

Reading Enhancement Advocacy in Dep Ed (R.E.A.D): Teachers' Life-Changing Task

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Abstract: *Reading is a skill that indirectly determines the future of a young individual while literacy is the legacy of the teacher to their learners. This study employed the qualitative research design with the use of phenomenological approach and grounded theory as a tool. It was found out that family orientation and background played a big and important role in the reading ability of the learners. It was also identified that the multilingualism of the learners affects their ability to read. It also creates their word confusion among the mother tongue, the Filipino and English languages. The non-readers may be concluded as a result of public educational system which employs policy on mass promotion and a learning scenario with a challenging ratio between a teacher and numerous students in one class. The said situation produces the non-readers in the higher grades. The intervention of the teachers proved to be effective which uses reading materials that ranges from alphabet chart, words, phrases, short paragraphs to short stories. The frequency of session ranges from two, three and the most is five hours per week. This paper recommends providing exigency of service of the academicians, to help battle the phenomenal illiteracy of learners through an extension program for a more literate society.*

Keywords—Reading Enhancement, Literacy Advocacy, Phenomenological Approach, Grounded Theory, DepEd Philippines

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the most essential factors in learning. It is also one of the four basic skills which needs to be developed in every learner. Through the years, several programs were launched to cater the reading needs of the learners. They include, Every Child a Reader Program (ECARP), an institutionalized program by Dep Ed which enforce the policy that every child a reader by Grade 3; Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (PhilIRI), a national assessment tool to determine the reading level of pupils from Grades I-VI; Bright Minds Read (BMR)Program, a regional initiative fund by MCDonald's House of Charities focused on Teaching Beginning Reading in consonance with ECARP; *Read-A Thon*, A reading enrichment skills via contests on best reader, best storyteller, best oral reading interpretative and vocabulary reading test; and Reading Recovery Program (RRP), a central office funded program to present literacy difficulties at an early stage before they begin to affect a child's education progress.

All of the abovementioned programs intend to enhance the reading skills and comprehension abilities of the learners. It is important to note that it is the comprehension level that defines the level of understanding of the reader. Reading Comprehension is a complex process that requires different building-block skills. These processes include the first three levels such as literal, inferential, and evaluative before attaining the main goal of understanding which is application of the idea learned through reading.

Reading comprehension should be given a priority status in the academic community because it is the backbone of learning. Former Department of Education Secretary Br. Armin A. Luistro said in 2012 that it is important to assess the reading capability of students because reading is the

foundation of all academic learning. He added that if a pupil fails to master basic reading skills at the outset, it will be a constant struggle for them to get through other disciplines successfully, thus depriving them of the chance to become literate and productive individual.

The abovementioned statement has still the same bearing at present, after 7 years. It was revealed in the study of Paz (2018) on reading comprehension level of students in Grade 7, that some levels of reading comprehensions are weak. They include interpretative, critical, and application that require desirable intervention program.

Furthermore, the article of Maliot in Manila Bulletin online platform titled, DepEd Strives to Enhance Reading Skills of Students, published on January 01, 2018 stressed that the Department of Education (DepEd) urged teachers to continue exerting efforts that will help instill the value of learning among their pupils and students. In the same article, it was mentioned that Angelika Jabines, Senior Education Program Specialist from DepEd-Bureau of Learning Delivery-Teaching and Learning Division (BLD-TLD), encouraged everyone to give books and other reading materials as gift to people who have yet to experience the joy of reading.

Hence, this paper focuses on how the teachers' initiative in conducting reading intervention sessions as their personal innovations may change the lives of their learners. This also forms part of their legacy as a teacher. Specifically, this study aims to identify the issues or problems related to reading of the identified learners. It also described the interventions made by the teachers taking up MAED program at Sorsogon State College School of Graduate Studies. The study 1 focuses on the reader and their problems in reading, study 2 highlights the reading teacher and the reading material; while

the last phase, the study 3 deals on the reading remediation and intervention programs designed by the teacher.

As an output of this paper, the MAED program may also provide curriculum enhancement or review and extension program for literacy. In addition, this research also expects that policy on award shall be drafted to acknowledge the effort of the teacher and to come up with copyrighted compilation of reading materials that may be utilized in the said extension program.

II. Objectives of the Study

This research intends to identify the experiences of teachers in English who are enrolled in MAED English program during the first semester of AY 2018-2019, in dealing with reading issues/problems of their learners. Likewise, it aims to document their innovations and designed reading strategies to help the various cases of their students.

