



**INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS' IMPLEMENTATION AND EXPERIENCES ON
PROJECT SARA (STRENGTHENING AND ADVOCATING READING
FOR ALL): BASIS FOR PROGRAM ENHANCEMENT**

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at determining the effectiveness of Project SARA, a reading intervention, based on the implementation and experiences of the teachers, learners, and parents. The researcher chose this study to help the struggling learners learn how to read and comprehend. Thus, this qualitative research study attempted to find out whether the use of Project SARA would be effective in improving the reading performance in the District of Sara. Utilizing in-depth interviews, 30 participants—comprising 10 teachers, 10 parents, and 10 struggling learners from the Schools District of Sara, Iloilo were chosen. Thematic analysis was employed for data analysis. A validated research-made interview guide questionnaire was used to gather their responses. After the conduct of the study, teachers, learners, and parents perceive Project SARA as beneficial in improving comprehension and addressing reading difficulties. The program was proven effective for non-readers, providing helpful materials, encouragement, and positive impacts. Experiences indicate a positive influence on reading proficiency and the cultivation of a reading culture.

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Keywords: *Project SARA, Experiences, Implementation*

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a fundamental skill that underpins all aspects of education and personal development. Proficient reading is not only essential for academic success but also for lifelong learning and participation in a knowledge-based society. In the Philippines, where education is a key driver of national progress, the need for effective reading intervention programs is paramount.

The Philippine educational system has undergone significant reforms in recent years to address various challenges and improve the quality of education. The implementation of the K-12 curriculum underscores the importance of reading proficiency as a foundational skill for all learners. However, despite these efforts, concerns persist regarding the reading abilities of Filipino learners.

National and international assessments, such as the National Achievement Test (NAT) and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2018), have consistently revealed alarming trends in reading proficiency among Filipino learners. These assessments indicate that a significant portion of learners fall below proficiency levels, hindering their academic progress and prospects.

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Effective reading intervention programs play a crucial role in addressing reading difficulties and improving overall literacy rates. Research has shown that early intervention is particularly effective in addressing reading challenges and preventing academic disparities (Ehri et al., 2001). Therefore, the implementation of evidence-based reading interventions is essential to bridge the gap between struggling readers and their proficient peers.

While there is a growing recognition of the importance of reading intervention in the Philippines, there is a paucity of comprehensive research that examines the effectiveness, challenges, and best practices of these programs within the local context. A deeper understanding of the experiences and outcomes of reading intervention initiatives is crucial for program enhancement and informed decision-making in education policy.

Project SARA (Strengthening and Advocating Reading for All) is a four-phased reading program that emerged as a response to the alarming decline in reading proficiency among Filipino learners in the District of Sara, as indicated by national reading assessments. The four phases are: Phase I - Phonemic Awareness (+ Letter Writing), Phase II - Blending and Word Families, Phase III - Basic Sight Words, Phrases and Sentences, and Phase IV - Reading Enrichment: Comprehension and Fluency. The Project draws motivation from the learning gap caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic. The pandemic and the closing of schools and the shifting from in-person classes to modular and online classes caused a detrimental effect on the reading skills of every

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learner. Through Project SARA, the aim is to address the pressing issue of declining reading skills and advocate for a culture of reading across all levels of education.

The implementation of Project SARA has yielded promising results, with improvements in reading proficiency documented in every school in the District of Sara. However, to sustain and enhance the program's impact, it is essential to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by school administrators, educators, learners, and communities involved in Project SARA.

The researcher conducted the study to provide a comprehensive analysis of the implementation of Project SARA, exploring the experiences and perspectives of stakeholders within the District of Sara. By examining the program's successes, limitations, and areas for improvement, the research aimed to offer valuable insights that can inform the enhancement of Project SARA and contribute to the broader discourse on reading advocacy and education reform in the Philippines.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methodology

This Chapter presents the research methodology used in the study. This includes the research method, research design, the respondents of the study, research instruments, data gathering and procedures, and the statistical tools used to analyze the data.

