



SURVEY ON THE READING DIFFICULTIES OF K-12 LEARNERS IN SELECTED TAGALOG-SPEAKING PROVINCES: BASIS FOR INTERVENTION

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Reading plays a vital role in all human activities. The development of those skills needed to produce learners who are good readers is one of the ultimate goals of every teacher especially those in the basic education. Filipino learners take several assessment processes in school wherein reading is a key area. It was in 2018 when selected 15-year-old learners took the PISA and the country ranked the lowest in Reading. This study employed a mixed-method of research in trying to know the reading difficulties of learners from kindergarten to senior high school. An online survey questionnaire was used to gather data supported by unstructured interview with teachers. With ninety-two (92) teachers participating in this research (with the majority teaching in elementary level), it was found out that the reading difficulties of learners when it comes to oral reading are the following presented from the most to the least observed: poor pronunciation, slow rate in reading, word-by-word reading, repetition, omission, insertion, reversal, and substitution. When it comes to comprehension, almost hundred percent of the participants agreed that inadequate understanding is a problem along with inadequate vocabulary knowledge. The teachers contend that if the reading material has a lot of unfamiliar words or vocabulary, the students lost their interest and understanding of the text. With all these findings, it was concluded that comprehension is really a problem for learners. The researcher humbly recommends that teachers provide a lot of exercises suited to the capacity of the learners which could help them overcome these difficulties in reading especially their problem with comprehension.

Keywords: comprehension, K to 12 learners, reading difficulties, survey

1. Introduction

Reading is one of the macro-skills which should be developed among learners to become successful in their literacy and academic endeavors. It is the most significant skill to master in order to ensure success in learning (Alderson, 2014 in Schwartz, 2015). It is believed that failure in all other academic subjects can be attributed to the learners' failure to read and comprehend. Several exercises are designed by teachers to help children develop their reading skills.

A child who fails to develop his or her reading skills at a certain level of education finds reading boring and difficult to achieve (Mondero, 2009). If children are not independent readers by the end of the third grade, it is unlikely that they will be able to be successful in the middle grades and beyond and most likely they will rarely be able to "catch up" with their peers. This phenomenon of reading failure makes the child inattentive, irritable, and passive. Therefore, failure in this area hampers him to achieve academically in other content area subjects. This may even lead to negative attitude towards schooling.

With this, it is really frustrating for pupils when they do not understand what they are reading. It is even more frustrating for teachers to see their pupils struggling on reading. When

pupils struggle with comprehension, they often lose their desire to continue to read, that is why teachers should always be checking on comprehension throughout their pupil's assigned readings. Reading comprehension is essential to ensuring learners' literacy in many subject areas. It is imperative that a pupil understands as well as retains the information he/she is reading. When a teacher realizes one or more of their pupils are struggling with comprehension it is crucial that they develop and implement strategies to help alleviate these frustrations.

In the Philippine education system, reading formed part of the core areas of basic education curriculum. For the last decade, the quality of Philippine education was put into a big question due to poor performance of students in reading both local and abroad. A Filipino child needs to develop higher order skills and functional literacy. It is given that any Filipino child with sufficient reading skills would have greater chances of success in school compared to a child whose reading skills are poor and more often than not, those with poor reading skills when assessed properly are diagnosed with reading disability.

Republic Act No. 9155 (RA No. 9155), otherwise known as the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, mandates the Department of Education (DepEd) to formulate national educational policies to improve the delivery of its services and achieve basic education outcomes. In line with this, DepEd implemented Republic Act No. 10533 (RA No. 10533) entitled "Enhanced Basic Education Act", also known as the K to 12 Program, which aims to equip Filipino learners with skills and competencies that address the demands of the 21st Century. www.deped.gov.ph

In 2018, the Philippines joined the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as part of the Quality Basic Education reform plan and a step towards globalizing the quality of Philippine basic education. Released on December 3, 2019, the 2018 PISA results revealed that the Philippines scored 353 in Mathematics, 357 in Science, and 340 in Reading, all below the average of participating OECD countries. (www.deped.gov.ph)

Issues like this triggered the researcher to conduct reading-related research. This study is hoped to extend assistance to teachers, administrators, and curriculum designers to have a more comprehensive review of the existing curriculum and evaluation of the reading materials used as well as the strategies employed by teachers which could help the learners cope with their reading difficulties.

2. Statement of the Problem

With different issues and concerns about the low reading performance of Filipino learners, the researcher was eager to know the reading difficulties of the learners which could contribute to their low reading performance. Specifically, this study answered the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the participants in terms of:
 - 1.1 Age
 - 1.2 Sex
 - 1.3 Years in service
 - 1.4 Grade/Year level handled
 - 1.5 Seminars in reading
2. What are the observed reading difficulties of K to 12 learners in terms of:
 - 2.1 Oral Reading
 - 2.2 Comprehension
3. What intervention could be proposed based on the results of this study?

