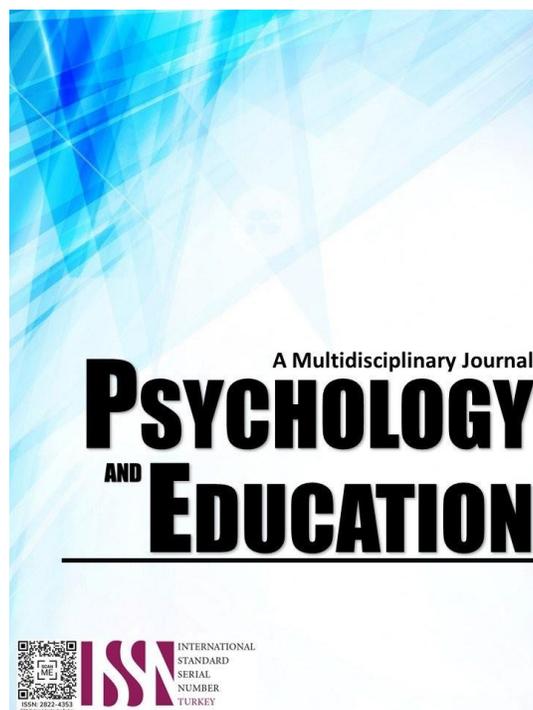


MUNTING PAARALAN, PANGHABANG BUHAY NA KARUNUNGAN: IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF THE READING LITERACY EXTENSION PROGRAM IN A RURAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN SOUTHERN NUEVA VIZCAYA



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Munting Paaralan, Panghabang Buhay na Karunungan: Impact Assessment of the Reading Literacy Extension Program in a Rural Elementary School in Southern Nueva Vizcaya

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Abstract

Research on the impact of community extension activities in higher education is limited despite its accessibility. This quantitative research aimed to assess the impact of the "*Munting Paaralan, Panghabang Buhay na Karunungan*" extension project for the Bachelor of Elementary Education at Nueva Vizcaya State University-Bambang Campus. Its goal was to determine how the 93 respondents from a rural elementary school in Bambang, Nueva Vizcaya, responded to the three-year extension project regarding its relevance and timeliness. The respondents viewed the extension project as very relevant and timely. There is no significant difference in the levels of assessment of the students and teachers and the levels of assessment in the three-year implementation. The information suggests maintaining relevant and timely extension activities to enhance Philippine education standards and address gaps left by the pandemic and lockdown. These programs may be directed towards teachers and students to reinforce and improve performance on national and international assessments. Additionally, funding for reading materials and initiatives that benefit students and teachers may be provided by the Department of Education. While respondent interviews were used in this study to corroborate the quantitative results, qualitative design may be used in future research to further elucidate the extension initiatives' significance. Action research may also be carried out to evaluate the efficacy of the materials and intervention activities used alongside the extension project.

Keywords: *extension projects, Munting Paaralan, Panghabang Buhay na Karunungan, national and international assessments, reading intervention*

Introduction

Reading is vital at every educational level since all subjects in the curriculum require reading, resulting in enhanced academic achievement (Cimmiyotti, 2013). Thorough reading skills are essential for everyone aspiring to thrive in contemporary society. The individual should possess the ability to understand basic written materials, such as agreements, invoices, and travel guidelines often seen in transportation information.

Acedillo (2023) highlighted the significance of reading in everyday tasks, estimating that students read for around 80% of their completed daily activities. This figure emphasizes the significance of reading, illustrating its usefulness in educational settings and everyday life. Reading is a significant activity essential for accomplishing academic objectives and successfully dealing with the difficulties of modern life. Tomas et al. (2021) argue that reading plays a crucial role in a child's educational development as it forms the basis for language proficiency and is an essential skill for success in the classroom.

