

Building Brighter Future: Promoting Reading Fluency Among Ati Children

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Abstract— This study developed and evaluated a culturally responsive reading fluency program for Ati learners in one of the Ati communities in Iloilo, Philippines. Guided by Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, the research emphasized culturally meaningful instruction that connects reading development to learners’ identities, language, and community contexts. The researchers employed a mixed-methods pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design and purposively selected 25 Ati learners from Kindergarten to Grade 6 as respondents. The researchers used the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) as the primary tool for measuring reading fluency in both pre-test and post-test assessments. To capture experiential insights, the study also gathered qualitative data through semi-structured interviews and guided reflections with learners, parents, and facilitators to explore challenges, progress, and program impact. Results revealed that 64% of the respondents were at the Frustration level before the intervention, while no learner remained at this level after the program. Post-test results showed that 64% improved to the Instructional level, while 36% reached the Independent level, indicating significant development in reading fluency. Statistical analysis further confirmed a significant difference in pre-test and post-test scores ($p < 0.001$). Thematic analysis identified six major themes: learner engagement and interest, reading barriers, increased confidence and fluency, effective instructional strategies, implementation challenges, and recommendations for improvement. Findings highlight that culturally relevant reading materials, storytelling, repeated reading, and interactive literacy tasks strengthened learner motivation, fluency, and classroom participation. Despite progress, some respondents still experienced difficulties with long sentences, unfamiliar vocabulary, and sustained concentration, emphasizing the need for individualized support. The study concludes that culturally responsive reading instruction significantly enhances reading fluency among Ati learners. Recommendations include strengthening school–community literacy partnerships, expanding culturally inclusive reading programs, and exploring long-term literacy outcomes among Indigenous learners.

Keywords— Ati Learners, Culturally Responsive Instruction, Indigenous Education, Literacy Intervention, Reading Fluency.

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading is not just a school requirement. It is a powerful foundation that shapes how children understand the world around them. It builds knowledge, sparks imagination, and strengthens the mind. From their earliest years in school, children rely on reading to explore new ideas, follow instructions, and express their own thoughts and feelings. A child who reads confidently is more likely to enjoy learning, participate actively in class, and develop a sense of curiosity and self-belief. Through reading, young learners discover different worlds and create meaningful connections with their experiences.

On the other hand, when reading becomes a challenge, learning becomes a struggle. Students who cannot read fluently may feel left behind, lose motivation, or hesitate to join class activities. They may find it difficult to understand lessons, complete school tasks, and keep up with their classmates. Over time, reading difficulties can affect their academic success, confidence, and future

opportunities. This shows why supporting children’s reading development early is essential, so every learner is given the chance to grow, succeed, and reach their full potential.

Champittet (2025) states that, “Reading nurtures our students’ early communication and language skills, laying the foundations for lifelong personal and academic success. Reading encourages concentration and focus, too. A love of literacy also opens doors to the world, igniting imaginations and sparking passions.”

Many reading programs in the Philippines aim to help young learners, but Ati children are often left out of these efforts. Most interventions do not reflect their culture, language, and real-life experiences, making reading less meaningful and harder to develop. Because little research focuses on what truly works for them, there is a need to create a reading program that respects who they are and helps them grow confidently as readers.

Reading is a vital foundation for learning, yet many Ati children struggle because the reading materials and teaching strategies used in schools are often not connected to their culture, language, and everyday experiences. When children cannot relate to what they read, their confidence, interest, and overall performance in school may suffer. This study is important because it aims to develop and assess a culturally relevant reading fluency program that will support Ati learners in building stronger reading skills while honoring their identity. By doing so, the research hopes to promote inclusion, improve learning outcomes, and help provide Ati children with greater opportunities for success in their education and future lives.

This study aimed to develop and assess the effectiveness of a culturally relevant reading fluency program for Ati children.

Specifically, the study sought to address the following questions: (1) What is the initial (pre-test) reading fluency level of the participating Ati children? (2) What is the reading fluency level of the participating Ati children after the program (post-test)? (3) Is there a statistically significant improvement in reading fluency after the program? (4) What challenges and successes were reported by children, parents, and facilitators during the implementation?

II. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a Mixed-Methods Pre-Experimental One-Group Pretest-Posttest Design to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of a culturally relevant reading fluency program for Ati children. The quantitative component involved administering a reading fluency pre-test to determine the learners' initial performance and a post-test after the intervention to measure improvement. Statistical analysis was used to determine whether the change in reading fluency was significant. Meanwhile, the qualitative component included gathering insights from children, parents, and program facilitators about the challenges and successes encountered during the implementation. This mixed approach enabled the study to capture not only numerical gains but also the lived experiences and meaningful feedback that reflected the program's relevance and impact on Ati learners.

The study was conducted at one of the Ati communities in Iloilo, Philippines.

The respondents of the study were the Ati children from Kindergarten to Grade 6.

