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Intensified Project REAL: an Answer to the Literacy Gaps of Grade School Learners in Rural Cebu, Philippines

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Abstract

This study examined Project REAL (Read Every Day and Learn) as a reading intervention program for Grade 3 pupils at Samboan Central Elementary School, Poblacion, Samboan, Cebu. This experimental study used a complete enumeration to survey all Grade 3 pupils. The research uses the standardized Phil-IRI Grade 3 Selected Passage in the Pretest to measure reading skills. Researchers collected data pre-test, during the Project REAL intervention, and post-test. Statistical analysis consisted of descriptive statistics for student and reading profiles, as well as a T-test to determine pre- and post-intervention reading disparities. Project REAL improved grade 3 students' reading comprehension, demonstrating that it may erase literacy disparities. Thus, strengthening Project REAL may help primary school literacy.

Keywords: *Rural, Philippines, School Project, Literacy Gaps, Grade School Learners*

INTRODUCTION

Literacy has a vital role in education, freedom, and social progress in today's linked society (Călinescu, 2023; Murray, 2021; UNESCO, 2021). Proficiency in reading and writing is of utmost importance for people all over the globe as it empowers them to get information, communicate proficiently, and engage actively in their societies (Barton & Lennon, 2020; Hidayati, et al., 2021). Despite the many benefits of reading, there are still big problems, both around the world and in people's own neighborhoods. These problems, along with new trends and changing educational environments, show how important it is to keep researching and stepping in to close reading gaps and make sure everyone has equal access to good education.

Literacy is still a big problem on a world scale, with millions of people still not being able to read and write (Lat, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). About 773 million people around the world don't know how to read or write, and two-thirds of those are women (UNESCO, 2021). Literacy results are affected by the problems and changes that happen in each community. Socioeconomic factors, regional settings, language diversity, and educational tools are all very important in determining how well and how quickly someone learns to read and write (Koyuncu & Firat, 2020). Disparities in access to quality education persist in several regions, perpetuating poverty and inequality (Koyuncu & Firat, 2020). Furthermore, rapid technical advancements and the extensive accessibility of digital media provide both

opportunities and challenges for the development of literacy. In order to ensure that individuals possess the necessary digital literacy skills for success in the 21st century, it is imperative to develop novel approaches (Luyten, 2022).

Despite ongoing efforts to address literacy issues, significant gaps in research hinder our ability to determine the most effective methods for promoting reading and writing skills (Shara et al., 2020). A lot of research has been done on different parts of reading training, but we still don't fully understand how socioeconomic factors, educational policies, teaching methods, and the unique traits of each student affect each other (Abril, 2022; Shara et al., 2020). Moreover, additional research is necessary to examine the influence of digital media on literacy, the involvement of parents in this setting, and the efficacy of technology-enhanced learning tools. The conducted research will provide significant data that may be used to substantiate well-informed adjustments (Luyten, 2022).

Completing these study gaps is crucial since reading plays a pivotal role in individual autonomy, economic advancement, and societal cohesion (Yan & Cai, 2022). Collaboration among researchers, educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders is crucial in advancing literacy equality and fostering inclusive school settings. This may be achieved by gaining a deeper understanding of the many elements that influence literacy development and devising impactful intervention techniques (Yan & Cai, 2022). The study of literacy is crucial not just for academic reasons, but also because it influences the trajectory of future

generations and the course of world progress in the face of emerging challenges like as the COVID-19 pandemic and the digital revolution.

Literature Review

Literacy is defined as the ability to comprehend written text, express oneself through writing, communicate verbally, and actively listen. These abilities enable people to engage with and comprehend the environment they live in. These talents enable learners to express thoughts effectively, comprehend others' perspectives with care, acquire information, and gain insights into the world around them.

Developing proficient reading skills is a crucial aspect of a child's education. Reading consists of two crucial components: comprehending the text and effectively identifying words. Proficient reading entails the ability to rapidly deduce the meaning of unfamiliar words and possess a comprehensive understanding of word meanings.

Conversely, the ability to replicate is required for writing. In order to cultivate a lasting passion for reading, it is essential for children to acquire these fundamental abilities. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated disparities in reading abilities among pupils, necessitating prompt and immediate action. The dissemination of information drew attention to disparities in schooling and had a detrimental impact on underprivileged pupils, resulting in a decline in their reading proficiency over the course of a year.

