



Empowering Communities through Reading Literacy: a Community-based Action Research on Gordon College's Reading Program Initiative in Olongapo City

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ABSTRACT

This community-based action research presents the implementation of the community-based reading program aimed at addressing the literacy needs of learners in Olongapo City. Utilizing the data from the stakeholders and barangay committees on education, the program identified learners requiring reading remediation and trained teacher education and communication students to deliver as implementers of the basic reading instructions. The action research initiative followed a structured framework: identifying needs, training implementers, program implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The study emphasized the importance of evidence-based practices, community engagement, and reflective processes in developing sustainable educational interventions. It highlights the potential of targeted programs to foster academic growth and strengthen community partnerships in addressing the community's needs.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is essential for academic and life success (Daniel et.al, 2021). However, many students struggle with reading, particularly those with reading difficulties (Toste et.al, 2018). Studies indicate that reading proficiency is important for both academic achievement and the development students' critical thinking and creativity (Varga, 2021; Abid et.al, 2023). Reading skills are essential not only for academic success but also to foster communication in various aspects of life. Likewise, reading skills do not only empower individuals to engage in educational materials but also prepare them for future challenges by broadening their perspective (Idulog et.al, 2023; Niculescu & Dragomir, 2023).

In the recent 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) result, the Philippines reflects a continuing trend of low literacy proficiency among Filipino students (OECD, 2023). Though the assessment result focuses only on the English reading skills of the learners, it is also important data on the reading profile of Filipino learners which may serve as a basis to explore the Filipino language reading profile. In the study of Idulog et.al (2023), it is highlighted that there is a potential for improvement even though recent studies suggest that Filipino students have poor reading abilities. Tomas et.al (2021) profiled the learners and the results suggest that most of the learners in the early grades are in the frustration level which means that the learners find more than one of ten words to be difficult in the reading text. Studies also show a correlation between the reading proficiency of the learners and their socio-economic status which necessitates targeted interventions to address this disparity and promote equitable access to quality education (Acido & Caballes, 2024; Rosales, 2024), therefore aligning with UN SDG 4.

The Gordon College is a local college in Olongapo City and is an education arm of the local government that aims not only to provide quality education but also to provide relevant community extension services for community development. The institution is continuously responding to the needs of the community which is evident through several studies and community extension services it has provided. These community extension services have significantly impacted the local communities by addressing vital needs and educational opportunities. Initiatives like "Project Tubig Para Sa Lahat" tackled necessities, providing clean water access and aligning with UN SDG 6, while subsequent evaluations highlighted the importance of project sustainability and management (Asio et.al., 2023; Asio et.al. 2024). Educational interventions led by pre-service teachers, such as literacy programs in barangay, addressed gaps in word recognition and comprehension among learners, emphasizing tailored learning approaches (Marila, 2023; Obispo, 2023b). these programs not only benefitted the communities but also enriched students' preparation for teaching by offering practical experience in managing classes and addressing learner diversity (Obispo, 2023a). Furthermore, the integration of community service into student activities fostered civic engagement and practical skill development, reinforcing Gordon College's commitment to holistic education and sustainable community development (Asio et.al., 2022; Asio et.al., 2023). In the same manner,

the accounts listed above on the necessity for a reading program initiative are hoped to be addressed by the institution.

This community-based action research aims to empower communities in Olongapo City by addressing the pressing need for improved reading literacy through a structured and collaborative reading program initiative of Gordon College. This aims to bridge literacy gaps by implementing evidence-based approaches, such as Alfabasa and Marungko methods while fostering engagement through interactive and engaging experiences for the learners. By involving the pre-service teachers and communication students, and the community, including the barangay and city officials, the program seeks to develop sustainable strategies for enhancing reading skills, promote inclusive education, and contribute to the holistic development of learners in the community.

IMPLEMENTATION AND METHODS

This paper represents the dedicated effort of Gordon College as an arm of the local government and as a local college to provide quality education and to promote community development through relevant community extension services and programs. The primary objective of this paper is to address reading literacy and provide a program that could assist the communities and their stakeholders in taking immediate actions to address reading remediation needs through training and implementation programs. This helps the community while teacher education and communication students were trained and immersed in the community to implement the reading program initiative of both the local government unit and Gordon College-College of Education, Arts, and Sciences.

This community-based action research follows the process as shown in Figure 1. The first phase involves the collection of data specifically the number of students that need reading remediation sessions. This phase is consistent with the first step as taken in the studies of Obispo (2023) and Marila (2023) wherein to identify the number of possible participants, a coordination meeting and interview with barangay officials were conducted, and initial observations and assessments were also performed. The second phase involves the training of teacher education and communication students that will implement the reading session. The third phase is the implementation phase where students will be immersed in the community while the fourth phase involves the observation and collection of feedback from participants or stakeholders. Lastly, the fifth phase involves the evaluation of the program and improving it for the future cycle of the program.