Raising a person's literacy level may improve their quality of life since it directly impacts their ability to find employment and other aspects of their working life (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2008). Because literacy and academic accomplishment are closely related, one of the most important objectives for today's educators should be to develop well-read students who are capable of understanding and challenging what they read (Grove & Hauptfleisch, 1982; Moreillan, 2007).

Nevertheless, the educational system now faces the challenge of cultivating skilled readers. The Philippines' inadequate reading proficiency, resulting in the nation's low global position, underscores the limited educational advancements in cultivating capable and well-informed individuals. Furthermore, the imposition of pandemic lockdown measures significantly impacted students in the nation, as shown by recent research done by UNICEF. The study revealed that students in the Philippines had subpar reading abilities. In his study, Cayubit (2012) said that an inadequate level of reading competence might manifest in several forms, including mispronunciation and a diminished ability to comprehend text. Early deprivation of adequate support may detrimentally affect the child's cognitive, interpersonal, and emotional growth. According to statistics from the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, just 15% of school students can read basic text. This suggests that only three of every 20 individuals have had a formal education. The pandemic lockdown was shown to be a significant factor influencing this finding. Therefore, a project extension was devised. According to a recent study, enrichment reading programs are one of the applications that benefit reading comprehension, reading awareness, and expressive abilities (Goodman, 2007; Schreiber, 2003).

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) strive to bring about change in their community members by implementing extension programs and services. Nueva Vizcaya State University, one of the leading institutions in the Philippines, prioritizes Research and Extension Programs as one of its main focuses. Its overall mission includes carrying out extension services, as stated in RA 9402. The University offers many extension service programs and projects to benefit the community stakeholders. These initiatives aim to enhance the development of skills required for the efficient and effective transfer of information.

The College of Teacher Education (CTEd) is a college of NVSU- Bambang Campus, together with three others. One of the programs offered by the institution is the Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd). This program leads the extension project called "Munting Paaralan, Panghabang Buhay na Karunungan," which aims to serve elementary students and teachers. Starting in 2021, the BEEd department implemented a reading intervention program at a rural elementary school in Bambang, Nueva Vizcaya. This program expresses support for the Department of Education (DepEd) initiatives aimed at cultivating reading skills in all students. The initiative made an effort to cultivate a reading habit among students. Luz (2007) emphasized that many Filipino students need more reading habits for effective learning. According to her observation, the issue of illiteracy is the main reason why the Philippines needs more competitiveness in the global economy and why a significant portion of its population remains impoverished or only manages to avoid it.

Most children who get early intervention for reading challenges quickly acquire the ability to read fluently and understand their reading. Conversely, the absence of assistance to enhance a child's reading abilities might have long-lasting repercussions on their education. Cultivating a love for reading at a young age may enhance academic performance, broaden lexical knowledge, and bolster self-assurance in students.

Although higher education community extension activity is accessible, there is a lack of research examining its effect or result. Although no specific evaluation quantifies the societal influence of community programs (Peprah et al., 2017), most of the research papers released concentrate on students' growth and progress (Llenares & Espanola, 2015). In addition, few research efforts have evaluated the enduring advantages and social influence of extension projects (Felicen et al., 2014). Hence, an impact assessment of the project, conducted three years after its implementation and completion, is advantageous for evaluating the extent to which the initiative has improved the lives of its beneficiaries. This impact assessment research analyzed the beneficiaries' perception of the relevance and timeliness of the performed extension project throughout its three-year execution.

Research Questions

Specifically, it aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the respondents' level of assessment of the extension program in terms of relevance and timeliness?
2. Is there a significant difference in the respondents' assessment levels on the extension program in terms of relevance and timeliness?
3. Is there a significant difference in the respondents' assessment levels on the extension program during the years of implementation?

Methodology

This study used the quantitative research approach (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative research is collecting and analyzing numerical data to understand ideas, perspectives, or experiences. This design played a crucial role in revealing the efficiency of the extension program during the three-year implementation.

