



## Assessment of the Reading Strategies in the Philippine Basic Education

**Angeline P. Dinoro, J-roel B. Semilla\*, Elesar V. Malicoban, Evedanie G. Beldad  
 Mary Joy F. Luga, Evelyn I. Dominguez**

Mindanao State University – Iligan Institute of Technology  
 Iligan City, Philippines

\*Corresponding author email: j-roel.semilla@g.msuiit.edu.ph

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**Abstract.** Reading is a mother skill from which all other higher-order skills come. As such it is of primary importance that when students go to high school and college, they have acquired the needed reading competencies that will help them become independent readers. Currently, the poor performance of basic education students in national reading assessment exams in the Philippines has caused concern for the reading ability of students in the lower grades. The present study examined the reading strategies implemented in the public schools of Iligan City and Lanao del Norte in terms of how teachers perceived it and based on the performance of students in the Philippine – Informal Reading Inventory (PHIL-IRI) for the last three years of the school year 2017-2020. Teachers from Iligan City and Lanao del Norte participated in the study and completed an online questionnaire. Their responses indicated that students have mastered alphabet skills but the least mastered were comprehension skills. It was also found that the teachers employed pre-reading activities as a strategy in reading instruction and teachers in Iligan City used the guided-reading approach more while those in Lanao del Norte favored the phonics approach. They also reported that students face several difficulties in reading ranging from alphabetic, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension skills. The PHIL-IRI results of students in Iligan City demonstrated that the reading strategies and activities were effective in improving the reading performance of students as evidenced from their pre-test to post-test scores.

**Keywords:** reading strategies; reading level; reading comprehension; reading skills; Phil-IRI

### 1. Introduction

The Philippine educational system regarded reading fundamental to all forms of academic learning and growth. In today's global society, an educated population is essential for the country's social and economic development. Hence, to improve the quality of life of Filipinos, the importance of developing the student's reading comprehension skills is highly given importance (Fermano et al, 2021). Among the Philippine schools, reading education is regarded as a priority area in basic education particularly in public schools under the Department of Education. Various reading programs have been implemented at all levels to ensure that every Filipino child learns how to read. However, the reading

competence and literacy rate of these children continue to drop as evidenced by reading assessment results like the Program for International Students Achievement (PISA, 2018).

The poor performance of students in the national exams underscores the need to examine where the problem is coming from. As with any high stakes testing, the pressure to perform is paramount, but given the steady decline of the scores, the issue could be more systemic such as the design and implementation of the curriculum or the delivery of instruction and the way reading comprehension is assessed.

The sad reality still exists, as the PHIL-IRI results showed that there are still many students in schools at all levels who remain to be in the frustration reading levels and this is indicative of the prevalence of poor reading skills among students in the basic education levels. As such most students still need teacher interventions to assist them to understand what they are reading which can be a disadvantage in the higher years as they are expected to have mastered reading competencies. The Department of Education has determined that the problem of nonreaders in high school falls on the shoulders of the lower levels of the educational system, particularly at the elementary school level. Nonreaders continue to exist in large numbers across all school levels.

The DepEd initiatives in addressing these issues dutifully provided for interventions, such as the "Regional Training on Grades 4 to 8 Reading Teachers on Care for Nonreaders (CNR) Program," which included Grades 7 and 8 teachers, and the "Brigada for Every Child a Reader," which was a response to the feedback of perpetuating the existence of nonreaders in both Elementary and Secondary Levels. However, as there are no institutional monitoring and evaluation of the said intervention programs, there is no way of knowing whether it was effective in addressing the needs of the readers and based on the deteriorating performance in the national exams, it would appear that the desired outcome has not been achieved.

Undoubtedly, reading comprehension is associated with good academic accomplishment; it is one of the key priorities of many teachers, particularly in high school. According to De Guzman et al., 2010 in Galgao, 2016, reading is "the mother of all skills" because it is the basic skill that all content areas require to understand what the subject is and how it can be mastered, and in the larger scheme of things, how it relates to each other.

