

Strengthening Early Literacy: Insights of Policy Modifications in the Implementation of the National Reading Program

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Abstract—This case study aimed to determine the impact of the National Reading Program (NRP) on the reading development of elementary learners in one Public Elementary School in Banate, Iloilo, Philippines. The study was limited to the perspectives and experiences of the teachers in the said school. A descriptive research design was employed, with data collected through researcher-developed instruments that were personally distributed and retrieved. The responses were categorized and analyzed thematically. Findings revealed that the implementation of the National Reading Program significantly contributed to improving the reading skills of struggling learners, particularly in the areas of phonics, fluency, and vocabulary. However, several challenges were encountered in the process, including limited teaching resources, insufficient time for reading interventions, overcrowded classrooms, and lack of parental involvement. Despite these obstacles, the program effectively addressed the needs of struggling readers through the use of individualized instruction, differentiated materials, targeted phonics and comprehension strategies, multisensory activities, and opportunities for repeated practice. These approaches allowed learners to progress at their own pace while receiving appropriate and focused support to overcome specific reading difficulties.

Keywords—NRP, Reading, Oplan Kaalaman, Pagbasa, RACMES, Bulig Basa

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading is recognized as one of the most vital components in the learning process Gilbas (2022) and is one of the four fundamental skills that every learner must develop within the classroom setting. A strong reading foundation is essential, as it serves as the backbone of academic success across all subject areas. The Department of Education (DepEd), recognizing this critical need, has launched various reading programs to address the diverse reading competencies of learners. Assessment of students' reading capabilities is therefore crucial to ensure that every learner is equipped with the basic literacy skills required for overall academic achievement. As emphasized by Gilbas (2022), students who fail to master foundational reading skills often face difficulties in school, ultimately hindering their chances of becoming literate, productive individuals.

To provide structured support, DepEd issued Memorandum No. 013, s. 2023, titled "Implementing Guidelines on the National Reading Program (NRP)". This memorandum sets the directive for a system-wide implementation of reading programs from the national level down to individual schools. It reinforces the importance of prioritizing reading instruction and lays out a clear framework for creating contextualized and sustainable reading initiatives. DepEd Memorandum No. 013, s. 2023, mandates schools to assess reading performance, implement appropriate interventions, and ensure that every learner is supported through a data-driven approach to literacy development. At the school level, the memorandum highlights the importance of collaboration among education

stakeholders, ensuring that the delivery of reading programs is aligned with local contexts and learner needs (Dayrocas & Junsay, 2023). In response, many schools have strengthened their localized reading initiatives. Teachers, being at the forefront of instruction, must be fully equipped to implement these initiatives effectively. One of the capacity-building efforts undertaken by school leaders is the conduct of School Learning Action Cells (SLACs), which provide ongoing professional development to enhance teachers' competencies in reading instruction (Plata et al., 2024).

Despite these policies and frameworks, challenges in implementation still persist. Issues such as limited funding for instructional materials and reading facilities, irregular teacher training, and low learner attendance in reading interventions continue to affect the success of the National Reading Program. Learners often feel embarrassed or anxious about participating in remedial sessions, and some are unable to attend due to household responsibilities or lack of parental support.

To address these gaps, the school introduced its School Improvement Plan titled "Oplan Kaalaman sa Pagbasa", along with a weekly remedial reading program every Friday, known as "RACMES Bulig Basa" a peer tutoring initiative aimed at creating a more engaging and supportive environment for struggling readers. Thus, the researchers aim to determine the impact of the National Reading Program (NRP) and explore how its implementation can be further strengthened. This study seeks to identify the effective strategies and necessary

adjustments in policies, guidelines, and school-level initiatives to ensure that all learners are given equitable opportunities to become proficient readers.

Objectives of the Study

This study was conducted to determine the insight of the National Reading Program in Elementary School.

