

Improving Elementary Learners' Reading Skills through Teacher Capacitation: An Evaluative Study

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Abstract. Elementary learners' reading skills need to be improved in all subject areas, as reading is said to be the avenue of all learning. Since every teacher is a reading teacher, teacher capacitization is generally viewed as vital in equipping and empowering teachers to contribute to the learners' reading ability. This study investigated the impact of capacitating teachers in teaching reading and reading skills and its effects on the improvement of learners' reading proficiency as shown by Phil-IRI post-test results and in their academic performance. The study "Improving Elementary Learners' Reading Skills through Teacher Capacitation: An Evaluative Study" implemented in Luinab Elementary School, Philippines, is an offshoot of the extension project. Findings revealed that before the teacher capacitization activities, the majority of the learners belonged to the frustration level. After a series of seminar workshops, webinar-virtual-workshop, instructional materials design, outputs presentation, and classroom visitation-observation, PHIL-IRI results showed that the majority of learners from frustration level were elevated to instructional and independent levels which implies improved reading performance in their reading proficiency. Moreover, a slight increase in learners' academic performance can be due to learners' better reading abilities as a result of teachers' capacitization intervention programs.

Keywords: elementary learners; reading skills; teacher capacitation; evaluative study

1. Introduction

The ability to read is one of the most essential educational outcomes of primary education. According to the DepEd Memorandum No. 173 Series of 2019, the overall results of the national assessments reveal that there are many early-grade learners struggling to meet the learning standards in early language, literacy, and numeracy. In addition, it was found out that there are low-performing students who could not comprehend (read and understand) Math and Science word problems that are written in English, hence, they were unable to demonstrate their knowledge in these content areas. Elementary and high school learners are still deficient in literary skills both in languages and content areas, more so in reading skills.

Per Program for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2018) results, the Philippines came in last of 79 countries that participated in a global survey of reading comprehension, a threat to the educational system. Learners' poor performance in the national examinations called for the empowerment of teachers to improve on this academic aspect.

To close the gaps mentioned above, it is necessary to increase each learner's proficiency; this can be achieved through the teacher's capacitation. Teacher capacitation was aimed at improving learners' reading skills and reading comprehension, and it resembles a professional learning community (PLC), providing reflexive dialogical space, based on action research approaches, for engagement in pedagogical learning (Feldman, 2014) and teacher capacitation, plus voluntary participation, and collaboration that effect change (Themane & Thobejane, 2017).

Capacitating the teachers elevates teachers' comfort level, enriches their teaching experience, and improves students' learning and academic achievement. In this study, 32 elementary teachers participated in an extension project by attending a series of seminar-workshops: 2 major seminar-workshops, non-graded classroom observation, participation in the Department of Education activities, Reading Camp and National Learning Camp, school-based Spelling Contest, and training for instructional materials design.

Geared on SDG 4-quality education, the extension project of capacitating teachers, entitled "Harnessing Reading Skills a cross Subject Areas" believed that equipping and empowering teachers would have an impact on learners' performance in school and life in general, towards improved reading and reading comprehension skills. Dewey (in Sharma & Monteiro, 2016) in his essay, "Education and Social Change," progressivism was observed, with society constantly changing, and education reflecting, generating, and guiding social change (Sharma & Moneiro, 2016).

Considering the crucial importance of the teacher's role as the facilitator of reading instruction in the development of reading comprehension skills of the students; thus, this research was conducted.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to evaluate the impact of teacher capacitation project on learners' reading performance in Luinab Elementary School (LES), and sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the learners' level of reading proficiency before the teacher capacitation project?
2. What were the activities undertaken to capacitate teachers in improving learners' reading skills?
3. How does the teacher capacitation project impact learners' proficiency in reading as shown by:
 - 3.1 PHIL IRI 2019 results?
 - 3.2 Academic Grade Performance in all subject areas in three grading periods?

1.2 Significance of the Project

This paper presents that this capacitation project for teachers is significant in the quest to help improve the reading skills of learners by conducting training-workshops for teachers. This project conceptualizes the intent of the team wherein teachers are empowered to

provide necessary competencies in reading, learners will also perform better or satisfactorily.

Further, it envisioned to contribute ease to the national problem of Filipino learners who are reported to have poor reading comprehension skills and continue academic pursuits, specifically in the teaching-learning how to read, how to read with comprehension prerequisite to learners' higher level of academic progress.