Specifically, it aims to describe the background of the students who have reading problems; (2) enumerate the issues or problems in reading of the identified students; (3) identify the types of reading materials that the teacher may use in various reading situations and come up with possible interventions and strategies that may be employed in each identified problem in reading; and (4) propose literacy extension program through the MAED English students as an advocacy to help the learners with reading problems.

III. Materials and Methods

This study employed the qualitative research design with the use of phenomenological approach and grounded theory as a tool. The use of phenomenological approach shall determine the experiences of the Teachers in English in dealing with their learners who have reading problems. It follows four steps such as bracketing, intuition, analysis and description. In collecting information, simple one on one interview was applied and FGD was conducted to validate the individual's responses. Narration is one of the important factors applied in the gathering of information where the researcher considered the saturation of details. Furthermore, in terms of the IM's effectiveness, the English teachers' solicited stories and feedbacks from the immediate family and school community about the performance of the reader were considered.

For in-depth discussion, the use of grounded theory as a tool was considered. It enabled the researcher to seek out and conceptualise the latent social patterns and structures pertaining to the identified issues in the reading ability of the learners. In this study, the reading situations and the reading materials were initially considered using an inductive approach. It then generated substantive codes, and later developed the theory on the use of schema in understanding the essence of reading per se and reading difficulties of the learner. Furthermore, it can be theorized that knowledge and reading are indeed interactive factors in the life of the learners.

Theoretical Framework

The schema theory identifies that the comprehension of the text is an interactive process between the reader's background knowledge and the text. The understanding requires the ability of the reader to relate the textual material to one's knowledge. According to Barlett (1932:201) "people have schemata, or unconscious mental structures that represent an individual's generic knowledge about the world. It is through schemata that old knowledge influences new information". The three basic types of this theory, (Urquhart and Weir, 1998: 71) are content, formal and linguistic. The content deals with the cultural knowledge, familiarity of the topic and prior experience of the subject. The formal type is also known as the textual schema where it is more concerned on the knowledge of discourse such as the rhetoric on myths, narratives, poetry, expository writing, research reports and the like. The third type, the linguistic mainly focuses on the skills and knowledge needed for precise decoding of the linguistic units of a text including grammar, syntax vocabulary and other discourse types.

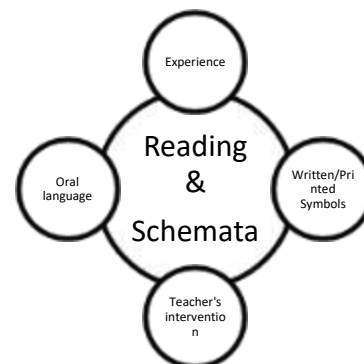


Fig. I. Factors Involved in Reading

Carrel, (1987:476) claimed that when either form or content are unfamiliar, reading is relatively difficult. His study involved high intermediate English as a Second Language (ESL) students which also resulted to the reverse idea that when both form and content are familiar, the reading is relatively easy. The same idea is supported by Chall (1996) on the stages of reading development that discussed the expected ability of the reader based on age.

Along with the schema theory, this study is also anchored on the interrelationship between knowledge and reading. As shown on the diagram, the individual experiences, oral language, the written/printed symbols, and the teacher's intervention are interconnected factors in reading.

IV. Results and Discussion

This paper discusses various cases of learners with reading difficulties. It focuses on specific learner with an interesting case/issue on reading who was chosen by his/her teacher. For

the purpose of confidentiality, the teachers and the students were coded. For geographical representation, the specific name of the schools were not mentioned, but the location was identified in the form of municipality.

1. The Learners with reading problems

The learners whom the teachers conducted reading remediation and strategies vary in terms of age, level and specific municipality where they come from. In terms of age, there are three 12 years old, the youngest age among the learners; while the oldest is 17, in the grade 9 level. There is also a 43 year-old non-reader, but not anymore attending school.

Out of nine learners with reading problems, eight learners are all in the middle school, six belong to grade 7, one in grade 8, and one in grade 9. In terms of gender, there are 5 male and 4 female with problems in reading. The table below presents the simple profile of the learners with reading problems.

Table 1. The Profile of the Learners with Problems in Reading

Learner Code	Age	Sex	Grade	Municipality
L01	14	M	7	Barcelona
L02	17	M	9	Gubat
L03	12	F	7	Prieto Diaz
L04	13	M	7	Magallanes
L05	12	F	7	Sor City
L06	15	F	8	Bacon Dist.
L07	12	M	7	Casiguran
L08	14	M	7	Castilla
L09	43	F	OS	Bulan

*OS –Out of School

The abovementioned learners with reading problems or difficulties are all residents of the Sorsogon Province. They came from the different municipalities of the first and second districts. The average age of the learners is 14. The said age is under the stage 4, described as multiple viewpoints, considering Chall’s (1999) stages of reading development. Accordingly in the said stage, the learners are expected to have the ability to deal with layers of facts and concepts added to those acquired earlier. It must be considered however, that without the basic knowledge acquired in stage 3, the reading materials with multiple viewpoints would be difficult. The stage 3 is described as reading for learning the new: a first step.

