INITIAL GAIN OF KADIGARRAN READING PROGRAM: BASIS FOR COMPETENCY REVIEW AND ENHANCEMENT

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ABSTRACT

 Globally, the study of Reading is crucial for individual and societal development, with literacy rates serving as a key indicator of educational progress. This study employed the non-experimental descriptive survey research design in investigating the research problem. This study will be conducted in Idong Elementary School, Sta. Cruz North District. The respondents in this study are the 152 struggling learners in reading in the research local. The respondents will answer the test-type questionnaire constructed by the researcher based on the least learned competencies in reading. This study makes use of the universal sampling procedure considering the manageable number of respondents in Idong Elementary School. This study will utilize the researcher developed test-type questionnaire which items and indicators are focused on the least learned competencies in reading. Based on the collective findings on this study, the following conclusions are drawn: The level of Initial Gain in the Kadigarran Reading Program in terms of Phonemic Awareness is Very High, the level of Initial Gain in the Kadigarran Reading Program in terms of Phonics is Very High, the level of Initial Gain in the Kadigarran Reading Program in terms of Fluency is High, the level of Initial Gain in the Kadigarran Reading Program in terms of Vocabulary is High, the level of Initial Gain in the Kadigarran Reading Program in terms of Comprehension is Very High, There is a Significant Difference on the initial gain in reading comprehension in Kadigarran Reading Program when analyzed according to gender.

KEYWORDS- *Initial Gain, Kadigarran Reading Program, Competency Review, Enhancement*

INTRODUCTION

Globally, the study of Reading is crucial for individual and societal development, with literacy rates serving as a key indicator of educational progress. "According to data from UNESCO and the World Bank", the global literacy rate has risen dramatically from a mere 12% in 1820 to 87% today, showcasing significant advancements in educational access and attainment (World Economic Forum, 2022). However, substantial regional disparities persist, with developed countries boasting near-universal literacy while regions like Sub-Saharan Africa still face considerable challenges. International assessments such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) provide valuable comparative data on reading achievement, highlighting the effectiveness of different educational systems and identifying areas for improvement (IEA, n.d.).

Effective reading instruction encompasses various components, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, as emphasized by the National Reading Panel (2000). These elements are fundamental in developing proficient readers who can decode text and understand its meaning. The "reading wars" between phonics and whole language approaches have shaped pedagogical practices, with researchers like Jeanne Chall advocating for the importance of systematic phonics instruction (Chall, 1967). Contemporary approaches recognize the need for a balanced literacy program that integrates both decoding skills and comprehension strategies to foster a love of Reading and lifelong learning.

Moreover, global literacy initiatives by organizations like UNESCO, the World Literacy Foundation, and Room to Read aim to address illiteracy by providing resources, educational programs, and community engagement (World Literacy Foundation, n.d.). These efforts focus on promoting Reading and writing skills, particularly in underserved communities, to unlock individual potential and create growth for opportunities. As the world becomes increasingly digital, new forms of literacy, such as digital and media literacy, are also gaining importance, requiring educators and policy-makers to adapt their strategies to meet the evolving needs of learners in the 21st century.

Education for all means no one should be left behind; thus, teachers should provide effective strategies for struggling readers. The "one-size-fits-all strategy" further divides the gap between the slow and advanced learners. This study used a quantitative observational research design to determine the reading ability of 30 struggling readers regarding word recognition, reading comprehension, and reading speed using reading stories, Dolch's basic sight words, and the Phil-IRI Manual 2018. The study develops strategic reading intervention materials to support teachers and students during the remedial programs (Abalos, 2020).

Essential skills learned in schools, such as Reading and writing, are considered a fundamental necessity; likewise, children in primary grades are expected to acquire specific competencies of these skills. Learners require tailored language assistance to promote academic reading comprehension. The classroom environment and the teachers' approach must be conducive to learning. Furthermore, such education systems' ideal goals and expectations interfere with the different considerations. Specifically, in the Philippines, the deterioration of quality education is constant due to problems faced by the country (Galang, 2021).

