The Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) Program: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

The implementation of the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) program is mandated by the Department of Education (DepEd) for implementation in schools as an assessment tool in determining the performance of learners in reading proficiency. This paper critically analyzed the implementation of Phil-IRI in schools as a prescribed reading program of DepEd. Following a critical analysis approach, the paper explored the problems encountered in the program implementation. The results of the inventory serve as the basis for teachers in creating appropriate reading intervention initiatives to improve the performance of struggling readers. Challenges were revealed along the Phil-IRI implementation which drew setbacks on literacy improvement, writing and reading proficiency of the learners. In the implementation process, some teachers were not adherent nor consistent to program interventions since they are already bombarded with workloads in their teaching tasks and so many paper- works for submission, apart from the time-consuming reading interventions. It was difficult to carry out the appropriate reading remediation in view of teaching time constraints and too many assigned works coupled with the insufficient instructional reading materials, limited or no technological facility and limited library resources. Indeed, developing the reading ability of learners with reading difficulties has never been an easy feat for the reading teachers.

I. Introduction

In the Philippines, one of the problems besetting the educational system is that many Filipino children struggle with reading which is particularly linked to low achievement results especially in the public schools. The low achievement results are further remarked to the poor development of reading skills among the learners. In 2019, the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metric [SEA-PLM] reported that a percentage of Filipino fifth graders performance exhibited least proficiency in three learning areas: mathematics, writing and reading (Bernardo et al., 2022).

The grade five learners' performance was assessed from chosen schools in six countries of Southeast Asia. It was evident in the data that Philippines is the second-least performer in reading with 10 percent, followed by Laos with a performance of only 2 percent (UNICEF and SEAMEO, 2020). Rivera and Aggabao (2020) also found out that

the reading difficulties of grade five pupils were particularly manifested on level of word recognition and reading comprehension.

Reading is a powerful tool that can be readily acquired to sustain the cornerstone of learning. In order to acquire knowledge and enhance new learning skills, reading ability must be developed in pupils. The ability to read is important to the learning of children along with the development of their skills in literacy and dynamic society involvement (DepEd, 2019). Hence, having the skill in reading is considered as a foothold for all academic learnings.

The reading inventory tool is conducted individually to learners to determine the reading performance of students which are then categorized into four levels: frustration, instructional, independent and non-reader. The lowest among the levels is frustration where the learner refuses to read showing withdrawal from reading situations. The instructional level is where the learner profits or gains from instruction. The independent is the highest level where the reader is self-reliant and reads with proficiency without the guidance or help of teacher/facilitator. And non-reader, the lowest among the levels, is where the learner cannot catch on and utter letter-sound associations for blended consonants, single consonants and other keyword sounds.

Skills in reading is a doorway to every individual to learn the academic subjects. Seemingly, teaching the learners how to read and developing their reading comprehension skill is not an easy task especially on the part of teachers. For without the mastery of this skill, consequently, a child can be left behind in the learning process. The challenge in making students be intrinsically motivated to improve their habit for reading plays a fundamental part in achieving better academic performance (Korantwi-Barimah et al., 2017; Liu and Ho, 2017; Omela and Martin, 2020). Most likely, it is a complex process to learn how to read and as well develop the reading comprehension skills of learners as it involves the reader, the text materials to be used and other related factors that somehow affect the reading activity.

Accordingly. the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines established and developed programs to encourage reading and to promote the development of reading skills among Filipino young learners. One of these programs is the Philippine Informal Reading Program (Phil-IRI) with DepEd mandate for implementation in all public schools of the country to address the issues concerning literacy improvement. The program consists of graded passages to identify the performance of learners in silent reading, oral reading and reading comprehension. These reading assessments or the conduct of reading inventory programs are used to determine the reading proficiency of learners in school which will then serve as basis for conducting enrichment reading programs.

However, after years of program implementation since 2011 in the elementary level, there are still questions, apprehensions and difficulties encountered especially by the teachers on the effectivity of the program. When a revised guideline for Phil-IRI implementation was drafted through DepEd Order No. 14, series 2018 introducing it to the secondary level. In this context, considering the has been implemented in the elementary level, substantial elementary graduates were still assessed as slow or non-readers. Evidently, the educational system is still confronted with issues concerning literacy improvement especially on many learners' status who fall behind in reading and writing, exhibiting poor performance in reading comprehension.

Undoubtedly, the reading proficiency lies in the hand of teachers based upon the successful implementation of reading programs in schools (Cabalo and Cabalo, 2019). Only through a successful policy implementation and reading intervention facilitated by

teachers where the school be successful in achieving high reading performance, developing and enhancing the reading skills of learners.

