



Assessing Teachers' Competence Level and Pedagogical Skills in Developing Early Grade Literacy: Continuous Improvement Activity

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the competence levels of teachers in pedagogical skills specifically aimed at enhancing early grade literacy. The focus is on assessing the effectiveness of instructional methods and identifying areas where teacher development can be improved. A prototype activity guide was designed and implemented to evaluate its impact on pedagogical practices. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gauge teachers' proficiency in critical literacy skills, including phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension strategies. The prototype activity guide was used as a tool for professional development, and its effectiveness was assessed through pre- and post-implementation evaluations. Findings indicate that while teachers generally possess foundational knowledge in literacy instruction, there are significant variations in their application of pedagogical strategies. The study reveals that targeted professional development, facilitated by the prototype activity guide, significantly enhances teachers' competence in delivering effective early literacy instruction. The results underscore the importance of ongoing professional training and support for teachers to ensure high-quality literacy education for young learners. The study concludes with recommendations for further refinement of the activity guide and suggests strategies for broader implementation to support early grade literacy development.

Keywords: *competence level, pedagogical skills, early grade literacy, mixed- methods*

INTRODUCTION

Effective early grade literacy instruction is essential for laying the foundation for students' academic success. Research indicates that high-quality literacy instruction in the early grades significantly influences long-term educational outcomes (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2020). However, there remains considerable variability in teachers' pedagogical skills and the implementation of literacy practices, which can impact students' literacy development (Pianta et al., 2021).

Despite the availability of various professional development resources, many teachers report challenges in applying these strategies effectively in their classrooms (Desimone, 2019). This highlights the need for targeted assessments of teachers' competencies and the development of practical tools to enhance instructional practices. Recent studies emphasize that effective professional development must be closely aligned with teachers' needs and provide actionable strategies for improving classroom practices (Hill et al., 2022).

In the Philippines, the assessment of teachers' competence in addressing literacy is guided by several legal and regulatory frameworks, notably Republic Act No. 7836 (The Professionalization Act of Teachers), which sets standards for teacher qualifications and assessments (Republic Act No. 7836, 1994). This is complemented by Republic Act No. 10533 (Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013), which mandates improvements in educational quality, including teacher competency in literacy (Republic Act No. 10533, 2013). Furthermore, DepEd orders such as No. 36, s. 2016, and No. 42, s. 2016, outline specific competency standards for teachers, including literacy instruction, while the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) provides a detailed framework for assessing and developing teachers' skills (Department of Education [DepEd], 2016a; DepEd, 2016b). These frameworks collectively ensure that teachers are well-equipped to deliver effective literacy education (DepEd, 2016a; DepEd, 2016b).

The researcher at the same time the Master Teacher 1 of the school which is the locale of this study envisioned to address these empirical gaps by assessing the current levels of teachers' pedagogical skills in literacy instruction and evaluating the effectiveness of a prototype activity guide designed to enhance these skills. By focusing on early grade literacy, this research aims to contribute to the development of more effective professional development tools and strategies that can support teachers in delivering high-quality literacy instruction and ultimately improve student literacy outcomes. Effective early grade literacy instruction is crucial for developing foundational reading skills that significantly impact students' future academic success.

Moreover as the research of Desimone (2019) indicates that while many educators have access to professional development resources, the actual impact on classroom practices and student outcomes can be inconsistent

(Desimone, 2019). The variability in pedagogical skills among teachers may result in differing levels of literacy achievement among early learners (Snow, 2020). This highlights a need for targeted assessments of teachers' pedagogical skills and the development of effective tools to enhance their instructional practices.

Thus, this study stems from the need to address these gaps by assessing teachers' current competence in literacy instruction and evaluating the effectiveness of a prototype activity guide designed to improve pedagogical skills. By focusing on early grade literacy, this research aims to provide actionable insights into professional development strategies that can enhance teaching effectiveness and ultimately support better literacy outcomes for the learners.