Educators face an unfortunate reality regarding reading fluency: many children encounter significant challenges when learning to read. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the average fourth-grade reading score decreased by 5 points in 2022, reaching its lowest level since 2005.

The average eighth-grade math score decreased by 8 points to its lowest level since 2003. This high percentage of students reading below proficiency levels could be due to many factors (Brooks et al., 2021).

Students may encounter many reading difficulties, such as basic challenges like text comprehension and decoding. In addition, some may be struggling due to deficits or learning disabilities like dyslexia. The number of reading problems students may face in the classroom can be overwhelming, Still, the good news is there are several techniques to help struggling readers with reading interventions. Here, we'll cover the basics of reading comprehension and why it is essential before detailing several intervention strategies that can effectively boost reading skills, including targeted phonics instruction, guided reading sessions, and the use of engaging literacy activities (Alava and Martinez, 2020).

Reading comprehension is the idea of understanding what you are reading. It relies on two interconnected abilities: word reading and language comprehension. In literacy instruction, both reading skills must be taught together because, although they are interconnected, they do not always develop simultaneously. Some students can read words on a page, but they do not grasp the meaning of those words. Others can understand a story being read out loud to them, but may not be able to read the words on the pages themselves (Alyousef, 2022).

Reading comprehension is important because it is a foundational skill that has a lifelong impact. When discussing the importance of reading comprehension, the Oxford University Press stated, "Good comprehension is vital if reading is to have a purpose, if a reader is to engage with and learn from a text, and, ultimately, if a reader is to enjoy what they're reading." Reading comprehension involves much more than just a reading level or fluency score; it encompasses understanding, interpreting, and analyzing the text. It is about purpose, engagement, learning, and enjoyment (Amin, 2020).

When students struggle with reading comprehension, educators should implement reading interventions as soon as possible. When teaching reading comprehension, it is important to implement an evidence-based curriculum that provides opportunities to teach comprehension skills routinely and across various reading levels (Andersen and Nielsen, 2020).

For a student to become fluent in word reading, They must be taught skills related to phonological awareness, phonics and decoding, and automatic word recognition. These three elements are foundational when it comes to reading instruction, and automatic word recognition is vital for reading fluency. According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, "By promoting long-term memory of words, teachers can help students rapidly improve their fluency in increasingly complex texts." (Ask et. al., 2020).

Language comprehension is a building block of reading comprehension. It has to do with a student's ability to understand different parts of a language, whether written or spoken. They begin learning language comprehension from a very early age simply by interacting with people around them. This may look like simple conversations with family members or reading a book with someone. They will begin to recognize sounds, letters, words, and phrases before eventually moving on to bigger comprehension concepts later down the road. When reading text, readers with good language comprehension will use deliberate, problem-solving thought processes to infer meaning from the text. Teaching reading comprehension is essential, but it is vital for early childhood education learners. Reading comprehension is a fundamental building block for learning across all subjects, including language arts and math. (Banerjee and Chaudhury, 2021).

Reading comprehension will not only help students with the rest of their educational career, but it will also continue to help them as they progress into the real world beyond school. "The importance of comprehension is what makes us advocates for ourselves and our families. The ability to read and understand through communication empowers us to make decisions in our lives. The brain is a remarkable component of our bodies and plays a vital role in our lives. Without this command center of our bodies, we would have no way to interact with others and lead amazing lives." (Bippert, 2020).

