

READING SKILLS ENHANCEMENT FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH PROJECT CARE: A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROJECT AMONG ALUMNI

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Abstract

The goal of teaching, research and extension must be towards the improvement of the community, systems, processes, and the improvement of people's lives in general. This paper aims to assess the implementation of Project CARE-Calabanga Community College Alumni Reading Skills Enricher, a community engagement project to evaluate its impact on target beneficiaries and to determine how to improve the conduct and implementation of this project. This study utilized mixed-method research design to investigate the operations, engagement of alumni-volunteers, problems encountered, as well as the effectiveness of the reading intervention conducted with selected Grade 7 students. A 3.83 score on Likert scale showed the passion of the alumni-volunteers in terms of their engagement and dedication to the project despite the problems encountered like conflict in schedule, lack of resources, emotional, and physical distractions during the conduct of the reading intervention. A 9.56 % increase in Oral Reading Proficiency and 18.08 score difference in Maze Test from beginning to the end of the project indicate significant improvements in reading proficiency of students using the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) test. The results were conclusive to indicate the effectiveness of the reading intervention project but recommendations were provided for further improvement.

Keywords: Oral Reading Proficiency, Reading, Reading Enrichment, Community Engagement, Extension Research.

Introduction

Higher education stands as a pivotal driver of performance, prosperity and competitiveness. UNESCO posits that the social responsibility of universities acts as a conduit linking their scholastic and teaching functions with societal progress. It holds considerable weight in catering to societal demands and can amplify its influence on society at local, national, and international stages via active participation within the community.

In an effort of Calabanga Community College to leverage the students' positive community engagement experiences, it launched Project CARE-CCC Alumni Reading Skills Enricher, a community engagement involving teacher-education alumni of the school who are pre-service teachers in a reading enhancement program among secondary school learners. Project CARE is a continuous program for the college alumni that aims to improve reading ability of students in the community. Low level of reading skills of students greatly impact academic performance. Since information is typically delivered in text, reading comprehension is a crucial skill for students to learn.

Effective reading is accomplished when one combines knowledge and skill in understanding the text. It involves cognitive and non-cognitive processes that a learner must harness to ensure that he/she achieves desirable reading fluency and the equally important reading comprehension. As Breznitz (2005) theorized, reading includes different sub-processes that crucially include the use and activation of visual and auditory modalities that operate alongside the linguistic brain systems. For learners to fully achieve a refined reading ability (in both aspects of fluency and comprehension), Breznitz (2005) proposed that they must be able to coincide the use of modalities and brain systems in a phenomenon which she calls 'synchronization.' Elaborating further, 'successful synchronization is based not only on the content of information but also on the speed at which the information is processed and transferred within and between the various systems activated in the process' (Breznitz, 2005, p. 11). Borrowing the arguments of Breznitz (2005), Hudson et al. (2009) developed their model of a multi leveled framework for assessing key reading

processes and sub-processes towards fluency (Figure 1). Critiquing how reading ability is measured in most standardized examinations, Hudson et al. (2009) basically argue that, in timed exams where learners are asked questions on reading comprehension, the results only identify students between categories of ‘good’ and ‘poor’ readers. Such results remain abstract, particularly on the breakdown of particular sets of reading abilities that learners must focus on to improve their reading ability. Citing Buly and Valencia (2002, cited by Hudson et al., 2009), they argued that reading difficulties occur in multiple areas which can be associated with a failure mark in the standardized exams.

Reading has always been one of the main challenges of educators. Based on the 2019 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS), 8.4% or 6.7 million Filipinos between the age ranges of 10 to 64 years old are functionally illiterate. In 2020, there were issues that around 70,000 learners in Bicol were categorized as non-readers based on the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) Group Screening Test results (Jaucian, 2020). Phil-IRI is a standardized tool used in the Department of Education (DepEd) to identify the reading ability of every learner along with their reading needs.

It is upon these circumstances that this study aimed to assess the implementation of Project CARE - Calabanga Community College Alumni Reading Skills Enricher, a Community Engagement Project of Calabanga Community College for the Second Semester of Academic Year 2021-2022 which aimed to engage teacher-education alumni in an education community consequently helping them improve the reading proficiency level of the students.

Theoretical Framework

At the core of this research is the integrative theoretical framework of Constructivism of Jean Piaget’s Schema Theory relative to language development with Hudson et al’s (2009) framework for understanding reading difficulties.