In this paper, the participants have identified their subjects, as under the frustration level, and the average age is 14. Based from the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil- IRI) 2018 Manual, the learners in the frustration level are considered as non-readers. The program was an initiative of the Department of Education (DepEd) designed as teachers’ tool in the three types of reading assessment; oral reading comprehension, listening comprehension and silent reading comprehension. The main objective is to let the

teachers identify the level of reading materials that the students can read and understand as well as the reading readiness of the student.

Out of the nine learners as subject of this paper, 5 are males and 4 are females. It is safe to conclude that the sex does not play a significant part in the reading ability of the learners. This is quite in contrary to the study of Remanente (2015) which identifies that the male participants in her research, *Factors affecting academic reading among students*, generally spend more time reading print and online news articles than the female students.

Most of the non-readers are in Grade 7, where they are supposed to have gained the reading ability from Grade 1 to Grade 6. It is also alarming to note that there are two learners who are in the higher grades that are also non-readers. In addition, one of the subjects in this paper is not anymore attending school, being the oldest in the group who benefited advocacy work of a teacher in Dep Ed.

The concern on the reading crisis in the Philippines was also reported in the online article of Albano recently published last April 10, 2019 in The Philippine Star titled, *Non-readers a growing population*. It highlights the issue that the media is also paying attention to the literacy problem as evident in the March 18 episode of GMA network, *Bawal ang Pasaway* titled *kalidad ng Edukasyon sa Pilipinas, lumalalaba?* hosted by Winnie Monsod. As mentioned, it is ironic that the said issue was not in consonance with the problem on the learning material production and procurement process of the Dep Ed. As stated further in the same article, the growing population of the non-readers seems not a priority of the department even if Secretary Briones considered to conduct review of the textbooks. The article pointed out that what the department should give more focus is the consequence of the thoughtless textbook and learning material production which has for instance mis spelled *Banaue Rice Terraces* to *Banana Rice Tereces*.

2. The Issues /problems on reading

There are nine learners who were chosen by the teachers with very alarming reading problem. They are specifically chosen by the teachers to conduct reading remediation/intervention. They are all identified as non-reader being in the frustration level based from the PHIL IRI evaluation.

Nolasco (2008) emphasized the difficulty in learning the second language of the multilingual learners in his paper titled, *The prospects of multilingual education and literacy in the Philippines*. The idea holds true in the acquisition of the four skills, speaking, listening writing and particularly, reading.

The preceding table shows the respective reading problem of the learners.

Table 2. The Issues/Problems in Reading of the Learners

Learner Code	Problems in Reading
L01	Cannot totally recognize words, letters only but cannot blend vowels with consonants.

L02	Difficulty in word recognition, fluency in oral reading and low comprehension
L03	Very low vocabulary, struggles with phonics and exhibits poor comprehension skills.
L04	Difficulty in reading words, cannot read even simple sentences, poor pronunciation and comprehension.
L05	Limited vocabulary words, mispronunciation and bad spelling, low comprehension in the second to the fourth level.
L06	Poor vocabulary, low comprehension in all levels.
L07	Low comprehension skills due to limited vocabulary
L08	Cannot recognize words, letter sounds and no comprehension.
L09	Cannot recognize words; letters only. Can comprehend if the material (Filipino only) will be read for her.

It can be noted that the basic requirement in reading, the letter and word recognition is the common problem among the learners. Some of them cannot even identify the sound of the letters of the alphabet, despite the completion of the elementary level. When the learner has low comprehension skills, it is obviously based from the foundation in reading, on the letter and word recognition problem that also results to limited vocabulary that leads to poor comprehension.

The problem on pronunciation is another issue in the oral reading, and its counterpart, the spelling problem in the written words. The said issues can also be traced back from the familiarity of the learner to their second language which is English. In the case of one of the recipients of the teacher's advocacy, the 43-year-old non-reader female who does not anymore attend school, she shows comprehension if the words are in the native language. She was only able to attend the first grade because of her health problem. Nevertheless, just like other learners, she is considered illiterate in terms of writing and reading, and low in comprehension whenever English language is concerned.