Reading performance in the Philippines has been a cause of concern for many educators and policy-makers. Researchers have conducted extensive studies to identify the root of the problem, and educators have implemented various interventions to improve students' reading proficiency. Despite these efforts, reading performance in the Philippines continues to lag behind that of other countries in the region. One possible reason for this is the lack of

emphasis on reading within the Philippine educational system. In most schools, students do not have enough time for independent reading, and teachers often lack sufficient training to teach reading effectively. (Burke et. al., 2021). In the Division of Davao Del Sur, particularly in Idong Elementary School, Sta. Cruz North District where the researcher is the school principal, problem in reading is given intervention through a reading program named Kadigarran, A Bagobo word that translates to "Kaayuhan" in Bisaya means "well-being" or "goodness." This program aims to address reading problems among learners in the early grades. In this context, the researcher wants to determine the effectiveness of the reading program by examining its initial gains alongside its implementation. Hence, this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW
It's important for teachers to instruct early readers that words are made up of phonemes, which can be separated and blended to form words. Without understanding this essential concept, students will struggle to decode. Instead, they might have to rely on memorization when reading. While they can develop a strong understanding of letters, these are critical building blocks for success in learning to read. Furthermore, the National Reading Panel research states that the beneficial effects of phonemic awareness teaching extend well beyond the end of the training period. (Bippert, 2020).

Students with reading difficulties tend to have lower levels of Phonemic Awareness. The best predictor of reading difficulty in kindergarten or first grade is the inability to segment words and syllables into constituent sound units. The NRP phonemic awareness research also found that the most effective teaching methods involve systematically teaching children how to manipulate phonemes with letters and instructing them in small groups. (Burke et. al., 2021).

Studies have found that phonemic awareness is the best predictor of reading success and subsequent reading progress in young children. In fact, phonemic awareness has been shown to be far better than IQ at predicting the reading and spelling abilities of young children. Thus, it is crucial to encourage phonemic awareness at home from an early age (Cadime et. al., 2022).

Explicit teaching of phonological awareness in these early years can eliminate future reading problems for many students. However, struggling decoders of any age can work on phonological awareness, especially if they have problems in blending or segmenting phonemes (Damayanti et. al., 2020).

Children learn skills through a variety of contexts, and no child will learn in the same mode as the other. With that in mind, teachers must provide multiple opportunities for children to discover phonemic awareness through engaging activities. Physical activity, music, poetry, and games are effective ways to enhance children's language skills and set them on the path to becoming independent readers.

 All these activities are used in our Reading Methods courses in which teacher candidates have deemed them effective to help understand and internalize the meaning of phonemic awareness (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2020).

Using phonics, technically known as synthetic phonics, is an effective and efficient method for teaching young students how to read. For this reason, phonics is the primary approach to reading instruction in many English-speaking countries. (Dowdall et. al., 2020).

Phonics can be described as the explicit and sequential teaching of reading through the relationship of letter-sound correspondence in words. Individual phoneme patterns are studied by segmenting, blending, decoding, and manipulating individual words. Supporters of the whole language approach believe that children's literature, writing activities, and communication activities can be integrated across the curriculum to teach reading, backers of phonics instruction insist that a direct, sequential mode of teaching enables students to master reading in an organized way (Duran and Duran, 2022).

According to Adams (1990), Once phonemic awareness is established and some sound-letter correspondences are learned, the brain begins to recognize new patterns dependently. After demonstrating phonemic awareness, students develop their phonological awareness, or their ability to rhyme, identify onset sounds, and recognize syllables (Armbruster, 2021).
In her landmark book, Learning to Read, Chall found that beginning readers who were systematically taught phonics showed significant improvements in their reading skills. Chall made it clear, though, that phonics instruction should not consist of mindless drills, should not be done to exclude of reading stories, and should not extend beyond the first half of first grade (Dwiningtiyas et. al., 2020).

Statement of the Problem
This study aimed to determine the level of the initial gain of the Kadigarran reading program and hopefully will design a competency review and enhancement program. Specifically, it answers the following sub-problems:
1.What is the level of the initial gain of the Kadigarran reading program in terms of:
1.1 Phonemic Awareness,
1.2 Phonics,
1.3 Fluency,

1.4 vocabulary and
2.5Comprehension?
2.Is there a significant difference in the initial gain in reading comprehension of the learners in the early grades when analyzed according to gender?
2.1 male,
2.2 female?
3. Based on the findings drawn out from this study, what competency review and enhancement program can be designed and proposed?

