

Reading remediation programs implemented in the indigenous people intensive secondary schools in Jabonga District, Agusan del Norte

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Abstract: This study aimed to evaluate the implementation of existing reading remediation programs in Indigenous Peoples (IP)-intensive schools in the Jabonga District, Agusan del Norte, with a particular focus on the Mamanwa learners. Utilizing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the research combined quantitative data gathered through validated reading assessments and surveys with qualitative insights from interviews with teachers and coordinators. A comprehensive review of national and local reading programs, primarily led by the Department of Education, revealed twelve initiatives, none of which were exclusively designed for IP learners, although many sought to address general literacy challenges among marginalized populations. Findings indicate that the implementation of reading remediation programs in IP-intensive schools is generally inadequate in fully addressing the needs of IP learners. Low reading proficiency among Mamanwa learners—particularly in phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension—was consistent with existing national assessment results such as the Phil-IRI and PISA. Challenges in program implementation were categorized into linguistic and pedagogical barriers, cultural and resource mismatches, socioeconomic limitations, weak community engagement, and limited teacher capacity. Nonetheless, promising practices were noted, including the use of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), development of culturally relevant materials, and collaborative community efforts. In response to the absence of an IP-specific reading remediation program, the study proposed the IReAD Program—an inclusive, context-responsive intervention aimed at addressing the unique educational needs of IP learners. The study concludes that while current reading initiatives offer some support to struggling readers, there remains a critical need for culturally and linguistically sensitive programs specifically tailored to Indigenous learners.

Keywords: reading remediation, Indigenous Peoples, Mamanwa learners, IP education, literacy intervention, MTB-MLE, IReAD program

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INTRODUCTION

Reading is an essential skill that has a profound impact on the academic success and overall cognitive development of every learner. Because of its significant implications for students' long-term educational achievement, many countries have invested resources in reading programs, particularly in rural areas (UNESCO, 2016). It is in these areas where learners, most especially members of indigenous people's groups, are believed to experience deprivation from learning. These learners encounter difficulties in reading due to language barriers and a lack of learning resources (Buenaflor et al., 2023).

Focusing on IP learners in the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) implemented the Language Arts and Multiliteracies Curriculum (LAMC) in 2016, which is embedded in the K–12 curricula. Under the LAMC, learners are expected to develop learning competencies that can be applied to various communicative functions (DepEd, 2016). This

curriculum enhancement aims to meet the needs of learners in keeping pace with the changes brought about by globalization. In this multicultural world, it is an indispensable requirement that learners be communicatively competent and highly literate to navigate the complex systems of communication and information. Being qualified and multilingual in the Mother Tongue, Filipino, and English is part of the curriculum's rationale to equip learners with the skills necessary to understand the multifaceted systems of communication in the era of globalization (Barrot, 2018).

Vulchanova et al. (2017) also noted that language literacy enhancement is a vital intervention to address issues that arise in the process of teaching and learning a language. It outlines language teaching practices, approaches, and strategies that guide teachers in producing learners who are both communicatively competent and highly literate. Being qualified and multiliterate in the Mother Tongue, Filipino, and English is part of the curriculum's rationale to equip the learners with the skills necessary to understand the multifarious systems of communication in the era of globalization (Barrot, 2018).

Contrary to the efforts and investments made by DepEd, reading problems have persisted in the Philippines, just as they have in many other countries. According to the results from the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), students in the Philippines scored less than the OECD average in science, mathematics, and reading. The most significant proportion of learners who showed dismal performance in reading are situated in rural areas, which potentially includes the members of minority groups or the indigenous community. PISA results show strong coherence with the 2015 Global Monitoring Report, which suggested that educational growth remained unequally shared and that disadvantaged children still lag behind their peers (EFA, 2015).

With an emphasis on teaching English and reading in rural areas, teachers undoubtedly find it a challenging task, as they must deal with multifaceted problems that are primarily linked to students, teachers, and facilities. Endriyati and Abasa (2019) asserted that the teaching of English in remote areas dominated by Indigenous Communities (IPs) is confronted by challenges arising from students' vocabulary, motivation, parental support, facilities, technological resources, and cultural differences. In addition, Paul (2013) noted that enrollment and dropout situations among IP students are primarily caused by adverse family environments, familial aspects such as caring for younger siblings, and poverty, which are significant impediments to education. Leñaño et al. (2019) also stated that previous efforts aimed at enhancing language literacy are coupled with several challenges that impede learners from acquiring and learning a target language. Moreover, Protacio (2021) emphasized that it remains a challenging task for IPed teachers to integrate specific pedagogical strategies into language teaching, given the diverse needs of Indigenous learners.

Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines, including those in Jabonga District, Agusan del Norte, often face significant barriers to accessing quality education. These barriers include language differences, as many students speak indigenous languages such as Mamanwa, cultural gaps in the mainstream curriculum, and a lack of culturally sensitive teaching materials (Macapagal, 2020). Studies emphasize that IP students are often at a disadvantage because their local language is not used in mainstream schools, where Filipino and English are the languages of instruction (Alonzo & Nemenzo, 2018).

At the local level, the Phil-IRI pretest results for the 2024-2025 school year in Agusan del Norte (ADN) (Appendix I) indicate low reading performance among high school students in the Jabonga District. This municipality is recognized for having a high concentration of IP

(Mamanwa) in its secondary schools, despite the efforts made by schools to improve the reading proficiency of Mamanwa learners who attend schools with the lowest ratings. In terms of literature, numerous studies have been conducted to understand the multifaceted factors affecting reading competence; however, a lack of in-depth evaluation of reading remediation strategies designed for IP-dominated schools remains.

Reading remediation refers to strategies and programs designed to support students who struggle with reading, focusing on improving fundamental reading skills, including phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Reading remediation has been given focus since the latest Phil-IRI results were released. Teachers of reading have been implementing remedial reading strategies and techniques that they believe are necessary for their learners; however, no formal assessment or evaluation has been conducted to determine the effectiveness of their work. This is now the focus of this study.

Moreover, the study's findings will serve as benchmark information that can be utilized by DepEd management, including school heads and teachers, in the development of IP learners, especially among Junior High School Grade 10 students in the Jabonga District IP intensive.

Problem statement

The primary objective of this study is to identify and evaluate the implementation of existing reading remediation programs in IP-intensive schools in Jabonga District, Agusan del Norte. Specifically, it seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What are the reading remediation programs implemented in IP-intensive schools in the Philippines?
2. What is the level of implementation of the reading remediation programs in the Indigenous People intensive high school as rated by the reading coordinators and teachers?
3. What is the reading proficiency of the Indigenous People (Mamanwa) learners ?
4. What are the challenges experienced by the reading coordinators in the implementation of the reading remediation programs?
5. What are the practices from the lens of the Indigenous People's intensive Junior High Schools of Jabonga District that promote better implementation of the reading remediation programs?

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized an explanatory sequential mixed-method design to assess the implementation of reading remediation programs in Indigenous Peoples (IP)-intensive junior high schools in the Jabonga District, Agusan del Norte. Consistent with Toyon (2021), the design allowed for the collection of quantitative data through surveys and actual reading assessments—followed by qualitative interviews to interpret and elaborate on the initial results. The quantitative phase measured program implementation across six dimensions, while the reading test assessed IP learners' proficiency in phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

The research was conducted in Jabonga, a third-class municipality in Agusan del Norte, known for its Indigenous Mamanwa population. The locale is marked by cultural richness but is also burdened by socio-economic challenges, such as limited educational resources and the threat of displacement due to extractive industries. Jabonga's five public high schools serve as critical centers for literacy development among Mamanwa students, whose pursuit of education amid adversity reflects their community's resilience.

Respondents included IP junior high school students (Mamanwa), reading coordinators, and teachers from the Jabonga District. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure adequate representation across schools.

In exploring the reading remediation landscape in the Philippines, the study reviewed several national and local programs. Major DepEd-led initiatives such as ECARP, MTB-MLE, Brigada Pagbasa, Catch-up Fridays, and the National Learning Camp (NLC) were found to target struggling readers broadly, often without tailoring approaches specifically to Indigenous learners. For example, ECARP focuses on early-grade literacy through teacher training and material development but suffers from uneven resource distribution in remote areas (DepEd, 2020; Cayabas et al., 2023). MTB-MLE effectively leverages the learner's first language to enhance comprehension and retention (Gaylo, 2020), yet it struggles with limited standardized materials and inconsistent support during the transition to Filipino and English (Monje et al., 2021).

Programs like Brigada Pagbasa and Sa Aklát Sisikat (SAS) take community- and advocacy-driven approaches to foster a culture of reading, but their reach remains limited due to dependency on volunteerism and donations (Afkar et al., 2023; Aquino, 2024). Catch-up Fridays and the NLC, introduced in response to learning gaps exacerbated by the pandemic, provide focused literacy interventions but are generalized across all learner groups.

Notably, in Agusan del Norte, school-based programs like SESTAR, RACER, RINNESH, and PROJECT RDL reflect grassroots efforts to address reading challenges. However, even these are designed for all struggling readers, not specifically for Indigenous learners.