Specifically, it aimed to:

1. Determine the insights of the Implementation of the National Reading Program towards the reading proficiency levels of the students across different grade levels, particularly struggling readers;
2. Elaborate the key challenges faced by teachers during the implementation of the National Reading Program; and
3. Explain how the program address the needs of struggling readers in their learning.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

According to Estrella (2022), teachers exhibit a high level of readiness in teaching reading, particularly in terms of content knowledge and motivational strategies. However, a moderate level of preparedness was observed in the procedural aspects of instruction, indicating a need for further training and professional development. Estrella (2022) emphasized that improving teachers' competence, academic qualifications, and teaching experience is crucial for enhancing reading instruction. Similarly, (Layugan and Algodon 2023) underscored the importance of establishing structured reading habits, such as implementing a daily 10-minute reading routine. They also advocated for the use of instructional materials aligned with learners' reading levels to support the development of foundational reading skills. Their findings highlight the need for a systematic approach to fostering literacy through targeted interventions.

Regardless of these strategies, several implementation challenges remain. (Abril et al. 2022) identified key barriers in the execution of reading programs, including teachers' non-adherence to interventions due to time constraints, limited access to instructional reading materials, insufficient technological resources, and inadequate library facilities. These limitations hinder the effectiveness of reading interventions and contribute to the overall disengagement and lack of cooperation among educators. Furthermore, (Apiles 2025) argued that foundational reading comprehension continues to pose a significant issue in many educational settings. The persistence of low literacy levels, limited vocabulary, and the wide variability in student reading abilities have made it difficult to achieve consistent progress in reading comprehension across diverse learner populations.

Supporting the goals of the National Reading Program (NRP), (Cruz and De Guzman 2021) emphasized the importance of early reading interventions grounded in evidence-based practices. Their study found that the integration of phonemic awareness, vocabulary instruction, and guided oral reading significantly improved literacy outcomes among early grade

learners. These components are consistent with the NRP's framework, which promotes a balanced approach to reading instruction. In addition, (Torres et al. 2020) highlighted the role of school leadership and community involvement in sustaining the goals of the NRP. They observed that schools with active reading programs, reading corners, and consistent monitoring practices showed better reading performance in standardized assessments, suggesting that institutional support and accountability mechanisms are vital to the successful implementation of reading programs. Meanwhile, (Santos and Ramirez 2023) explored the impact of digital literacy tools aligned with the NRP, showing that learners exposed to multimedia reading platforms demonstrated higher engagement and comprehension levels. Their findings support the integration of technology-enhanced reading strategies, especially in underserved or resource-limited schools. Collectively, these studies reveal a pressing need to address both teacher readiness and systemic barriers in order to improve reading outcomes among learners. A multi-faceted approach involving professional development, adequate learning resources, community engagement, and structured literacy practices appears essential for effective reading instruction and the fulfillment of the National Reading Program's objectives.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted at a public elementary school in Banate, Iloilo, Philippines, and involved the participation of five teachers. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who were deemed most relevant to the research focus. All participants voluntarily agreed to take part in the study.

The research utilized a descriptive qualitative design to determine the perceived insight of the National Reading Program (NRP) on teaching experiences of the teachers for policy modification. Data were gathered through a structured survey designed to elicit in-depth insights into the participants' experiences and perspectives. To analyze the qualitative data, the researchers employed Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. This method allowed for the systematic identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns (themes) within the data, providing a rich, detailed, and nuanced account of the participants' responses.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents and analyzes the key findings of the study, which explores the implementation and impact of the National Reading Program (NRP) in enhancing foundational literacy skills among learners. The results are organized into thematic areas that emerged from the data, focusing on phonics-based instruction, access to resources, teacher professional development, differentiated learning, and the creation of supportive learning environments. Each theme is discussed in relation to current research and educational frameworks, highlighting both the strengths and challenges of the program as perceived by teachers. The discussion aims to provide deeper insights into how the NRP supports early

literacy development and identifies areas for improvement to ensure more inclusive and effective reading instruction across diverse classroom contexts.

