



## Project Ready: Encounters and Challenges of English Pre-Service Teachers

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### ABSTRACT

The study aimed to explore the encounters and challenges of the 15 pre-service English teachers who participated in Project Ready a community-based reading program. Through document and thematic analyses of the narrative report and reflection paper of the participants, the researchers interpret and illicit meaning as their bases for exploring the effects of Project Ready. The study concluded that Project Ready is deemed to be a significant community-based reading program as it offers both the pre-service English teachers and students a first-hand opportunity in teaching reading comprehension. The researchers recommend that schools and its stakeholders must prioritize creating engaging reading classroom environment, promoting multisensory and collaborative reading approaches and developing customized reading intervention.

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## INTRODUCTION

The 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results revealed that the Philippines made no significant improvements from the 2018 PISA results since the country is still ranked amongst the lowest performers out of the 81 participating countries under the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). In Reading, the country ranked 79<sup>th</sup> with Level 1a or a score of 347. Using these results, there may be a necessity to provide reading programs. Furthermore, in the recent Intelligence Quotient (IQ) Ranking made by the World Population Review (WPR) website, the country is ranked 111<sup>th</sup> place out of the 199 countries with an IQ average of 81.64. This implies that the IQ level of the country is below average. In line with this, the results reflect the quality of education and available resources to people in their respective geographical areas. Since it is found out that the country is below average, it means that the quality of education and availability of resources is potentially poor.

These aforementioned findings may prove that the learning crisis is occurring primarily in the reading comprehension of the Filipino students be it in basic education level or even in tertiary. Hence, there is a need to introduce practices to enhance the reading comprehension of the students to assist in alleviating the possible harmful effects of these findings. De Dios (2015) as cited by Villanueva (2022) stated that low reading comprehension may adversely affect other disciplines and may provide a hard time negotiating with future employment prospects in the international arena. Butterfuss et al. (2020) cited Snow (2002) to define reading comprehension as *the process of extracting and constructing meaning through engagement with written language*. Simply, reading comprehension is a skill that will enable the learners to create meaning through language. As such, it can be perceived as a capability of consuming, analyzing and interpreting a text that may result in discussing it.

Cayubit (2012) as cited by Villanueva (2022) stated that Filipino students may have greater possibility to succeed in school if they have adequate reading skills to assist their higher-order thinking skills yielding in achieving good functional literacy levels. This may pose a challenge to Filipino teachers in finding ways to uplift the reading comprehension of their students. Moreover, reading comprehension may also be viewed as a necessary skill towards personal and professional growth as described by Banditvilai (2020) as a *lifelong skill for academic learning and success in school*; thus, reading is undeniably a vital life skill. Gan and Ocampo (2021) suggested that community-based literacy programs may influence the reading development of the students. Such programs are those conducted by some volunteer groups or academic institutions as their community extension activity. One of the known reading programs is the Brigada Pagbasa initiated by the Department of Education (DepEd). Brigada Pagbasa is a national reading movement aiming to contribute towards nation-building through assisting the Filipino children in enhancing their reading skills by partnering to some stakeholders (*Brigada Pagbasa Programme (National Reading Brigade)*, 2022).

In addition to this, the local government unit of Olongapo City, Philippines conducted its first community-based reading program by partnering to Gordon College, a local higher education institution, through the Research Development and Community Extension Services Unit yielding towards the creation of Project Ready. Thus, the study aimed to explore the encounters and challenges of the selected pre-service English teachers, who took part in Project Ready, as a way of describing the impacts of the said program to be another way in supplementing the reading comprehension crisis that the Filipino students are having.

## IMPLEMENTATION AND METHODS

Project Ready that stands for Reading and comprehension Enhancement to Achieve literacy Development in Young learners is a local-based reading community immersion program spearheaded by the local government unit of Olongapo City, Philippines. This program aims to provide weekly reading remediation from July to August 2022 in barangay Pag-Asa and was assisted by third-year Bachelor of Secondary Education majoring in English (BSEd-English) students. It focuses on enhancing the reading comprehension of select elementary students through the conduct of pre- and post-assessments and the integration of numerous interactive reading activities, such as creative storytelling and game-based reading.

This study aimed to explore the encounters and challenges of 15 selected third-year BSEd-English students through document analysis of their written narrative reports and reflection papers. Document analysis is *a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents* (Bowen, 2009). This is the selected qualitative data analysis of the researchers since the study aims to explore only the encounters and challenges faced by the participants. The sources of the qualitative data are the narrative report and reflection paper of the selected pre-service English teachers. The said documents are examined and interpreted using thematic analysis and coding. The participants are delimited in 15 due to the consideration proposed by Creswell (2013) that it should be around 3-25 participants only. The participants are selected based on their complete attendance and assistance during the conduct of the aforementioned program.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Upon the conduct of the thematic analysis of the responses, there are two themes emerged.