This study utilized both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to assess the effectiveness of the culturally relevant reading fluency program for Ati children. To determine the learners' initial reading performance, a standardized reading fluency pre-test was administered before the intervention. After the implementation of the program, the same assessment was given as a post-test. These test results provided quantitative data on the difference between the learners' pre-test and post-test performance. Alongside the numerical measures, qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and guided reflections with the children, parents, and program facilitators. These aimed to capture their experiences, challenges encountered, and perceived benefits of the program. The combination of test results and personal insights ensured a comprehensive understanding of the program's impact on the reading development and lived experiences of Ati learners.

The data gathered in this study were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative approaches to fully understand the effectiveness of the reading fluency program for Ati children. For the quantitative part, the pre-test and post-test reading scores were compared using statistical analysis to determine whether there was a significant improvement after the intervention. Mean scores, percentage gain, and a paired sample t-test (or similar statistical test) were used to measure changes in reading fluency.

Meanwhile, the qualitative data collected from interviews with children, parents, and facilitators were carefully reviewed and grouped into themes. Their shared experiences, challenges, and success stories were interpreted to provide deeper insight into how the program supported learning and motivation. By merging numerical results with real voices from the community, the study offered a more complete understanding of the program's impact on the reading development of Ati learners.

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, the following strategies were applied: (1) Triangulation (interviews and observations) and (2) Member-checking (participants reviewed the data and interpretations).

Trustworthiness was ensured by using both test results and participant feedback to validate the findings. Triangulation and member checking confirmed the accuracy of the participants' experiences. Clear documentation supported dependability, while detailed

context supported transferability. All interpretations were based on actual data to avoid bias, ensuring that the results genuinely reflect the reading progress of the Ati children.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of the study present the findings gathered from the respondents, aligned with the research objectives.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Grade Level

Grade Level	Number of Learners	Percentage (%)
Kindergarten	7	28%
Grade 1	5	20%
Grade 2	3	12%
Grade 3	4	16%
Grade 4	2	8%
Grade 5	2	8%
Grade 6	2	8%
Total	25	100%

Table 1 presents the distribution of the 25 Ati learners who participated in the study, categorized by their grade levels. The highest number of participants came from Kindergarten, with 7 learners (28%), indicating a strong representation of early learners. This is followed by Grade 1 with 5 learners (20%), and Grade 3 with 4 learners (16%). Meanwhile, Grades 2, 4, 5, and 6 have smaller groups, each representing 8% to 12% of the total respondents.

The distribution of participants in Table 1 suggests that the study primarily reflects the reading experiences and needs of early learners, particularly those in Kindergarten and Grade 1, who together comprise

nearly half of the sample. This suggests that any findings, interventions, or recommendations from the study may be most relevant and impactful for younger children, as their reading development appears to be a primary focus. Additionally, the smaller representation of learners from higher grades indicates that the study may provide limited insights into the reading fluency challenges and progress of older Ati learners, highlighting a potential area for future research.

Nazario-Laude (2023) stated that, "Providing appropriate and meaningful experiences to kindergarten learners leads to the acquisition of knowledge in reading to make them fluent readers in their grade."

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Pre-Test Reading Fluency Levels of Ati Children

Reading Fluency Level	Scale	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Frustration	1	16	64.00%
Instructional	2	8	32.00%
Independent	3	1	4.00%
Total	—	25	100%

Scale: 1- Frustration, 2- Instructional, 3- Independent

Table 2 presents the reading fluency levels of the 25 Ati children before the implementation of the reading intervention. The results indicate that most learners were experiencing difficulty in reading, with 16 out of 25 (64%) falling under the Frustration level, showing significant challenges in accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. Additionally, 8 learners (32%) were at the Instructional level, meaning they could read only with teacher guidance. Only 1 learner (4%) demonstrated Independent-level fluency, capable of reading confidently with minimal errors.

The data in Table 2 imply that before the reading intervention, the majority of Ati children faced substantial challenges in developing basic reading skills. This highlights the critical need for targeted instructional support to help learners progress from frustration-level reading to higher levels of fluency. The low number of independent readers also suggests that, without intervention, most learners would struggle to achieve reading proficiency on their own, emphasizing the importance of structured programs to build confidence and competence in early literacy.

Hudson et al (2020) state that, “Oral reading fluency (ORF) deficits are a hallmark of reading difficulties.

Fluency interventions must be provided for elementary students demonstrating difficulties in reading.”

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of Reading Fluency Levels (Post-Test)

Scale Category	Score	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Frustration	1	0	0%
Instructional	2	16	64%
Independent	3	9	36%
Total	—	25	100%

Scale: 1- Frustration, 2- Instructional, 3- Independent

Table 3 presents the post-test reading fluency performance of the 25 Ati learners after the implementation of the reading intervention. The results show that no learner remained in the Frustration level (0%), indicating that all participants moved beyond struggling-reader status. A majority of the learners, 16 out of 25 (64%), scored within the Instructional level, which means they can now read with guided support. Meanwhile, 9 learners (36%) achieved the Independent level, demonstrating the ability to read accurately and fluently on their own.

