

## READING INSTRUCTION AND INTERVENTIONS IN MULTIGRADE SCHOOLS IN QUEZON

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aimed to undermine the realities of reading instruction in three multigrade schools in Quezon province during the COVID-19 pandemic. They analyzed data obtained from Phil-IRI in the past three years and focused on how teachers implemented reading instruction in multigrade settings. The researchers investigated the interventions they employed. Results revealed that parental involvement played a critical role in reading instruction. Teachers espoused varied reading strategies and focused on material selection, integration, and contextualization. Formative strategies, home visitations, and interventions that involved parents were implemented.*

*Keywords: multigrade, reading, reading instruction, strategies, reading skills, last mile school*

### INTRODUCTION

Reading has tremendous power in fueling the development of all aspects of language ability and holds importance to human life. Teaching reading is a complex and arduous task. The challenges that confront this activity are exacerbated in the multigrade setting. According to the Republic Act 896 or the Elementary Education Act of 1953, classrooms could cater to two grade levels if there were not enough learners to fill the required class size (Robles, 1953, as cited by Ballesteros & Ocampo, 2016). Reading instruction in this context differs significantly from typical monograde classrooms. There are two grade

levels with two different target skills. While the role of teachers is deemed multidimensional, it does not guarantee success in the delivery of competencies and the teaching of reading (Ballesteros & Ocampo, 2016). In their research, Ramathan and Mzimela (2016) claimed that there was a gap between the teachers' strategies and the application of these strategies in multigrade settings. Further, they asserted that teachers needed to understand the curriculum and that manuals used in teaching reading might be inappropriate for a multigrade setup.

Meanwhile, Naparan and Alinsug (2021) emphasized the need for appropriate strategies for reading instruction to succeed. They

concluded that classroom management, collaborative learning, differentiated instruction, connecting lessons in real-life, technology integration, and teachers' flexibility were crucial to succeed in multigrade settings. Sampson (2016), on the other hand, asserted that teaching reading could be an effective teaching strategy for multigrade. The participant maximized the multigrade classroom to her advantage by engaging the whole class in various reading activities while highlighting developmentally appropriate tasks. Further, she claimed that teaching reading in a multigrade setting was not a lost cause. The case of the teacher she investigated proved that reading could be taught with proper strategy and help students develop their holistic well-being.

The success of teaching reading in multigrade sectors rests on the teacher. According to Cabalo and Cabalo (2019), teachers play a crucial role in ensuring learners can comprehend texts. They emphasized the need to hire effective teachers. If there were brilliant teachers who could handle struggling learners, the number of frustrated readers could be decreased. Further, age, sex, and family income could not guarantee reading success. Thus, the more qualified the teacher is, the higher the chances of improving the learners' reading levels. Contrary to what others believed, absenteeism did not pose any direct link to the performance of students. Carroll (2010) found insufficient scientific evidence to support the belief. More research is needed to validate or establish the extent of its effects. However, this was contradicted by Dolean, Melby-Lervåg, Tincas, Damsa, and Lervåg (2019). In their research, students' socioeconomic status (Roma children) affected their school attendance. This, in turn, affected their school performance and reading skills. This also affected their language skills.

This research was anchored on Schulman's notion of Pedagogical Content Knowledge. This theory posits that the teacher must have the concepts, theories, and ideas needed for learning reading to ensure quality reading instruction in settings like the multigrade classroom. Teachers must possess sophisticated knowledge of methods and strategies, including sound judgment (as cited by Ramathan and Mzimela, 2016). In this regard, teachers utilize their discretion when deciding what to teach, how to teach it, and when. The practice of this kind of discretion is called Teacher Agency, a term coined by Campbell (2012). Teacher Agency posited that under challenging situations, teachers relied more on their intuitions to find solutions to problems that arose during instruction, very much the same in the context of reading instruction (as cited by Ramathan and Mzimela, 2016).