2. Review of Related Literature

The sharpening of reading skills is highly relevant for young learners to develop and master both knowledge and skills in the different subject areas, thereby improving learners' academic performance and maximizing multiple potentials and skills, referring to Pretorius' (2000) assertion that learners need to be good readers in order to be able to "read to learn", and that reading is important for learning because it gives readers independent access to information, in an information-driven society. It is also a means constructing of meaning and acquisition of new knowledge. Pretorius (2000) found that learners had distressingly low reading levels and slow reading speeds, but were better at making inferences, and still performing academically, with evidence of differences in reading ability in relation to academic performance. On the other hand, according to Vaughn et. al., (2019), students who read proficiently read more text and acquire a broader vocabulary and understanding of content-related constructs, advantaging them not only in knowledge acquisition but also more broadly in general reading comprehension.

Students who demonstrate reading comprehension difficulties read less text and score lower on achievement tests in part because of underdeveloped background knowledge and vocabulary Ahmed et al. (2016) Since the teacher's role is important in encouraging student participation in reading skills at any level, and in any subject area, teachers would have a great impact on motivating learners, specifically in reading because most of the learners hesitate to read except those that are short and simple to understand. As such, motivation is vital for learners to develop creative thinking skills and flourishing self-confidence by expressing ideas freely in the English language in all subject areas. Batocael & Noble (2014) asserted that teachers admit children in Grade 1 with expected language and literacy skills needed to cope in formal academic settings, but that is not the case for many children. Anciado and Aguilar (2019) agreed that integration of reading in the content area is crucial in developing literacy, thus collaboration of language learning and content area purposively improves learners' reading and concept understanding abilities in the classroom.

In another study on "Learners Improve in Reading Comprehension by Learning How to Teach Reading Strategies" Helvicoch (2019) emphasized that not only regular teachers, but aspiring teachers too, lack the needed knowledge about scientifically based programs, a challenging issue in teacher education. Researchers agree that future teachers' knowledge about scientifically based reading programs and ability to teach reading strategies effectively become the essential presuppositions for learners to become good readers (Al Otaiba, Lake, Greulich, Folsom, & Guidry, 2012; Podhajski et al., 2009). A parallel contention by Jose & Raja (2014) delved into classroom teachers' role in helping learners to improve reading, teachers are careful in avoiding hindrances and in making their wards' effective and successful reading capabilities. Inasmuch as teachers are the prime sources for learners to cultivate reading habits, their advice and encouragement will help the learners move a step further in developing their attitude toward reading, referring to Balinasetal (2017).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study utilized the descriptive type of research. This design is more appropriate because the researchers' primary goal was to characterize the teacher-capacitation activities and determine whether this intervention had a substantial impact on the students' reading proficiency level. Moreover, this study also described the learners' academic performance after the intervention.

3.2 Participants

The participants were composed of 30 purposively chosen teachers and 721 learners in Grades 2 through 6 in Luinab Elementary School of Iligan City, Philippines.

3.3. Instruments

Philippine Informal Reading Inventory. The 2019 Phil-IRI results from Luinab Elementary School, Iligan City were utilized in this study. The Phil-IRI is a revised assessment tool that consists of graded passages. It is administered to individual learners to determine their reading level. This assessment enables teachers to determine whether learners are reading above or below their grade levels, thereby allowing them to tailor their instructions to meet the specific needs of each student.

In this study, only the performance of the learners in silent reading was assessed using the Phil-IRI graded passages for silent reading which consist of speed reading and comprehension tasks (Llego, 2018; DepEd Order No. 14 s. 2018).

Table 1: Phil-IRI Silent Reading Test Criteria

Reading Levels	Reading Speed – Word Per Minute (WPM)	Comprehension
Independent	Fast Readers – 100 and above	90-100% correct answers
Instructional	Average Readers – 61 to 99	75-89% correct answers
Frustration	Slow Readers – 60 and below	74% and below correct answers

Table 1 below shows how learners can be classified into independent, instructional, and frustration levels in silent reading. The independent level is the highest level at which a reader has adequate background knowledge of the topic and can access text very quickly and with no or very few errors while the instructional level is the level at which a reader is not independent, but has adequate background knowledge for a topic, and can access text quickly few errors. The frustration level includes text for which a reader does not have an adequate background level for a topic and/or cannot meet criteria for instructional levels of accuracy and rate. (DepEd Order No. 14 s. 2018; Llego, 2018).