The primary objective should be to promptly and precisely identify significant areas of educational deficiency. Prioritizing evaluations specifically relevant to the classroom content is crucial, as it provides teachers with valuable insights for their future actions. more than passive film consumption and information acquisition; it requires active engagement and participation from students. It is necessary for them to continuously engage in cognitive processes, actively use their existing knowledge to derive significance from the material, and establish connections. Furthermore, the availability of data and the ability to adapt easily greatly simplify the lives of learners. We facilitate this by providing educators with immediate digital instructional materials tailored to individual students' progress and achievements. Furthermore, there is compelling data to substantiate the effectiveness of this approach. According to the official website of the Philippine Information Agency (PIA) in Quezon City, the Department of Education (DepEd) has announced

its intention to develop a framework for a learning recovery plan. This is due to

an increasing number of institutions resuming inperson instruction. DepEd emphasized the critical nature of ensuring the efficacy of solutions to enable accelerated learning and universal access. The framework encompasses several measures, including the extension of school sessions, the elongation of the school year, the establishment of learning support centers in educational institutions and other learning venues, the initiation of summer programs for remedial and intervention learning, and the recruitment of additional learning support assistants (Boliver, 2022). The Department of Education mandates schools use the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI). This application assesses students' reading abilities. The Department of Education (DepEd) has required schools to use the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) for reading assessments. Phil-IRI emphasizes the need for carefully strategizing and executing literacy improvement efforts, as stated by Abril et al. (2022). In August 2017, Phil-IRI tools assessed the reading proficiency of third-grade students in Quezon City schools.

The study aimed to develop an educational intervention plan using the data obtained from the descriptive poll research approach. In order for a student to improve their reading proficiency, they must be able to effortlessly comprehend and interpret examination information. This would enhance their reading proficiency. Students have the opportunity to peruse a wide array of testing resources, therefore enhancing their comprehension of test questions and other reading materials. It is crucial for individuals to observe them. Increasing the amount of time they dedicate to reading books will enhance their comprehension of written language. For instance, some students within the same class may possess the ability to read at a quicker pace compared to their peers, but others may lack the ability to read altogether. The variability in pupils' reading levels poses a challenge for teachers and raises questions about their effectiveness as educators. This is precisely why educators emphasize the importance of reading in the school setting. Teachers can use the Phil-IRI review tool in the classroom to assess students' reading proficiency and their ability to articulate their reading abilities.

Project REAL seeks to address literacy learning disparities through scholarly research and publications, taking into account the impact of COVID-19 on traditional teaching methods. Bendanillo et al. (2023) examined the phenomenological experiences of online

learners to determine the benefits and drawbacks associated with this form of education. According to

Bhardwaj et al. (2020), understanding how students experience virtual classrooms might help Project REAL develop personalized digital interventions for each learner. Project REAL utilizes educational technology to promote remote learning and literacy sessions, with a specific focus on improving accessibility in low-resource regions. Cajucom et al. (2022) emphasized that employing sophisticated pedagogical techniques and providing sufficient guidance enable instructors to effectively adjust to changing educational landscapes. This support empowers educators to apply evidence-based approaches to enhance literacy in blended learning environments, especially when confronted with difficulties in providing specialized instruction, particularly in mathematics, amid the epidemic (Cariaga, 2022; 2023). Halaissi et al. (2023) suggested incorporating innovative and unconventional methods to promote hands-on learning and analytical thinking in literacy programs. This study provides evidence that Project REAL successfully educates children in the ideas and methods of social entrepreneurship, resulting in improved proficiency in reading, problem-solving, and social-emotional competencies. Through their study, Ginoo et al. (2023) deepened our understanding of psychology and its relevance to academics. This study investigates the correlation between arithmetic anxiety, resilience, and academic achievement in seventh-grade children. The study primarily focuses on teaching, but its findings also have consequences for reading. In today's world, Cariaga et al. (2023) emphasized the critical importance of digital literacy for children in order to meet their comprehensive learning demands and strengthen their academic resilience.

Locally, the COVID-19 pandemic has hampered Grade 3 pupils at Samboan Central Elementary School, Samboan District, in reading and writing; therefore, our main challenge is finding ways to help them. It hurts students' reading and comprehension. Multiple connected factors contribute to their low reading level, creating several, often insurmountable, learning hurdles. This matter is of great importance and requires prompt action to address the problems with educational success in schools. Samboan Central Elementary School is prioritizing programs, initiatives, and activities that aim to enhance the reading proficiency of Grade 3 students. This attempt is consistent with the Department of Education's goal of nurturing a strong and lasting nation. The school launched Project REAL (Read Everyday and Learn) with the goal of addressing reading inadequacies among Grade 3 pupils. The

project requires cooperation between internal and external partners to

encourage multitasking and aid the learner. This is consistent with our school improvement plan.