This paper aimed to determine how multigrade schools in Quezon province carried out reading instruction amid the pandemic. It was widely acknowledged that having two grade levels in one classroom was challenging enough. One could only imagine how difficult it would have been for the teachers and learners to participate in this endeavor. The findings of this research could be a valuable input in program development for multigrade schools and in reading instruction in challenging settings. Stakeholders might also find these results as inputs for future partnerships with these schools.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The research aimed 1) to determine how multigrade schools facilitated reading instruction amid the pandemic and 2) to

determine the interventions teachers gave to learners.

## METHODOLOGY

This research utilized a qualitative case study as an approach to inquiry. Baxter and Jack (2008) defined this as an approach that allows researchers to explore the phenomenon in its natural context. As a case study, it utilized several data sources. This design was suited to the context of the current research. The case in focus was reading instruction and intervention, which can only be explored with due consideration to the context. Further, the current research takes on the descriptive case study approach since it was focused on describing the reading instruction and intervention in the context of MG schools amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data sources for the research included Phil-IRI results for the last (3) years, qualitative questionnaires, and focused group discussions. Observations at this point could not be undertaken for the safety of the researchers and the teachers.

This study sought the help of six (6) teachers from three multigrade schools who handled reading and performed tasks related to reading instruction, like Phil-IRI. They also implemented reading programs to aid struggling readers.

At the onset of the research, the researchers analyzed several documents to establish the case. The researchers gathered results of the Phil-IRI from the last three (3) years from these schools. They noted some significant observations and deduced inferences as to the performances of the learners in reading. Some of the noteworthy findings from the document analyses include the rarity of non-readers but the prominence of

students who were at the frustration and instructional levels. Students who developed proficiency in reading were smaller. Most students who were at the lower proficiency levels were males.

A set of questions were sent to the participants via messenger to gather detailed accounts of their reading instruction and intervention. This was so because of the improbability of interviewing a person. Coordination with the participants was sought. All the necessary information regarding data management, confidentiality, and ethics was explained in writing. Answers to these questions were tabulated and analyzed to get themes and a general understanding of the case. The literature review aided the researchers in interpreting the responses.

The researchers conducted a teleconference with their adviser and co-researchers to obtain a more profound sense of the responses. Follow-up questions were asked in addition to the interview questions posed in the qualitative survey.

Conducting qualitative research requires care in handling possible ethical issues that may arise. In terms of permission, letters were sent to the co-researchers before the questions for the study. A consent form was also sent to ensure that the participants understood the goals of the paper. The language used in these letters was crafted so that confusion would be lessened if not completely avoided.

Second, the researchers ensured that the co-researchers would participate in the research without being harmed. The paper was conducted when most areas of Luzon were placed under the Modified General Community Quarantine, where non-essential travels were limited. The only way to carry out the research was through virtual means. Classes in the

country were conducted remotely (distance learning), making observation impossible. Lastly, their identities were kept confidential by using pen names. This also ensured the privacy of these teachers.

The obtained data were transcribed and read to get the gist of the answers. Significant statements were sifted from the responses and were coded. The codes were clustered by color and were analyzed in terms of their relationships to form themes that answered the questions posited in this paper. Analyses and interpretations of the responses were supported by literature and firsthand accounts of the co-researchers.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Reading Instruction in Multigrade Schools

#### 1.1 Parental Involvement as a Strategy in Teaching Reading

During the pandemic, parents took on the challenging role of teachers. Since they were the 'guide at the side' that supervised their children's schooling, the responsibility of enhancing their children's abilities was in their hands. The teachers sought the help of the parents in ensuring that reading instruction continued despite the distance that prevented teachers from being physically available to teach reading. Teacher A claimed that "strategies for intermediate at primary grades [include] follow up [by the] ...parents towards the reading ability of the pupils." They sought the help of the parents in ensuring that reading instruction continued despite the distance that prevented teachers from being physically available to teach students reading. Further, teachers left notes on the materials and

explained to parents the parts their children needed to understand at home.