Piaget’s (1972) constructivist perspective suggests that children in the sensorimotor and pre-operational phases of cognitive development are actively constructing language *schemas*. As children engage with their surroundings, these *schemas* develop progressively strengthening speech communication and symbolic thinking. As they enter the pre-operational stage, children begin to use complex language to express thoughts and ideas about objects or people not immediately present, emphasizing their capacity for symbolic thinking. Simultaneously, Hudson et al. (2009) posit that reading capabilities can be understood as a continuum of processes and sub-processes. In this framework, learners are not just passive recipients but are active “knowledge holders” with distinct needs. The framework assists in the diagnosis of reading challenges, which then guides the development of specialized teaching methods. A sophisticated approach to literacy education and assessment is supported by the combination of these approaches. In using Piaget’s theory, educators can concentrate on activities that promote the formation of *schema* for language and symbol recognition at the proper developmental stage.

In situating the reading capabilities of the learners within the hierarchical order in the framework of this research, this will provide not necessarily perfect instructional diagnostics but as something that builds the foundation to base assessment and instructional strategies (Hudson et al., 2009).

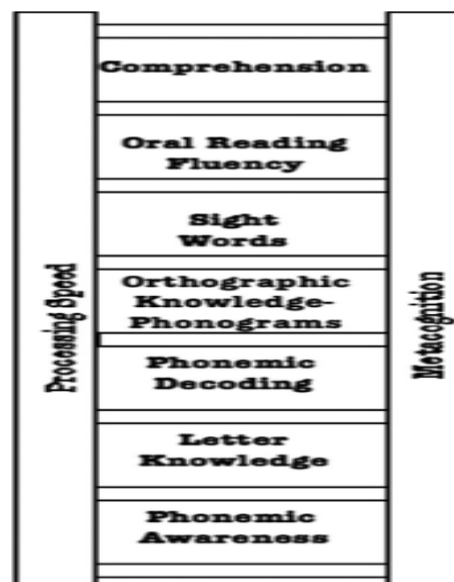


Figure 1: Multilayered Framework for Assessing Processes and Sub-Processes of Reading Fluency (Hudson et al., 2009)

Conceptual Framework

Figure 2 presents the conceptual paradigm of the study in an IPO format - Input, Process, Output. The first box presents the input of the study which are the Assessment of Project CARE - CCC Alumni Reading Skills Enricher and the Reading Proficiency Level of the beneficiaries of the Program. Second box presents the process that this

study will be undertaking which includes the conduct of the Survey questionnaire, Focus group Discussion (FGD), and the adoption of Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). Expected output of this study is presented in the third box which is the Enhanced CCC Community Engagement Program which will be crafted based on the findings of the study.

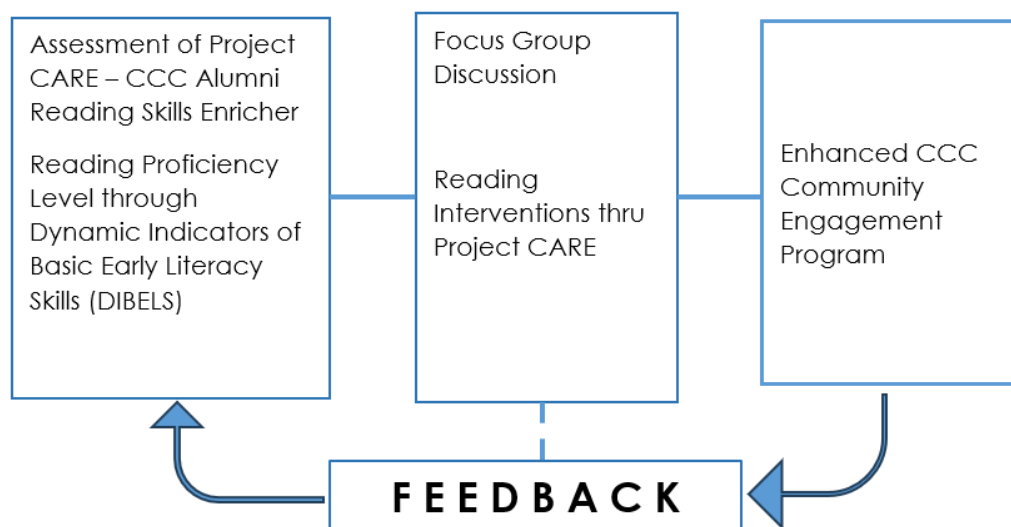


Figure 2: Conceptual Paradigm

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to assess the implementation of Project CARE - Calabanga Community College Alumni Reading Skills Enricher, a Community Engagement Project of Calabanga Community College for the Second Semester of Academic Year 2021-2022. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the status of the Project CARE-Calabanga Community College Alumni Reading Skills Enricher, a Community Engagement Project of Calabanga Community College in terms of the profile of the alumni and activities of the project
2. What is the reading proficiency level of the target beneficiaries before and after the implementation of Project CARE?
3. Is there a significant change on the reading proficiency level of the target beneficiaries before and after the implementation of Project CARE?
4. What is the level of participation, experiences, and problems encountered by the alumni in implementing Project CARE?; and
5. What are the possible innovations that can be adopted to enhance the implementation of the Project CARE as a community engagement project?