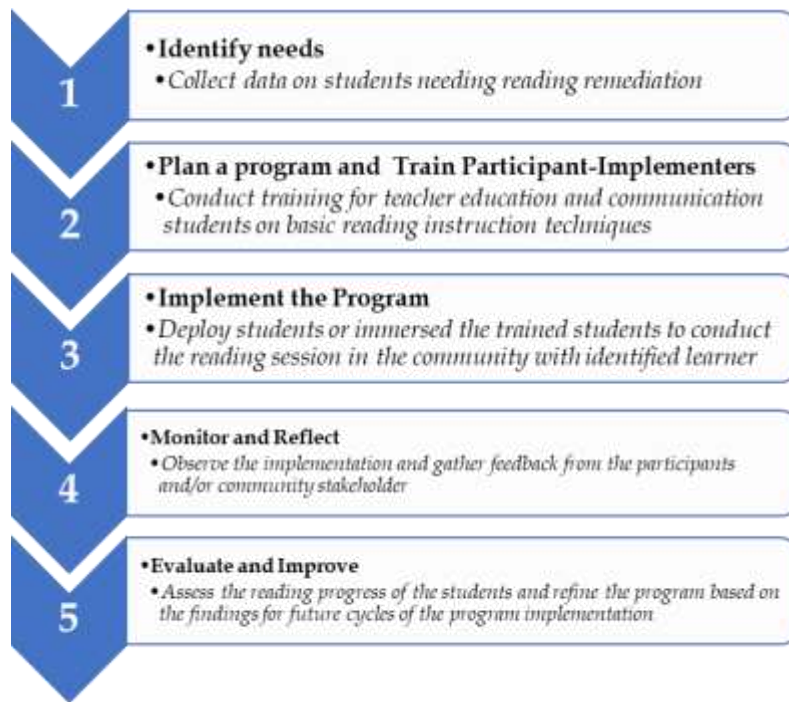


Figure 1. Conceptual Process of the Study

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This community-based action research is initiated through the dedicated effort of Gordon College to provide quality education and promote community development through relevant extension programs. Though the paper follows the structured framework as illustrated in Figure 1, this paper would include the presentation of the four processes which involve identifying the needs, planning a program and training of implementers, implementation of the program, and monitoring and reflect phases.

Identifying the needs

The Gordon College together with the offices of Research Development and Community Extension Services (RDCES), Academic Affairs, and the College of Education, Arts, and Sciences (CEAS) conducted a coordination meeting with the DepEd- Schools Division of Olongapo, the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Olongapo, the different barangay official and the chairmen of the education committee, and the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) of each of the barangay. In this phase, the number of students who need reading remediation is identified. The committee on education heads of each of the barangays are tasked to submit the tentative number of students.

Table.1 Number of Learners for the Reading Program as Submitted By Each Barangay

Barangay	Number of students
Asinan	3
Barretto	67
East Bajac-Bajac	174
East Tapinac	26
Kalaklan	20
Mabayuan	72
New Banicain	21
New Cabalan	147
New Kababae	46
New Kalalake	13
Old Cabalan	75
Pag-asa	70
Sta. Rita	42
West Bajac-Bajac	60
West Tapinac	30
Total	866

Table 1 presents the initial number of 863 students that will participate in the reading program as provided by each barangay. It is important to note that this number is the tentative number of participants as identified and determined by each committee of education chairman of each barangay. This does not reflect also the actual number of students that need remediation as identified by the DepED-SDO Olongapo City. This number also includes participants who are out-of-school youths.

Plan a Program and Train Implementers.





Figure.1 (Photo on the Left is the Community Extension Services Unit (CESU) Director Discussing the Importance of the Training Before Implementing the Program; Photo on the Right is the Training on Alfabasa; and Photo in the Middle is Training on the Marungko Approach)

The training of the pre-service teachers and communicators that will implement the reading program includes the Alfabasa and Marungko Approach. In the first session, the participants were guided on the use of alfabasa. The Alfabasa approach is a Filipino Literacy program designed to make learning fun, interactive, and effective. It employs phonic-based instruction and a systematic progression of skills, starting with letter recognition and sound association, moving to blending sounds to form words and culminating in reading fluency. Alfabasa also emphasizes a multisensory learning experience, combining visual, auditory, and kinesthetic methods to support various learning styles. According to Masigan (2020), the action songs and movement-based activities as a component of the Alfabasa make reading more meaningful and engaging by creating a concrete and realistic learning experience.

In the next session, the Marungko Approach is introduced for teaching reading. The training began with motivational activities such as tongue twisters to engage the participants in the training. Then, the Marungko Approach is explained and emphasis is given to the four levels of reading within this approach, from proper letter sound enunciation to blending sounds to form words (Repaso & Macalisang, 2024). The session concluded with a practical activity reinforcing letter sounds, building on prior Alfabasa lessons to enhance reading skills.

Implementation of the Program

The reading program initiative of Gordon College is in collaboration among its offices, Academic Affairs, Research Development and Community Extension Services (RDCES), and the College of Education, Arts, and Sciences (CEAS). This program will be implemented in each barangay of the city where pre-service teachers and communication students with community immersion classes will be the implementers of the program under the supervision of each faculty member handling the respective community immersion courses. The program will be in a structured flow as seen in Figure 2 below.