METHODOLOGY
Research Design
This study employed the non-experimental descriptive survey research design in investigating the research problem. It is descriptive because the data are presented in quantitative descriptions on "The Initial Gain of Kadigarran Reading Intervention Program." According to Good (2005), this method of research provides a mere description of tasks, presenting the conditions regarding the nature of the group of persons or class of events that involved analysis, classification, and measurement. It involves varied information regarding the current or present condition.

Research Respondents
This study will be conducted in Idong Elementary School, Sta. Cruz North District. The respondents in this study are the 152 struggling learners in reading in the research local. The respondents will answer the test-type questionnaire constructed by the researcher based on the least learned competencies in reading. This study makes use of the universal sampling procedure considering the manageable number of respondents in Idong Elementary School.

In this study, the distribution of respondents across the grades reveals insightful patterns within the pupil population. Specifically, Grade 1 has 2 pupils, while Grade 2 has a slightly higher count of 3 pupils. Both Grade 3 and Grade 4 consist of 2 pupils each, indicating a balanced representation. Grade 5 mirrors this with 3 pupils, but it is Grade 6 that stands out, boasting the highest number with 4 pupils. Overall, the total number of pupils in this study is 16, highlighting a diverse mix across the different grades. These learners are currently enrolled in Idong Elementary School school year 2024-2025, whose names and other information are stipulated in the Learner Information System (LIS).

Research Instrument
This study will utilize the researcher developed test-type questionnaire which items and indicators are focused on the least learned competencies in reading. The respondents will give their responses on the items in the test to the best of their ability which will determine how far have they developed their reading skills. The test-type questionnaire will undergo pilot testing in a school that is not part of the research local to measure its validity and reliability.

Data Analysis
The following statistical tools will be used in the analysis and interpretation the responses in this study.

Mean will be used to describe the level of reading comprehension of the respondents as they undergo the Kadigarran reading program.

t test was used to determine the significant difference on the reading comprehension of the research respondents when analyzed according to gender. t test is a statistical test used to compare the means of two groups to see if there is a significant difference between them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
This chapter displays the summary of the findings, conclusions and recommendations drawn out by the researcher after the analysis and interpretation of the findings had been made.

This study sought to determine the level of the initial gain of the learners in Kadigarran reading program. This study employed the non-experimental descriptive survey research design in investigating the research problem. It is descriptive because the data are presented in quantitative descriptions on the Initial Gain of Kadigarran Reading Program: Basis for Competency Review and Enhancement. According to Good (2005), this method of research shows merely description of tasks presenting the conditions regarding the nature of the group of persons or class of events that involved procedure of analysis, classification, and measurement. It involves varied information regarding the current or present condition (Deauna, 2005).

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Conclusions

Based on the collective findings on this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

The level of Initial Gain in the Kadigarran Reading Program in terms of Phonemic Awareness is Very High, the level of Initial Gain in the Kadigarran Reading Program in terms of Phonics is Very High, the level of Initial Gain in the Kadigarran Reading Program in terms of Fluency is High, the level of Initial Gain in the Kadigarran Reading Program in terms of Vocabulary is High, the level of Initial Gain in the Kadigarran Reading Program in terms of Comprehension is Very High, There is a Significant Difference on the initial gain in reading comprehension in Kadigarran Reading Program when analyzed according to gender.

The Schema Theory suggests that prior knowledge plays a crucial role in understanding new texts. Children rely on their existing knowledge (schemas) to make sense of new information. For example, if a child has experience with animals, they will comprehend a story about a zoo much more easily. Teachers encourage comprehension by activating and building on these schemas before introducing new texts. This theory supports the findings above as regards the reading comprehension of the learners.