The level of reading speed and reading comprehension of the learners were computed using the following formula:

$$\text{Reading Speed} = \frac{\text{no. of words read}}{\text{reading time in seconds}} \times 60$$

$$\text{Reading Comprehension} = \frac{\text{no. of correct answers}}{\text{no. of total items}} \times 100$$

Grades. Grades reflected in the report cards were used to determine the academic performance of learners in all subject areas.

3.4 Procedure

A letter of permission was prepared for the school principal where the study was conducted. This letter of permission asked the school principal to allow the researchers for data collection in the school. Upon approval, the data on learners' reading proficiency levels were gathered through the Phil-IRI Assessment tool while learners' academic performance was gathered from the report cards which reflected the grades of the learner in all subjects.

Intervention to capacitate teachers in improving learners' reading proficiency was designed in major training-workshop matrices. Training-workshop A highlighted the training on Reading, Reading Strategies, and Reading Comprehension. It followed the training design from a revisit of the Theories in Reading, on Beginning Readers, the role and implications of Psychological Readiness in the classroom. Outputs of the training required the design of lessons with reading strategies integrated.

Matrix B of the training-workshop was on Facilitating-Learning for Comprehension Development, on sustaining the Building Blocks for Reading Comprehension, on Improving Reading Comprehension, and on Differentiated Design and 21st Century Literature upholding Localization. Other activities include assistance for teachers in the conduct of Summer Reading Camp, peer consultation, classroom visitation, and Instructional materials Design and Critiquing.

3.5 Data Analysis

Frequency, Percentage Distribution, and Mean were used to describe the results of learners' reading proficiency level and academic performance in all subject areas.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Learners' Reading Proficiency Level before the Teacher Capacitation Project

Table 2: Learners' reading proficiency level before the teacher capacitation project

Grade Level	Frustration Level	%	Instructional Level	%	Independent Level	%	Total
Grade 2	88	56.77	36	23.23	31	20.00	155
Grade 3	94	72.87	28	21.71	7	5.43	129
Grade 4	96	73.28	31	23.66	4	3.05	131
Grade 5	99	70.71	39	27.86	2	1.43	140
Grade 6	91	58.33	54	34.62	11	7.05	156
Total	468	65.82	188	26.44	55	7.74	711

Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage distribution of learners' reading skills ability. The results indicate that in terms of their reading proficiency, the majority of the learners (65.82%) belonged to the frustration level which implies that the computed value for comprehension is 74% and below. This means that the pupils show withdrawal from reading situations by refusing to read and that these pupils were classified as slow readers.

Furthermore, about 188 learners (26.44%) belonged to instructional which reflects a computed value of 75% to 89%, and are classified as average readers while only 55 or 7.74% of the learners were able to reach the independent level of reading proficiency which denotes 90% to 100% computed value of comprehension and are classified as fast readers. When taken per year level, 70% to 74% of the learners in grades 3, 4, and 5

belonged to the frustration level. Hence, the results disclosed a notion that the reading proficiency level of learners was still at the frustration level. Thus, learners' reading ability needs to be improved since there were only a few of them who could read independently and with ease without the help and guidance of the teacher. This is consistent with the PISA (2018) results disclosing the Philippines as the lowest in rank of the 79 surveyed countries. It may imply that Filipino learners are struggling in terms of following instructions from a manual, finding out when, where, and why of an event, and communicating with others for a specific transaction.

In the study of Myles, Hilgenfeld, Barnhill, Griswold, Hagiwara, and Simpson (2002), they gave overviews of the mean difference scores in each of the areas of PHIL-IRI. In all areas except one (Frustration Reading level), participants' reading levels were lower than their actual grade levels.