Scope and Delimitation

This study assessed the implementation of the Project CARE - Calabanga Community College Alumni Reading Skills Enricher, a Community Engagement Project of Calabanga Community College. It dealt with the profile of the alumni and activities of the project. Additionally, It also included the reading proficiency of the beneficiaries of the Project CARE who are students from one of the secondary schools in Calabanga. The participants of this research were the volunteer-alumni of the college particularly the education courses graduates. It did not include alumni who are non-education graduates and those who did not volunteer are reading skills enrichers.

Methodology

Research Design

The mixed-method was utilized in this study. Quantitative analysis was used in identifying the effect of the Reading enhancement session to the reading proficiency of the students and on the level of engagement of the reading enhancement volunteers. Qualitative analysis was used in analyzing the experiences and difficulties encountered by the volunteers.

Participants/Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study were the CCC alumni particularly the Teacher education course graduates who are pre-service teachers from batch 2019 and

the secondary learners enrolled for S/Y 2021-2022 who are beneficiary of the Project CARE.

Instrument/s of the Study

The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) was used to monitor and evaluate Oral reading fluency and Comprehension. Specifically, two tests were administered: Oral Reading Fluency Test and Maze Test.

DIBELS (n.d.) is a standardized reading and literacy skills test administered to the sample population. It is renowned worldwide for its high level of reliability and validity in assessing the literacy skills of students. It was developed thru extensive empirical research in reading and literacy.

Additionally, a four-point scale survey questionnaire, validated by the institutional review board of Calabanga Community College, was utilized to describe the level of engagement of the reading volunteers.

Data Collection and Analysis

In the analysis of data for the oral reading fluency Test and Maze test, this study adopted the computations indicated in DIBELS. To determine the significant changes in the beginning, middle and end in each test, comparative analysis of the Oral Reading Fluency Accuracy and Maze Test Adjusted results were done.

Ethical Considerations

In this study involving secondary school students and CCC alumni, the cornerstones of ethical conduct were informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, and harm minimization. Participants were thoroughly informed about the research's nature, emphasizing their right to voluntary participation and withdrawal from the study at any time without repercussions. Privacy of the participants was stringently maintained through secure data handling, participant anonymity, and aggregation of reported results. The research design was meticulously crafted to

minimize potential harm or discomfort, with due consideration for session timings to prevent additional academic stress on the students.

The integrity of data and its interpretation was prioritized to uphold research credibility, employing checks to prevent data manipulation and ensuring bias-free results interpretation. Transparency is extended to honest and accurate results communication, acknowledgment of study limitations to promote academic honesty and further research. With secondary school students' involvement, parental or guardian consent was obtained alongside student consent, underpinning the research with age-appropriate and respectful communication. Guided by the protocols of the Institutional Review Board of Calabanga Community College, these ethical measures collectively ensured respect for participants' rights and dignity, contributing to the study's credibility and integrity of research.

Result and Discussions

The status of the Project CARE- Calabanga Community College Alumni Reading Skills Enricher, a Community Engagement Project of Calabanga Community College were evaluated in terms of the profile of the alumni and the activities of the project. The reading proficiency level of the target beneficiary were identified before and after the implementation of the reading sessions. Significant change in the reading proficiency level was also determined. The level of participation, experiences, and problems encountered by the alumni in implementing Project CARE were determined. Possible interventions to enhance the implementation of the community engagement project among alumni were also identified.

Table 1 below shows the results about the status of the Project CARE in terms of the profile of the alumni-volunteer.

Table 1: Profile of the Alumni involved in the Project CARE Calabanga Community College Alumni Reading Skills Enricher, A Community Engagement Project of Calabanga Community College

Volunteers	Number
LET Passers	10
Working	5
Alumni signed as volunteers	10

It can be gleaned from the table that all of the Alumni who signed to be volunteers are all LET Passers. This implies that all reading volunteers are licensed teachers, hence, capable of administering reading sessions among the beneficiaries. However, it can also be noted that half of the number are working, this may be the reason why not all of these

volunteers were able to finish the three-month period reading sessions.