This review of national and local initiatives reveals a significant gap: while many programs aim to raise literacy among marginalized groups, none are exclusively developed for IP learners. This systemic oversight fails to account for the unique linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic barriers faced by Indigenous students. As such, despite the presence of multiple reading interventions, these programs often fall short of being culturally responsive or contextually relevant for learners like the Mamanwa.

Therefore, this study underscores the critical need for an IP-exclusive reading remediation program—such as the proposed IReAD—that centers on the lived realities, linguistic identities, and cultural heritage of Indigenous learners. Such a program could address the persistent gaps in reading proficiency by grounding instruction in community-based knowledge, mother tongue use, and inclusive educational practices.

Level of implementation of the reading remediation programs in the Indigenous People intensive high school

It can be observed that the majority of the items are associated with mean scores that have a verbal description of 'low.' In particular, the lowest mean rating of 1.71 indicates a low level of agreement among respondents to the item “The program addresses the language barriers that Indigenous students may face when learning in Filipino/English.” This finding highlights that reading programs do not adequately address language barriers, which are evident hindrances to the teaching and learning processes among Indigenous Peoples (IP) learners. Saysi and Batuctoc (2023) noted that language barriers significantly impact the reading proficiency of learners, particularly in multilingual and Indigenous Peoples (IP) communities. When students are taught in a language that is not their mother tongue, they often struggle to understand the material, leading to poor comprehension and retention. This gap between the language of instruction and

the learner's first language creates cognitive challenges, as students must first decode the unfamiliar language before they can grasp the content. For example, in the Philippines, where over 180 languages are spoken, many Indigenous Peoples (IP) learners face difficulties in schools where Filipino or English is the medium of instruction, resulting in lower literacy rates compared to their peers (Delprato, 2021).

On the other hand, the largest mean score of 3.43 indicates high agreement among teachers with the item "The reading program includes activities that encourage active participation and interaction with the content, making learning enjoyable." Based on the researcher's personal experiences, school reading programs are often dominated by activities and exercises, making learners more engaged in the learning process. Saysi and Batuctoc (2023) similarly noted that most approaches in reading programs are learner-centered. Such methods enable learners to engage in learning most of the time.

Consequently, the overall mean of 2.30 statistically implies a low level of reading program design and content relevance. At the local level, this low mean score is reflective of several areas that need improvement, particularly in the public schools of the Jabonga district. Instructional materials are not validated, and there is insufficient capability-building support for teachers to ensure curriculum and content relevance based on the needs of IP learners.

The lack of culturally responsive program design can alienate Indigenous Peoples (IP) learners, making the content inaccessible and unengaging. Programs that fail to incorporate local languages, traditions, and contexts do not resonate with students, leading to disinterest and disengagement. This disconnect can exacerbate literacy gaps, as students are unable to connect with the material or see its relevance to their lives. For example, suppose reading materials are only available in Filipino or English. In that case, IP students may struggle to comprehend the content, hindering their ability to develop essential reading skills.

The low implementation levels in terms of content relevance can perpetuate systemic inequities in education. IP students often face unique challenges, such as limited access to resources and exposure to mainstream educational practices. When remediation programs fail to address these challenges or do not adapt to the specific needs of IP learners, they become ineffective.

Level of implementation of reading remediation programs in Indigenous Peoples intensive high schools and its alignment with literature

The evaluation of reading remediation programs in Indigenous Peoples (IP) intensive high schools in the Jabonga District revealed an overall low level of implementation (grand mean = 2.53), underscoring the need for systemic reforms in reading interventions for marginalized learners. The assessment covered six dimensions: program design and content relevance, language and linguistic appropriateness, teacher preparation and professional development, resource availability and utilization, student engagement and motivation, and monitoring and assessment of student progress.

Program Design and Content Relevance (mean = 2.30) was rated low, suggesting that existing reading materials lack cultural relevance and contextual alignment with the traditions, values, and lived experiences of Indigenous learners. This finding is consistent with Delprato (2021) and Saysi and Batuctoc (2023), who emphasized that culturally detached content alienates learners, reduces engagement, and widens literacy gaps in IP communities.

Language and Linguistic Appropriateness received an average rating (mean = 2.81), reflecting some efforts to integrate local dialects and mother tongue instruction. However, the limited emphasis on Indigenous vocabulary and insufficient linguistic scaffolding hinder smooth transitions to Filipino and English. These findings affirm UNESCO's (2016) advocacy for mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) and are supported by Raihan et al. (2024), who argue that language mismatch is a critical barrier in multilingual contexts like the Philippines.