The participants comprised 93 elementary students and teachers from a rural elementary school in Bambang, Nueva Vizcaya, Philippines. The annual participation count is as follows: 28 respondents for 2021-2022, 30 for 2022-2023, and 35 for 2023-2024. The respondents were chosen randomly, according to the specified inclusion criteria: (1) being a teacher or student in a public elementary school; (2) having taken part in the extension activities; and (3) expressing willingness to participate. The area was selected based on the fact that extension activities are conducted therein.

The data collection process included the use of a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was derived from the University's training, activity, technical advisory/evaluation form. The questionnaire consists of two sections that focus on relevance and timeliness. The researcher obtained permission to conduct the study to collect relevant data by submitting a formal request letter to the Office of Schools Division Superintendent of Nueva Vizcaya, Philippines. Once the University and the SDO office had thoroughly examined the ethical aspects of the methodologies and procedures, they granted ethical clearance and issued the authorization to proceed. The researcher personally administered the questionnaire.

Before the data gathering, the participants were provided with a clear and concise explanation of the research's goal, objectives, and importance. They were requested to provide their signatures on the informed consent document. They were assured of their identity and the confidentiality of their replies. Participants were also instructed to provide honest answers to ensure the study's findings and conclusions were trustworthy and accurate.

The collected data underwent statistical analysis utilizing measures such as mean, independent t-test, and ANOVA. Interviews with the respondents were conducted to further validate the reliability of the results and their interpretation.

Results and Discussion

Respondents' level of assessment of the extension program in terms of relevance and timeliness

The data in Table 1 show that the respondents found the extension activities to be "very relevant," as shown by the overall mean of

4.54.

Table 1. *Level of Assessment on the Extension Program in terms of Relevance*

<i>Respondents</i>	<i>2021-2022</i>	<i>2022-2023</i>	<i>2023-2024</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Qualitative Description</i>
Students	4.52	4.63	4.77	4.64	Very Relevant
Teachers	4.01	4.75	4.53	4.43	Very Relevant
			Overall Mean	4.54	Very Relevant

The results imply that since the Philippines has been one of the countries affected by the pandemic, there is a need to focus on the students' reading skills since most of the beneficiaries were on the modular set-up during the lockdown. This also shows that both the students and teachers see the importance of the extension program over the years since it helps students improve their reading abilities, which is a crucial skill in the development of students' academic performance.

The results of national and international assessments, particularly on reading, show otherwise in terms of ranking. The respondents were able to find the significance of the extension program, particularly on reading activities, which is one of the key aspects in delivering quality education in Basic Education. An elementary student who reads and comprehends well can learn and be knowledgeable since understanding is possible.

The results are supported by Teacher A's remarks, "The project of NVSU is very appropriate since most of our students are pandemic babies. This will help not just the students but also us teachers because if our students can read and understand what they are reading, we are sure they are really learning." Student B also responded, "Natututo po kaming magbasa at kailangan namin ito kasi po nung lockdown, nahirapan po kaming mag-aral." (We are learning to read, and we need it because it was difficult for us to study during the lockdown.)

The relevance element of this rating may have been influenced by the study of the respondents' requests and needs. Various fields use needs assessments, and their effectiveness in guiding action at both macro and micro levels has been well demonstrated (Baker et al., 2012; Forrest et al., 2004; Loscalzo et al., 2017; Moreland et al., 2009).

Table 2. *Level of Assessment on the Extension Program in terms of Timeliness*

<i>Respondents</i>	<i>2021-2022</i>	<i>2022-2023</i>	<i>2023-2024</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Qualitative Description</i>
Students	4.64	4.73	4.53	4.63	Very Timely
Teachers	4.26	4.73	4.64	4.54	Very Timely
			Overall Mean	4.59	Very Timely

Table 2 shows that the respondents perceived the extension project as "very timely," as evidenced by the overall mean of 4.59.

The data could mean that the respondents find the extension activities to be immediate, given the present concern since the beneficiaries were affected by the pandemic and the lockdown. Because of the sudden close of schools during the peak of the pandemic and the results of the modular learning delivery mode, the respondents find the intervention essential to scaffold the students' abilities, particularly in reading.