In terms of the activities of the Project CARE Calabanga Community College Alumni Reading Skills Enricher, this involves reading session with identified beneficiaries from Quipayo National High School, one of the secondary schools in Calabanga.

They were Grade 7 students who were permitted by their parents to undergo the reading sessions, every week for three (3) months. In line with the reading sessions, they took three assessments on the beginning, middle and end of the sessions.

Of the ten (10) volunteers, only six (6) of them were able to accomplish the three-month reading session with the beneficiaries. This can be attributed to them having respective work during the implementation of the project.

As to the effect of the reading sessions conducted among the student-beneficiaries, following are the results of the two reading tests which measures their reading proficiency.

Table 2 presents the results in the Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) Test. This presents the number of the words correctly read and incorrectly read by the student (beneficiary) in the Beginning, Middle and End.

Table 2: Oral Reading Fluency Test Results during Beginning, Middle and End Sessions

	Benchmark Reading 1 Beginning		Benchmark Reading 1 Middle		Benchmark Reading 1 End	
	Words Correct	Errors	Words Correct	Errors	Words Correct	Errors
Student 1	278	1	364	0	381	0
Student 2	296	46	347	20	371	9
Student 3	226	53	353	11	358	23
Student 4	274	5	358	6	379	2
Student 5	296	3	347	17	317	10
Student 6	149	130	327	37	336	45
Average	253.17	39.67	349.33	15.17	357.00	14.83
ORF ACCURACY	86.45		95.84		96.01	

ORF Accuracy: $\text{ORF words Correct} / (\text{ORF Words Correct} + \text{ORF Errors}) \times 100$

Results show that in the beginning Student 1 has only 1 error and 278 words correct, while student 6 got 130 errors and only 149 words correct. During the middle and end, student 6 still has the highest errors which total to 37 and 45 committed errors while student 1 got no errors on both levels. It can also be noted in the data that 66% or 4 out of 6 students gradually achieved less errors from beginning to end.

In terms of the Oral Reading Fluency Accuracy Rate, the average of 86.45% in the Beginning session shows that the group is labeled as **Intensive support-At Risk**, which means that 80% of the students score below the 20th percentile rank in the criterion measure. The average of 96.01% in the End

session shows that the group is labeled as **Core Support-Negligible Risk** which means that nearly all students are at or above the 40th percentile rank in the criterion measure. (*DIBELS 8th Administration and Scoring Guide*). Furthermore, there was a notable 9.56% increase, from 86.45% in the beginning to 96.01% in the End, making the group **Negligible Risk** from **At Risk**. Thus, it can be inferred that the reading sessions conducted by the reading volunteers helped in increasing the accuracy level of the students-beneficiaries in Oral Reading Fluency.

Below is the result in the reading session using maze.

Table 3: Maze Reading Comprehension Results during Beginning, Middle and End Sessions

	Benchmark Reading 1 Beginning		Benchmark Reading 1 Middle		Benchmark Reading 1 End	
	Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect
Student 1	46	14	38	22	58	9
Student 2	30	10	43	9	55	6
Student 3	33	27	47	13	60	7
Student 4	49	11	56	4	62	5
Student 5	52	4	57	3	62	5

Student 6	23	37	24	36	26	34
Average	38.83	17.17	44.17	14.50	53.83	11.00
Maze Adjusted	30.25		36.92		48.33	

Maze Adjusted: Number Correct-(0.5 x Number of Incorrect)

In the reading comprehension session using Maze, the Maze adjusted score in the beginning, middle and end session of 30.25, 36.92 and 48.33 respectively are all labelled as **Core Support-Negligible Risk** which means that nearly all students are at or above the 40th percentile rank in the criterion measure. (*DIBELS 8th Administration and Scoring Guide*). However, it can be noted that there was a leap in the score from beginning to end, from 30.25 to 48.33, a huge difference of 18.08.

With these results, the conduct of the reading sessions which focus on the oral reading fluency and reading with comprehension among the students-beneficiaries may have significantly contributed to the increased level of reading proficiency. As Breznitz (2005) theorized, reading includes different sub-processes that crucially include the use and

activation of visual and auditory modalities that operate alongside the linguistic brain systems. For learners to fully achieve a refined reading ability (in both aspects of fluency and comprehension), Breznitz (2005) proposed that they must be able to coincide the use of modalities and brain systems in a phenomenon which she calls 'synchronization.' Elaborating further, 'successful synchronization is based not only on the content of information but also on the speed at which the information is processed and transferred within and between the various systems activated in the process' (Breznitz, 2005, p. 11).