Topping and Wolfendale (2019) stressed that the involvement of parents in their children's reading provided opportunities for them to learn the necessary skills to attain proficiency. Such skills include options for learning basic reading skills up to higher skills. It helped parents and children enjoy reading. Students could enjoy moments with their parents while sharpening their literacy skills.

#### 1.2. Providing, Selecting Materials, and Utilizing Various Reading Approaches

Some participants provided students with materials to help them practice reading at home. One of the participants explained that the materials that he provided focused on the practice of phonics and phonology. For frustrated readers, the materials given to them were age and level appropriate. Gagen (2008) stressed that students read materials that were level appropriate. The co-researchers of the current study asserted the same notion. Teacher D chose materials based on "...the reading abilities of each pupil." Teacher F supported it, and provided "... reading materials and activities with different levels suited ... [to students'] capabilities". According to Fielding (1990), central to reading to learn was the utilization of appropriate materials. A text that is too easy or too advanced for a learner might negatively impact reading instruction.

Further, the teachers advocated reading approaches, specifically the Marungko Approach. Destacamento (2012) explained how the Marungko Approach worked. Instead of reading the alphabet, these were sounded. For instance, the alphabet letter M would not be read as 'ma' (Filipino Alphabet), but instead, it would be sounded as 'mmmm.' This approach

was recommended for non-readers. The teachers encouraged the parents to help the students practice the sounds of the alphabet to augment their skills despite being out of the supervision of their teachers.

### 1.3. Selecting and Contextualizing Materials

The teachers focused on contextualization. They chose materials based on what was available in the community. Since these children reside in mountainous regions or by the sea, selecting materials appropriate to their context was essential. However, foreign content to multigrade students could tickle their imagination, expanding their horizons about a world beyond their own. They could learn about modes of transportation and new species of animals, among others that exist in other places. Bonganciso (2016) stressed the relevance of contextualization in reading instruction. These could be achieved by designing materials that focus on the activities, concepts, and context relevant to the learners.

## 2. Reading Interventions in Multigrade Schools

### 2.1. Phil-IRI Results, Informed Practice, and Reading Strategies

The results of the Phil-IRI provided teachers with information that could be used as their baseline data as far as the status of the students in their reading. Teacher F explained that the data from the assessment was used to identify the focus of the intervention. Further, one of the participants explained, *“The data from the PHIL-IRI is beneficial because it serves as one of your bases in planning, designing the reading instructional and the school’s reading programs or activities to improve the reading performance of the learners.”* This was

supported by Teacher E, asserting, *“We’ve been able to obtain the weaknesses and strength of every student as to what kind of intervention is suitable for every one of them.”*

Further, the data obtained from the PHIL-IRI could be beneficial because it served as the bases for planning and designing the reading instructional and the school’s reading programs or activities to improve the learners’ reading performance. For the most part, Phil-IRI served as the basis of interventions. It presented opportunities for teachers to target weaknesses and nurture students’ strengths in reading.

It was equally important to note what the teachers did after the pretest. It would be safe to surmise that they continuously supported their readers on the frustration and instructional reading levels throughout the school year.

### 2.2. Identifying Factors that Affect Reading Skills

Teacher D stated, “...there are many factors that contributed to students failing to read, including background knowledge, their ability...”. Other participants blamed poor reading habits could also affect students’ skills in reading. Personal factors, family-related factors, and socioeconomic factors could affect reading skills. Individual factors include the student’s interests and their skills in reading. Habibian, Roslan, Idris, and Othman (2015) stressed identifying what motivates and demotivates students to learn. It could be probable that making the context conducive to reading would help students learn faster.

Family support played a vital role in ensuring the students’ success in reading. According to Teacher A, family support played a critical role in ensuring the students’ success in reading. Teacher B expressed her concern

for students whose parents did not have the initiative to foster reading habits in their children. It was supported by Teacher F, who observed parents' lack of encouragement for their children to start reading. Topping et al. (2019) emphasized in their research that the absence of parental support in teaching reading could pose a significant threat to the acquisition of such. Through parents, the students could be guided as to what skills would be necessary to thrive in a challenging society. Their presence would suggest support at home and a notion that reading also occurred at home and not only in schools. It could be surmised from the findings that one of the most significant challenges of teaching reading in these settings was the support of the immediate family. However, the researchers understood that parents in these settings would have different orientations about reading and learning. This factor could be investigated in a different light.