The results also imply the need to conduct more timely extension activities to solve the gap caused by the pandemic in the education landscape. The continuous implementation of such activities could strengthen the quality of education in the Philippines and elevate the country's ranking in national and international assessments, such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

In the interview, Teacher D answered, "The extension project is very timely, kasi (because) the recent results of examinations tell us that students, especially the product of the pandemic, are having difficulties in reading." Student A also added, "Nahihirapan po kami nung pandemic mag-aral ng kami lang, kaya po maganda po na meron na kayo ngayon para po mas matuto po kami sa inyo at sa mga teachers po namin dito." (During the pandemic, we had a hard time studying by ourselves, so it is good that you are here now so that we can learn more from you and our teachers.)

The impact of COVID-19 on worldwide education may be deemed detrimental because many students are experiencing a temporary interruption in their education (Ramij & Sultana, 2020). This is why the project extension is timely for the present needs of the respondents.

Significant difference in the respondents' levels of assessment in terms of relevance and timeliness

Table 3. *Significant Difference in the Respondents' Levels of Assessment in terms of Relevance*

<i>Respondents</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
Students	4.64	93	0.91	0.41	Not significant
Teachers	4.43				

The data in Table 3 shows that the student respondents rated the extension program higher than the teacher respondents in terms of relevance, as evidenced in the means, 4.64 and 4.43, respectively. However, the two mean scores show no significant difference, as

evident in the t-computed value of 0.91 and the p-computed value of 0.41.

The results suggest that the extension program is perceived to be beneficial by both the direct beneficiaries and the teachers. This also implies the need for continuous partnership between Basic Education schools and NVSU.

Possible activities to be included may also target teachers, particularly on how to improve the teaching of reading and the teaching-learning in general. Other relevant extension activities aside from the brigada pagbasa for students may also include teacher trainings on strategies.

Teachers lack contact with students during the school closure. Therefore, they only contribute a little to students' education during these times (Atteberry & McEachin, 2021). These times may have a detrimental effect on past learning successes, according to the literature and ad hoc evidence (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2020). The discussion was interestingly advanced by Angrist et al. (2021), who said this effect also translates into a loss of learning chances. Therefore, even if the teachers did not directly benefit from the extension activities, they still think the gaps left by the pandemic may be filled.

Table 4. *Significant Difference on the Respondents' Levels of Assessment in terms of Timeliness*

Respondents	Mean	N	t-value	p-value	Remarks
Students	4.63	93	0.61	0.58	Not significant
Teachers	4.54				

Table 4 shows that there is no significant difference in the respondents' level of assessment of the extension project in terms of timeliness, as seen in the t-computed value of 0.61 and the p-computed value of 0.58. Both the students and teachers perceived the extension project as very timely, with a mean of 4.63 and 4.54, respectively.

The extension project is perceived as a need during the post-pandemic. Despite the little difference in the ratings of the students and teachers, the extension project was conducted at the right time. This could mean that the conduct of activities such as the extension project to cater to the current needs of the students and teachers is significant.

In addition, it is important to note that the students' rating, as the primary beneficiary, could imply that more extension activities should be implemented to improve students' literacy skills.

Despite this concerning state of education, a thorough examination indicates that specific abilities, such as reading proficiency, which call for regular practice sessions, appear especially vulnerable to deterioration during a period outside of school (Zimmerman et al., 2019; Cooper et al., 1996; Bergen et al., 2021). According to earlier studies, one of the short-term effects of attending an at-distance school is experiencing learning setbacks. These setbacks may result in long-term impairments in one's ability to read and write, especially for children with low accomplishments (Kuhfeld, 2022). From the standpoint of teachers and students, the conduct of the extension is at the appropriate time.