In the level of participation, of the alumni implementing Project CARE, the table below shows the result.

Table 4: Level of Participation in the Project of the Alumni-Volunteers

Area of Participation	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Planning of the activities regarding the program	3.83	Highly Engaged
Orientation with the beneficiaries and parents	3.83	Highly Engaged
Preparation of the reading materials	3.83	Highly Engaged
Implementation of the reading enhancement to the beneficiaries	3.83	Highly Engaged
Recording and reporting of the results.	3.83	Highly Engaged
AVERAGE	3.83	Highly Engaged

Legend:

1.0-1.75 - Not Engaged

1.76-2.50 - Less Engaged

2.51- 3.25 - Moderately Engaged

3.26-4.00 - Highly Engaged

On the level of participation in terms of the different areas concerning the conduct of the activity under Project CARE, all areas have a weighted mean of 3.83 which is interpreted as Highly Engaged. This shows that in the planning, orientation of the student-beneficiaries and their parents, preparation of the materials, implementation, recording and reporting of the results, the project volunteers are highly engaged. Thus, this project indeed has the volunteers as its backbone. Using the 4-point Likert scale, the project volunteers believed that they are highly engaged at the project's implementation.

When asked about their experience in implementing the project, the volunteers revealed that they loved and enjoyed conducting the reading sessions with the student-beneficiaries, those were the times that they were able to practice their teaching career and be able to assist in improving the students-beneficiaries' reading proficiency. Generally, they

believe that their experience prepared them in their future career as teachers. As McDonald et al. (2011) found that community-based field experiences may serve to broaden preservice teachers' understanding of teaching and learning. As their findings indicate, community-based field experiences afford additional opportunities-beyond traditional PK-12 school settings-for preservice teachers to see and understand when and where teaching and learning occur.

One of the volunteers shared that she was challenged in conducting the reading activity because the student-beneficiary assigned to her did not know how to read texts in the English Language. She has to begin with letter sounds, CV, and CVC patterns to help the student read fluently in English. Aside from the provided material by the researchers, she gave her student additional reading materials suited to her level. With this experience these future

teachers were able to look into how the teaching-learning happens in the real setting taking into account the initial ability of the students with regards to the task at hand. Measuring the reading proficiency levels of the students, before, during, and after the reading sessions guided the volunteers in gauging their students' reading abilities. Assessment is a crucial component of education that is used to guide instruction. The first stage in developing effective reading instruction is to establish a baseline performance for students. Pupils come to class having a wide range of literacy skills. It is vital to tailor literacy teaching to each student's specific needs. Initial and continuous reading assessments can be used to establish individual needs.

As to the problems encountered by the alumni in implementing the project, time, emotional and physical distraction emerged as the main problems. The project volunteers were restrained by the timeline of the project which required them to conduct four (4) reading sessions in a month for three (3) months. Some of them even made adjustments in the schedule for both student and teacher to be on their common free time. This may be the reason why some of the project volunteers were not able to complete the whole duration of the project. Next is the emotional distraction among the student-beneficiary. Some of them are distracted by the other school activities which hamper them in participating to the reading sessions. Physical distractions in the other hand refers to the place of learning where they conduct the reading sessions. Students and teachers were sometimes distracted by the various things happening in their surroundings.

Conclusions

From the results of this research, it can be concluded that (1) the alumni-volunteers who conducted the reading sessions are all LET Passers who were trained to administer the DIBELS test and reading sessions to selected students; (2) there was a 9.56 % increase in the Oral Reading Proficiency result of students from beginning to the end of the reading intervention project which is a significant jump from being categorized as **At Risk** to **Negligible Risk** in the DIBELS spectrum. Similarly, there was an increase in Maze Test scores of 18.08 in the beginning and end of the study. Respectively, all students fall under the **Core-Support-Negligible Risk** in the DIBELS spectrum; (3) Hence, there is a significant increase in terms of Oral Reading Proficiency and Comprehension. (4) In the Likert Scale, the result showed that the level of participation of alumni-volunteers in implementing Project CARE has a weighted mean of 3.83 which is Highly Engaged although they encountered problems like conflict in schedule, emotional, and physical distractions.

Recommendations

The researchers recommend the following: (1) conduct a similar research and extension that targets non-readers because this is a major problem in our country; (2) allot more time for training of alumni-volunteers especially on teaching non-readers; (3) provide adequate support to researchers and alumni-volunteers; and (4) conduct further studies on the different community engagement projects which focus on the improvement of reading proficiency level of school learners to strengthen the link of the scholastic and teaching functions of higher education institution to societal progress.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest in the conduct of this research.

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