Skilled readers pay attention to textual information by drawing conclusions from it and evaluating it (Brasell et al., 2008). It is hoped that after each grade level, the student can attain the corresponding reading level so that they will be prepared to take on the more advanced lessons in the higher levels. Besides, poor reading comprehension among students will have a domino effect in that, promoting students to the next level without attaining the requisite reading competencies will only exacerbate the problem and will lead to a systemic decline of the Philippine educational system. This would also mean that the country will have learners who are not able to read critically and correctly comprehend what they are reading, which can seriously affect the preparation of students for higher education.

Clearly, the importance of reading comprehension, as an academic and life skill cannot be taken for granted, and it is of primordial value to be able to ensure that students become competent readers. As such, the present study sought to examine and evaluate the reading curriculum at the local and provincial levels among the public schools in the division of Iligan City and Lanao del Norte. It aimed to determine the reading skills, reading approaches and strategies used, alignment of the written and implemented curriculum to

provide the Department of Education with empirical evidence on the state of the reading curriculum and competencies of students to help them develop better programs and initiatives to improve the reading skills of students in the locality.

## **1.1 Research Objectives**

The study was conducted to investigate the reading curriculum in basic education as a means of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the implemented curriculum in reading among the public schools in Iligan City and the province of Lanao del Norte. The specific objectives of the study are the following:

1. To identify the mastered reading skills of students as perceived by teachers.
2. To identify the difficulties encountered by students in reading skills as perceived by the teachers.
3. To determine the reading approach utilized by teachers in their classes.
4. To identify the common reading activities provided by the teachers in the delivery of the lesson.
5. To determine the reading performance of students based on the Phil-IRI results from school years 2017-2018, 2018-2019, and 2019-2020.

## **2. Related Literature**

### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

The Stages of Reading Development by Jeanne Chall (1983), which consists of 6 developmental stages, serves as the foundation for this study. According to Chall, the development of reading abilities followed a hierarchy, with each talent building on the one before it. Her idea aids educators in knowing when and how to include different strategies into the curriculum at different stages of students' growth and development (Khasanovna, 2022). We will concentrate on Stages 1 to 3 as described by Steinman, LeJeune, and Kimbrough (2006) because this research is solely confined to elementary school learners, particularly those in the sixth grade. The first stage of Chall's (1983) paradigm is where children begin receiving formal reading instruction. The capacity of young readers to translate previously random letter forms into spoken language is what distinguishes this stage. They start to link phonetic patterns with letter forms. To decode new words, simple graphemes (letters) and combinations of graphemes are linked to sounds that may be combined and mixed (Breech & Pedley, 1994). The reader learns rules that help them recognize when sounds change based on the letter combinations that emerge.

The remaining phases of Chall's (1983) model share a crucial characteristic beyond Stage 2. In Stages 3-5, learning new material and understanding meaning are the primary goals of reading. Later phases shift the emphasis from the 'medium to the message'. Readers start using reading as a tool to expand their knowledge when automatic decoding is accomplished in Stage 2. Learning progresses most effectively when texts are straightforward, technical complexity is kept to a minimum, and concepts are expressed from a single point of view since Stage 3 readers still have limited information, thoughts, and experiences. Accurate concepts and word meanings are crucial during this first stage of knowledge acquisition because readers are learning to incorporate meaning into their own restricted knowledge base. According to Piaget (1952), children develop a new super tool for incorporating information about the outside world into their own schematic worldview.

The present study attempts to examine the reading curriculum in basic education in the local public schools in the division of Iligan City and Lanao del Norte, with the assumption that poor reading comprehension skills undermine the academic performance of students

as they go through the higher levels. Based on Chall's model, students should have gone through the first 3 stages of reading development in order to build their reading skills and the acquisition of higher-order reading skills can only happen if the students had been able to satisfactorily master the competencies in the first three stages. As such, the present study aimed to examine the reading competencies of basic education students in terms of this model and how the reading curriculum delivery is aligned to support the said model.