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Research Method

The research method used in the study is narrative inquiry under qualitative research. It is a way of understanding and inquiring into experience through collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

In-Depth Interview research was used in this study to gather comprehensive and detailed information from participants about their experiences, perspectives, beliefs, and attitudes related to a specific topic or research question. These interviews were conducted in a one-on-one or small group setting, allowing for open and in-depth discussions (Creswell, J. W. 2013).

Research Design

The study used qualitative research design. That sought to understand and interpret the subjective experiences, meanings, and social contexts of individuals or groups. It involved collecting and analyzing non-numerical data, such as interviews, observations, and textual materials, to uncover patterns, themes, and insights related to a specific research question or topic (Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. 2017).

Narrative inquiry design is a suitable design in exploring the stories and narratives of participants. It provides a holistic view of their experiences and how they construct meaning related to reading interventions.

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Participants of the Study

The study involved ten (10) elementary teachers from different schools in the District of Sara, ten (ten) elementary learners from different schools in the District of Sara, and ten (10) parents or guardians from different schools in the District of Sara. Participants were selected considering that they were relevant to the study who were both capable and interested in answering the interview questions restricted by ethical considerations and consent of the respondents.

The participants were chosen through a purposive sampling procedure. Participants were intentionally selected since they possess specific characteristics and experiences relevant to the research question. The researcher secured a letter of permission to conduct the interview and showed it to the participants.

Research Instrument

The primary research instrument utilized in the study was Interview Guide Questions. The interview guide was divided into three question guides: questions for the teachers, questions for the learners, and questions for the parents. Participants were asked three probing questions about their insights in the implementation and experiences of Project SARA.

The development of the interview guide aligns closely with the research objectives and inquiry. It encompasses a curated set of open-ended inquiries, probes, and prompts, all meticulously designed to elicit nuanced information and insights from participants (Rubin & Rubin,

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2011). The research instrument facilitated the systematic collection of qualitative data by guiding the conversation and enabling consistent coverage of essential subjects, thereby ensuring the richness and depth of the obtained information.

The construction and validation of the interview guide questions is an integral aspect of the research process and necessitates alignment with the specific research goals and inquiries. It encompasses a range of questions, probes, and follow-up prompts carefully crafted to encourage participants to share their experiences, perspectives, and insights (Seidman, 2013).

Validity of the Research Instrument

Validity of the Research Instrument is one of the most important criteria for the quality of a test. Validity refers to the appropriateness, meaningfulness, correctness, and usefulness of inferences that a researcher makes based on the data he collects (Subong, 2005). In a content-related validity, the content and format must be consistent with the definition of variables and sample of subject to be measured and is also helpful in validating the items in the questionnaire (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2007).

The researcher constructed nine (9) interview questions which were divided into three (3) categories, teachers, learners, parents. It was submitted to the thesis adviser for review and for the face and content validation to a panel of experts. The panel of experts inspected each item based on appropriateness, relevance, clarity of the language used, and correctness of sentences.

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The corrections or modification, suggestions on the content of the questionnaire were followed in the final draft of the instrument before the conduct of the study.

Data Gathering Procedure

The study was qualitative in nature; thus, an in-depth interview was administered.

Preparation for interviews involved a systematic approach, with the researcher selecting participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Prior to the interviews, the researcher ensured informed consent from each participant, providing them with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and confidentiality (Merriam, 2009).

The researcher scheduled interview sessions that promoted collaborative effort, considering participants' preferences and availability, aiming for mutually convenient times and locations (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The next step involved the researcher developing the interview guide, carefully crafting open-ended questions, probes, and prompts aligned with the research objectives (Seidman, 2013).

As the interviews commenced, the researcher focused on establishing rapport with participants at the beginning of each session, creating a comfortable and non-judgmental atmosphere for open communication (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). The researcher introduced the study, explaining its purpose and scope, while reaffirming the voluntary nature of the participants' involvement.

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The researcher crafted an interview guide that served as a flexible framework during the interview, guiding the systematic exploration of key topics through posed questions and prompts (Silverman, 2015). Probing and clarifying techniques employed by the researcher encouraged the participants to elaborate on their responses, seeking deeper insights (Holter et al., 2019).

Recording and documentation were crucial steps in the process. The researcher, with participants' consent, ensured audio recording of the sessions for accurate data capture (Patton, 2015). Additionally, the researcher took detailed field notes, recording non-verbal cues, observations, and contextual information (Merriam, 2009).