3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method of research using survey questionnaire as the main instrument supported by unstructured interview. The survey questionnaire deals with the profile of the participants and the reading difficulties of learners. The data gathering procedure was done using online platforms. Interview was conducted by the researcher to support their responses to the instrument administered online.

This study was participated in by ninety-two (92) K to 12 teachers from Marinduque and Quezon provinces. The online questionnaire was sent to more than a hundred teachers teaching in different levels from elementary, junior high school and senior high school. Unfortunately, not all of them were able to answer the survey due to some issues about their schedule and connectivity. *(Please see Table 1 for the profile of the participants)*

Further, this research used statistical treatment like frequency and percentage in dealing with numeric data on profile of the participants.

4. Results and Discussion

This study gathered the following data from the participants presented in tables supported by discussion.

Table 1

Profile of the participants

Profile	f	P (%)
<i>Age</i>		
51 above	7	7
41-50	12	14
31-40	37	40.4
21-30	36	38.6
20 below		0
<i>Sex</i>		
Male	21	22.8
Female	68	73.7
<i>Rank</i>		
Master Teacher	8	8.9
Teacher 3	13	14.3
Teacher 2	13	14.3
Teacher 1	54	58.9
Substitute/Contractual		0
<i>Grade/Year level handled</i>		
Senior High School	21	23.2
Junior High School	24	26.8
Elementary	45	50
<i>Years in Service</i>		
21 years above	7	7.1
16-20		0

11-15	15	16.1
6-10	29	32.1
1-5	36	39.3
Less than a year		0
<i>With Reading-related seminars and/or trainings</i>		
Yes	69	75.4
No	23	24.6
<i>Level/s of Reading-related seminars and/or trainings</i>		
International	1	7.8
National	14	15.7
Regional	27	29.4
Local (school-based, district, division)	63	68.6

Table 1 reveals the profile of the teacher participants. It could be gleaned from the table that most of them are female, 31-40 years old and are teaching in the elementary level. The data also show that majority of the participants occupy Teacher 1 post with 1-15 years of teaching experience. It could also be noted that only few of them are occupying Master Teacher's position and those serving for more than twenty (20) years.

Seminars and trainings attended could also help teachers in the teaching-learning process and their professional development. It could be seen from the table that only few of the participants have attended national and international seminars and/or trainings related to reading. Most of them have just participated in locally-conducted seminars and/or trainings. Seminars and trainings attended by teachers could also contribute to their teaching performance and the performance of pupils as well but it was not explored in this research.

Table 2

The observed reading difficulties among the K to 12 learners

2.1 Oral Reading

Difficulties	f	P (%)	Rank
1. Poor pronunciation	66	72.4	1
2. Slow rate in reading	63	69	2
3. Reversal	44	48.3	3
4. Word-by-word reading	43	46.6	4
5. Repetition	38	41.4	5
6. Substitution	26	27.6	6
7. Insertion	26	27.6	7
8. Omission	22	24.1	8

2.2 Comprehension

Difficulties	f	p	Rank
1. Vocabulary knowledge inadequate	82	89.3	2
2. Understanding inadequate	83	90.2	1

Tables 2.1 and 2.2 present the reading difficulties observed by teachers among their learners. Table 2.1 displays the oral reading difficulties observed presented according rank (most

observed to least observed) while Table 2.2 shows the difficulties observed when it comes to comprehension.

As presented, learners from elementary to senior high school experience the identified difficulties as observed by their teachers. Teachers said that even in the junior and senior high school, there are still students who can hardly pronounce words especially if the words are new to them. It could also be noted that learners have problems with their speed. They were also observed interchanging words while reading. Word-by-word reading was also observed among the learners across levels according to teachers especially in reading English texts. On the other hand, it is still good to note that only few participants observed that their learners omit words, insert, or substitute while reading. Since majority of the teacher participants are teaching in the elementary level, it is assumed that majority of the pupils who are experiencing these reading difficulties are elementary school pupils.

Research findings indicate that the children who experience difficulties in learning to read are likely to experience a negative cycle of low self-esteem, reduced motivation and less persistence to academic tasks, leading to further failure experiences, come as no surprise to most educators. Although there may be many reasons why children have difficulty learning to read, research indicates that the vast majority of poor readers share a common source of their reading problem, which is failure to develop accurate and efficient word recognition skills (Sternberg, 2006). Moreover, a large and growing body of research evidence suggests phonemic awareness of the phonemes of sounds within speech to be the root cause of the problem for most poor readers (Munro 2004). Phonemic awareness refers to the initial acquisition of spelling-to-sound correspondence skills necessary for efficient reading in an alphabetic Language. Longitudinal studies suggest that children who fail to develop efficient word recognition skills in first grade, display ever increasing deficits in both accuracy and speed of word recognition. As they advance through the primary grades and into high school, particular problems with decoding long, polysyllabic words may be exhibited. In addition, they are likely to display an inability to generalize the ruled for pronouncing long word, and a tendency to rely on only one strategy such as "sound-out" by letter sound correspondence or to make guesses based on only a few letters. Their lack of automatic word identification skills may also lead to a greater but far less efficient reliance on context cues than that of good readers. (Stanovich 2014)

When it comes to comprehension, it is evident that majority of the teacher participants observed that their learners have difficulty in comprehending text materials and that they have inadequate understanding and inadequate vocabulary knowledge.