Teaching children how to use digital devices may help Project REAL integrate digital and conventional literacy, despite their seemingly unrelated nature. This integration teaches students how to critically examine electronic content. Through empirical research, Project REAL greatly improves literacy. This method builds links between socioeconomic, psychological, and technological components. Project REAL seeks to improve children's academic performance and adaptation in a fast-changing world by promoting socio-emotional resilience, digital literacy, and creative educational methodologies.

Project REAL suggests that parental involvement and the implementation of subject-specific teaching approaches have a positive impact on enhancing children's reading abilities. Encouraging the promotion of teamwork between home and school. Project REAL is a comprehensive strategy that aims to tackle and diminish disparities in literacy through multiple research studies. It ensures that everyone has an equal opportunity to access high-quality education during the COVID-19 epidemic by using technology, implementing new teaching methods, and fostering collaboration.

Methodology

The pupils' reading comprehension improved through Project REAL (Read Every Day and Learn) in every remedial class, utilizing selected reading passages for better Phil IRI results. The study adhered to a proper methodology, taking into account the research design, location, and respondents. The study employs instruments that are both valid and reliable, follows a systematic data gathering procedure, and employs statistical tools for data analysis.

Research design

This study used an experimental design because its main purpose was to determine the effectiveness of Project REAL in addressing literacy gaps among Grade 3 learners. The study will use a total enumeration to determine the respondents.

Locale of the Study

The researchers conducted the study at Samboan Central Elementary School, Poblacion, Samboan, Cebu.

Respondents to the study

The study's respondents were Grade 3 students at Samboan Central Elementary School. Both male and female learners are part of the study. There were 40 male learners and 30 female learners.

Research Instrument

To determine the pupils reading performance, a standardized questionnaire in Phil-IRI Grade 3 Selected Passage in Pretest was used, both silent and oral.

Validity and Reliability of the Test Instrument

The survey questionnaire used in assessing the pupils' reading and comprehension levels was the standardized PHIL IRI Form used in public elementary schools specifically for the reading and comprehension standard competencies. Hence, there was no validation and reliability testing.

Data collection procedure

We sent request letters to the superintendent and the principal of the school before conducting the datagathering procedure, requesting permission to obtain the Phil-IRI results (pre-test) and discussing the purpose, significance, and details of the study. The treatment group then started with Project REAL as a reading intervention. We immediately retrieved the post-test results and tabulated them. We statistically treated the collected data according to the set objectives.

Statistical treatment and analysis

We analyzed the data using the statistical tools included in descriptive statistics. For SOP 1, we used frequency and percentage distribution, which aimed to determine pupils' profiles in terms of age and gender when taken as a whole during the Phil-Iri pretest. SOP 2, which aimed to determine the pupil's reading profile based on the Phil-Iri Pretest result before the intervention, used frequency and percentage distribution. SOP 3, which aimed to determine the pupil's reading profile based on the Phil-Iri Post test result after the intervention, also used frequency and percentage distribution. A T-test was used in SOP 4, which determines the significant difference in the learners' reading level before and after the intervention. We gathered, tabulated, and processed the data shortly after the Grade 3 learners at Samboan

Central Elementary School, Poblacion, Samboan, Cebu, responded, demonstrating that intensifying Project REAL is the solution to closing literacy gaps.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part presents the data findings with its analyses and interpretation.

Age. The age of the respondent is presented on table 1. There were 41 or 58.57% pupils who are 8 years old and 29 or 41.43% who are 9 years old. Data showed that the majority of respondents were 9 years old.

Table 1. *Distribution of Respondents according to age*

Age	Frequency	Percent
8 years old	41	58.57
9 years old	29	41.43
Total	70	100

Sex. Table 2 shows the distribution or respondents when grouped according to sex. There were 38 or 54.29% male and 32 or 45.71% female. It implied that there were more male respondents than females.

Table 2. *Pupil's Distribution According to Sex*

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	38	54.29
Female	32	45.71
Total	70	100

Pre-test Word recognition. Table 3 presents the pupils' level of word recognition and reading comprehension based on the oral reading profile in Phil-IRI Pre-test. Data showed that there were 22 or 31.43% frustrated, 6 or 8.57% independent, 20 or 28.57 instructional, and 22 or 31.43 non-readers. The Post-test of the pupils based on Phil-IRI Oral reading is presented on Table 4.