Theme 1: “Unlocking Literacy: Reading Success Through Phonics”

It underscores the vital role of phonics-based instruction in enhancing foundational reading skills among learners. This aligns closely with the goals of DepEd’s National Reading Program (NRP), which seeks to improve literacy outcomes across all grade levels by promoting evidence-based reading strategies.

Phonics teaching children the relationship between letters and sounds serves as a cornerstone in early literacy development. By focusing on systematic and explicit phonics instruction, the NRP aims to help learners decode words more effectively, leading to improved reading fluency and comprehension. This is particularly critical in the early grades, where mastering these skills lays the groundwork for academic success in later years.

The theme also reflects DepEd’s commitment to addressing reading gaps revealed by national assessments and international studies, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), which highlighted the need for stronger reading programs in the country. By integrating phonics into reading instruction, the National Reading Program empowers teachers with tools to build confident, independent readers and ensures that no learner is left behind.

The National Reading Program supports early literacy and improves reading skills like phonics and vocabulary, but the pacing needs adjustment to better accommodate diverse learners who require more time for mastery.

The teachers capture a key strength and a challenge within the implementation of the National Reading Program. According to her, “National Reading Program has been helpful in guiding my instruction, especially through its focus on early literacy skills”. On one hand, the program’s emphasis on early literacy especially phonics and vocabulary has clearly contributed to improved reading outcomes. Many teachers, like yourself, have seen students become more confident in decoding and word recognition skills.

However, the concern about “curriculum pacing” reflects a broader issue in literacy instruction: not all students learn at the same rate. I believe the pacing of the curriculum needs to be adjusted to meet the needs of diverse learners stated by the teacher. While some quickly grasp phonics concepts, others need “repeated exposure and practice” to fully internalize these skills. Another teacher states that, “I believe that while the program is effective for most students, it doesn’t cater enough to students with learning disabilities or those who are significantly behind in reading”. Furthermore, the teacher added, the guidelines and materials provided by the program

have helped me focus on key literacy skills such as phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension. When the curriculum moves too quickly, struggling readers may fall behind, which can affect their confidence and future learning.

Adjusting the pacing to include “differentiated instruction, remedial time, or flexible modules” could help bridge these gaps. By aligning the program more closely with learners’ actual progress, DepEd can ensure that its goal of inclusive and equitable literacy development is truly met.

The engaging materials of the National Reading Program have boosted student interest, but more support and training are needed to fully maximize their use.

The National Reading Program’s engaging and interactive reading materials have significantly boosted student interest and supported the development of foundational literacy skills such as phonics and vocabulary. As the teacher says, I’ve noticed an increase in student engagement because of the interactive and visual elements in the reading materials. While these resources are highly effective, their full potential can only be realized with ongoing teacher training and more flexible pacing to meet the varied learning needs of students.

Theme 2: Empowering Readers: Access to Resources, Learning Environment and Professional Development

Empowering readers requires a comprehensive approach that integrates “professional development for teachers, access to essential resources, and a supportive learning environment”. Teachers must receive continuous training on evidence-based reading strategies, including phonics, comprehension, and vocabulary development, to enhance their instructional practices (Snow, 2010). In addition, providing students with the right resources—such as books, digital tools, and interactive learning materials—is essential to creating an engaging and effective reading environment (Guskey, 2000). Furthermore, fostering collaboration among teachers and involving parents in the reading process can significantly improve student outcomes (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

Teachers should be trained in the science of reading, focusing on phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Ongoing professional development and mentorship are crucial for effective implementation and adapting to students’ evolving needs.

The “science of reading” provides a comprehensive framework for literacy instruction, emphasizing key elements such as phonemic awareness, which is the ability to recognize and manipulate sounds in words, and “phonics”, which connects sounds to written symbols. Other crucial components include “fluency” (the ability to read smoothly), “vocabulary” (understanding the meanings of words), and “comprehension” (the ability to understand and interpret what is read). Research consistently shows that these elements are fundamental for developing proficient readers (Snow, 2010).