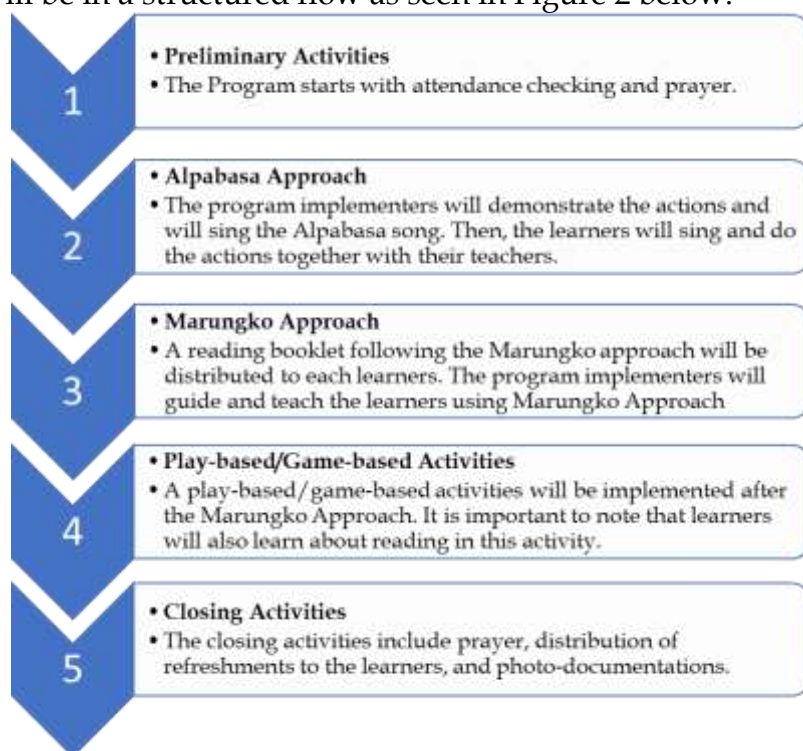


Figure.3 Flow of the program

The program consists of five key phases designed to engage learners in interactive and meaningful reading activities. It begins with preliminary activities, including attendance checking and prayer, to set a positive tone. The Alfabasa Approach follows, where program implementers guide learners in singing and performing actions to reinforce letter sounds. The Marungko Approach then introduces a reading booklet and structured teaching which emphasizes phonemic awareness and reading fluency. This is complemented by play-based and game-based activities to further enhance engagement and reinforce reading concepts. Finally, the program concludes with closing activities

such as prayer, refreshments, and photo documentation which creates a holistic and enjoyable learning experience. This structure will be followed throughout the implementation of the program.

Monitor and Reflect

The monitoring phase involves the attendance checking of the learner-attendee of the reading program per barangay. This is to ensure that during the evaluation phase, only those who completed the program will be assessed. The table below shows the final number of the learner-attendees of the reading program as submitted per barangay:

Table.2 Number of Learners for the Reading Program as of June 29, 2024

Barangay	As of June 29, 2024
Asinan	5
Barretto	16
East Bajac-Bajac	50
East Tapinac	20
Kalaklan	40
Mabayuan	20
New Banicain	16
New Cabalan	55
New Kababae	25
New Kalalake	15
Old Cabalan	22
Pag-asa	50
Sta. Rita	9
West Bajac-Bajac	No data submitted
West Tapinac	40
Total	383

Table.3 Number of Learners for the Reading Program on the First Session (June 29, 2024) and 2nd Session

Barangay	Actual Number of Participants on the 1st session	Actual Number of Participants on the 2nd session
Asinan	3	2
Barretto	24	22
East Bajac-Bajac	56	37
East Tapinac	13	10
Kalaklan	24	29
Mabayuan	13	24
New Banicain	13	14
New Cabalan	42	34
New Kababae	14	11
New Kalalake	16	11
Old Cabalan	13	16

Pag-asa	26	20
Sta. Rita	11	13
West Bajac-Bajac	34	10
West Tapinac	5	14
Total	307	267

Table 3 shows the actual number of participants across 15 barangays during the first two sessions of the reading program. As seen in the data, there was a decrease in the number of participants from the first session (307) to the second session (267), indicating a reduction of 40 participants (approximately 13%). This decrease in the number of participants suggests potential challenges in sustaining participants' engagement or attendance, which may require strategies to address for improved consistency in attendance for future sessions.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The community-based reading initiative of Gordon College demonstrates a commendable effort in addressing the literacy needs of the community. By identifying a large number of participants needing reading remediation and implementing structured approaches like Alfabasa and Marungko, the program provided meaningful, engaging, and interactive activities to improve learners' reading skills. Despite its well-planned structure, the attendance data highlights a changing number of participants, pointing to challenges in maintaining consistent attendance and participation.

To sustain engagement and attendance, the program implementers should consider the following strategies:

1. Establish communication channels with parents, guardians, and barangay officials to encourage consistent attendance and participation.
2. Introduce rewards or recognition to motivate participants to attend the sessions regularly.
3. Continuously monitor the implementation of the program by gathering feedback from the participants and implementers to improve its implementation.
4. Enhance collaboration with barangays to foster stronger community support and accountability for attendance.

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