4.2 Activities Undertaken to Capacitate Teachers in Improving Learners' Reading Proficiency

Table 3: Activities undertaken to capacitate teachers in improving learners' reading proficiency

A. 1st Training-Workshop on Reading, Reading Strategies, and Reading Comprehension	
Mode of Conduct	Face-to-Face
No. of Participants	30
Date	Topics
April 5, 2019	A Revisit of the Theories in Reading Beginning Reading: A retrospect for 21 st Century Learners The Role and the Implications of Psychological Readiness in the Classroom The Teaching of Reading
April 6, 2019	Reading Strategies across Subject Areas Sample Lesson Plan with Strategies Integration
B. Seminar-Workshop on Facilitating Learning for Comprehension Development	
Mode of Conduct	Face-to-Face
No. of participants	30
Date	Topic
November 27, 2019	A Revisit and Clarification of Extension Objectives
November 29, 2019	Sustaining the Building Blocks for Reading Comprehension Improving Reading Comprehension through Understanding Riddles Differentiated Activities design
December 4, 2019	The Story Strategy for Pupils The Performance or Output Assessment The 21 st Century Literature Upholding Localization
C. Other Activities	
Date:	
April 2019	Summer Reading Camp
May-December 2019	Consultation, visitation, classroom observation & peer critiquing
June –July 2019	School Visitation & Classroom Observation
August 25, 27, September 1, 2019	Instructional Materials Design and critiquing per Grade Level Presentation of Outputs

Table 3 shows the matrix of the teacher capacitation through seminar-workshops. The matrix is in sets A, B, and C. In Set A, the topics given to the participating teachers in the first seminar-workshop conducted, six (6) fundamental topics that serve as the cornerstone, and a revisit of theories in teaching reading. This seminar-workshop aimed to retool or

upskill teachers with a necessary paradigm in teaching reading and in developing or improving their learners' reading comprehension skills.

The second seminar workshop which is Set B had topics given to the participating teachers in which seven (7) topics were aimed to encapsulate the theme, "Liberating the Teachers, Empowering the Pupils." This further aimed to sustain the focus of the teachers to utilize strategies in developing reading skills not only in English or Reading subjects but also in all subject areas. Table 2 further shows that sessions were conducted on a half-day schedule to address the challenge of conflict of schedules and availability of time.

To augment and do follow-up for monitoring and supervision for the entire capacitation project for the teachers, a matrix of activities like consultation, visitation, classroom observation and peer critiquing, and cooperation in the holding of Brigada Eskwela and Summer Reading Camp were all included as shown to comprise the Set C activities.

The conduct of training-seminar and webinar workshops as a major capacitation activity was perceived to be important and helpful for the teachers as shown by their evaluation ratings. As a certain capacitation framework is primarily rooted in teachers' objectives, it has also to be designed to cater to their needs. In fact, before the implementation of a teacher capacitation activity, a framework for such specifically on capacitating teachers in teaching reading will be created out of the adjudged best teaching reading strategies and teaching reading resources (Espiritu, 2019).

Generally believed, teacher capacitation would equip teachers and allow them to explore and implement the teaching-learning process with confidence and student-oriented success. In the study of Aguilar and Anciado (2019), results revealed that the key to improving the learning competencies of the learners is to enhance the most important skill in the classroom which is reading, and as stressed in the event in the teaching-learning process, once the teachers are capacitated, the learners are also capacitated.

4.3 Learners' Reading Proficiency Level after the Implementation of the Teacher Capacitation Project

Table 4: Learners' reading proficiency level after the implementation of the teacher capacitation project

Grade Level	Test	Frustration Level	%	Instructional Level	%	Independent Level	%	% of increase	Total
Grade 2	Pre-test	88	56.77	36	23.23	31	20.00	20.00	155
	Post-test	27	17.42	66	42.58	62	40.00		155
Grade 3	Pre-test	94	60.65	28	18.06	7	4.52	24.51	129
	Post-test	23	14.84	61	39.35	45	29.03		129
Grade 4	Pre-test	96	61.94	31	20.00	4	2.58	55.13	131
	Post-test	19	12.26	21	13.55	91	58.71		131
Grade 5	Pre-test	99	63.87	39	25.16	2	1.29	28.41	140
	Post-test	15	9.68	79	50.97	46	29.68		140
Grade 6	Pre-test	91	58.71	54	34.84	11	7.10	31.61	156
	Post-test	27	17.42	69	44.52	60	38.71		156
Total	Pre-test	468	65.82	188	26.44	55	7.74	35.02	711
	Post-test	111	15.61	296	41.63	304	42.76		711

Table 4 shows the results of pupils' reading proficiency before and after the intervention. The findings demonstrated an increased number of learners in all grade levels who perform better in reading. Moreover, there is an increase of 20.00% of Grade 2 learners who belonged to the independent level, an increase of 24.51% in Grade 3, 55.13% in Grade 4, 28.41% in Grade 5, and 35.02% in Grade 6. All in all, there is a 35.02% increase in learners who belonged to the independent level as demonstrated in the post-test. This implies that the learners can understand and access text very quickly and with very few errors. Moreover, there is a significant decrease in the number of pupils at frustration level across grade levels while an increased number of pupils were found at the instructional level in the post-test.

