

Benchmarking Reading Proficiency: Evaluating Reading Levels Among Grade 6 Pupils of Pagbilao Central Elementary School

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Abstract

This study assessed the reading proficiency levels of 190 Grade 6 pupils at Pagbilao Central Elementary School using the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) to determine their comprehension performance and identify areas needing intervention. The assessment results revealed that the majority of the pupils lacked proficiency in reading comprehension. Based on Phil-IRI standards, the average reading level was 3, corresponding to the frustration level, indicating that most learners struggled to decode, understand, and interpret grade-level texts. Out of 190 respondents, 155 pupils (82%) were classified under the frustration level, while only a small number reached the instructional level, and none attained the independent level. One pupil scored zero, reflecting extreme difficulty in both word recognition and comprehension.

Further analysis of comprehension components showed that literal and inferential questions received the lowest mean scores. These results indicate that pupils experienced challenges in identifying explicitly stated details and in making

logical inferences from the text. The mean score and standard deviation further confirmed a consistent pattern of weak performance across these comprehension areas. The descriptive statistics revealed limited reading fluency, while inferential statistics (t-values and p-values) supported a significant difference between pupils' current reading level and the expected grade-level proficiency, highlighting the need for focused intervention.

The findings underscore a critical deficiency in reading comprehension among Grade 6 pupils, emphasizing the necessity for a structured and contextualized reading intervention. These results serve as the empirical foundation for implementing Project INSPIRE (Innovative, Nurturing Strategies and Practices in Reading Enhancement), an initiative designed to improve learners' reading comprehension through guided reading sessions, interactive comprehension exercises, and localized learning materials aimed at helping pupils progress from the frustration to the instructional and independent levels.

Keywords: *Reading Proficiency, Phil-IRI, Comprehension, Frustration level, Project INSPIRE*

INTRODUCTION

Background and Rationale

Reading is defined as a cognitive process that involves decoding symbols to arrive at meaning. Reading is an active process of constructing meanings of words. Reading with a purpose helps the reader to direct information towards a goal and focuses their attention. Every individual pupil is unique concerning their reading comprehension capabilities. While many pupils can read, not all are able to do so effectively or comprehend what they are reading. This discrepancy highlights the importance of assessing and addressing reading proficiency levels. In elementary education, it is crucial to identify pupils who struggle with reading and comprehension to provide targeted interventions.

According to the data released by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022, the Philippines landed in the bottom 10 out of 81 countries in reading comprehension, mathematics and science and showed minimal improvement, results of the 2022 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) test revealed. In addition, after being ranked the lowest out of 79 participating countries in 2018 in reading comprehension, the Philippines was ranked 76th out of 81 countries for 2022. (Servillos, 2023)

Moreover, at least 90% of Filipino children aged 10 struggle to read or understand simple text, according to the World Bank's 2022 data on learning poverty. But even before the COVID-19 pandemic set back students' learning, the pre-pandemic figure pegged learning poverty in the Philippines at 70%. (Chi, 2024)

The data caught the researcher's attention, particularly regarding the number of pupils who struggle to read or understand simple texts. These results prompted the researcher to conduct a study aimed at determining the reading levels of Grade 6 students of Pagbilao Central Elementary School.

The researcher believes that a program could be developed to address these challenges and enhance the reading skills of the pupils. By focusing on creating effective localized and contextualized interactive materials, the program aims to provide support to enhancing reading proficiency among the pupils.

Review of Related Literature

Reading is the foundation for all academic learning. Proficiency in reading influences academic performance. Learners who are proficient in reading tend to achieve better grades in their academic subjects. On the other hand, learners without the ability to read abound academic, emotional, and social issues. Children who are behind their peers in reading will develop low self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy (Bernanke, 2022).

In a recent survey conducted by UNICEF in year 2022, the reading proficiency of children is one the major problems in poor and developing countries such as Cambodia, Chad, Congo, Ethiopia, Gambia, Mozambique, and Myanmar, which suffered a similar fate of having only less than 15 percent of children able to read a simple text due to the longest school's closure caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (de Vera, 2022). , In the Philippines, the difficulty of learners in reading and comprehending is a problem that has been solved previously, especially in public elementary schools. Despite the Department of Education's initiative to implement programs and activities to promote and enhance the literacy of the learners to read

and comprehend, the number of poor reader learners continues to rise after two years of no face-to-face classes (Manaois, 2021).