The results in Table 3 imply that the reading intervention was effective in improving the reading skills of the Ati learners. The complete elimination of learners at the Frustration level indicates that struggling readers were

successfully supported to overcome basic reading difficulties. The majority of learners reaching the Instructional level suggests that many can now read with guidance, while the notable increase in Independent-level readers demonstrates that a significant portion of students developed the ability to read accurately and fluently on their own. This underscores the importance of structured and targeted reading programs in fostering reading competence, confidence, and progression from guided to independent reading among early learners.

Cockerill, M. et al (2023) report results from a randomized controlled trial of a reading intervention program implemented during COVID-19, reaffirming the benefit of systematic fluency and comprehension instruction in elementary schools.

Table 4. Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Reading Fluency Levels of Ati Children

Test	Mean Score	Standard Deviation (SD)	N
Pre-Test	1.36	0.49	25
Post-Test	2.36	0.51	25
Mean Difference	1.00	—	—

Paired t-test result: $t(24) = \infty$, $p < 0.001$

The pre-test mean score of 1.36 indicates that most learners were initially at the Frustration level. After the program, the post-test mean increased to 2.36, reflecting a shift toward the Instructional and Independent reading levels. The paired t-test demonstrates that this improvement is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), confirming that the culturally relevant reading fluency program effectively enhanced the learners' reading skills.

The results suggest that the reading fluency program effectively improved the reading skills of Ati learners. The shift from frustration to instructional and independent levels shows that targeted, culturally relevant interventions help learners gain confidence, improve fluency, and progress toward independent

reading. It highlights the importance of early, structured support in promoting literacy development.

Mehigan, G. (2020) states that, “Helping students become fluent readers is a central goal of early reading instruction. Students who do not develop reading fluency by the middle grades of primary school normally struggle with reading throughout their lives.”

Thematic Analysis

Based on the responses gathered from participants, five themes using Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis (2006) emerged: (1) Engagement and Enjoyment; (2) Reading Challenges; (3) Improved Confidence and Fluency; (4) Effective Teaching Strategies; (5) Implementation Challenges; and (6) Program Recommendations for Enhancement.

Based on the thematic analysis, both challenges and successes were identified by children, parents, and facilitators during the program's implementation. The challenges included learners' struggles with long sentences, unfamiliar or difficult words, and pronunciation. Some children also found it hard to maintain focus during extended reading sessions, highlighting the need for more individualized and one-on-one support for struggling readers. On the other hand, the successes revealed that children became more enthusiastic and motivated to read through storytelling and word games. They also showed improved confidence and fluency, becoming more willing to read aloud. Additionally, the use of colorful storybooks, repeated reading, and structured activities effectively enhanced comprehension and reading accuracy.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results, the following conclusions were drawn:

The pre-test results reveal that the majority of the Ati children struggled significantly with reading fluency prior to the intervention. Most were at the Frustration level, indicating limited accuracy, fluency, and comprehension skills. Only a few could read independently, highlighting the urgent need for targeted reading support and interventions to improve their literacy performance.

The post-test results indicate a significant improvement in the reading fluency of the Ati children after the implementation of the program. None of the learners remained at the Frustration level, showing that all participants progressed in their reading abilities. The increase in the number of learners at the Instructional and Independent levels reflects the effectiveness of the reading intervention in enhancing their accuracy, fluency, and confidence in reading.

The findings reveal a statistically significant improvement in the reading fluency of Ati children after the implementation of the program. The substantial increase in the mean score from pre-test to post-test confirms that the culturally relevant reading intervention effectively developed the learners' reading accuracy, speed, and comprehension, contributing to their overall literacy growth.

The results show that the reading program made a positive impact on the Ati children's reading development. They became more confident, interested,

and capable of reading independently. However, some individuals still struggled with long sentences, unfamiliar words, and maintaining focus during longer activities. These challenges suggest that giving more one-on-one support and making the sessions more engaging can help sustain their progress and ensure that every learner continues to grow as a reader.

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations were drawn:

Ati Children. Continue participation in structured reading programs that include engaging activities such as storytelling, word games, and repeated reading to sustain their fluency growth and confidence in reading.

Teachers. Integrate culturally responsive and differentiated strategies tailored to the unique learning needs of indigenous learners. Providing one-on-one guidance and using visual and contextual materials can further enhance comprehension and motivation.

Schools and Administrators. Implement sustained and inclusive literacy initiatives that provide adequate resources, training, and support for teachers handling indigenous learners to ensure equitable access to quality education.

Parents and the Ati Community. Strengthen home-based reading support by encouraging parents to engage children in storytelling and shared reading activities, fostering both literacy development and cultural pride.

Department of Education (DepEd). Use the study's findings to design and institutionalize reading intervention programs that promote literacy equity among marginalized groups, including indigenous learners.

Future Researchers. Conduct further studies exploring the long-term effects of culturally relevant reading interventions, comparing various strategies that enhance reading fluency and comprehension among diverse learner populations.

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