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Managing for literacy: School-based reading program practices and Grade 4 reading outcomes in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Reading is a core skill in elementary education, making effective management of school-based reading programs important to learner development. However, limited Philippine evidence has examined how reading program management practices relate to actual reading outcomes among elementary learners, particularly in small-school settings. This study examined school-based reading program management practices and their relationship with the reading performance of Grade 4 learners at Saui Primary School, Cabagan District, Isabela. A descriptive-correlational design was employed with eight teachers and 35 Grade 4 learners. Teachers assessed program management in terms of planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, while learners' reading performance was determined using Phil-IRI results. The findings showed that the reading program was very highly managed, with implementation receiving the highest rating. Most learners were at the instructional reading level, while a smaller group remained at the frustration level. A significant positive relationship was found between program management and reading performance ($r = .46$, $p < .001$). Schools should strengthen data-based planning, targeted reading intervention, and systematic program evaluation.

Keywords: School-based reading program, program management, reading performance, Grade 4 learners, Phil-IRI.

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INTRODUCTION

Reading is more than a basic academic skill. It supports learning across the curriculum and helps children participate meaningfully in school and society. For elementary learners, weaknesses in reading can affect their ability to understand lessons, follow written instructions, and acquire new knowledge. The Department of Education (DepEd, 2018) recognizes this concern through the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), which provides

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information that can be used to identify learners' reading needs and guide appropriate instructional responses.

International evidence also points to the value of sustained reading support. Hall et al. (2023), in a systematic review and meta-analysis of elementary reading interventions, found positive effects of reading interventions on reading outcomes among learners with or at risk for reading difficulties. Such evidence suggests that reading improvement requires more than identifying learners who struggle. Schools need organized systems that allow teachers to assess needs, provide appropriate support, and monitor progress.

The Philippine context makes this concern particularly important. Results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 showed that only 24% of Filipino 15-year-olds reached Level 2 or higher in reading, compared with 74% across OECD countries (OECD, 2023). PISA does not directly measure Grade 4 reading performance, but the result points to a continuing national concern regarding reading development. The concern has long been recognized in Philippine education policy. DepEd Order No. 45, s. 2002 established the Every Child a Reader Program and directed schools to assess children's reading ability, identify learners who need additional instruction, and implement measures to improve reading comprehension (DepEd, 2002). Reading improvement, therefore, is not only an instructional responsibility. It is also a school management concern.

A school reading program requires more than a set of activities. It needs planning, coordination, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Philippine evidence supports this view. Lucero et al. (2019) found that the implementation and evaluation of school reading programs were influenced by the appointment of reading coordinators, administrative initiative, availability of reading materials, teacher participation, and stakeholder cooperation. Their findings highlight the role of school managers in creating conditions that support reading program implementation.

Dayrocas and Junsay (2023) reached a related conclusion in their study of the Department of Education reading program in Panabo City Division. Their findings identified management support through policies, teachers, external stakeholders, learning spaces, and learning resources. The study illustrates that reading programs operate within a broader organizational system. Their success depends not only on what teachers do inside classrooms but also on the support structures provided by school management.

International research, however, suggests that the relationship between management and learner achievement is not always direct. Hallinger et al. (1996), in their study of elementary schools, found that principal instructional leadership was associated with school learning conditions rather than simply producing a direct effect on reading achievement. More recent evidence has reached a similarly cautious conclusion. Pietsch et al. (2025), using international data involving approximately 1.5 million students across more than 50,000 schools in 75 countries, found that the relationship between instructional leadership and student achievement varied across contexts. These findings indicate that management practices should be examined within the conditions in which they operate.

Implementation quality is another important consideration. Van Dijk et al. (2023) reviewed 50 reading intervention studies and found substantial variation in how implementation fidelity was defined and measured. They argued that implementation fidelity should be considered during the research-design stage because differences in implementation can affect student outcomes. For school reading programs, this means that the existence of a program does not necessarily indicate that it is functioning as intended. The quality and consistency of implementation also matter.

Philippine studies have also documented the importance of reading assessment and intervention. Gagno (2022) found that an eight-week reading program improved the Phil-IRI performance of 39 Grade 6 learners, with reading performance moving from the frustration

level to the instructional level. Tomas et al. (2021), using a much larger sample of Filipino learners, reported that many learners were at the frustration level and identified reading difficulties, lack of mastery of reading elements, and the absence of a strong reading culture as concerns that schools needed to address. These findings reinforce the value of assessment-based reading programs.