In addition, At least 90% of Filipino children aged 10 struggles to read or understand simple text, according to the World Bank's 2022 data on learning poverty. But even before the COVID-19 pandemic set back students' learning, the pre-pandemic figure pegged learning poverty in the Philippines at 70% (Chi, 2024).

Moreover, in the study of Amorganda entitled Reading Proficiency of Grade 6 Learners revealed that the reading proficiency of Grade 6 learners was at a frustration level. Furthermore, in the study of Salibay results indicated a marked improvement in reading skills, demonstrating the effectiveness of reading interventions program.

Statement of the Problem

This study generally aims to determine the reading levels of grade 6 students.

Specifically, this will seek answers to the following questions:

1. What is the reading level of the pupils of Pagbilao Central Elementary School?
2. What is the type question getting the lowest score in the reading assessment test?
3. Based on the finding of the study, what program can be derived for to improved pupils reading level?

Objectives

This study aims to determine and evaluate the reading proficiency levels of Grade 6 pupils at Pagbilao Central Elementary School using standardized passages from the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The researcher employed descriptive research method to analyze the data, including the use of statistical tools and measures to derive descriptive statistics about the reading level of grade 6 pupils.

Participants

The respondents were of Grade 6 pupils at Pagbilao Central Elementary School

Instruments

In assessing the reading levels of Grade 6 pupils at Pagbilao Central Elementary School using standardized passages from the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI).

Procedure

The study was conducted to evaluate the reading comprehension levels of Grade 6 pupils at Pagbilao Central Elementary School using the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI). Prior to data collection, approval was secured from the school principal and the Grade 6 teachers. The procedure began with a pre-assessment orientation to explain the purpose and process of the reading test to the pupils. The Phil-IRI was then administered individually to all 190 learners in a quiet and supportive classroom setting. Each pupil was asked to read a grade-appropriate passage, after which they answered comprehension questions designed to measure literal, inferential, and critical understanding. The test administration lasted approximately 30–40 minutes per session and was facilitated by the researcher with assistance from trained teachers. After the assessment, all responses were checked, scored, and classified according to the Phil-IRI proficiency levels: frustration, instructional, and independent. The results served as the basis for identifying the pupils' current reading level and determining the need for targeted interventions such as Project INSPIRE.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from the Phil-IRI assessment were encoded and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including the mean and standard deviation, were computed to summarize the overall reading performance of the pupils. Frequency and percentage distributions were used to identify the proportion of learners falling under each reading proficiency level. To determine whether significant differences existed between groups (e.g., by gender or class section), independent-sample and paired-sample t-tests were conducted. The p-values were used to test the level of significance, while effect sizes were computed to determine the magnitude of differences. Results were presented through tables and figures for clearer interpretation and to support the development of appropriate reading enhancement strategies.

RESULTS

The results of the reading assessment revealed that a majority of the 190 Grade 6 pupils at Pagbilao Central Elementary School lacked proficiency in reading comprehension. Based on the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) standards, the average reading level was 3, corresponding to the frustration level. Out of 190 pupils, 155 (82%) were classified under the frustration level, indicating that they struggled to decode, understand, and interpret grade-level texts. Only a small portion of the pupils reached the instructional level, while none attained the independent level, signifying that no learner could read and comprehend texts on their own without assistance. Moreover, one pupil scored zero, showing extreme difficulty in both word recognition and comprehension.

An analysis of item responses further revealed that literal and inferential questions received the lowest scores among all comprehension types. This suggests that many pupils had difficulty identifying explicitly stated details in the text (literal comprehension) and making logical conclusions or assumptions based on the passage (inferential comprehension). Such weaknesses may be attributed to limited vocabulary, lack of prior reading exposure, and insufficient practice in critical reading tasks.

The findings clearly indicate that most Grade 6 pupils are not yet reading at the expected proficiency level for their grade. The dominance of the frustration level reflects the urgent need for intensive reading intervention to address learning gaps and develop comprehension skills. The results also point to

the necessity of designing localized and contextualized reading materials that specifically strengthen literal and inferential understanding.