### **Fostering Enriched Reading Environment**

Based on the responses of the participants, there are four insights that can be obtained. Majority of the participants shared about *establishing a positive and engaging atmosphere* wherein they have observed that the students may learn best if the classroom environment may condition them to focus on learning.

Participant 1 shared that *"The room was adored with colorful charts, reading materials and an atmosphere of camaraderie"* leading him to conclude that *"A positive environment encouraged participation"*.

Moreover, Participant 2 also asserted that, “*The lively activities created a vibrant atmosphere in the classroom, fostering a sense of joy and camaraderie among the students*” that supports the aforementioned insights of Participant 1.

Overall, for this first insight, it underscores the vitality of establishing a classroom environment that may encourage active participation and joy in the teaching-learning process as experienced by the participants. Furthermore, the responses also brought up for *catering personalized and adaptable teaching* wherein Participant 3 stated that “*...student’s involvement in group reading activities indicated not just their individual excellence but also their capacity to collaborate and positively contribute to the learning environment. Their eagerness to learn served as a reminder that each student is unique, and as educators, we must be prepared to adapt our teaching methods to suit individual learning styles and paces*” demonstrating her recognition for individual differences whilst emphasizing the need for personalized learning.

One way to achieve this is to have “... the spirit of adaptability... with fellow educators, weaving a tapestry of shared guidance for students” as mentioned by Participant 6. Using this statement, Participant 6 added that demonstrating adaptability and collaboration can bring adaptable teaching to student learning more personalized. Additionally, some participants observed that *multisensory and collaborative learning* may also be established to deliver quality teaching. Participant 5 stated her own teaching as “... *step-by-step approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of each letter and its associated sounds*” in this way, she observed improvement in the reading of her students.

On the other hand, Participant 7 said that, “*Employing visual aids, contextual learning and engaging activities will not only facilitate the acquisition of new words but also student learning experience enjoyable and relatable*” with this, she invested towards the “... *natural affinity for digital interaction, making the learning process dynamic and captivating*”. As a result, Participant 7 acknowledges the natural inclination for digital interaction and the significance of exposure to various materials.

Another lived experience discussed is about *being reflective towards equitable education*. Participant 10 shared that, “*Taking the time to reflect on and analyze your teaching practice helps you to identify more than just what worked and what didn’t*” that exemplifies how teachers must be reflective in everything they are doing. At the same time, Participant 12 encourages, “...*recognizing and nurturing the potential of all students, regardless of their backgrounds, we can collectively uplift future generations and create a more equitable society*”.

The insights gathered from the participants' responses highlight the importance of establishing a positive and engaging classroom environment, personalized and adaptable teaching, as well as the implementation of multisensory and collaborative learning to foster an enriched reading environment. Participant experiences emphasized the significance of a positive atmosphere, vibrant activities, and the use of visual aids and engaging activities to create a joyful and relatable learning experience (Morales et al., 2021). Furthermore, the need for adaptability and collaboration among educators to cater individual learning styles and paces was underscored, aligning with the concept of personalized adaptive learning (Peng et al., 2019). Additionally, the

participants stressed the importance of being reflective towards equitable education, recognizing and nurturing the potential of all students, regardless of their backgrounds, to create a more equitable society (Tao, 2022).

The literature supports the participants' insights by providing evidence of the relationship between classroom engagement and academic success, well-being, and the role of teaching practices in promoting student engagement and achievement (Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2013; , Olivier et al., 2020; , Sanetti et al., 2017). Moreover, relevant studies emphasize the significance of creating a positive classroom climate that is essential for improving teaching effectiveness and student engagement (Chen, 2022; , Vidić, 2021; , Cartledge & Kourea, 2008). The use of adaptive teaching methods and the incorporation of digital interaction to make the learning process dynamic and captivating align with the emerging challenges in online learning scenarios, especially in the post-pandemic era (Rapanta et al., 2021; , Zhilmagambetova et al., 2022). Additionally, the importance of multisensory and collaborative learning is supported by some studies that highlight the impact of classroom interactions on student engagement and academic outcomes (Yang et al., 2021; , Larson et al., 2020). In summary, this first theme corroborates diverse insights from the participants to illustrate their lived experiences in terms of classroom dynamics and environment, leading to the recommendation to establish an enriched reading environment to cultivate an enthusiastic learning atmosphere through positivity, adaptability, and collaboration.

### **Navigating Challenges towards Inclusive Learning**

Upon document analysis, the responses of the participants yield five insights related to the challenges that transpired during the conduct of Project Ready.

Participants 4, 7, 8 and 11 shared similar experiences wherein they realized *reading proficiency challenges* towards the assigned students to them.

Participant 4 shared that her student is “... *still getting used to the words “should”, “could” and “would” and “... need to work on her expressions, recognition of high-frequency words and fluency in reading”*. With these observed student difficulties, Participant 4 stated that, “*Being patient is really important because every child learns at their own pace”*.