Despite these studies, a gap remains in the local literature. Philippine research has often examined reading difficulties, intervention programs, Phil-IRI results, or management support separately. Fewer studies have examined school-based reading program management practices alongside actual learner reading outcomes. This distinction matters because a reading program may exist without being consistently planned, implemented, monitored, and evaluated. Understanding the management side of literacy provision can provide a different perspective on why some learners continue to experience reading difficulties.

The local setting provides a useful context for examining this issue. The study was conducted at Saui Primary School in Cabagan District, Schools Division of Isabela. The researcher was a Teacher III and served as a Phil-IRI Coordinator. She handled Grades 3 and 4, with Grade 4 identified as the target learner group. This professional context provided direct access to the school's reading program and relevant assessment information. The use of Phil-IRI data also aligned the study with DepEd's policy framework, which recognizes reading assessment as a basis for planning and improving school reading programs (DepEd, 2018).

The study aimed to determine the extent of school-based reading program management practices in terms of planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation; assess the reading performance of Grade 4 learners; and determine whether a significant relationship existed between reading program management practices and learner reading performance. The study also sought to provide evidence that could guide the development of a School Reading Improvement Plan.

The paper contributes to the discussion on literacy management by connecting school-level management practices with learner reading outcomes. Its focus is not on testing a particular reading intervention. Instead, it examines how the school manages its reading program and how these practices relate to learner performance. This perspective may be useful to school heads, reading coordinators, teachers, and other education managers seeking to strengthen school-based literacy programs.

Statement of the problem

The study aimed to determine the extent of school-based reading program management practices in terms of planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation; assess the reading performance of Grade 4 learners; and determine whether a significant relationship existed between school-based reading program management practices and the reading performance of Grade 4 learners.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive-correlational survey research design. Calmorin and Calmorin (2007) described descriptive research as appropriate for examining existing conditions, while correlational research is used to determine relationships among variables as they naturally occur. The design was appropriate because the study described the management of the school reading program and examined its relationship with learner reading performance without manipulating the variables.

The study was conducted at Saui Primary School, Cabagan District, Schools Division of Isabela. The participants consisted of eight teachers involved in the school reading program and 35 Grade 4 learners. Total enumeration was used for the teacher group and the Grade 4 learner group within the study setting.

Data on reading program management were collected through a validated researcher-adapted questionnaire covering four dimensions: planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The teachers rated the extent to which these practices were observed in the school reading program. Learners' reading performance was determined using their Phil-IRI results. The use of Phil-IRI was consistent with DepEd Order No. 14, s. 2018, which provides guidelines for the administration of the revised Phil-IRI and the use of reading assessment information for instructional planning.

Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used to summarize the findings. For the correlational analysis, each teacher's composite management-practice score was paired with the mean Phil-IRI performance of the Grade 4 learners under the teacher's instructional responsibility. Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to determine the relationship between the two variables, with statistical significance tested at the 0.05 level. Appropriate permissions, informed consent, confidentiality, and data-privacy procedures were observed during data collection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The school-based reading program was very highly managed, with an overall mean of 3.72 (SD = 0.41). Implementation received the highest rating (M = 3.81, SD = 0.43), followed by monitoring (M = 3.76, SD = 0.45), planning (M = 3.68, SD = 0.46), and evaluation (M = 3.63, SD = 0.48). The results indicate that the school had established practices for carrying out reading activities and following learner progress.

The high rating for implementation suggests that the reading program had been translated into actual school and classroom activities. Teachers appeared to carry out planned reading activities and provide support to learners who experienced reading difficulties. This finding is consistent with Lucero et al. (2019), who identified teacher participation, administrative initiative, reading coordinators, and available reading materials as important elements in implementing school reading programs. A program becomes meaningful when its plans are reflected in regular practice.

Monitoring also received a high rating. This indicates that learner progress was regularly observed and considered in the implementation of reading activities. Such monitoring is important because reading difficulties can vary across learners. The Phil-IRI provides information that can help schools identify these differences and determine appropriate responses (DepEd, 2018). Monitoring therefore serves as a link between assessment and instructional decision-making.

Planning received a slightly lower rating than implementation and monitoring. The result may indicate that the school was stronger in carrying out activities than in systematically preparing them. Planning requires clear targets, defined responsibilities, appropriate schedules, and adequate resources. It should also be connected to actual learner assessment results. When these elements are not clearly linked, reading activities may depend too heavily on individual teacher initiative.

Evaluation received the lowest rating among the four dimensions, although it remained within the very high range. This finding deserves attention because evaluation goes beyond checking whether activities were completed. It asks whether those activities achieved their intended purpose. The result may suggest that the school had stronger routines for implementing and monitoring reading activities than for systematically examining their

effectiveness. School managers may therefore need to strengthen the use of evidence when deciding which reading activities should be continued, modified, or discontinued.