Research Question

This study looked into the effectiveness of the implementation of 4KS (Kaklase ko Kaagapay Ko) Continuous Improvement intervention Program in addressing Reading among Grade 2 learners for school year 2023-2024 as basis for a Literacy Continuous Improvement Intervention plan.

Specifically, this sought answers to the following sub-problems

- What is the level of reading performance of grade 2 learners before and after the 4K'S Reading intervention?
- Is there a significant mean improvement between the pretest to the posttest of grade 2 learners exposed to the 4k's (Kaklase ko Kaagapay Ko) reading intervention?
- What are the lived learning experiences of the respondents?
- Based on the findings, what Research – Based Continuous Improvement Intervention in Reading can be designed?

Hypothesis

In consideration to the sub- problems, the null hypotheses will be tested at 0.05 level of significance:

Ho: There is no significant mean improvement between the pretest to the posttest of grade 2 learners exposed to 4K'S (Kaklase ko Kaagapay Ko) Intervention.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Early grade literacy is a critical foundation for students' academic success. Teachers play a crucial role in fostering this development, and their competence and pedagogical skills are essential factors.

Several studies emphasize the importance of ongoing professional development for teachers in enhancing their knowledge and skills in early grade literacy. For instance, Vaughn and Fletcher (2019) explore strategies for enhancing teacher competence in literacy instruction. They emphasize the importance of targeted professional development to address gaps in teachers' knowledge and skills. The study highlights effective practices, including ongoing assessment and feedback mechanisms, to improve early literacy outcomes.

Guskey (2021) explores how ongoing improvement efforts can significantly boost teacher competence by providing a structured approach to professional development. The paper introduces a framework to assess the effectiveness of these programs, focusing on clear criteria for evaluating their impact. It highlights the need for continuous support and follow-up as essential components for translating training into lasting changes in teaching methods. By emphasizing sustained engagement, Guskey argues that meaningful improvements in teaching practices are more likely to occur. This approach ensures that professional development leads to tangible enhancements in educational outcomes.

Darling-Hammond (2022) offers an in-depth review of systems designed to assess teacher competence, focusing specifically on literacy instruction. The author argues that effective assessment tools and practices are crucial for pinpointing and addressing areas where teachers need improvement. The book examines different assessment models, evaluating their strengths and limitations in the context of enhancing teaching skills. It also explores how these models influence educational policy and practice, suggesting that well-designed assessments can drive meaningful improvements in teaching. Overall, Darling-Hammond emphasizes that accurate assessment is key to fostering better literacy instruction and advancing educational outcomes.

Hiebert and Reutzel (2023) investigate how various pedagogical strategies influence early literacy development, finding that certain instructional approaches and techniques can have a substantial impact on students' literacy outcomes. Their study provides evidence that tailored strategies—when effectively implemented—can significantly enhance literacy skills. They emphasize the need for aligning these strategies with teachers' competence levels to achieve the best results. By matching instructional methods with teachers' skills and knowledge, the study argues that the effectiveness of literacy instruction can be maximized. Overall, Hiebert and Reutzel highlight the critical role of both strategic choice and teacher proficiency in improving early literacy development.



The effectiveness of teacher professional development programs may vary depending on the specific context. Shanahan and Shanahan (2020) explore how pedagogical skills impact literacy instruction, emphasizing that the effectiveness of teacher professional development programs can differ based on context. They argue that teachers must be adept at applying research-based instructional strategies to effectively support early literacy development. Their review highlights that continuous professional development is essential for refining these skills and ensuring teachers stay updated with the latest research. By focusing on ongoing training, the authors stress that educators can better foster students' literacy growth. Overall, their work underscores the importance of context-specific and sustained professional development in improving literacy instruction.

Malloy and Gambrell (2018) explore the benefits of interactive read-alouds in promoting early literacy development, emphasizing their effectiveness in various critical areas. Their research reveals that interactive read-alouds significantly boost vocabulary acquisition, enhance comprehension, and increase engagement among young readers. These read-alouds involve interactive techniques where teachers and students actively participate, discussing the text and making predictions, which helps deepen understanding and foster a love for reading. The study provides practical strategies for integrating interactive read-alouds into early reading instruction, suggesting ways to incorporate questioning, discussion, and interactive elements to maximize their educational benefits.