Moreover, Interactive Model of Reading highlights how reading comprehension happens through a combination of both bottom-up (decoding words and letters) and top-down (using context and prior knowledge) processes. Young learners don't just read words individually; they make sense of them by using cues from the text, their experiences, and their ability to predict meaning. This approach emphasizes the importance of phonics, vocabulary, and critical thinking skills. This theory also supports the findings of this study,

On the other hand, Differences in Reading Achievement Theory suggests that females tend to outperform males in reading comprehension due to various cognitive, social, and motivational factors. Studies have shown that girls generally have stronger verbal abilities and are more engaged in reading activities, which contributes to their higher reading comprehension scores2. However, some studies indicate that gender differences may vary depending on the type of text being read, with boys performing better in science-related passages. This theory supports the findings of this study that there is a difference on the reading comprehension skills of male and female learners.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings drawn out by the researcher in this study, the following recommendations are offered:

DepEd should prioritize a comprehensive intervention program that includes curriculum enhancements, teacher training, and nationwide literacy initiatives. A well-structured reading framework must incorporate evidence-based strategies, such as phonics instruction, vocabulary development, and comprehension exercises tailored to various proficiency levels. DepEd can also launch targeted support programs for struggling readers, providing remedial interventions to bridge learning gaps. Establishing standardized reading assessments and monitoring systems will allow for data-driven decisions to refine policies and interventions, ensuring continuous improvement in literacy outcomes.

Moreover, DepEd should foster strong partnerships with schools, communities, and private organizations to cultivate a reading culture beyond the classroom. Providing accessible digital reading materials and integrating technology into literacy programs can further enhance comprehension skills, especially in underserved areas. Encouraging active parental involvement through reading workshops and home-based literacy activities will help reinforce comprehension strategies outside school settings. By making reading comprehension a national priority, DepEd can lay the foundation for lifelong learning and academic success among students.

School heads should integrate structured reading programs into the curriculum, emphasizing differentiated instruction to meet diverse student needs. Encouraging collaboration between teachers through professional learning communities can facilitate the exchange of best practices and effective strategies for enhancing reading comprehension. Furthermore, school heads must actively support the use of reading assessments to track student progress, enabling early identification of learning difficulties and timely interventions.

In addition to instructional strategies, school heads can promote reading-friendly environments by creating well-stocked libraries, organizing book fairs, and initiating school-wide reading challenges. Strengthening partnerships with local organizations and parents can further reinforce literacy efforts by involving the community in reading initiatives. By providing ongoing support, resources, and motivation to both educators and learners, school leaders can create a sustainable literacy framework that fosters long-term academic success.

Teachers must adopt dynamic instructional approaches to ensure initial gains in reading comprehension. Implementing interactive and student-centered teaching methods, such as guided reading, peer discussions, and comprehension exercises, can engage students in meaningful learning experiences. Differentiating instruction based on students' reading levels and providing targeted interventions for struggling learners will enhance comprehension skills effectively. Regular formative assessments, including quizzes and reading reflections, can provide insights into students' progress and inform necessary adjustments to instructional techniques.

Beyond classroom strategies, teachers should cultivate students' love for reading by introducing diverse literary genres, integrating real-world connections, and incorporating technology-based literacy tools. Establishing partnerships with parents and encouraging home-based reading activities can reinforce comprehension strategies

beyond school hours. Professional development opportunities, such as literacy workshops and collaborative teaching sessions, can equip educators with the latest research-based approaches, ensuring sustained improvements in students' reading abilities.

Future researchers can explore the integration of digital tools, gamification, and adaptive learning systems to enhance reading comprehension in modern educational settings. Investigating the role of socio-economic factors, language diversity, and cognitive development in literacy acquisition can lead to more inclusive and equitable interventions. By continuously contributing to the evolving field of literacy education, researchers help pave the way for sustainable, data-driven solutions that support long-term reading success for all learners.

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