Teacher Preparation and Professional Development (mean = 2.39) also received a low rating, indicating limited training and professional support for educators working in IP contexts. This mirrors Stenman and Pettersson's (2020) findings that teachers in remote and Indigenous schools often lack access to culturally responsive pedagogy and continuous professional development, which are essential in tailoring instruction to diverse learning needs.

Resource Availability and Utilization (mean = 2.46) was low, highlighting inadequate access to culturally relevant materials, technological tools, and Indigenous-language resources. These issues align with Roy and Mishra (2022) and Javaid et al. (2022), who stress that the lack of material and technological infrastructure in marginalized areas diminishes program credibility and student learning outcomes.

Student Engagement and Motivation (mean = 2.39) was also rated low, with learners demonstrating limited enthusiasm, ownership, and pride in their reading progress. This finding supports Idulog et al. (2023) and Holladay (2024), who emphasize that disengagement results from cultural irrelevance, survival-oriented mindsets, and poor teacher-student rapport in under-resourced communities.

Monitoring and Assessment of Student Progress was the most developed component, with an average rating of 3.09. While systems for tracking and evaluating progress exist, timely feedback and parental involvement remain insufficient. Chen et al. (2023) also highlight how teachers' workload constrains feedback delivery, while Lovett et al. (2021) stress that limited engagement in monitoring weakens program sustainability and impact.

Reading proficiency of the Indigenous People (Mamanwa) learners

Results showed that the majority of the IP learners demonstrated a low level of proficiency in phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. This is supported by the respective mean scores of 1.92, 1.82, 1.87, and 3.95, respectively. During the actual conduct of the reading exercises, several observations are highly noted. The majority of IP learners could hardly enunciate the words correctly, as their jaws and tongues are accustomed to uttering their native languages. The findings are also consistent with the latest Phil-IRI results, which categorize the majority of IP learners as needing improvement. On the other hand, the respective standard deviations of 1.26, 0.75, 1.76, and 1.32 further indicate that some IP learners may have demonstrated significant improvements in reading. However, the majority of the IP learners still need serious remediation and reinforcement.

In the literature, the problem of reading proficiency among IP learners is heavily linked to both internal (personal) and external (environmental) factors. Delprato (2021) noted that beyond educational factors, socioeconomic and systemic challenges also contribute to the low reading proficiency of IP learners. Many IP communities face poverty, limited access to healthcare, and other socioeconomic barriers that affect students' ability to focus on learning. Additionally,

systemic inequities in the education system, such as underfunding and a lack of policy enforcement, perpetuate the marginalization of IP learners.

In terms of human resources, the effectiveness of reading remediation programs also depends on the quality of teacher training and support. Many teachers in IP-intensive schools lack adequate training to address the unique linguistic and cultural needs of their students. For example, teachers may lack fluency in the local language or the pedagogical skills to teach effectively in multilingual settings (Kirss et al., 2021).

Another significant factor is the lack of resources and technological facilities in IP-intensive schools. Many of these schools are located in remote or underserved areas, where access to books, trained teachers, and digital tools is limited. Without adequate materials, reading remediation programs cannot be effectively implemented, leaving students without the necessary support to improve their literacy skills (Dumatog & Dekker, 2020).

The literature and the findings presented in problem 3 demonstrate coherence in examining the dismal performance of IP learners in reading. The study's results provide a clearer picture of the gaps in the implementation of reading remediation programs.

Challenges experienced by the reading coordinators in the implementation of the reading remediation programs

The implementation of reading remediation programs in IP-intensive junior high schools in Jabonga District is confronted by two overarching categories of challenges: (1) educational and cultural integration, and (2) systemic and community support issues. These challenges, drawn from both quantitative data and interview responses from reading coordinators, reveal persistent gaps in aligning educational initiatives with the unique needs of Indigenous learners.

Reading coordinators reported that linguistic and pedagogical challenges significantly hinder students' reading development. The mismatch between the language of instruction (typically Filipino or English) and the learners' native dialects makes it difficult for IP students to acquire foundational reading skills. Compounding this issue is the lack of teacher training in culturally responsive and multilingual instruction, which results in ineffective pedagogy.

Another major concern is the cultural and educational resource mismatch. Reading materials and curriculum content are often devoid of Indigenous cultural references, traditions, or lived experiences, leading to learner disengagement. Coordinators emphasized the absence of culturally relevant books, learning tools, and instructional approaches suited to IP learners' contexts. These issues mirror Mercado's (2021) findings, which underscore the importance of integrating cultural identity into instructional content to promote relevance and inclusivity in IP education.