The authors recommend using read-alouds to introduce new vocabulary and concepts in context, which aids in vocabulary development and comprehension. They also emphasize the importance of selecting diverse and engaging texts to capture students' interest and stimulate meaningful conversations about the material. By creating a dynamic and interactive learning environment, read-alouds support various aspects of literacy growth, such as listening skills, critical thinking, and narrative understanding. Malloy and Gambrell highlight that these interactive sessions are not only educational but also enjoyable, making reading a more engaging and enriching experience for young learners. Overall, their study underscores the value of interactive read-alouds as an effective tool for enhancing early reading instruction and fostering a positive attitude towards reading.

Adams (2015) underscores the critical role of phonemic awareness in early reading development, emphasizing its significance in helping students decode words and achieve reading fluency. Phonemic awareness, which involves recognizing and manipulating individual sounds in words, is presented as a foundational skill crucial for developing effective reading strategies. The book explains that this skill is essential for understanding the relationship between letters and sounds, which underpins the ability to read words accurately. Adams offers practical advice on enhancing phonemic awareness through various instructional practices, such as interactive activities and targeted exercises designed specifically for early readers.

These instructional strategies are aimed at strengthening the core reading skills necessary for early literacy. Engaging activities might include games that focus on sound recognition and manipulation, while targeted exercises could involve practice with blending and segmenting sounds. By incorporating these methods into daily reading instruction, educators can help students build a solid foundation for reading success. Adams stresses that without strong phonemic awareness, students may struggle with decoding and fluency, which are critical for reading proficiency. The book highlights that developing phonemic awareness early on is essential for fostering successful readers who are prepared for more advanced literacy tasks. Overall, Adams' work provides a comprehensive guide to understanding and implementing phonemic awareness as a key component of early reading instruction, reinforcing its pivotal role in achieving long-term literacy success.

Cummings and Garrison (2020) explore the impact of social and emotional factors on early literacy development, finding that students' well-being plays a crucial role in their engagement and success with reading instruction. The study reveals that emotional and social stability can significantly enhance students' ability to concentrate, participate, and excel in literacy activities. By focusing on the importance of creating supportive learning environments, the authors suggest that addressing students' social and emotional needs can improve their overall literacy outcomes. Their recommendations include strategies for fostering an environment that supports emotional well-being and encourages active participation in reading. The study highlights that when these emotional and social factors are properly managed, they contribute to more effective reading instruction and better literacy growth. Cummings and Garrison underscore that the connection between emotional well-being and academic achievement is fundamental in early literacy education. Their work suggests that improving students' social and emotional contexts can lead to substantial improvements in their reading skills. Overall, the research advocates for a holistic approach to literacy instruction that integrates attention to students' emotional and social needs.

Tomlinson (2017) emphasizes the vital importance of differentiated instruction in meeting the diverse needs of early readers. The book details various strategies for adapting reading instruction to fit the varying skill levels, interests, and learning styles of students. Tomlinson argues that effective differentiation is essential for ensuring that all early



graders can develop strong reading skills, as it allows teachers to provide personalized support and appropriately challenging activities. Practical approaches are provided for teachers to tailor their instruction to individual student needs, fostering a more inclusive and engaging learning environment. The book highlights how differentiation can address diverse learning requirements and improve reading outcomes for all students. Tomlinson's work advocates for the integration of differentiated instruction as a core component in literacy education. By customizing teaching methods, educators can better support each student's literacy development. Overall, the book underscores the significance of differentiation in creating effective and supportive reading instruction for young learners.