The reading-performance results showed that 68% of the 35 Grade 4 learners were at the instructional level, 22% were at the independent level, and 10% were at the frustration level. The majority of learners were therefore able to perform at the instructional level. This is a positive result, although instructional-level readers still require teacher support to develop greater independence.

At the same time, the presence of learners at the frustration level requires attention. These learners may need more focused and sustained intervention. Tomas et al. (2021) similarly found that reading difficulties remained a concern among Filipino learners and emphasized the need for contextualized school reading programs. The present result supports the importance of continuing to identify learners who require additional assistance rather than assuming that a school-wide reading program benefits all learners in the same way.

The finding is also consistent with Gagno's (2022) study, which showed improvement in Phil-IRI results after an eight-week reading intervention. While the present study did not test an intervention, the result reinforces the value of using reading assessment data to identify learner needs. Assessment is useful when it leads to appropriate instructional action.

More importantly, the analysis showed a significant positive relationship between school-based reading program management and learner reading performance ($r = .46$, $p < .001$). The coefficient indicates a moderate positive association. Higher management-practice ratings were associated with better reading outcomes in the paired teacher-level data.

This finding suggests that management may create conditions that support effective reading instruction. Planning identifies priorities. Implementation turns plans into activities. Monitoring provides information about learner progress. Evaluation provides evidence for subsequent decisions. When these processes work together, teachers may be better positioned to provide consistent support to learners.

The finding should, however, be interpreted with caution. A correlation of .46 indicates association and does not establish causation. Management practices were related to the observed reading outcomes, but other factors may also have contributed. Learner motivation, attendance, home literacy experiences, teacher characteristics, instructional strategies, reading materials, and previous reading ability may influence learner performance.

This cautious interpretation is consistent with international evidence. Hallinger et al. (1996) showed that instructional leadership may operate through school learning conditions rather than through a simple direct effect on achievement. Pietsch et al. (2025) likewise found that the relationship between instructional leadership and student achievement varied across educational and cultural contexts. These studies suggest that school management should be viewed as part of a larger system that shapes teaching and learning.

Implementation quality also provides an important lens for understanding the finding. Van Dijk et al. (2023) found considerable variation in how implementation fidelity was conceptualized and measured across reading intervention studies. Their work suggests that the presence of a reading program is not enough. What matters is how consistently and appropriately it is implemented. The positive association found in the present study therefore supports closer attention to the quality of program management.

The findings have practical implications for educational management. The school should continue its strong implementation and monitoring practices while giving greater attention to evaluation. Phil-IRI results can be reviewed regularly to identify priority learners and determine whether interventions are producing improvement. Teachers can also use these results when planning differentiated reading support.

The role of school leadership is equally important. Reading coordinators and school administrators can provide technical assistance, ensure the availability of appropriate reading materials, and create opportunities for teachers to discuss learner progress. Dayrocas and Junsay (2023) emphasized the importance of management support, resources, learning spaces, teachers, and stakeholder participation in sustaining the DepEd reading program. These elements can help turn reading activities into a more coherent school-wide effort.

The findings therefore support the development of a School Reading Improvement Plan. The plan should use assessment results as its starting point. It should identify learners who need intensive support, specify intervention strategies, assign responsibilities, establish monitoring schedules, and include clear measures for evaluating progress. In this way, reading management can become a continuous process rather than a collection of separate activities.

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that the school-based reading program at Saui Primary School was very highly managed. Implementation received the highest rating, while evaluation received the lowest. The result suggests that the school was able to carry out reading activities effectively but could strengthen the way it determines whether these activities achieve their intended results.

Most of the 35 Grade 4 learners were at the instructional reading level. A smaller group reached the independent level, while some remained at the frustration level. These learners require closer monitoring and more focused support. Phil-IRI results should continue to guide reading intervention and instructional decisions.

The study also found a significant positive relationship between reading program management and reading performance. Better management practices were associated with better reading outcomes. The finding does not mean that management alone caused learner performance. Other learner, teacher, family, and school factors may also have contributed.

The school should strengthen program evaluation and data-based planning. Teachers and the reading coordinator should regularly review Phil-IRI results and use them to plan appropriate interventions. Learners at the frustration level should receive targeted and sustained assistance. School leaders should provide needed materials, technical support, and time for reading activities. A School Reading Improvement Plan should be developed and reviewed regularly so that the program remains responsive to learners' actual reading needs.

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