However, for teachers to implement these strategies effectively, “ongoing professional development” is critical. This ensures that educators are continually improving their skills, staying current with the latest research, and adjusting their methods to meet the diverse needs of their students. “Mentorship” programs can further enhance this development by pairing less experienced teachers with seasoned professionals who provide guidance and support. These ongoing learning opportunities help teachers adapt to “changing student needs”, whether they involve students struggling with reading or those who require advanced challenges (Guskey, 2000).

Providing continuous training and mentorship will empower teachers to better address literacy challenges, ultimately improving student outcomes across various learning contexts.

Teachers need training in differentiating instruction for diverse learners. Regular assessments are key to tracking progress and providing support. Access to resources like books, materials, and technology is crucial for effective implementation.

Recognizing that “students learn at different paces” and have a wide range of needs, it is essential that teachers are trained in “differentiated instruction”. Differentiation allows educators to adjust their teaching strategies, materials, and assessments to meet the individual needs of their students. This is particularly important in addressing the needs of “struggling readers”, who may require additional support, and “advanced learners”, who need more challenging material to stay engaged and continue progressing (Tomlinson, 2001).

To support this approach, “regular assessments” are a critical tool for teachers. By consistently evaluating student progress, teachers can identify areas where students are excelling or where they may need further intervention. This data-driven approach helps ensure that all students, regardless of their learning pace, receive the support they need to succeed (Guskey, 2000).

Moreover, the “availability of resources” such as books, instructional materials, and technology plays a vital role in implementing the reading program effectively. Having access to a variety of materials allows for more “engaging” and “diverse” learning experiences that can cater to different learning styles. Technology, in particular, can offer interactive learning tools and provide instant feedback, further enhancing the learning experience (Meyer & Rose, 2005).

Ensuring that teachers are equipped with the right training, assessments, and resources is essential for fostering an inclusive and effective reading program that meets the needs of all learners. A collaborative environment for teachers to share best practices is vital for the reading program's success. Engaging parents with resources and strategies also helps reinforce learning outside the classroom. A collaborative environment among teachers is fundamental for enhancing the effectiveness of any educational program. When educators can

come together to share their experiences and best practices, they foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement. Teachers benefit from the collective wisdom of their peers, which can help them refine their teaching strategies, address challenges, and adapt to changing student needs (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). This collaboration promotes a sense of community and empowers teachers to implement the reading program more effectively.

In addition to fostering collaboration among teachers, it is equally important to “engage parents” in the reading process. Parents play a vital role in supporting their children's literacy development, especially when they are provided with clear, practical resources and strategies to use at home. Research indicates that parental involvement in early education significantly enhances children's academic achievement, particularly in literacy (Epstein, 2011). By equipping parents with tools to support reading at home—such as reading strategies, appropriate books, and activities—schools can create a stronger link between home and school learning, fostering a consistent and supportive learning environment.

Ultimately, the “combination of teacher collaboration and parental involvement” ensures a well-rounded and effective approach to reading education, helping students develop essential literacy skills both inside and outside the classroom.

Theme 3: Foundation for Reading Success

To support reading success, it is essential to focus on foundational skills by prioritizing explicit and systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies. Teachers must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to implement research-based reading practices, while creating a literacy-rich environment in schools and classrooms that encourages both reading and writing.

The foundation of effective reading instruction rests on key elements that must be explicitly taught and practiced. These elements include “phonemic awareness” (the ability to hear and manipulate sounds), “phonics” (connecting letters to sounds), “fluency” (reading with speed and accuracy), “vocabulary” (knowing the meaning of words), and “comprehension” (understanding what is read). Research consistently shows that explicit and “systematic instruction” in these areas is crucial for students' reading success, particularly in the early grades (Snow, 2010).

Teachers must be provided with the “knowledge and skills” necessary to implement “research-based reading instruction” practices. This requires ongoing professional development that is aligned with evidence-based literacy strategies. Training should cover best practices in teaching phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and comprehension, ensuring that educators are equipped to support all learners, including those who may be struggling (Guskey, 2000).