Significant difference in the respondents' levels of assessment on the extension program during the years of implementation

Table 5. *Significant Difference on the Levels of Assessment on Relevance during the Years of Implementation*

Year	Mean	N	f-value	p-value	Remarks
2021-2022	4.27	93	1.99	0.28	Not significant
2022-2023	4.69				
2023-2024	4.65				

The results in the table show that there is no significant difference in the respondents' level of assessment on the three-year implementation of the extension project in terms of relevance, as evident in the f-computed value of 1.99 and p-computed value of 0.28. Despite the little difference in the mean scores per year, 4.27 for SY 2021-2022, 4.69 for SY 2022-2023, and 4.65 for SY 2023-2024, the respondents still perceived the extension project as very relevant.

These data imply that the extension activities were successful during the three-year duration. The extension was sustained, particularly its relevance to the beneficiaries. Hence, a project's sustainability is crucial to determining its effectiveness over the years of its implementation. Though ratings vary, the data still suggest the significance of reading intervention activities to bridge gaps caused by factors such as the pandemic and the lockdown.

Teacher D responded, "Since we started our partnership, the impact on our students has continued. So, we hope that we can continue this extension activity since it is helpful to our students."

According to Tacbas et al. (2010), extension programs and services should be sustained or enhanced regarding skill training, pertinent seminar workshops, and capacity development.

Remarkably, community response and stakeholders' responsiveness are the primary determinants of the longevity of community extension initiatives rather than sponsors and funders (Llenares & Deocar, 2018). Collaborative efforts and cooperation among

colleagues enable the training to be provided effectively and successfully. To make extension programs viable and empowering, it would also be preferable to encourage collaborative extension (Mojares, 2015).

Table 6. *Significant Difference in the Levels of Assessment on Timeliness during the Years of Implementation*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>f-value</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
2021-2022	4.45	93	1.50	0.35	Not significant
2022-2023	4.73				
2023-2024	4.59				

Considering the respondents' levels of assessment of the extension project in terms of timeliness during the three-year implementation: 4.45 for 2021-2022, 4.73 for 2022-2023, and 4.59 for 2023-2024, the data in the table show that there is no significant difference in the levels of assessment in terms of timeliness, as evident in the computed *f*-value, 1.50, and computed *p*-value, 0.35.

The findings suggest that the respondents found the extension project conducted promptly during the three years of implementation. The project was sustained because of the current needs. This may also suggest the need to consider the sustainability of extension projects targeting not only students but teachers as well. Student B said in the interview, "Sana po tuloy tuloy yung pagpunta niyo parin sa amin lalo na po ngayon na kailangan ko at ng mga classmates ko ang pagtuturo niyo lalo na po sa pagbabasa." (I hope you keep coming to us, especially now that my classmates and I need your teaching, especially in reading.)

Davis (2020) highlighted the need to develop extension projects that are more resilient and efficient, capable of operating effectively even during crises.

Conclusions

The respondents assessed the extension project as very relevant and very timely. There is no significant difference in the evaluation levels between the students and teachers and in the evaluation levels throughout the three-year execution of the extension project.

The study's findings indicate the need to maintain the execution of prompt and relevant extension projects to enhance the standard of education in the Philippines and tackle the deficiencies resulting from the pandemic and lockdown in the educational domain. These initiatives may focus on students and teachers to improve student's abilities and performance in national and international examinations.

The BEE Department or the University may sustain the extension projects or may conduct studies that specifically target strategic intervention materials, which may assist researchers and teachers in enhancing literacy abilities. Partnership with other agencies or organizations is also encouraged.

Given that the most significant financial allocation is provided to the Department of Education (DepEd), the department may devise strategies to optimize the production of learning materials and books for student use.

Further studies have the capacity to address some constraints associated with this study's approach. This study used a quantitative research approach and included interviews to validate the results. Future research may consider using a qualitative design to get a more comprehensive understanding of the effect of extension activities. Finally, other researchers may consider doing action research to evaluate the effects of the extension project and the effectiveness of the materials and intervention activities.

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