## **2.2 Reading Skills of Elementary Learners**

### *Word Recognition Skills*

Word knowledge is multidimensional, meaning that the learner must gain knowledge of the target lexical item's phonological and orthographic forms, meanings, morphological structure, syntactic behavior, connection, and collocation with other words, among other things. Knowing the word's form is necessary for expanding one's vocabulary, and learning the word's meaning and orthographic form are both essential for improving one's reading abilities. Even while the learner may know the shapes and meanings of words, their level of automaticity and access speed may not be fully established. Therefore, it's crucial to practice effective word recognition techniques (Shiotsu, 2009). The sub-scales of word recognition include (1) visual recognition of letter characteristics, (2) letter identification, (3) creation of grapheme-phoneme correspondences, (4) use of orthographic redundancies such regularities in letter sequences, and (5) linking of words to their semantic representations (Shiotsu, 2009). In a similar vein, Chiu (2018) coined the term word recognition to describe the utilization of letter-sound correlations, letter patterns, and word-specific orthographic information for reading regular and irregular words (Chiu, 2018).

### *Alphabetic Skills*

Both English-speaking and non-English-speaking children reading abilities are strongly predicted by alphabetic abilities, which include letter knowledge (Lyytinen et al., 2004; Muter & Diethelm, 2001; Molfese, et al., 2006). According to several researchers, children who were good at naming letters (naming upper- and lower-case letters, recognizing beginning and ending word sounds) when they entered kindergarten had better abilities on tests of phonological processing and word reading by the end of kindergarten and in first grade than children who had not (Denton & West, 2002; West, Denton, & Germino-Hausken, 2000; Molfese, et al., 2006). Senechal, LeFevre, Smith-Chant, and Colton (2001) used a longitudinal study of 84 children who were studied from the start of kindergarten to the end of third grade to examine the role of procedural skills (such as knowledge of letter names) in comparison to conceptual knowledge (such as knowledge of print concepts, book conventions). Although there were no direct links between conceptual abilities and later reading abilities, procedural abilities at the start of kindergarten and the beginning of first grade were linked to reading abilities at the end of first grade and reading fluency at the end of third grade.

In addition, Molfese et al. (2006) examined the development of letter naming and writing (skills in writing the first name, dictated and copied letters, and dictated and copied numbers) among 79 preschool children. They found out that children with more developed letter-naming skills were able to combine letters using phonetic representations to create "words". Children who scored well on letter naming also scored well on letter writing, including dictating or copying letters and writing part or all of their names. Regardless of whether the numbers were copied or dictated, letter-naming abilities and number-writing abilities were associated. Compared to writing or copying letters and numbers, first name writing received the greatest writing marks. In addition, Sulzby and colleagues (Bus et al., 2001; Sulzby, Barnhart, & Hieshima, 1989) shared that, the teachers in the classroom can

encourage the kinds of writing and reading activities that children do in “rich literacy homes”. Further, they asserted that reading takes place too, during writing.

### *Vocabulary Skills*

The development of reading comprehension and potential causal relationships between vocabulary and word use has lately attracted the attention of several scholars (Muter, Hulme, Snowling, & Stevenson, 2004; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network, 2005; Ouellette & Beers, 2010; Sénéchal, Ouellette, & Rodney, 2006; Verhoeven & van Leeuwe, 2008; Protopapas et al., 2013). They have treated vocabulary as a longitudinal predictor of reading comprehension. Throughout primary school, a very large sample of Dutch students ( $N = 2,143$ ) was evaluated six times, and the results of longitudinal research indicated that as word identification skills organically improved, reading comprehension shifted to rely more on vocabulary and listening comprehension (Verhoeven & van Leeuwe, 2008).

The results of two independent school samples, which were presented, further indicate the significance of vocabulary in predicting reading comprehension across grades (Yovanoff et al., 2005). Another research examined the language and literacy of 81 (8 to 10 years old) children. Vocabulary accounted for distinct variance in reading comprehension and exception word reading in regression models, but not in text reading accuracy, decoding, or regular word reading. Children with poor reading comprehension demonstrated oral vocabulary deficiencies and correctly read fewer exception words, which is consistent with these results. Findings from Ricketts, Nation and Bishop (2007) show that not all reading abilities are correlated with spoken vocabulary.

Poor comprehenders (children who struggle with reading comprehension while having age-appropriate decoding skills) are frequently found to have vocabulary issues (Colenbrander et al., 2016). They investigated this complexity by evaluating the vocabulary and spoken language abilities of weak comprehenders on an individual basis. They found that vocabulary knowledge is complicated and might influence reading comprehension in several ways. Although the patterns of oral language deficit varied among individuals, the results showed that all poor comprehenders had some level of oral language deficit in the setting of intact nonword and irregular word reading skills. A minority possessed vocabulary that was acceptable for their age but had low syntactic or auditory comprehension abilities, while the majority had deficient vocabulary skills that manifested as semantic deficiencies.