The data, therefore, suggest that the interventions provided such as the seminar workshops, classroom observations, and consultations enabled teachers to support the learners in improving their reading ability. In the study of Luciano (2019) which described the performance of pupils in the Phil-IRI after the intervention, there was a huge improvement for the learners in reading.

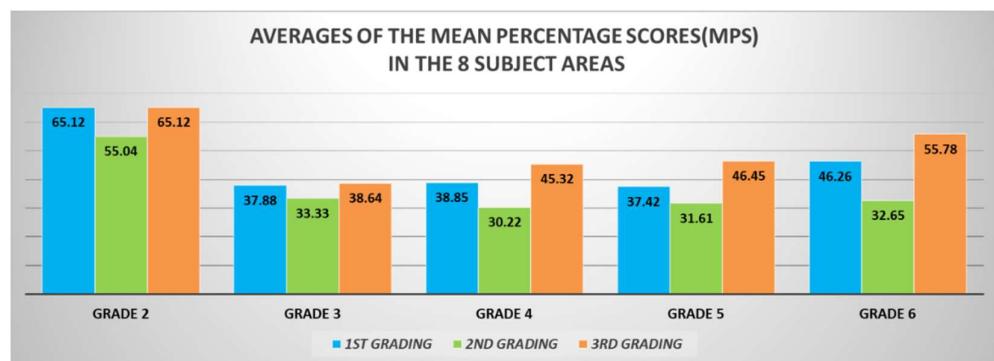


Figure 1: LES Learners' Academic Performance in all Subject Areas

With regard to academic performance, the mean percentage score (MPS) of all subject areas is shown in the graph above. It can be gleaned from the findings that all the MPS results of the 3rd grading period in each grade level are higher compared to the 1st and 2nd grading periods except for Grade 2 in which the results of MPS are the same as the 1st grading. Moreover, the overall MPS results showed that there is an increase of 14.08 from the 2nd grading to the 3rd grading period after the teacher capacitation activity. These indicate a slight increase in learners' performance which also improves their reading proficiency level.

5. Conclusion

Overall, this study has shed light on the significant impact of professional development interventions on reading competencies. However, several limitations need to be acknowledged, which may have influenced the findings and should be considered in the interpretation of the results. Firstly, the study's sample size was limited, comprising a specific group of elementary learners and teachers from a particular geographical area, which may limit the external generalizability of the findings to distinct populations. Additionally, the duration of the intervention might have influenced the observed improvements, as longer-term follow-up data could have provided deeper insights into the sustainability of the effects. Furthermore, although efforts were made to minimize biases, the lack of a control group in this study makes it challenging to definitively attribute the observed improvements solely to the teacher capacitation intervention.

Despite these limitations, this study holds several important implications for educational practice and policy. The findings highlight the significance of investing in teacher professional development programs that focus on enhancing instructional strategies and providing teachers with the necessary tools to foster students' reading skills effectively. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of incorporating varied strategies, classroom observations, and continuous capacity-building initiatives to empower teachers in their efforts to develop students' oral reading ability. Policymakers and educational institutions can use the insights from this study to design and implement comprehensive teacher capacitation programs that positively impact student learning outcomes.

Moreover, the research provides valuable contributions to the existing literature on literacy education, particularly in the context of elementary learners. The multifaceted approach of the teacher capacitation intervention, which included seminar-workshops, instructional materials design sessions, and the provision of relevant teaching materials, demonstrates the potential for implementing a holistic and sustainable model for improving reading skills among young learners. As literacy remains a foundational skill critical for academic achievement and lifelong learning, this study emphasizes the necessity of continuous efforts to enhance teacher capacities and promote effective reading instruction in early education.

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