In the interviews with the Dep Ed teachers, they were asked on their opinion how the learners were able to graduate despite being a non-reader. They were also asked on what could have been the reason why those learners are under the frustration level. These are their replies;

Kasi po may mass promotion, ipinasa na lang dahil naka tatlong ulit na ang bata sa grade 6; Kasama po ang bata sa isang pamilya na talagang mahihina ang ulo; Galing po sa mahirap na pamilya, nagtartrabaho pa daw po pagdating ng bahay at bihirang makapasok ng school lalo na pag walang pamasaha o baon.

The above verbatim responses of the teachers can be translated to the reasons such as; to put the blame to the promotion policy in the Dep Ed for K to 12, based on Dep Ed Order No. 13, s 2018, where they have to pass the learner if

he/she has been a repeater more than once; the learner belongs to a family who is noted having a low IQ; or from a very poor family where the learner needs to help in the family provision to the extent of not attending school from time to time especially during tougher times without money for food or fare expenses.

The identified problems in reading are quite the same with the research work of Imam, Mastura, Jamil and Ismail (2014) conducted in Cotabato City among the 666 first year student respondents from 18 identified public and private high schools. The general results showed four out of six reading skills such as understanding vocabulary in context, noting details, predicting outcome and making inference were indexed at a low mastery level.

Another study on the effectiveness of reading with remedial reading students in a Philippine secondary school confirms the family background as a contributory factor in the learning process. In the said study, ninety percent of the students at the school come from low-income homes where there is scarcity of the reading materials. The same thing holds true in the present study that the learners belong to the frustration level as what the teachers commented about their family background.

Others say that most learners are anxious to the types of questions particularly the "how's" and "why's". The said types of questions need the learner's further explanations, rather than simply stating the answers directly lifted from the material. One teacher revealed that she really translates the questions to Filipino and even allow the learner to answer in Filipino due to limited vocabulary in the English language.

The abovementioned language problem find ally in the article of Bernardo in the book, Philippine English, Bautista and Bolton eds. (2009). It is titled, *English in Philippine education: solution or problem?* which discussed the history of criticism and debate in English in Philippine Education. Accordingly, there is the overwhelming majority of Filipino children who find their limited proficiency in English a major stumbling block in their efforts to learn in the various domains of knowledge. The following are Bernardo's words:

They are likely to be alienated by a classroom learning environment which requires them to communicate, to know, and to think in English. They are also likely to fail in examinations and writing requirements in English, to perceive much of formal education as irrelevant, and to drop out of school altogether. (p. 36)

Hence, the problems or issues in reading of the identified learners are the results of the various factors that accumulate from the early foundation years of their education. Their being non-readers may result to further problems in the near future and the big possibility of dropping from school.

3. Materials, strategies and reading interventions designed by the teachers to advocate remediation among the learners with problems in reading.

There are various materials that were utilized by the teachers in their advocacy to provide remediation to the learners with problems in reading. Their choice of a particular learner to whom they extend personal advocacy on reading enhancement was anchored on their own observation aside from the result of the reading evaluation tool used by the CHED. Rasinski (1999) in his study, identified that the availability of reading level rate norms can assist reading diagnosticians in evaluating the performance of children who are having trouble in reading. In this paper, the common assessment tool used in the reading evaluation is the Dep Ed's Phil IRI.

In the study of Rolstad, Mahoney and Glass (2005), it is shown that bilingual education is consistently superior to all English approaches and concluded that bilingual education programs are effective in promoting academic achievement. In the Philippine setting, it may be considered similar in perspective to this study. The teachers considered advocacy in their reading intervention session to help the bilingual learners adapt the learning process through enhanced letter to word recognition, increased vocabulary thereby result to increased comprehension.

The preceding table provides summary of the materials, strategies and interventions designed by the teachers in their advocacy in the enhancement of reading among specific learners.

Table 3. Teachers' Materials, Strategies and Reading Interventions

	Materials and Methods	Frequency of Reading Intervention
T01	Use of sight words from youtube with focus on CVC and spelling activity and IM's for kindergarten.	One hour session every day
T02	Use of colourful fairy tales and bed time stories	One hour session, three times a week
T03	Use of video clips of the alphabet with focus on sounds and pictures	One hour session every day
T04	Use of big books with pictures and nursery rhymes	30 minutes per session, 2x a day- 3x a week
T05	Use short paragraphs with comprehension questions and spelling drills	One hour every day
T06	Use of stories from the internet with pictures to improve the vocabulary words	Twice a week only
T07	Short stories and questions on the literal level	One hour session per day
T08	Children's storybooks with sounds (Battery operated)	One hour session per day
T09	Alphabet chart in English and Short stories in Filipino	Once a week, every Sunday

The strategies and the reading enhancement materials of the teachers vary among the respective learners with reading problems. They range from alphabet chart to short paragraphs and short stories. The frequency of session ranges from two, three and the most is five hours per week which may equate the schedule of a regular subject. It can be noted from the table that the materials as well as the strategies of the teachers in grade 7-9 are similar to the materials of the pre-school and the teachers teaching in elementary grades. In the study of Ehri, Nunes, Stahl and Willows (2001) *The Systematic phonics instruction helps students learn to read: Evidence from the national Reading panel's meta-analysis*, it revealed that systematic phonics instruction helped children to read better than all forms of control group instruction, including whole language.