### *Fluency Skills*

In addition to accuracy (understanding the word), reading speed (automaticity), and prosody, fluent reading is a complicated skill (Allington, 2006; Bashir & Hook, 2009; Fuchs, et al., 1993; Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2006; Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2005; Klauda & Guthrie, 2008; Pikulski & Chard, 2005; Rasinski). Basarana (2013) looked into the connection between fourth-grade kids' reading habits, circumstances, and scenarios, and their understanding. The study's results showed that fluent reading was a sign of comprehension using Pearson correlation analysis; prosody predicted in-depth meaning linking better than the other fluent reading skills, whereas proper reading skills predicted surface meaning linking better. Additionally, the results showed that there was only a minimal relationship between reading speed and understanding.

Another research by Klauda & Guthrie (2017) examined the connections between reading comprehension and three levels of reading fluency—the individual word, the syntactic unit, and the entire passage—among 278 fifth-graders with varying reading abilities. The

research backs up an automaticity effect for word recognition speed as well as an automaticity-like impact on syntactic processing ability. Furthermore, multilevel regressions performed on longitudinal data indicate a reciprocal link between reading comprehension and fluency (Klauda & Guthrie, 2017).

Moreover, Miller and Schwanenflugel (2008) conducted longitudinal research with 92 kids in grades 1 and 2 to look at how reading prosody develops and how it affects oral reading fluency and reading comprehension. The development of an adult-like intonation contour in second grade was shown to be correlated with the absence of fewer pausal incursions during oral reading in first grade. Once word reading abilities were taken into consideration, outcome model testing showed that the intonation contour was a significant predictor of subsequent fluency. A better understanding was predicted by the early adoption of an adult-like intonation contour and a decrease in the number of pausal incursions between the first and second grades. Therefore, prosodic oral reading may indicate that kids have mastered fluency and are better able to comprehend what they read. The findings of this study are in favor of using prosody in official criteria of fluency in oral reading.

### *Reading Comprehension*

One study examined various theoretical models for comprehension to offer solutions for converting research into practice and policies for enhancing instruction because reading comprehension is among the most cognitively demanding activities in which humans engage and is challenging to teach, measure, and research. The results showed that raising reading levels would need a concerted effort from academics, teachers, and policymakers with an emphasis on long-term fixes. To increase understanding, it will be important to put early and constant emphasis on the development of previous knowledge, vocabulary, inference, and comprehension monitoring abilities throughout growth (Elleman & Oslund, 2019).

The progression of students' varied schoolwork is aided by their capacity for reading comprehension, which is a crucial competency. It facilitates their ability to decode texts, analyze, clarify, and articulate their own thoughts regarding written materials (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). According to Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016), EFL students can understand texts more easily when reading comprehension techniques like partner reading, multiple reading strategies, assessment, and running records are used. Other techniques include reciprocal teaching, instructional conversations, visualization, and instructional conversations. They contend that teachers may aid EFL students in acquiring prior information, instruct them in text structures, and urge them to practice, keep track of, and assess their own reading comprehension abilities. The proper and efficient application of reading comprehension methods should also be taught by teachers to their students. In the end, they concluded that EFL students should read more real texts and develop excellent reading habits, even if some of the texts are not relevant to their interests. This would help them gain a better grasp of the many types of written texts in their language.

Additionally, McKown & Barnett's (2007) action research attempted to use higher-order thinking abilities to enhance reading comprehension in second and third-grade pupils. They discovered that comprehension techniques including anticipating, drawing connections, picturing, inferring, asking questions, and summarizing had an influence on students' understanding.

### *Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI)*

The Philippine Informal Reading Inventory is one of the evaluation techniques used to determine the degree of reading competency (Marual-Gillaco, 2014). It particularly determines the proportion of word recognition accuracy and the percentage of right responses to comprehension questions based on a set of criteria for reading levels to assess students' reading competency. The children's reading abilities are divided into four stages based on the Phil-IRI scale: nonreader, frustrated, instructional, and independent. At the frustration level, students that struggle with reading prefer to avoid it by refusing to do so. While a student can read alone and without instructor assistance at the independent reading level, students at the instructional level can only read when directed.