Moving on to data management and analysis, the researcher oversaw the transcription of audio recordings into verbatim text, maintaining the integrity of the data (Seidman, 2013). Qualitative data analysis techniques, such as thematic analysis or content analysis, were then applied by the researcher to identify patterns and themes within the interview data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The researcher ensured that ethical considerations were paramount, involving the treatment of participants' identities and responses with utmost confidentiality. The researcher ensured anonymization of data to protect participant privacy. In a concluding ethical step, participants were offered a debriefing opportunity by the researcher, allowing them to provide feedback or seek clarification on their involvement in the study. This meticulous approach, led by the researcher, ensured a comprehensive and ethical interview process.

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Data Analysis Procedure

Thematic analysis was used for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes the data set in (rich) detail. However, it also often goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic (Braun, V., & Clarke, V., 2019). It included a step-by-step guide comprised of familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and producing the report.

Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and rereading the data, noting down initial ideas.

Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.

Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.

Checking in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic "map" of the analysis.

On-going analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.

Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The qualitative research using the phenomenological research design aimed to formulate a program enrichment on Project SARA as basis for program enhancement during the school year 2022-2023.

The qualitative research method utilized in the study was descriptive using in-depth interview. The interviewer during the interview was allowed to sit at a considerable distance and to think about the series of questions about a certain issue. The aim was to get the main idea or the necessary views of the participation in a certain issue in a social context through the responses of the participants to the questions.

The study used phenomenology under qualitative research design. Phenomenology can be considered a philosophical approach in undertaking qualitative research. (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2007).

The participants of this study were thirty (30); ten (10) teachers, ten (10) parents, and ten (10) struggling learners. They are all from the Schools District of Sara, Iloilo.

The research instrument utilized in this study was a researcher-made interview guide. Voice and video recorder were used for data gathering and documentation depending upon the permission of the participants.

The data gathering instruments were subjected to face-to-face content validation by a panel of experts. Thematic analysis was used for descriptive data analysis.

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Permits from the participants were obtained to allow the researcher to conduct the study.

The researcher personally went to the school/house/place convenient to the participants to conduct the interview.

The following were the findings of the study:

Based on the information gathered during the conduct of the in-depth interview, teachers' understanding on the implementation of Project SARA was helping learners with difficulty in reading and improving reading comprehension.

For learners they were teachers to read and giving reading materials.

As to what they can say about the implementation of Project SARA according to teachers, it was a big help for non-readers and the effective use of reading materials. For learners they were helpful and encouraging. For parents, they were a great help to read and write and understand the importance of reading.

As to teachers' experiences on the implementation of Project SARA, they were enjoyable and exciting and had a positive impact. As to learners, they were teaching us to read and remediation. As to the parents, they were Easy to understand and Enjoyable.

Based on the results of the study the following insights were drawn:

Project SARA as an intervention program presents a significant component of the modern education system to address the needs of every school in relation to struggling learners. Thus,

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the program aims to address the diverse needs of learners, parents and teachers who may face challenges in the future.

The literacy program develops the language skills of the struggling learners, especially reading and writing skills. For this reason, good understanding and the optimal role of all elements are needed so that the program can be further developed in a variety of meaningful activities.

Teachers, learners, and parents' experiences in the implementation of Project SARA developed academic skills, exposure, and training that help them do their current work more effectively and prepare them to facilitate learning. These academic skills in reading can be cultivated by learners only when teachers are enriched with the proper academic setting and equipped with a planned intervention program.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and findings of the study, the Technical Working Group (TWG) may improve reading intervention programs by examining their objectives, strategies, and impact with a focus on their significance within the specific needs of the struggling learners.

The Schools District of Sara may serve as the doorway to knowledge acquisition of learners of the district initiatives program that may highlight various literacy and numeracy programs of the Department of Education, Schools Division of Iloilo.

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Teachers, learners, and parents may receive specialized reading training in partnership with other non-government organizations in capacitating teachers and parents in effective reading instruction and basic tools needed for the implementation of the intervention program.

The study may be duplicated in other congressional districts with their intervention program that will focus primarily on literacy and numeracy.



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