Another factor pertained to the socio-economic aspect of the learners. Teacher B pointed out that students who were somewhat well off could be given more opportunities to read than those who belonged to impoverished households. This was supported by Teacher C, "...lack of reading materials both at home and school." This theme differed from the concept of Doelan et al. (2019) when it came to the effects of socioeconomic status on reading. Socioeconomic status in the context of the students affected not the learners' attendance but the resources available to them. It could be interpreted from this perspective that the lack of opportunities or exposure to resources could have affected possible interventions that could be carried out at home.

### **2.3. Home Visitation, Parental Involvement, Materials Distribution, and Reading Interventions**

Teachers went to their students' houses to teach them reading whenever they could. One of the participants shared that he visited his students at their homes and talked to the parents, inquiring about the student's reading practice status. Further, teachers maximized the use of social networking sites in connecting to parents.

It could be surmised how big the role parents played in providing necessary support for the learners in these trying times. Most of the interventions that could have been planned amidst this pandemic involved parents – a perspective that was not so much explored before the COVID-19 pandemic. These kinds of platforms allowed for an easier way of materials distribution. Lastly, teachers resorted to looking, adapting, and distributing reading materials for their students.

In terms of instruction, aside from involving the parents, the teachers relied heavily on providing materials for their students. Leko (2013) and Gagen (2008) emphasized using level-appropriate materials. Further, Bonganciso et al. (2016) also stressed the integration of contextualization in reading materials.

Interestingly, the teachers were concerned about the disparity between the concepts presented in the books they used and the existing concepts in their environment. It was important to note that the schools were in the mountainous region and by the sea. Ideas that are foreign to them create confusion. However, teachers in MG schools did not dismiss the thought that even though there were things, concepts, and ideas that were rare in the contexts of MG schools, these could also expand the student's horizons and spike their curiosity about those things.

## CONCLUSIONS

The researchers concluded that multigrade teachers saw parents' crucial role in teaching their children how to read. They served as para-educators to their children, while teachers became their beacon of support. Most of the instruction during the pandemic was carried out remotely. Hence, teachers looked for ways to reach out to their students. One way was to provide materials for them. Based on the data obtained, most participants were advocates of the Marungko Approach. Lastly, they focused on materials selection and the integration of contextualization. They selected materials with links to the community where students resided and contextualized reading instruction in their ways.

Reading interventions provided during the time of COVID-19 were based on the results of Phil-IRI. Phil-IRI provided the baseline data to which they could plan their interventions. Formative strategies such as reading charts and comprehension activities were provided. In addition, the participants considered the factors that could have affected the skills of their students. Three main factors were identified: personal, socioeconomic, and family-oriented factors. It could be surmised from this perspective that interventions considered these. Lastly, the participants determined home visitation, parental involvement, materials distribution, and reading interventions. Despite the threat of COVID-19 to their safety, teachers visited students at their respective homes to check their progress now and then. Further, the interventions they put in place involved parents. They also resorted to providing additional materials that students could read at home.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the recommendations of the research.

1. There is a necessity to have a comprehensive reading program grounded on scientifically based reading research applicable to multigrade schools. It should be carefully aligned with the needs of the readers.
2. Ensure that instructional materials are available and that these provide systematic instruction.
3. Provide quality training and development for teachers that focuses on the foundational concept of learning to read and other reading programs. Development should focus on effective classroom instruction.
4. Appreciate and motivate parents to assist their children at home. The teachers can make some ways to let parents participate in every homework or assignment. Encourage parents to be involved in their child's reading progress. Let them understand that the whole responsibility does not belong to the teacher.

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