Marual-Gillaco (2014) discovered that the grade four students had mastered reading the fundamental sight words; only a small number of errors were noted. Most of them were rated as having instructional-level reading comprehension, which implies that they might still benefit from more reading instruction. They can read with help and with the right instruction, and it won't be long until they can read independently. As a result of the research, a reading profile that served as the basis for creating a reading program was created.

Cabardo (2015) carried out research akin to this, utilizing the Philippine-Informal Reading Inventory to determine the reading competence of first-year to third-year high school students as the foundation for a reading intervention program. The findings showed that the majority of students were in the instructional level for oral reading, where the majority of the males were less proficient in reading than the females in both silent and oral reading, and that the majority of students belonged to the frustration level of reading proficiency in silent reading. When pupils' reading competency levels are examined by their year levels and gender, there are no appreciable differences. The levels of reading skills of pupils in silent and oral reading, however, were significantly different.

Additionally, the study by Luciano and San Pedro (2016) sought to explain how 1,697 Grade II students from 19 schools in San Miguel North District, Bulacan performed on the Phil-IRI test in the school year 2014–2015 after adopting a number of intervention measures. In terms of silent reading speed, word recognition, and comprehension, the reading proficiency of the students was divided into three categories: frustrated, instructional, and independent. For slow readers, there was a significant improvement in quiet reading; it went from 23.60% to 45.98%, while for quick readers, it went from 19.46% to 37.35%. However, for the typical group, it only rose from 34.56% to 41.2%. For the slow and fast groups, the mean difference was statistically significant, but not for the average group. Word recognition and comprehension scores showed a similar pattern. The mean difference between the pre-and post-test scores for the three levels was statistically significant, but the rise for the instructional group was less pronounced. Although the reading and comprehension skills of the students significantly improved because of the various learning activities provided, it is unclear which intervention technique was most successful. It was advised to use a consistent set of standards to measure students' reading progress and to thoroughly evaluate the tactics used.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Design**

The present study employed a descriptive research design. Descriptive research design is a type of research design that aims to obtain information to systematically describe a phenomenon, situation, or population. It was used in this study to provide information on the reading curriculum of basic education in Iligan City and Lanao del Norte as perceived

by the reading teachers and based on the PHIL-IRI results. Moreover, this research design allows for the replication of the study in other parts of the country where reading comprehension skills also appear to be deficient. Consequently, the present research can provide reliable and valid findings as the study was conducted within the parameters of descriptive research design.

### **3.2 Participants of the Study**

The participants of the study involved 670 teachers from 10 districts in the division of Iligan City and 30 districts from Lanao del Norte, Philippines. The inclusion criteria include teachers employed in public elementary schools.

### **3.3 Data Gathering Procedure**

The researchers sought the approval of the Schools Division Superintendent (SDS) for Iligan City and Lanao del Norte before any data were gathered. The researchers sent a letter to the SDS identifying the different target schools of the study together with their endorsement to contact the principals of the schools. An invitation letter to participate was sent to the individual schools to reach out to the participants. The study was conducted in the middle of the lockdowns brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic which led to a shift in the data-gathering procedure such that an online survey questionnaire was made available for the participants. Also, the planned interviews and focus group discussions were no longer feasible due to the limitations cited. The responses were collected using Google Forms and were subjected to descriptive analysis.

### **3.4 Instruments Used**

The primary instrument used in the study includes a researcher-developed questionnaire to gather the participant's perceptions about the mastered reading skills, difficulties encountered by learners in reading skills, reading strategies, and activities employed by the teachers. Aside from the online questionnaire, the researchers also utilized Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) to determine the reading levels of the schools in Iligan City for the past three school years (2017-2018, 2018-2019, and 2019-2020).

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Responses gathered from the online survey questionnaire were collated and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Rating, frequency, and ranking were used to present the responses regarding the reading skills, reading approach, and activities used in the delivery of reading instruction. To present the reading performance of the students on the PHIL-IRI test, a percentage was used.

## **4. Results and Discussions**

This section presents and discusses the results of the study to answer its research objectives. The presentation is divided into two parts: the perceptions of the teachers, and the results of the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory for the past three years in the public schools of Iligan City.