The second set of challenges is rooted in broader systemic constraints. Socioeconomic and community engagement issues—such as poverty, geographic isolation, and low parental literacy—were cited as major barriers to effective reading remediation. These factors limit both access to learning opportunities and the capacity of families to reinforce literacy development at home.

Moreover, engagement and implementation barriers, including student absenteeism, lack of interest, and irregular program execution, further diminish the impact of remediation programs. Teachers also face capacity and workload constraints, as administrative responsibilities and overlapping schedules restrict their ability to concentrate on reading instruction and pursue professional development tailored to multicultural and multilingual education settings.

These concerns are echoed in the literature. Belandres and Cruz (2024) emphasized the critical role of sustained community and parental support in the success of IP education. Without such involvement, learners are less likely to receive consistent reinforcement of reading skills outside the classroom, reducing the overall effectiveness of school-based interventions.

Interview data provided direct confirmation of these issues. Reading coordinators voiced frustration over language barriers, irrelevant materials, irregular student attendance, and inadequate administrative support for focused literacy work. Despite some professional development efforts, the training remains inconsistent and insufficient for addressing the complex needs of Indigenous learners.

Practices from the lens of the Indigenous People's intensive Junior High Schools of Jabonga District that promote better implementation of the reading remediation programs

The practices were categorized into two major themes, namely, (1) inclusive and engaging educational practices and (2) collaborative and supportive program implementation.

The first theme was inclusive and engaging educational practices. The practices revolve around culturally and linguistically inclusive education. Implementing reading programs in students' native languages to effectively build foundational reading skills. Developing and using reading materials that reflect the cultural values, traditions, and experiences of Indigenous Peoples (IP) communities was evident. The practices also illuminate comprehensive teacher and community engagement. The district provides ongoing training for teachers to address the specific linguistic and cultural needs of IP students. The schools engaged parents and the community in the reading programs to reinforce learning at home and create a supportive environment. The practice also shows engaging and culturally relevant learning activities. The district organized reading camps and other activities during Reading Month and the summer to enhance students' reading skills engagingly. The schools incorporated oral traditions and storytelling into the reading curriculum to make learning more relatable and engaging for IP students.

The study by Magdadaro and Sacramento (2022) also emphasizes the positive role of community participation by IPs in the planning and implementation of IP education.

The second theme was collaborative and supportive program implementation. The practices revolve around collaborative and reflective program implementation. IP education fosters collaboration between teachers, school administrators, and community leaders to ensure the effective implementation of reading programs. The district conducts regular assessments and evaluations of the reading programs to identify areas for improvement and ensure they meet the students' needs. The practices also show resource allocation and targeted support. The schools provide access to sufficient and appropriate reading materials, books, and learning tools tailored to the needs of IP students. They implemented targeted interventions and support mechanisms for students who are struggling with reading to help them catch up with their peers.

The study by Bamba et al. (2021) supported these findings, as they concluded that a collaborative and supportive IPed increased IPs' leadership capacity, as IPs' holistic worldviews support it.

CONCLUSION

The existing reading remediation programs in the country are not exclusively designed for IP learners; most of these are developed for all learners who have demonstrated low proficiency or competence in standard reading assessments. Local efforts to improve reading, particularly at school levels, are also evident. However, these are also developed for all learners who show low reading abilities and not exclusively for IP learners.

It is believed that the implementation of reading remediation programs in the Indigenous Peoples' intensive high school in the Jabonga district is more focused on areas needing improvement rather than accomplishments. This evaluation result highlights the need for an intervention, which is presented in the output of this study.

Consistent with the findings in the literature, this study provides additional quantitative evidence that supplements existing research, demonstrating the low reading proficiency of Mamanwa or IP learners in terms of phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. These are primarily reflected in the latest international assessment results, such as the PISA.

Challenges in implementing reading remediation programs are highly evident. The lack of an IP-exclusive reading intervention program is a significant concern. This is exacerbated by the inadequacy of resources, poor community and stakeholder engagement, and a lack of access to teacher opportunities and empowerment in handling IP learners in general. While these findings are common in the literature, this study strongly concludes that there is a clear need for programs designed exclusively for IP learners, such as the Mananwas.

Despite the identified challenges in implementing reading remediation programs, positive practices are also observed within schools, such as the implementation of MTB-MLE and support from some local stakeholders and teachers.

The data indicate a need to implement an IP-exclusive reading program, as proposed in this study.

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Reading remediation programs implemented in the indigenous people intensive secondary schools in
Jabonga District, Agusan del Norte

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