Grounded on this premise, this paper evaluated the implementation of the Phil-IRI in schools and assessed the difficulties encountered along its implementation to shed light valuable solutions in the successful application and improvement of the program. The authors contend that examining and analyzing the performance of learners particularly in their reading proficiency can shed light in formulating appropriate reading interventions supportive towards literacy improvement and honing the performance of struggling readers.

II. Review of Literatures

2.1 The goal of the Phil-IRI Program

Conforming to the primary program of DepEd which is the "Every Child a Reader Program" (ECARP) in 2004, the reading inventory program is carried through the Department's Bureau of Learning Delivery. The revision of Phil-IRI was set early in 2013 preceding the implementation of K-12 Curriculum. In order to reinforce the program, it was promulgated for implementation in all public schools nationwide. It directly addresses the aspiration in making Filipino children as writers and readers at their grade level by determining their difficulties and reading skills. In 2018, the Revised Phil-IRI was introduced to the secondary level, specifically in the grade 7 to battle up the problems in the growing numbers of non-readers both in Filipino and English.

DepEd Order No. 14, (2018), the "Implementing Guidelines on the Administration of Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI)" stipulated that one of the precedence of the Department is to improve literacy. Its goal is to provide effective reading instruction to empower the Filipino children to be able to speak in both languages of Filipino and English. The informal reading inventory is directed to be a tool as classroom-based instruction to measure and draw out the level of reading performance of students.

2.2 Policy Implementation of the Phil-IRI

The DepEd Order No. 14 (2018) details the implementation guidelines of the Phil-IRI for Grades 3 to 6 in both the elementary level and secondary levels nationwide. It stipulated the responsibilities on the dissemination in every level of school governance and the utilization of the said tool. The guidelines are to be strictly applied to ensure and evidence-based approach adoption by teachers and school principals. The instructions are to be student-oriented and receptive to individual learners' needs as well to the whole class. It should also conform to the existing guidelines and policies in classroom assessment of K-12 program as mandated in the DepEd Order No. 8, series of 2015.

In accordance to the process of administration, the Bureau of Learning Resources takes charge in compiling the materials for Phil-IRI which is uploaded in the DepEd website portal through the "Learning Resource Management Development System" prior to the opening of classes. every school year. These materials are then downloaded by school supervisors, school heads and the teachers who implement the program in school. In order to guarantee that teacher facilitators have the exact set of materials to be used in the distribution, the schools are encouraged to get the subsidy for reproduction from the schools' local funds or MOOE. The region and division offices first administer for teachers an orientation or training on the supervision of Phil-IRI before conducting the program in school level.

In its profound relevance, the Phil-IRI is an informal reading inventory that determines the performance of pupils in reading proficiency at different levels (DepEd

Phil-IRI Manual, 2018). It is an assessment tool that can be managed by teachers inside the classroom. It comprises graded passages designed by reading experts and aims to describe and measure the pupils' reading performance individually in silent reading, oral reading and listening comprehension in English and Filipino. The IRI aims to find out the reading proficiency of pupils at three levels: independent, instructional, and frustration. Consequently, the data collected from the assessment become the bases of teachers for designing and planning reading instructions that is responsive to the students' needs and as the basis for enhancement of school reading programs that would help improve the overall reading performance of school.

2.3 Implementation in the School Level

Teachers need to be guided with the data regarding the recent reading abilities and levels of their students for them to design and device reading instruction appropriate to the students' needs. This testing approach describes how children read at their levels. It adopts the principles that give emphasis on the need for education - culturally sensitive, responsive and learner-oriented. Assessment tools in reading can be used to diagnose the learners' needs and difficulties in reading and Phil-IRI is one of these evaluating tools administered in schools.

The Phil-IRI, as a substantiated instrument, measures the learner's reading skills and comprehension level. Through reading passages, the learner's word recognition and comprehension are being evaluated variably and subjectively during the assessment. The administration of tools is conducted in two setups, the (1) silent and (2) oral reading tests. The tool basically intends to estimate the reading fluency of learner's comprehension level in view of oral assessment and in terms of reading speed and comprehension within a time frame. Both tools employ significant measures used by teachers in rating the reading performance of the individual learners.

The program is conducted in two distinct events, where a pre-test is administered at the beginning of the school year from July until August and a post-test at the ending of school year in month of February which undergoes four stages within the school year. In stage 1, all students will undergo the foremost assessment using the Phil-IRI Group Screening Test (GST) then those learners whose performance are identified below the expectation, meaning, those who get below 14 in total raw score of Phil-IRI GST, should undergo in stage 2 which is the facilitation of graded passages (Pre-test). In this stage, the strength and weakness in reading of learners are identified.

The collated results of the pre-test become the bases of interventions which is the stage 3. Teachers provide specialized instructions and reading programs within the school year to improve the reading proficiency and performance of those who were identified under the frustration and non-reader level. And lastly, stage 4 as the final stage, is the supervision of the graded passages (Post-test) to determine if there was improvement or development in the reading performance level of the learners.