In addition to effective instruction, creating a “literacy-rich environment” is equally important. Classrooms and schools should be filled with print materials such as books, posters, and writing tools, encouraging both “reading and writing”. A literacy-rich environment fosters a culture where students see reading and writing as valuable and enjoyable, motivating them to engage with texts regularly. Research also shows that when students are exposed to a variety of reading materials and are encouraged to write, their literacy skills improve significantly (Morrow, 2014). By combining explicit instruction with a supportive environment, schools can provide the foundation students need for long-term reading success. To improve reading outcomes, differentiated instruction, culturally relevant materials, technology integration, comprehension strategies, and oral reading practice are key. Ongoing assessments and family engagement are also vital for monitoring progress and reinforcing learning at home. The diverse needs of students require “differentiated instruction” an approach that tailors teaching to accommodate varying learning speeds and styles. This ensures that each student receives the support they need, whether they require interventions for struggling readers or more challenging material for advanced learners (Tomlinson, 2001). To maintain student engagement, “high-quality, age-appropriate, and culturally relevant reading materials” should be prioritized. These materials not only align with students' interests but also reflect their diverse backgrounds, helping them connect more deeply with the content (Gay, 2010). Integrating technology, such as interactive reading apps and digital resources, further enhances engagement and allows for personalized learning experiences (Meyer & Rose, 2005).

Reading comprehension strategies, such as “making inferences, predicting, summarizing, and questioning”, are vital tools for improving understanding and critical thinking while reading. These strategies can be taught explicitly and reinforced through “ongoing assessments”, which help teachers monitor progress and provide timely feedback (Guskey, 2000).

Moreover, “oral reading practice” is essential for building “fluency”. Repeated readings and guided practice help students become more confident and fluent readers. This should be complemented by “family involvement” in the learning process. Workshops, reading clubs, and home reading activities can significantly support children’s literacy development, creating a bridge between the classroom and home environments (Epstein, 2011). By combining “differentiation, engaging materials, comprehension strategies, fluency practice, and family engagement”, schools can create a comprehensive approach to support the reading development of all students.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The findings emphasize the critical importance of a comprehensive, evidence-based approach to literacy instruction, centered on the foundational elements of the science of reading phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency,

vocabulary, and comprehension. The National Reading Program (NRP) has made significant strides in promoting early literacy through systematic phonics instruction and engaging learning materials, which have boosted student interest and improved decoding skills. However, challenges such as rigid curriculum pacing and insufficient support for diverse learners, including those with learning difficulties, highlight the need for greater flexibility and differentiation in instruction. Continuous professional development and mentorship for teachers are essential to enhance instructional effectiveness, alongside the provision of age-appropriate, culturally relevant, and technology-integrated resources. Additionally, fostering teacher collaboration and strengthening parental involvement are vital to reinforcing reading habits beyond the classroom. Ultimately, by aligning teaching practices with student needs and creating literacy-rich environments, the NRP can more effectively cultivate confident, independent readers and fulfill its vision of inclusive, equitable literacy for all learners.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the results and discussion of this research, it is recommended that the Department of Education (DepEd) enhance the implementation of the National Reading Program (NRP) by adopting a more flexible, inclusive, and teacher-supported approach. Specifically, the pacing of phonics instruction should be adjusted to accommodate the varied learning needs of students, particularly those who require more time and repeated practice to master foundational skills. Differentiated instruction should be emphasized, allowing teachers to tailor strategies and materials for struggling readers, learners with disabilities, and advanced students. In line with this, continuous professional development focused on the science of reading including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension must be prioritized, paired with mentorship programs to support teacher growth. Access to diverse, engaging, and culturally relevant reading materials, as well as interactive technological tools, should also be expanded to foster student motivation and literacy engagement. Furthermore, a strong emphasis should be placed on creating collaborative professional learning communities among teachers and involving parents in the reading process through home-based literacy strategies. Lastly, consistent formative assessments should be used to monitor student progress and inform instructional decisions. Through these strategies, the NRP can better support equitable and effective literacy development for all Filipino learners.

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