Table 3. *Pupils Level of word Recognition and reading comprehension based on the oral reading profile in Phil-IRI Pretest.*

Oral Reading Level (Pretest)	Frequency	Percent
Frustration	22	31.43
Independent	6	8.57
Instructional	20	28.57
Non-Reader	22	31.43
Total	70	100

Post-test Word recognition. Table 4 shows the pupils' Level of Word Recognition and reading comprehension based on the oral reading profile in Phil-IRI Post-test. It implied that there were 5 or 7.14 % frustrations, 41 or 58.57% independent, 24 or 34.29% instructional, and 0 or 0% non-reader. This implied that after intensifying the Project REAL majority of the pupils improved their literacy skills, especially the Frustration and Nonreaders.

Table 4. *Pupils Level of Word Recognition and reading comprehension based on the oral reading profile in Phil-IRI Post-test*

Oral Reading Level (Pretest)	Frequency	Percent
Frustration	5	7.14
Independent	41	58.57
Instructional	24	34.29
Non-Reader	0	0
Total	70	100

Significant Difference on Pupil's Reading Profile. As shown in Table 5, the pupil's reading profile during the Pre-Test has Mean Score of 17.50 and a Post-Test Mean Score of 17.50 with t-test value of 4.52 and p-value of 0.020 which led into a decision of Reject Ho and a Conclusion of Significant. It implied that there is a significant difference on the pupil's reading profile before and after the reading intervention, meaning the Project REAL is very effective to uplift or improve the Pupil's Reading Skills.

Table 5. *Significant Difference on Pupil's Reading Profile before and after the Intervention*

Difference on the Pupil's Reading Profile before and after the Intervention	Mean	T-Test	P-Value	Decision	Conclusion
Pre-Test-17.50 Post Test-17.50	17.50	4.52	0.020	Reject Ho	Significant

Summary of Findings

The study demonstrates the efficacy of Project REAL in enhancing the reading abilities of 8 and 9-year-old kids. A large proportion of the pupils were 8 years old, while a substantial number were 9 years old. The gender distribution showed a small predominance of male pupils (54.29%) compared to female pupils (45.71%).

The preliminary assessment indicated that 31.43% of the students were encountering difficulties in their reading skills, with another 31.43% experiencing

frustration, 31.43% unable to read, and 28.57% performing at an appropriate instructional level. Just 8.57% of the students demonstrated the ability to read independently. This underscores the necessity for intervention, as the majority of pupils were not attaining the expected levels of reading competency.

The post-test findings revealed a significant enhancement in the students' reading skills following the implementation of Project REAL. The percentage of students experiencing frustration decreased from 31.43% to 7.14%, and there were no students who were unable to read. The proportion of autonomous readers had a substantial rise from 8.57% to 58.57%, while the educational level observed a small increase to 34.29%. The alterations observed suggest that the intervention had a significant beneficial effect, raising a considerable number of students from a state of struggling readers to levels of independence and instruction.

The statistical analysis validated the observed improvements, as indicated by a t-test value of 4.52 and a p-value of 0.020. This confirms the presence of a statistically significant change in reading profiles before and after the intervention. This is compelling proof that Project REAL was successful in enhancing the reading proficiency of the students.

Inductive observations indicate that treatments focused on early literacy play a crucial role. By addressing students at a young age, these interventions can result in significant improvements in reading skills, which are essential for their overall academic achievement. Project REAL is a highly inclusive and effective initiative that demonstrates its ability to bring about significant change, regardless of gender. Nevertheless, the fact that 34.29% of students are still at the instructional level indicates that ongoing assistance is required to ensure that all students achieve complete reading autonomy.

CONCLUSION

The reading abilities of 8 and 9-year-old children were greatly enhanced by Project REAL, as demonstrated by a notable rise in the percentage of independent readers and a decrease in the number of pupils facing reading challenges. The intervention demonstrated efficacy irrespective of gender, as evidenced by statistical analysis which confirmed a substantial and meaningful improvement in reading proficiency following the intervention. Although there have been improvements, the fact that a significant proportion of children are still

performing at the instructional level highlights the necessity for ongoing assistance in order to ensure that all students attain complete reading independence. These findings emphasize the crucial significance of early literacy interventions in promoting academic achievement.

Editor's note: Authors declared no conflict of interest in this study.

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