III. Discussion

3.1 The Importance of Reading Inventory Program in Schools

Children who struggle from reading are still one of the major concerns that exists of the Philippine government. Once a child has a reading difficulty, as the case maybe, he might also face some difficulties in other learning areas. The reading performances of learners is associated with their achievement in academics since reading is essential in developing study habits effectively (Balan et al., 2019; Daniel et al., 2017). Furthermore, as these children struggle from reading, teachers also struggle to make ways in making

them good readers. As there are mandates in giving emphasis on student achievement, there came the important need for applicable reading assessments or techniques such as informal reading inventories (IRIs) in Philippine public schools.

The IRIs or informal reading inventories as reading assessments, help teachers determine to which grade level of proficiency the students belong, to unfold and cater problems in reading and to easily and regularly monitor students' progress. Baldevarona (2020) emphasized that Phil-IRI is effective because it gradually improves the performance of struggling readers by way of exposing them from simplified texts to more inexplicable ones. The regular conduct of IRIs in school helps educators control assessment and instruction to align all year long. Reading assessments or informal reading inventories are intended to provide teachers with the initial perception of the learner's level of reading towards a definite passage which then becomes the fundamental point for teachers to construct individualized instructions for reading according to learners' needs.

Because learning is crucial to gaining knowledge, it is very important to initially have a perception of the students' reading performance which can be done by performing reading inventories in schools. The conduct of Philippine informal reading inventory helps in determining the strength and weakness of a student (Inding, 2020), also in analyzing the difficulty in reading and knowing the origin of difficulty in comprehension (Jolejole-Caube et al., 2019). This is where intervention programs can be done individually to cater the needs of learners who struggle from reading or with difficulties in reading (Saraspe and Abocejo, 2020). With this, learners' development can be gauged such that progress in reading skills can be gained.

3.2 Difficulty on the Development of Appropriate Reading Programs and Interventions

The Phil-IRI was developed as a measuring tool that gives description and access to the reading performances of leaners in aid for teachers to design appropriate reading programs and interventions (DepEd Order No. 14, 2018). The effective implementation of a reading inventory program depends on its successful administration in schools. However, challenges came across as the implementation moves in progress. Despite efforts to provide comprehensive and extensive reading-based program, external factors still greatly affect pupils' readiness and eagerness towards reading activity.

As the program was implemented all over the country, it has drawn support yet with positive and negative feedbacks among teachers who are the program front runners. Recamara (2018) mentioned that one of the team members who created the Phil-IRI testing tool found out that teachers solely use the reading tool as a diagnostic test mainly for documentation purposes. Despite the identified reading problems and difficulties encountered by the pupils, no follow-up process and supplemental reading has been made. Recamara (2018) also cited that the said observation was also noticed in the Division of Dapitan City where majority of teachers asserts that Phil-IRI is deemed to assess the reading ability of learners so it should be followed by interventions. In reality, program interventions were neglected for it is time consuming and an additional stockpile of paperwork for teachers (Baldevarona, 2020) considering the number of students they need to deal with, including other teaching tasks that they do.

Reading inventories cannot serve its purpose to fast track the reading abilities of learners if there is no incorporation of reading interventions, this is where a reading program fails. Rivera and Aggabao (2020) pointed out that it should be domineering for teachers to not only identify pupils who are struggling in reading, but they must also come up with the most appropriate reading remediation which means that they need to find solution after they found out their learners' reading weaknesses. Giving them the soonest

intervention and utilizing strategies to cater their needs can be beneficial. Schools need to carry out different remediation programs as effective practices in improving the performance of struggling readers. Damong-as and Doctor (2019) noted that adopting a guided reading as a form of intervention improves learner's reading ability from frustration to instructional and moving to independent level on the bases of comprehension, fluency in reading and level of word recognition. Guiding the learners by making them fully aware of their reading level including their reading strengths and weaknesses is an important task of a teacher (Trazo and Abocejo, 2019). Undoubtedly, the instruction will become way effective if learners will have the knowledge of their reading performance.

Another concern is that DepEd lacks in providing necessary trainings for language teachers who conduct the reading inventory program in schools (Ligudon and Ildefonso, 2022). Since teachers play a vital role in the educational system, it is but proper that administrators lead in sponsoring more trainings and seminars to guarantee the needed innovations for developing instructional reading materials supportive to the enhancement of learners' comprehensions skills (Cuñado and Abocejo, 2018). In the acquisition of an effective reading skills, one of the primary requirements is to develop a healthy reading habit with emphasis on proper semantics and syntax (Sartika et al., 2020). Along with guided sound and word recognition, correct perception and comprehension and understanding different linguistic processes have become major challenges in the development of effective reading intervention program (Tomas et al., 2021). Thus, teachers who will be assigned in giving reading remedials or sessions should be well equipped and trained in linguistic aspects.