Ehri and Roberts (2016) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of phonics-based approaches in early reading instruction. Their analysis reveals that systematic phonics instruction has a significant positive impact on early reading achievement. Specifically, students who receive well-structured phonics instruction demonstrate notable improvements in their reading skills compared to those who do not receive such instruction. The study highlights that effective phonics instruction involves clear and sequential teaching methods, along with consistent practice. These best practices are essential for developing strong decoding skills, which are crucial for reading fluency. Ehri and Roberts argue that phonics-based instruction provides a solid foundation for early literacy development. Their findings support the use of systematic phonics approaches as highly effective for enhancing reading success in young learners. The research underscores the importance of implementing phonics instruction with fidelity to maximize its benefits. Overall, the study reinforces the value of phonics in fostering early reading proficiency.

The literature mentioned above emphasizes the critical role of both teacher competence and pedagogical skills in developing early grade literacy. Continuous improvement activities, targeted professional development, and effective assessment tools are key factors in enhancing literacy instruction. Further research is needed to explore the long-term impacts of various strategies and to refine professional development programs to better support teachers in their literacy instruction roles.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study primarily made use of pure experimental method of research. According to Tanner (2018) experimental research method is a systematic and scientific approach to research in where the researcher employs one or more variables, and controls and measures any change in other variables. It employs the pretest-posttest designs; which the researcher will be giving a test given before and after the exposure of the designed groups.

Grabe and Stoller (2002) say that reading is a way to draw information from the text and to form an interpretation of that information. The process of drawing information and interpreting information requires the work of the brain actively. In 3 additions, Burns (1984) says that reading is a thinking process. The act of recognizing words requires interpretation of graphics symbols. In order to comprehend a reading text, a student must be able to use the information, to make inferences and to read critically and creatively to understand figurative language, to determine the author's purpose, to evaluate the ideas presented, and to apply the ideas to actual situation.

The researcher will be focused on a real situation (teaching), with real people (learners and teachers) in an environment familiar to myself (classrooms) in order to answer my research questions. The researcher studied the interactions of events, human relationships and other factors. First thing to do is using pictures and let the learners identify its name. Then the researcher will show the name of the picture then let them try to read the word. Then after that the researcher will show some phrases then let them read it slowly.

Research Environment

This study was conducted in an Elementary School of Carcar City Division, specifically to the identified learners after the reading assessments, which is directly under the justification and direct supervision of the Department of Education, Carcar City Division.

The school is categorized as the small elementary school which is composed of a School Head, 8 teachers, and a total population of 124 learners for this school year 2022-2023. The school has been an active participant of DepEd's academic and co-curricular activities which made it to accumulate the following awards respectively; Most Outstanding Brigada Eskwela 2022 & BE Jingle Program Implementer Elementary School (medium) Category, 1st runner up in medium school category in Brigada Eskwela 2019, Champion in Inter-School Folk Dance Competition Elementary Category held at the Mountain Wing Atrium, SM Seaside City Cebu, last September 23, 2018, Outstanding School Implementer in Food Security Program, Outstanding School Implementer in Brigada Eskwela 2019.

The teachers are adapting multimedia's learning tools. In fact, 100% of the teachers have laptops and 70% of the classrooms have television used during their teaching.

Research Respondents

The respondents of the study were the Grade Two struggling learners having difficulty to read. The researcher will use purposive sampling to answer the survey questionnaires. As shown in the table, there are 11 boys and 3 girls in total of 14 respondents.

Table 1

Respondents of The Study

Research	Section	Population per Class		
		Boys	Girls	TOTAL
	JL	11	3	14

Instrument

The researcher was using a 32-item test as instrument to be used to measure the respondents' pretest and posttest achievement on the topics. The content is then checked and validated by the School Head before it will be used to determine its correctness and reliability. The following learning competencies will be taken from the curriculum guide to ensure that the questionnaire is in line with the lesson.

Data-gathering Procedure

The researcher primarily asked permission and approval to conduct the study in the identified school by sending a written request to the principal addressed to the Schools Division Superintendent.

The researcher will administer the pretest before the start of delivering the topic and at the end of the topic in order not to affect the other class schedules of the learners, and the test will be administered on Friday because it will be activity day to all students under the K-12 curriculum.

The results of the retrieved copies of the questionnaire will then be tabulated, presented, discussed and interpreted. The data are analyzed and interpreted and will then be provided with conclusion and recommendations based on the findings.