At the same time, Participant 7 observed additional challenge in terms of “... *proficiency in English reading comprehension was not particularly high...*” that impacts her student to “*wasn't able to complete the readings, resulting in unanswered questions*” as a result the student of Participant 7 “... *faced difficulties and was unable to read the passage fluently, highlighting her struggle with English reading*”.

Additionally, Participant 6 encountered *student absenteeism* as he shared that “... *my two male students once again failed to attend the gathering*”; hence, this challenge may affect the continuity of the learning.

Participants 9 and 12 shared the same observed challenges from their students. Participant 9 stated that her student “... *still cannot read some of the words in the booklets*” while Participant 12 observed that her student “... *doesn't know*

how to read English at all” and “... read a little bit of Filipino but couldn't actually read words with 6 letters or more”. Using these responses, both participants observed a challenge in terms of *individual learning pace*. With this, it has been observed that some students may still have difficulties dealing with specific words, sounds or reading skills.

Participant 12 pointed out that *financial constraints* may also impact learning. Based on her observation, Participant 12 stated “... *financial constraints that limit access to educational resources, such as books, school supplies, or even a conducive learning space*”.

On the other hand, Participants 11, 13 and 15 observed *phonological and pronunciation challenges* in their students. Participant 11 enumerated the weakness of her student by sharing that her student has a “... *difficulty with the /th/ sound despite practicing it in the booklet, ... encountered issues with the /f/ sound, often substituting it with the /p/ sound, occasionally overlooked the letter -s in plural nouns and present tense verbs, ... unfamiliar with reading verbs ending in -s in their past tense form, and ... faced challenges pronouncing and comprehending words with five syllables*”. As for the student of Participant 13, he shared that the “... *low voices of my two students...*” made it difficult for him to understand their responses well. Participant 15 also enumerated the observed challenges she had towards her student. According to Participant 15, the student “... *can't read two letters “w” and “p”, and ... barely forgets the letters that I point randomly, he can't recognize the letter “n” and “y”, he still pronouncing the letter “p” as “u”*”.

There is also an instance wherein Participant 15 let her student to sing the alphabet song but it was noted that the student “... *can't continue from letter “j” to “z”*”. Lastly, Participant 12 raised an observed regarding her student. She said that her student “... *has a really short attention span*” emphasizing the need for varied, engaging and multisensory teaching materials and methods.

The challenges related to individual learning paces, such as phonological and pronunciation difficulties, and attention span issues underscore the importance of personalized and differentiated instruction, which is a key aspect of inclusive teaching (Drigas & Theodorou, 2016; Alomar, 2022). Inclusive teaching practices aim to meet the diverse learning needs of all students, including those with learning difficulties, by providing tailored support and utilizing varied instructional methods, such as multisensory approaches and assistive technologies (Drigas & Theodorou, 2016; Alomar, 2022; Cuturi et al., 2021).

The literature emphasizes the need for systemic solutions to address challenges in inclusive learning environments (Gjermestad et al., 2022). It also underscores the importance of teacher perceptions and attitudes towards inclusive education, as they play a crucial role in addressing individual learning differences and creating inclusive classroom environments (Okoye et al., 2019). Inclusive education is also associated with the concept of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which aims to break down barriers in learning processes, emphasizing the need for diverse and flexible teaching approaches to accommodate students with varying learning needs (Collins et al., 2018). Additionally, the literature emphasizes the role of institutions in supporting

inclusive learning environments and driving reforms to ensure the sustainability of inclusive practices (Abels et al., 2020).

Generally, the second theme encapsulates the observed challenges of the participants from their assigned students. On these challenges, reading proficiency, attendance, individual learning paces, financial constraints, phonological and pronunciation challenges, as well as attention span, were raised. These observed challenges may impose a need to establish interactive and inclusive teaching approaches and strategies that would address these challenges and, at the same time, assist in fostering an enriched reading environment suited for the target students.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Project READY is deemed to be a significant community-based reading program as it offers first-hand reading instruction opportunities for pre-service English teachers as well as an additional activity that may assist the reading comprehension of the student-participants.
2. The study found numerous observations related to enriching the reading environment as a way to enhance the learning experience. The pre-service English teachers emphasized utilizing colorful charts and promoting camaraderie inside the classroom, resulting in enthusiastic learning through positivity, adaptability, and collaboration.
3. The challenges encountered by the pre-service English teachers underscore the significance of developing interactive and inclusive teaching approaches; hence, there must be an emphasis on varied, engaging, and multisensory teaching materials and methods.
4. Schools and their stakeholders must prioritize the creation of a positive and engaging classroom environment that will suit different types of learners, especially when a reading program is done in a community center.
5. Educators must promote multisensory and collaborative approaches when doing a reading program as they can influence a positive learning experience. One way to do it is to continuously conduct and improve the community-based reading program by incorporating phonological and pronunciation-focused activities to address language-specific challenges.
6. Develop more tailored reading interventions to address reading proficiency challenges, considering that the students may have their own learning paces and need personalized support.

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