reading level classification—such as Grade Ready, Light, and Full Refresher—was calculated and compared across grade levels before and after the intervention. To supplement the quantitative data, qualitative findings from teacher observations and feedback

were thematically analyzed to assess learner motivation and participation. This dual approach enabled the study to capture both statistical changes in literacy levels and nuanced insights into the learning behaviors influenced by the integrated intervention programs.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The baseline assessment (BOSY) indicated that prior to the interventions, many students were in the Full Refresher or Light intervention groups across grades and subjects, reflecting varying degrees of reading difficulties. For instance, in Grade 1, the initial data showed that only about 24% of learners were in the Grade Ready category, with a significant portion still needing remediation. Similarly, in Grade 2 and Grade 3, many students were in the Full or Light groups, indicating the presence of reading challenges at the start of the school year. This baseline data confirmed the need for targeted interventions to support learners with low reading proficiency.

Effects of the interventions on reading performance and motivation

Post-assessment results (EOSY) demonstrated a substantial improvement in learners' reading levels across all grades and subjects. The number of students classified as Grade Ready increased significantly—most notably, in Grade 1, from approximately 42% at BOSY to 58% at EOSY; in Grade 2, from around 22% to 74%; and in Grade 3, from about 27% to 70%. Simultaneously, the number of learners in the Full Refresher group decreased to nearly zero, implying that the remedial interventions effectively addressed initial difficulties. The "Tindahan ng Karunungan" system likely contributed to this progress by motivating learners through tangible rewards, as evidenced by increased engagement and participation during remedial sessions. The consistent improvements indicate that the integrated approach successfully enhanced both reading performance and learner motivation.

Causes of reading difficulties

While this study primarily focused on intervention outcomes, the initial data suggest that reading difficulties among struggling learners stemmed from disruptions caused by the pandemic, limited access to reading resources, and varying levels of reading foundations among students. The presence of a sizable percentage of pupils in the Full Refresher and Light groups at BOSY indicates that foundational literacy skills were still developing, highlighting the need for targeted remedial support.

Challenges and best practices

Though not explicitly measured, observations during implementation suggested that challenges such as limited classroom resources, varying levels of parental support, and financial constraints potentially limit the continuity and reach of these programs. Conversely, best practices included active teacher supervision, regular follow-up meetings, involvement of parents and stakeholders, and the use of motivational incentives like the "Tindahan ng Karunungan." These strategies fostered a positive learning environment and facilitated student progress.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Project MMK (Mag-aral Magbasa, Handa sa Kinabukasan), in conjunction with the "Tindakan ng Karunungan" motivational system, significantly improved the reading skills of learners from Grade 1 to Grade 3 at Imelda Elementary School. The assessment results showed a substantial increase in the number of students classified as Grade Ready by the end of the school year, while the proportion of learners in the Full Refresher group decreased to nearly zero. The motivational strategy of earning and redeeming stars effectively boosted learners' engagement, participation, and enthusiasm for remedial reading activities. Furthermore, regular monitoring, stakeholder involvement, and the adaptation of reading materials to learners' needs contributed to these positive outcomes. Despite these successes, the study was limited by its reliance on quantitative data, which did not fully capture learners' motivation and behavioral changes, and its short-term nature that may affect the sustainability of the gains achieved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To sustain and further improve the positive impacts of the Project MMK and "Tindakan ng Karunungan" programs, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Conduct regular and comprehensive assessments at the start and end of each school year to identify learners in need, monitor progress, and evaluate intervention effectiveness.
2. Hold consistent stakeholder and teacher meetings to discuss progress, challenges, and adjustments, ensuring collaborative efforts and clear roles.
3. Strengthen parental involvement through continuous communication and orientation, encouraging home reinforcement of reading activities.
4. Continue tailoring reading materials to suit grade levels and individual learner needs to enhance engagement and comprehension.
5. Maintain a system of weekly progress monitoring to adjust interventions promptly based on learners' evolving needs.
6. Provide ongoing professional development for teachers to improve instructional strategies, intervention techniques, and motivational methods.
7. Sustain motivational incentives like the "Tindakan ng Karunungan" to foster active learner participation and a positive learning environment.
8. Regularly evaluate and refine intervention strategies using assessment data and stakeholder feedback to ensure continuous improvement.
9. Continue recognizing and rewarding learner achievements to motivate students toward academic excellence.

Implementing these recommendations can strengthen the program's effectiveness, foster sustained literacy development, and promote a positive, inclusive learning environment. Future research should also explore long-term skill retention, parental involvement impacts, and the scalability of these interventions to other schools or regions.

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