Statistical Treatment of Data

The following were the statistical measures used to analyze the data gathered by the researcher. These are:

1. Frequency was used to determine the pretest and posttest performance of the grade 2 students in reading using short phrases.
2. T-test of Two Samples was used to determine the mean improvement between the pretest to the posttest of grade 2 learners exposed to short phrases.
3. Narrative Analysis is used to determine the learning experiences of the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pretest and Posttest Performance Level of Grade Two Learners

The pretest and posttest performance level of Grade two learners were measured through the use of assessment validated and tested by the experts. The results of the pre-test and post-test is discussed in separate table.

Table 3

PRE-TEST PERFORMANCE OF GRADE TWO LEARNERS

	Pre-test		
Test Scores	F	P	Interpretation
25-32	1	7.14	Outstanding

17-24	5	35.71	Very Satisfactory
9-16	6	42.85	Satisfactory
0-8	2	14.28	Fairly Satisfactory
Total	14	100	

Table 3 presents the frequency and percentage of the pre-test performance of Grade 2 learners in Reading. It reveals that out of 14 respondents only one(1) or with an equivalent percentage of 7.14 obtains an outstanding performance. Then five(5) or with an equivalent percentage of 35.71 obtains Very Satisfactory performance. It also shows that 42.85 percent or 6 out of 14 learners get a Satisfactory rating which spells out that majority of the learners find reading at a satisfactory level. It also reveals that 14.28 percent or out of 14 learners there are 2 learners who are rated Fairly Satisfactory performance in Reading.

This finding implies that the teacher shall motivate the learners in reading. The majority does not find difficulty in their reading lesson, however they still need to improve their understanding of what they read. This supports the study of Tarigan. That reading is one of four important language skills that needs to be mastered by students. To be able to understand reading materials well, students must have broad insights. To have good insight of reading, one must have a motivation to do it. As supported by the study of Suyono, 2009 who stated that to fulfill these demands, the literacy ability, one of which is realized by reading activity is something that is very important and needed by every individual. Reading not only voiced the symbols written, but must be able to understand the meaning of the series of words. Reading is a skill / skill that underlies other literacy skills (Suyono, 2009).

Table 4

POST TEST PERFORMANCE OF GRADE TWO LEARNERS

	Post-test		
Test Scores	F	P	Interpretation
25-32	5	35.71	Outstanding
17-24	7	50.00	Very Satisfactory
9-16	2	14.28	Satisfactory
0-8	0	0	Fairly Satisfactory
Total	14	100	

Table 4 presents the frequency and percentage of the pre-test performance of Grade 2 learners in Reading. It reveals that out of 14 respondents there were five(5) or with an equivalent percentage of 35.71 obtains an outstanding performance. Then seven (7) or with an equivalent percentage of 50 obtains Very Satisfactory performance. It also shows that 14.29 percent or 2 out of 14 learners get a Satisfactory rating which spells out that majority of the learners find reading at a satisfactory level. It is noticeable that no learner obtains a Fairly Satisfactory performance in Reading.

This finding implies that the teacher shall have interactions with the learners actively so that the learning process will be successful. The majority does not find difficulty in their reading lesson, however they still need to improve their reading and understanding. This support the study of Tarigan that reading is a process that is done by the readers to be used for getting the message conveyed the writer on the medium of writing text.

Table 5

PRE AND POST TEST SIGNIFICANT MEAN IMPROVEMENT OF GRADE TWO LEARNERS

Variables	Level of significance	T-TEST	Interpretation	Decision
Pretest and Post test	0.05	0.026438	Significant	Reject null

This table shows the significant mean as tabulated using the T-test of Two samples in the Data Analysis Toolpak. As shown in this table the tabulated value is 0.026438 which is lesser than the 0.05 alpha level of significance. Thus, null will be rejected since there is significance mean improvement between the pretest and the posttest scores of the grade2 learners using short phrases in addressing reading gaps.

Lived Experiences of Learners Exposed Reading Intervention.