The teachers both in Iligan City and Lanao del Norte observed that most of their learners were able to master the basic alphabetical skills which is crucial in learning how to read. Being able to label letters and familiarity with letter forms, names, and corresponding sounds represent an important component and a predictor of later reading and spelling abilities (Piasta & Wagner, 2010) which the learners of this study have mastered.



**Table 1: Mastered reading skills of learners as perceived by the teachers**

Reading Skills	Iligan City		Lanao del Norte	
	Rating	Rank	Rating	Rank
Alphabetical Skills	1107	1	959	1
Vocabulary Skills	918	2	774	2
Fluency Skills	893	3	753	3
Comprehension Skills	799	4	695	4

However, despite the learner's mastery of the alphabet, teachers perceived their learners to have difficulty understanding the context from what they have read since reading comprehension ranked the lowest in the result. This may be due to the learners' limited vocabulary, inability to make inferences, slow reading and other underlying cognitive processes that support reading comprehension skills. This is consistent with the 2018 PISA result where reading scored the lowest among Filipino learners.

Overall, learners were most likely competent when it comes to identifying letters, letter sounds, and being able to read sight words, while the students were still unable to fully understand what they are reading.

**Table 2: Difficulties encountered by learners in reading skills as perceived by the teachers**

Alphabetic Skills	Vocabulary Skills	Fluency Skills	Comprehension Skills
<i>Iligan City:</i>			
*Difficulty in recognizing letters and sounds *Poor letter-sound knowledge *Inability to blend sounds	*Difficulty in understanding new words *Inability to use context clues properly *Unable to spell words correctly	*Lack of expression in oral reading *Slow in reading	*Inability to make inferences *Inability to sequence a series of events *Difficulty in identifying the main idea *Poor comprehension
<i>Lanao del Norte:</i>			
*Poor letter-sound knowledge *Poor phonological skills (blending sounds/phonemes) *Poor sight word skills	*Limited vocabulary *Difficulty identifying word meaning *Unable to understand words	*Slow reading *Poor intonation	*Difficulty in identifying main ideas

Similar findings have been noted by the respective teachers regarding the reading difficulties encountered by both the Iligan City and Lanao del Norte learners. Teachers in Iligan City have identified problem areas that their students encountered while learning how to read in terms of the alphabet, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension skills. For the alphabetic skills, the most frequently cited problems were difficulty in recognizing letter-sound correspondence and blending sounds. The most basic skill that is vital to being able to read is to accurately identify letters and sounds, as letters are needed to form words and sentences. If teachers have to spend so much time addressing this problem, they would not be able to teach children more advanced reading skills.

In terms of vocabulary skills, the teachers reported that most students have difficulty understanding new words, are not able to use context clues properly, and have difficulty in spelling words. The vocabulary repertoire of students needs to grow as they move from one grade level to the next, they are introduced to new words with an increasing level of

complexity and their ability to comprehend what they read is largely dependent on how they understand words. Fluency skills would pertain to the mastery and ease with which students are able to read aloud. The teachers indicated that students have difficulty in terms of not having the correct expression in oral reading, they read slowly and have poor intonation which can be indicators of problematic reading.

Lastly, the teachers emphasized that students have poor reading comprehension because they have a very limited vocabulary, they only learn words that are introduced in class and maybe less encouragement from parents in for reading at home. Also, students were unable to make inferences based on what they have read, they found it difficult to identify the implied meaning in the passages or stories that they work with in class. Even so, they also found it difficult to find the main idea of the paragraph or passage and to correctly determine the sequence of events in a story.

Brady (2020) confirms such a result and even found in her investigations that early phoneme awareness and letter knowledge are good predictors of later reading literacy performance. Likewise, being slow to read, problems in fluency, and difficulty in identifying the main idea can deter learners' capacity to comprehend the whole reading material.