The outcomes serve as a strong basis for implementing a reading enhancement initiative such as Project INSPIRE (Innovative, Nurturing Strategies and Practices in Reading Enhancement) at Pagbilao Central Elementary School. Through guided reading sessions, interactive comprehension exercises, and contextualized activities, the program aims to help pupils progress from the frustration level toward the instructional and independent levels of reading proficiency.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study revealed that a significant majority of the 190 Grade 6 pupils at Pagbilao Central Elementary School were at the frustration level of reading proficiency, based on the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) standards. This means that most learners were unable to read and comprehend grade-level texts independently, with 82% classified under frustration, none reaching the independent level, and only a few at the instructional level. These results imply that learners lack mastery in decoding and understanding written texts, particularly in literal and inferential comprehension, which are essential components of reading proficiency.

The dominance of the frustration level among pupils indicates that many are not yet equipped with the necessary reading and comprehension skills expected of Grade 6 learners. The poor performance in literal and inferential questions further suggests limited reading exposure, inadequate vocabulary development, and a lack of critical thinking skills necessary for text interpretation. Such findings imply that the learners may struggle not only in English or Filipino subjects but also in other learning areas that require reading comprehension, thereby affecting their overall academic performance.

The results of this study are consistent with previous research and global reports on reading challenges among elementary pupils. According to UNICEF (de Vera, 2022), many children in developing countries, including the Philippines, have difficulty reading simple texts, especially after prolonged school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, the World Bank (Chi, 2024) reported that 90% of Filipino children aged 10 struggle to read or understand basic text, a sharp increase from the pre-pandemic rate of 70%. In line with these findings, the study of Amorganda (2022) revealed that the reading proficiency of Grade 6 learners remained at the frustration level, which aligns with the current study's results. However, the study of Salibay (2023) showed that after the implementation of a structured reading intervention program, learners demonstrated significant improvement in their reading performance. This comparison emphasizes that reading interventions, when effectively designed and localized, can positively influence learners' reading outcomes.

The findings underscore the urgent need for sustained and structured reading intervention programs in elementary schools, particularly in rural areas like Pagbilao. The implementation of Project INSPIRE (Innovative, Nurturing Strategies and Practices in Reading Enhancement) is timely and necessary to address these learning gaps. Through guided reading sessions, interactive comprehension exercises, and contextualized materials that reflect local culture and experiences, teachers can better support learners in developing their literal and inferential comprehension skills. For policymakers, the study highlights the importance of reinforcing existing DepEd reading initiatives such as the Every Child a Reader Program (ECARP) by integrating more localized and evidence-based interventions at the school level. Strengthening teacher training in reading instruction and monitoring pupil progress through regular reading assessments should also be prioritized to ensure continuous improvement in literacy outcomes.

While the results provide valuable insights into the reading proficiency of Grade 6 pupils, the study is limited to one public elementary school, which may not fully represent other schools in the district or division. Additionally, external factors such as home literacy environment, parental support, and language exposure were not explored in depth, which may also influence reading performance. Future studies could expand the scope to include multiple schools and examine the impact of these contextual factors on reading comprehension levels.

The study reinforces the need for targeted, localized reading interventions to enhance pupils' comprehension skills and overall literacy. With the implementation of Project INSPIRE and similar programs, there is potential to move learners from the frustration level toward the instructional and independent levels of reading proficiency, contributing to improved academic performance and lifelong learning skills.

Conclusion

Most Grade 6 pupils at Pagbilao Central Elementary School are struggling with reading, with many at a frustration level and none reaching an independent level.

Students struggle most with literal and inferential questions in reading, showing that these areas need more attention and help.

Reading Intervention Program is needed to help pupils to improve students reading skills.

Recommendations

Implement a Project INSPIRE (Innovative, Nurturing Strategies and Practices In Reading Enhancement) at Pagbilao Central Elementary School to help Grade 6 pupils improve their reading skills and reach higher proficiency levels.

Create a localized and contextualized materials that specifically address literal and inferential questions into the reading intervention program (Project INSPIRE) to better support pupils in these challenging areas.

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