

Reading Strategies, Early Literacy Performance, and Instructional Challenges in Grade I Classrooms: Basis for a Contextualized Literacy Action Plan in Cluster IV, Philippines

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Abstract — This study examined the reading performance of Grade I learners, the reading strategies implemented by teachers, and the challenges affecting early literacy instruction in Cluster IV public elementary schools in the Philippines. Using a descriptive-correlational design, the study analyzed Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment results for 545 Grade I learners and survey responses from 50 teachers. Findings showed that 44.40% of learners were reading at grade level, 21.65% were transitioning, and 31.74% remained in the emerging or developing levels, indicating persistent foundational literacy gaps. Teachers most consistently implemented phonics instruction, sight-word recognition, guided reading, shared reading, and literacy games, while listening centers and interactive/shared writing were less frequently used. Major learner-related constraints included limited vocabulary, weak letter-sound recognition, low readiness, short attention span, and low reading motivation. Home and environmental barriers were likewise pronounced, particularly weak parental involvement, limited reading support at home, and socioeconomic constraints. A positive association was found between teachers' reading strategies and learners' reading performance ($r = .29$), suggesting that stronger instructional practices are linked with better literacy outcomes. The study concludes that early literacy improvement requires explicit instruction, differentiated support, home-school collaboration, and resource-responsive interventions. A contextualized action plan is recommended to strengthen foundational reading achievement.

Keywords: Grade I learners; early literacy; reading strategies; reading performance; contextualized intervention

I. INTRODUCTION

Foundational literacy in the early grades is a decisive predictor of later academic success because reading development depends on the interaction of phonological awareness, oral language, decoding, fluency, and comprehension. Recent evidence shows that early literacy interventions and explicit instruction in foundational skills can improve children's reading outcomes, while the use of decodable texts strengthens early word recognition and reading accuracy. These findings reinforce the need for systematic, developmentally appropriate reading instruction in Grade I classrooms.

Reading achievement, however, is not determined by classroom instruction alone. Reading motivation, home literacy experiences, parental beliefs about reading, and school-home conditions all shape the quality of children's literacy development. Studies have shown that children's reading growth is stronger when families actively engage in reading practices at home and when instructional environments are aligned with learners' developmental and linguistic needs. This broader ecological view is especially relevant in public elementary school settings where literacy outcomes are often shaped by both pedagogical and socioeconomic conditions.

Teacher capacity also matters. Evidence indicates that teacher professional development, classroom progress monitoring, and structured literacy supports are associated with better early reading performance. When teachers are equipped to differentiate instruction, monitor learner growth, and implement evidence-based reading practices, literacy outcomes improve more substantially. Within this context, the present study examined reading performance, teacher-implemented reading strategies, and instructional challenges among Grade I learners in Cluster IV, Philippines, as the basis for a contextualized literacy action plan.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive-correlational design derived from the uploaded source manuscript. The manuscript reports CRLA-based reading results for 545 Grade I learners across 10 schools and questionnaire data from 50 Grade I teachers regarding reading strategies and challenges. It also notes a broader sampling frame of 801 learners and a planned sample of 180

across 14 schools; thus, the present article interprets the findings primarily on the basis of the final analytic data reported in the results tables. Frequency counts, percentages, weighted means, and Pearson product-moment correlation were used to analyze the data, with ethical safeguards such as informed consent, confidentiality, and age-appropriate procedures explicitly noted in the source study.

III. RESULTS

The CRLA results showed that 242 learners (44.40%) were already reading at grade level, while 118 (21.65%) were transitioning, 61 (11.19%) were developing, 63 (11.56%) were high emerging, and 49 (8.99%) were low emerging. Although the largest single group had reached grade-level proficiency, the combined proportion of emerging and developing readers remained substantial, indicating that many Grade I learners still needed structured remediation and targeted literacy support.

With respect to classroom practice, the most consistently implemented strategies were phonics instruction (WM = 4.83), sight-word recognition (WM = 4.80), games and literacy activities (WM = 4.63), guided reading (WM = 4.57), and shared reading (WM = 4.47). Frequently used but less dominant strategies included visual aids/picture cues (WM = 4.10), word family and rhyming activities (WM = 4.03), and repeated reading (WM = 3.70). Listening centers or audio-assisted reading (WM = 2.90) and interactive/shared writing (WM = 2.53) were only sometimes implemented. These patterns suggest a strong emphasis on decoding and fluency, with less regular use of integrative and expressive literacy activities.