**Table 3: Reading strategies used by the teachers**

Reading Strategies	Iligan City		Lanao del Norte	
	Frequency	Rank	Frequency	Rank
Guided reading strategy	239	1	261	2
Phonics strategy	166	2	273	1
Sight word strategy	163	3	249	3
Language-expertise strategy	113	4	200	4
Linguistic strategy	98	5	191	5
Multi-sensory strategy	83	6	150	6

The guided reading approach, widely used by the teachers in Iligan City, is when teachers provide limited but clear guidance on reading and how they can understand what they are reading. This approach is also more appropriate for students who still need assistance in reading. Struggling readers are more likely to learn essential reading skills and strategies if the teacher clearly leads the teaching and learning process, does the direct or explicit explanations, modeling or demonstrating, and guided practice model of instruction are part of the teacher's repertoire of teaching methods (Rupley, 2009).

Results also showed that teachers in Lanao del Norte were more inclined to use the phonics approach followed by the guided-reading approach and the sight-word approach. The phonics approach involves the use of individual letter sounds and then combining the sounds to form words. Most teachers in this area find the phonics approach more effective in teaching students how to read, as each letter sound is mastered, it is easier for the students to combine those sounds to read a word. This could be most appropriate for younger learners and if teachers use the approach even with those in the upper grades, then it could be indicative of serious delays in the reading ability of the students.

On the other hand, the multisensory approach which helps learners to read and spell using a variety of senses like using clay, magnetic letters, sandpaper words, and sand writing is less likely used by teachers in teaching reading. This may be due to the availability of materials and the lack of time to prepare for the instructional resources.

**Table 4: Activities used by teachers in the delivery of reading instruction**

Reading Strategies	Iligan City			Lanao del Norte	
	Frequency	Rank		Frequency	Rank
Pre-reading Activity	202	1		256	1
During Reading Activities	183	2		184	5
Games or Fun Activities	149	3		244	2
Drills/Recitation/Debate/Panel Discussion	137	4		232	3
Post-reading Activities	122	5		181	6
Interactive Reading Activity	113	6		231	4
Acting Out	73	7		151	7

The pre-reading activities can be as varied as introducing keywords, new words, or emotions evoked by the reading passage or story. These activities are often provided in textbooks and in the curriculum prescribed by the Department of Education and are the easiest activities to use. Teachers reported that they used pre-reading activities more than any other reading activities, which often enabled students to prepare themselves to read and understand the text or story. The teachers also relied on fun games or activities that helped students enjoy reading so that they would come to love reading and not see it as a boring task or difficult ordeal. Even older students would still find these games enjoyable, which is probably why teachers also like using this strategy.

The least used strategy by the teachers in reading is acting out which is akin to role-plays wherein the students portray parts of the story they are reading to help them better understand it as well as demonstrate whether they have accurately understood the message of the story. Younger students, however, are not as keen on acting out since they might not be able to deduce the story or be able to portray it at all, coupled with the fact that younger students are self-conscious and will not volunteer to do the activity.

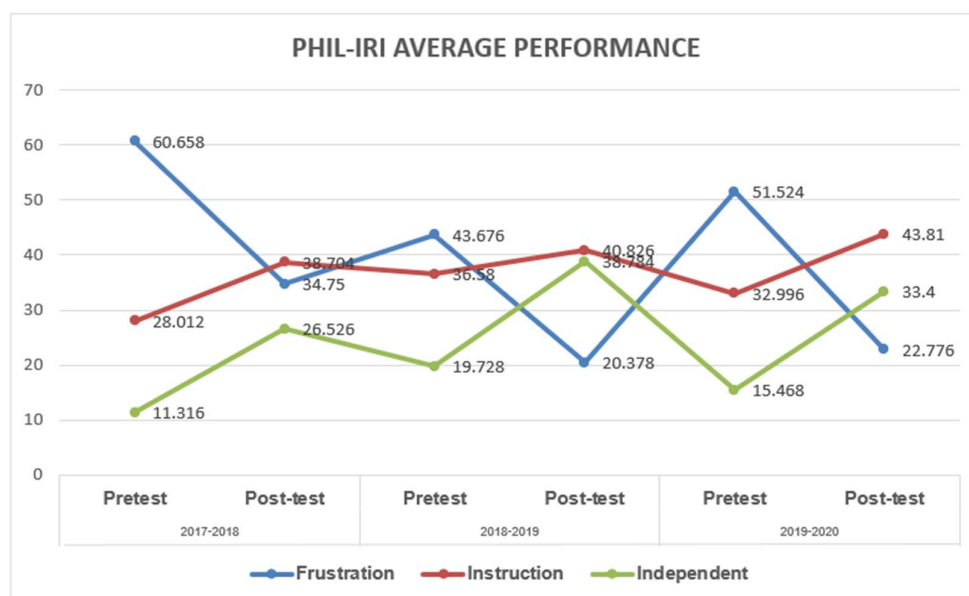
Table 5 displays the Phil-IRI Report for grades 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 for the most recent three (3) years, from 2017 to 2020. The reading levels of learners have been divided into three based on Phil-IRI, namely the frustration, instructional, and independent levels. For the school year 2017-2018 pre-test results, most of the learners were in the frustration reading level. This can be expected since students have not yet received reading instruction for that school year but having 60% of learners in the frustration level for each grade level is quite high which suggests very poor reading ability. The frustration level means that students cannot read or refuse to read the passages or text because of having poor reading skills. However, the post-test results in the same school year showed a marked improvement in that almost half of those in the frustration reading level moved into the instruction reading level, and there was also a 10% improvement for those in the independent reading level. This implies that the reading strategies and reading activities provided by the teachers were helpful in assisting learners to improve their reading skills.