The said teachers' initiative of conducting the reading interventions had a big impact on the part of the learners. Based on the interviews with the teachers, they honestly commented that the task was sacrificial on both parties, them and the learners. Both must devote their vacant time for the reading session.

The teachers had to improvise materials which they do not necessarily use anymore in the grade level they are

handling. They further commented that they are aware that no reward will be given yet the thought of helping a learner in their own little way is enough prize. The one-hour time they allot in reading intervention may result to a milestone, as they claim. This is the exact words of Teacher 4: *Ang sarap sa pakiramdam na marinig na kaya na nyang basahin ang isang word, tapos naging phrase at sentence pagkalipas ng dalawang buwan.*

This teacher refers to the overwhelming feeling of satisfaction when the learner can read the word which turn to phrases and sentences after the sessions in two months. This personal comment of Teacher 4 is almost the same with the other teachers, who have pronounced that there is indeed the feeling of accomplishment after seeing that the learner has progressed from frustration to instructional level. In the study of Collie, Shapka and Perry (2012), it investigated whether and how teachers' perception of social-emotional learning and climate in their schools influenced three outcome variable, the sense of stress, efficacy and job satisfaction. The study concluded that job satisfaction in terms of the students' performance and behavior is a considerable factor to lessen the teachers' stress.

The teachers also met some difficulties in persuading the learner with reading problem to attend the reading intervention sessions. One says, "nahihiya ang bata kaya ayaw sana mag isang magpa turo na bumasa" (the child feels embarrass and anxious to attend one on one or tutorial type of reading), while the other teacher recalled, "na bu bully ng mga kaklase dahil hindi marunong magbasa", (the classmates bully the non-reader) and another said, " hindi pinapayagan ng magulang at baka tumatambay lang, nagpapalibre sa gawaing bahay" , (the parents do not permit because of the thought that it is one way of avoiding the chores by not coming home on time).

The above cited reasons that cause difficult situations for the teachers to convince the learner in attending reading intervention sessions finds ally in the study published in Reading Psychology. The paper of Lazarus and Callahan (2000) described that attitude toward reading affects students' achievement. The idea is the same in the present study where the learners with problems in reading have various considerable emotional, psychological, and environmental (home) factors.

4. Proposed SGS extension program with MAED English majors- Literacy campaign

This study proposes an extension program, *Let us READ (Raise, Empower and Develop) the Learners in Sorsogon*, of the School of Graduate Studies along with the students, preferably those in the MAED English and PHD Language English programs. The proposal does not limit, however the involvement of the other programs. The main intention of the extension program is to help enhance the literacy rate of the pupils in the elementary level encourage the learners to develop the love for reading to prepare them in the higher

grades, anchored on the theme, *Every Learner is a Reader in Sorsogon.*

V. Conclusion and Recommendation

This paper contends that although the economic status of the learners was not part of the profile, it can be easily interpreted that the family orientation and background play a big and important role in the reading ability of the learners. Most of the non-readers may be concluded as victims of public educational system that caters to the numerous learners all in one class, with a ratio of 1:50-60 In addition, the mass promotion also plays a role where even a nonreader may pass the subject due to the type of grading system including the type of examinations.

Morover, it can be concluded that the learners in the Philippines are multilingual which basically affects the reading and learning process. This paper deals more on the reading of English materials, thus the difficulty encountered on the part of the learners who are considered slow and needs additional support. The support may come from teachers or any adult who is an advocate of literate society. One single step of the learner may lead to a milestone, once the reading blocks are unlocked.

The role of the teachers is indeed life-changing. It is true that the teacher may make or unmake the child. The reading advocacy of the teacher is a program that helps not only the individual learner but the entire family towards the whole society in general. If there will only at least one teacher to stand up and care to at least one of his/her nonreader learner, it may paved a long way to a whole new perspective and world of that learner. It was also discussed in the International Handbook of Teachers and teaching by Biddle, Good and Goodson (2013), which covers the traditions of work and the newest perspectives, concepts, insights, and research-based knowledge concerned with teachers and teaching.

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