The most serious learner-related challenges were limited vocabulary (WM = 4.52), difficulty recognizing letters and sounds (WM = 4.42), lack of readiness for formal reading instruction (WM = 4.40), short attention span (WM = 4.34), and low interest or motivation in reading (WM = 4.12). In instructional terms, differentiating instruction for struggling readers was the most serious challenge (WM = 4.24), followed by moderate concerns related to class size, instructional time, teacher training, and progress assessment. In the materials and home domains, limited access to books at home (WM = 4.32), insufficient technology (WM = 3.82), low parental

involvement (WM = 4.66), little reading support at home (WM = 4.72), and socioeconomic barriers (WM = 4.40) emerged as major constraints on literacy development.

Pearson correlation analysis further showed a positive relationship between reading strategies and learners' reading performance ($r = .29$). Statistically, this is better interpreted as a modest positive association rather than a strong one, meaning that stronger implementation of reading strategies was linked to better learner outcomes, but other factors also likely influenced reading performance.

IV. DISCUSSION

The prominence of phonics instruction, sight-word recognition, guided reading, and shared reading in the present study is consistent with contemporary evidence showing that explicit foundational-skills instruction and the use of structured or decodable reading materials are beneficial in early literacy development. The Cluster IV findings therefore support the continued use of systematic decoding-oriented instruction, particularly for learners who remain below grade-level expectations.

At the same time, the relatively limited use of listening centers and interactive/shared writing suggests that instruction may be more heavily concentrated on decoding than on broader meaning-making, oral language expansion, and expressive literacy. This matters because reading motivation and active literacy engagement are associated with stronger comprehension development. A balanced early literacy program should therefore preserve explicit phonics instruction while also integrating oral language activities, shared writing, meaningful text discussion, and motivational reading experiences.

The findings on home and environmental barriers are especially consequential. The highest-rated problems in the study involved weak reading support at home, low parental involvement, and socioeconomic constraints. These results align with research showing that parent beliefs, home reading practices, and literacy-rich household environments significantly shape children's early reading development. In practical terms, the data imply that school-based literacy reform in Cluster IV will be insufficient unless it is paired with parent orientation, take-home reading support, and community-based literacy access.

The study also highlights the instructional burden placed on teachers. Differentiating instruction for struggling readers was identified as the most serious classroom-level challenge, and this is consistent with literature showing that progress monitoring, instructional adaptation, and teacher professional development are crucial for early literacy improvement. The modest correlation coefficient in the present study further suggests that teacher strategies matter, but they operate alongside learner readiness, motivation, family support, and resource availability. For this reason, a contextualized action plan should be multi-level, combining teacher training, assessment-based intervention, classroom resources, and home-school collaboration.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The study demonstrates that early literacy performance among Grade I learners in Cluster IV is uneven: while a substantial proportion of learners are already reading at grade level, many remain in the emerging and developing stages and therefore require targeted support. Teachers appear to rely most strongly on foundational reading strategies, particularly phonics and sight-word instruction, but more integrative literacy practices are less consistently implemented. Learner readiness, vocabulary limitations, weak home support, and socioeconomic barriers remain major constraints. Overall, the data indicate that reading strategies are positively associated with reading performance, but the effect is modest, underscoring the need for a broader ecological response to literacy development that extends beyond classroom instruction alone.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

First, Grade I teachers should sustain explicit phonics, guided reading, and sight-word instruction while incorporating more shared writing, oral language development, and comprehension-focused activities. Second, schools should implement differentiated small-group intervention for learners in the low emerging, high emerging, and developing categories. Third, teacher development programs should focus on differentiation, literacy assessment, and progress monitoring. Fourth, school leaders should expand access to leveled books, visual literacy materials, and appropriate digital supports. Fifth, stronger parent engagement mechanisms, such

as reading workshops, home reading logs, and take-home story packs, should be institutionalized. Finally, future studies may test the effectiveness of the proposed action plan through experimental or quasi-experimental designs and address the reporting inconsistency between the manuscript's planned sample and final analytic dataset to strengthen methodological precision.

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