In the following school year, the pretest results showed a decrease in the percentage of students with a frustrated reading level compared to the previous school year at about a 20% decrease. There was also a greater percentage of students in the instruction and independent reading levels. The post-test results for the school year 2018-2019 showed a very positive improvement wherein more students scored in the instruction and independent reading levels. It could be said that the reading strategies and activities implemented by the teachers implemented during this school year were very effective in improving the reading skills of the students.

**Table 5: Phil-IRI results in Iligan City public schools**

Level	2017-2018		2018-2019		2019-2020	
	Pretest	Post-test	Pretest	Post-test	Pretest	Post-test
Grade 2						
Frustration	60.65	34.75	42.21	23.65	52.01	23.93
Instruction	28.02	38.71	34.53	39.36	30.90	39.83
Independent	11.32	26.52	23.24	36.97	17.08	36.22
Grade 3						
Frustration	60.66	34.75	42.11	23.08	53.75	21.60
Instruction	28.01	38.71	32.55	39.10	30.17	41.96
Independent	11.31	26.52	25.32	37.81	16.07	36.43
Grade 4						
Frustration	60.66	34.75	46.49	20.36	51.70	24.00
Instruction	28.01	38.70	36.77	41.18	35.43	48.18
Independent	11.32	26.53	16.73	38.45	12.86	27.81
Grade 5						
Frustration	60.66	34.75	46.86	18.24	49.78	24.73
Instruction	28.01	38.70	38.77	40.61	34.42	43.94
Independent	11.31	26.53	14.36	41.14	15.78	31.31
Grade 6						
Frustration	60.66	34.75	40.71	16.56	50.38	19.62
Instruction	28.01	38.70	40.28	43.88	34.06	45.14
Independent	11.32	26.53	18.99	39.55	15.55	35.23

In the school year 2019-2020, the pretest results indicated that half of the students in each grade level were found to be in the frustration reading level, while about 35% were in the instruction level and 15% were in the independent reading level. When compared to the post-test results, the performance of the students vastly improved as about 75% of the students scored in the independent and instructional reading level, while about 25% remained in the frustration reading level, which is still quite high.

**Figure 1: Average performance of students in Iligan City based on the Phil-IRI results**

As depicted in the graph, the students started with most of them in the frustration reading level but at the end of last school year, there were more students in the instruction reading level. The graph indicates that the reading strategies were helpful for students to improve their reading skills and that the teachers' use of various activities in the delivery of reading instruction worked. Although the end goal is to make every student an independent reader compared to where the students started and where they are after 3 years, it can be said that students in Iligan City improved their reading skills.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the current reading skills of students in the basic education levels of public schools in Iligan City and Lanao del Norte were considered unsatisfactory. It is a reality that learners are struggling even with the fundamental skills that must be acquired for them to become better readers. The teachers are quite adept at using various strategies and utilizing different activities in the delivery of reading instruction and they at times resort to using the simpler ones that they believe are more effective. It is also true that based on the reading stages model of Chall, it is important that students be able to master the basic skills in stages 1 to 3 before they can become independent readers. Additionally, the Phil-IRI results for three academic years showed improvement in their reading ability in Iligan City.

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