As a component of reading, reading comprehension can be best understood if one is adept with the different cognitive processes as current models suggest that such processes play a significant role in comprehension skills (Meneghetti et al., 2006). Van den Broek (2004) highlighted that short- and long-term memory is a factor in the reading comprehension skills of an individual as a reader needs to store and manipulate information in his working memory during text procession and at the same time in order to construct a coherent representation of what he has read, the reader would have to refer to his prior knowledge. Inference also plays a major role in reading comprehension as understanding of the text read goes beyond literal wherein integrated mental representation of what was read is created and processed (Bowyer-Crane & Snowling, 2005; Yuill & Oakhill, 1991). Recent studies on reading comprehension stressed the importance of the concept of individual differences wherein attempts are made to account for how the process and components of reading comprehension differ among those labeled as skilled and less skilled readers (Oakhill, Cain, & Bryant, 2003).

Similarly, Duke (2010) stated that comprehension is a process in which readers make meaning by interacting with text through the combination of prior knowledge and previous experience, information in the text, and the views of readers related to the text. Kintsch (1998) and van Dijk and Kintsch (2004) defined reading comprehension as the process of creating meaning from text. The purpose is to get an understanding of the text rather than to acquire meaning from individual words or sentences. The outcome of reading comprehension is the mental representation of a text meaning that is combined with the readers' previous knowledge.

Renzulli (2011) in his study proposed an enrichment program called "Enhanced Triple Model. This model emphasizes that students should be provided with a range of learning strategies and environments complying with their interests and skills so that they can acquire valuable experiences. Enrichment reading programs and applications can be used for gifted children or children having learning difficulties. Through such programs, students are provided with comprehensive reading education, taking their areas of interest and motivation into consideration.

Reading enrichment programs, according to recent study, are one of the applications that have a favorable impact on reading, reading comprehension, reading awareness, and oral expression skills, among other things (Goodman, 2015; Schreiber, 2013). Through the reading process, the transfer of prior knowledge into the reading environment, working with different texts and textual structures, making predictions and inferences, setting goals and employing strategies are all considered to improve the reading environment and reading comprehension, amongst other things. Enhancing reading comprehension, writing abilities, textual analysis, and creativity skills, as well as overcoming reading challenges are all significant goals of the enrichment reading program. Meanwhile, Alexander, Carr, and Schwaneflugel (2015) provide valuable information regarding kids who have reading issues, as well as highlighting the effectiveness of enrichment reading programs in the elimination of these difficulties.

The key to developing good readers is to identify thorough and effective programs that are proven to succeed. One of the most crucial factors in achieving success is having a qualified teacher. When it comes to education, one area that must be prioritized is reading, particularly in the early years of school. The quality of a program is only as good as the quality of the teacher who is delivering it. One of the most significant factors in a student's success is having a teacher who is well-trained and encouraging. The second requirement to a successful program is that it concentrates on the critical areas of reading and provides ample time for pupils to study and practice these fundamental components of reading. And the third step is to have a variety of programs that are used for identifying and assisting at-risk students. Recognition & Response is an early intervention technique developed by the FPG Child Development Institute to assist in the identification of children who are at risk of developmental problems (2017). The evidence foundation is typically generated retrospectively through the evaluation of an intervention," says the author. This is done in order to immediately understand that creating the evidence basis for Recognition & Response from the beginning will give a compelling lens through which to develop breakthroughs in the field," she explained in her statement (Coleman, 2017).

5. Conclusion

After the interpretation and analysis of the gathered data, it can be concluded that learners from different levels have their own reading difficulties whether oral reading or comprehension.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher offers the following recommendations:

1. The Department of Education may consider providing opportunities and chances for teachers to attend seminars and trainings related to reading. These could help them enhance their teaching competencies and develop their skills in designing reading activities which could aid the reading difficulties of learners across levels;
2. Teachers may be encouraged to be more creative in developing tools to assess the reading skills and performance of their learners;
3. Learners are advised to practice reading oftentimes and make reading a part of their reading habit. They are encouraged to engage themselves in exercises which could improve their skills in pronunciation and reading speed. When it comes to the development of their comprehension, learners may be instructed to find ways to improve their vocabulary knowledge which contributes to better understanding and comprehension of the text material.

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