Another challenge is the establishment of conducive reading environment based on the reading requirements of each pupil (Adapon and Mangila, 2020). The use of effective methods and variety of teaching strategies for reading taking into consideration the individual differences and learning needs and capacity of pupils (Shuel, 2021) can also be very beneficial. This helps eliminate difficulties in the implementation of reading program or intervention by the school. Also beneficial is the integration of the reading program into the curriculum of the pupils who have diagnosed with reading difficulties is on the top concern (Tomas et al., 2021).

3.3 Availability of School Reading Facilities

The focus in strengthening the different reading programs and intervention towards educational excellence can be achieved with the availability of sufficient reading materials such as textbooks, magazines, articles and among others (Morelos, 2021). In this way, every educational institution realizes and sees the need for a minilibrary in every classroom. The presence of school library center or hub fully equipped with varied references and updated reading materials across different grade levels.

Adjacent to providing school library hub is the importance of allowing pupils to have a library period where they can spend time in reading. Figuracion and Ormillla (2021) pointed out that pupils are instructional readers, which means teachers will have to instruct their pupils to read during their library hours. This library hour is one way to effectively develop reading skill and hone their reading habit (Ameyaw and Anto 2018). Sor and Caraig (2021) emphasized that the provision of reading clinics for students who need intervention likely improve their level of comprehension and reading skills.

The lack of technological or digital facility is another crucial factor amidst the drastic change from the traditional to the technological driven based education. With the availability of high-technology and to meet global standards, educational institutions can capitalize and invest in equipping the school with computers, online reading materials and other e-learning system (Abumandour, 2021) that can be used to maximize pupils reading

ability. Engaging pupils with the use of computer and its different reading application will entice and renew their interest in reading (Quinto et al., 2020). Encouraging the use of reading materials that can be accessed by using technology helps in improving the reading skills of students (Toyong and Toyong, 2021).

3.4 Parents' Participation

The lack of parental support and monitoring also contribute to the low reading proficiency results of the learners. Regardless of their sex, age and family background or income, pupils were not aware nor even cared to aspire to have a good reading performance since most of the parents do not follow-up and neglect the reading progress of their children at school (Cabalo and Cabalo, 2019). Reading activities are not to be limited inside the classroom nor learners tend to read just because they are instructed by their teachers to do so. Whether at school or at the convenience of their respective houses, a habit for reading must be developed by the pupils. Good (2019) affirmed that parental involvement increases pupils' performance whether in a face-to-face or through distance learning. This renders importance the parent's involvement and recognizes the role of parents as an evident factor in students' reading performance and development.

The use of computer technology provides a wide array of information that can be both beneficial and harmful towards pupils, proper guidance of parents is very much needed. In order to monitor pupils' online activities, parents need to have the experience and knowledge in the process and information of different online platforms along with the curriculum their children undergo. This enables them to guide their children in accomplishing the activity and to help them perform better. Words of encouragement and moral supports are ought to be given by parents to struggling young readers instead of disappointment. The more parents get involved in their children's reading program, the more the struggling learners are motivated in attaining higher academic performance (Cole, 2017). As the parents are getting more involved, the more the struggling readers are attaining high achievement in performance.

V. Conclusion

Grounded on the foregoing discussion of findings, the Phil-IRI provided teachers with the primary insights of the reading ability of learners. Indeed, the effectiveness of the reading program depends on its appropriateness and suitability to the target age group. Knowing the learners; what they need, how they learn, what they already know about the learning institution (not just the teachers), helped them to effectively improve in the learning process. Preferably, the creation of contextualized reading curriculum by the educational institution and planners can be adopted and sustained. Beside implementing the Phil-IRI and developing effective reading programs or interventions, there is a need for every learning institution to ensure the availability of learning facilities supportive towards revitalizing the learners' skills. These can include reading spaces, libraries, reading materials and textbooks. Exposing the learners to differentiated reading materials and intervention pave the way for enhanced learning.

In the implementation of Phil-IRI and reading interventions, the teachers must provide the necessary means towards improving the reading proficiency of the learners in conformity with the results of their reading assessment. The DepEd may prioritize the conduct of trainings and programs for language teachers to hone their innovative skills in designing and developing instructional reading materials, especially in the attainment of mastery in reading comprehension.

The developers of materials for reading inventory should ensure the the content is aligned with the learners' needs, reading level and ability adhering to the competencies advised by the DepEd. The schools must also be equipped with digital technology and related applications to train students to be at par with the global standards. Likewise, the authors strongly suggest a collaboration between parents, teachers and inherent stakeholders to join forces in assisting students reading engagement activities at home encouraged and supported by the parents.

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