The implementation of the 4K'S Reading Intervention Activity has various learning experiences for the Grade 2 learners in an elementary school. These are memorable experiences in engaging themselves in learning Reading of short phrases using pictures. There are two (2) themes that emerged from the interview of participants of the study. The following are: Attractive and Colorful Pictures, Learning is more fun when using pictures in reading. The themes are discussed separately.

1. How do you find our activity?

Unsay ikasulti nimo sa atong gihimo nga activity?

The use of varied activities can let the learners interest in reading. They find it very interesting and exciting.

One learner said:

"Makalingaw kaayo ang atuang mga activities. Masulod gyud sa akoang utok ang mga gepangbasa"

(I really enjoy with varied activities. I've learned a lot)

2. Why do you say so?

Nganong mao mana imong nasulti?

The use of varied pictures attracts the learners to listen attentively and actively engage themselves in reading. They find it very interesting and exciting as the teacher presented the various phrases.

One learner said:

"Ganahan kaayo ko sa mga pictures nga gipakita inig basa. Dali ra ko makatimaan sa mga basahon tungod sa mga pictures."

(I like the reading materials which uses pictures because it is colorful and it attracts me to watch and read. I can easily read because of the use of the pictures.)

The statement of the learner manifested that the use of pictures in reading short phrases helps the learner to read easily because it is attractive. Colorful reading materials creates a meaningful learning experience for the learners.

3. What have you learned from our activity?

Unsa may imong nakat-unan sa atuang activity?

Introducing to the student the different activities can be the way to make the learners learned a lot.

One learner said:

"Dali ko nakat-on og basa."

(I can easily understand and learned how to read.)

4. Aside from that, what else you have learned?

Unsa paman ang lain nimong nakat-unan sa atuang activity?

They find that pair-share very interesting and exciting in learning reading various phrases.

One learner said:

"Nakat-on pod ko mam ug pakig friend. Kana bang makamao nako magpatabang nila nga makabasa ko"

(I have lot of friends and I also ask help from them on how to read.)

5. What part of the activity you like most? Why?

Asa sa atong gihimo nga activity ang pinakaganahan nimo? Ngano man?

One of the techniques of the teacher to motivate learners in reading is to create an innovative reading strategy. The use of pictures is one way of providing learners with interesting in reading to have a fun and enjoyable learning experience.

One learners said that:

"Malingaw ko inig basa kay naay mga pictures nga makita unya dali ra ko makat-on ug basa."

(I really enjoy reading the short phrases with pictures. I can easily read.)

6. What part of the activity you don't like? Why?

Asa sa atong gihimo nga activity ang dili kaayo nimo ganahan? Ngano man?

Learners don't like the way I let them read by their self.

One learner said:

"Di ko ganahan magbasa nga ako ra mam. Dili kayo ko makat-on"

(I don't like reading alone.)

The statement of the learner manifested that reading alone cannot help the learner to read easily.

7. Is there anything that you can suggest to make the activity? What is that?

Aduna ba kay mahatag nga idea/suggestion para mas monindot pa ang atoang activity nga ghimo? Unsa man kini?

One of the techniques of the teacher to motivate learners in reading is to let the learners enjoy while learning. Having games is one way of providing learners with interesting in reading to have a fun and enjoyable learning experience.

One learners said that:

"Nindot unta kung mag games mam para lingaw pod ba"

(It is better to have games while learning reading for us to enjoy the learning)

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that reading short phrases was an effective way in improving learners reading gaps grounded on the data on the findings of this study that this intervention conducted has improved learners reading ability during the conduct of the post-test.

The findings of this study affirmed Piaget's Constructivist Theory which states that humans create knowledge through the interaction between their experiences and ideas and that the individual is at the center of the knowledge creation and acquisition process.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are hereby suggested:

That School Head shall provide the learners support in strengthening the performance in reading short phrases; and activity sheets shall focus on the various reading materials.

Then the teachers may conduct one-on-one reading remediation using short phrases with corresponding colored pictures.

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