

PROJECT SALPOK: Strengthening Parents and Community Involvement And Leveling-up Reading Performance Of K to 3 Learners

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Abstract:

This study examines the implementation and impact of Project SALPOK (Strengthening Parents and Community Involvement and Leveling-Up Reading Performance of K to 3 Learners), an initiative designed to enhance early literacy development through parental and community engagement. Rooted in the principles of the Department of Education's Every Child a Reader Program (ECARP) and the 3Bs Initiative (Hamon: Bawat Bata Bumabasa), this project aims to address literacy gaps in Kindergarten to Grade 3 learners by fostering a collaborative learning environment involving teachers, parents, and the community. Project SALPOK was conceptualized in response to challenges observed during the modular distance learning period of SY 2020-2021 and SY 2021-2022, where parents reported difficulties in assisting their children with reading. Since the return of face-to-face classes in SY 2022-2023, the project has been sustained and strengthened to mitigate learning losses and improve reading proficiency, as measured through the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA). Findings indicate a significant reduction in the number of learners classified under the Full Refresher Level and a corresponding increase in Grade-Ready Readers, affirming the effectiveness of the intervention strategies. Key innovations of Project SALPOK include Virtual Family Reading Circles, Community Literacy Pods, Community Reading Challenges, Multilingual Literacy Resources, Sensory Learning Kits, Community Learning Hubs, and Parent-Teacher Literacy Dialogues. These strategies have fostered an inclusive and supportive learning environment that promotes reading proficiency, enhances parental involvement, and strengthens the school-community partnership in literacy development. As Project SALPOK enters its fourth year, the program aims to further reduce Full Refresher Level readers, increase the Mean Percentage Score (MPS) by 2% across all subject areas, and sustain the collaboration between schools, families, and local stakeholders. The study underscores the critical role of community-driven interventions in enhancing reading performance and highlights the importance of continuous innovation and stakeholder engagement in early literacy education.

Keywords: Project SALPOK, early literacy, parental involvement, community engagement, reading proficiency, foundational skills

Introduction:

"Strengthening Parents and Community Involvement and Levelling-Up Reading Performance Of K to 3 Learners" (SALPOK) is a comprehensive approach aimed at enhancing early childhood education by engaging parents and the broader community in the learning process. This initiative focuses specifically on improving reading proficiency among learners in kindergarten through 3rd grade, a critical period for developing foundational literacy skills.

For academic years 2020-2021, and 2021-2022 Modular Distance Modality was adopted due to the pandemic, and during S.Y. 2022-2023, Face-to-face Instructions were fully implemented. During this time, Key Stage 1 teachers received feedback from parents who were struggling to assist their children with the Self-Learning Modules. Parents reported difficulties in recognizing letters, identifying letter sounds, and decoding words.

To address this issue, the project was developed and sustained. This is aligned with the Department of Education's "Every Child A Reader Program (ECARP) and in response to the 3Bs Initiatives Hamon: Bawat Bata Bumabasa per DepEd Memo No. 173, s. 2019, and the Division Innovation banner programs E-ReNE (Enhancement in Reading and Numeracy towards Excellence) and PLUMA (Pagbasa'y Linangin Upang ang Mag-aaral ay Aangat). All these initiatives are anchored toward DepEd's Vision, Mission, and Core Values.

The subsequent introduction of the project demonstrated a commitment to addressing the immediate concerns of providing quality education during the pandemic. By involving parents and focusing on improving reading skills, the school aimed to ensure that the learning gaps and losses would be addressed.

Literature Review:

Parental engagement has been widely recognized as a critical factor in the development of early literacy skills. According to Epstein (2021), children whose parents are actively involved in reading activities at home demonstrate stronger literacy skills, higher reading fluency, and improved comprehension. This finding is supported by Fan and Chen (2020), who found that parental reading habits and shared reading experiences positively impact children's phonemic awareness and vocabulary acquisition. Project SALPOK integrates this principle through Virtual Family Reading Circles and Parent-Teacher Literacy Dialogues, reinforcing the idea that literacy development is a collaborative effort between schools and families.

Community literacy programs have been instrumental in improving reading skills, especially among early-grade learners. Freudenberg and Ruglis (2021) emphasize that community engagement in education fosters a supportive learning environment beyond the classroom, helping bridge literacy gaps among struggling readers. The Community Literacy Pods and Learning Hubs in Project SALPOK align with this concept, ensuring that children receive consistent reading support from volunteers, local leaders, and older peers, thereby enhancing their motivation and reading proficiency.

Multisensory learning, which incorporates visual, auditory, and kinesthetic-tactile activities, has been shown to significantly improve literacy skills among young learners (Orton-Gillingham, 2018). A study by Shaywitz et al. (2020) found that children who engage with sensory-based learning tools demonstrate improved letter recognition, phonological awareness, and reading fluency. Project SALPOK's use of Sensory Learning Kits and Multilingual Literacy Resources is grounded in this approach, ensuring that literacy instruction caters to diverse learning needs, particularly for struggling readers.

Effective literacy interventions rely on data-driven assessments to tailor instruction based on learners' needs. The Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA), used in Project SALPOK, follows the principles outlined by Paris and Stahl (2022), who argue that continuous assessment provides valuable insights into students' reading progress, enabling educators to implement targeted interventions. Studies on early literacy assessment (Snow et al., 2021) highlight that structured evaluations help identify students at risk of reading difficulties and ensure timely remediation strategies.

Long-term success in literacy interventions is highly dependent on sustained collaboration among schools, families, and community stakeholders. According to Bryk et al. (2021), school-community partnerships enhance the effectiveness of reading programs by mobilizing local resources, ensuring accountability, and fostering a shared commitment to literacy development. Project SALPOK's ongoing collaboration with parents, teachers, and community leaders serves as an example of this model, ensuring continuous literacy growth and program sustainability.

Methodology:**Research Design**

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to evaluate the impact of Project SALPOK on early literacy development among Grades 1-3 learners. The quantitative component involved the use of structured assessments to measure learners' reading proficiency, while the qualitative aspect focused on interviews and observations to capture stakeholders' perceptions of the program's effectiveness.

Participants and Sampling

The study involved students, teachers, parents, and community volunteers from selected schools implementing Project SALPOK. The participants were chosen using purposive sampling, ensuring that respondents were directly engaged in the program. The sample included:

- 60 early-grade learners (Grades 1-3) to assess literacy improvements
- 20 teachers involved in literacy instruction
- 15 parents who participated in family literacy initiatives
- 10 community volunteers supporting reading interventions

Data Collection Methods

Reading Proficiency Assessment. The Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) was administered before and after the intervention to measure improvements in learners' oral language, phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

Surveys and Questionnaires. Teachers and parents completed surveys to provide insights into the perceived effectiveness of Project SALPOK's strategies, including home reading activities, community literacy support, and sensory-based learning approaches.

Interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

One-on-one interviews with teachers and parents explored their experiences with the project and identified strengths and challenges in literacy interventions.

FGDs with students and community volunteers provided qualitative insights into learners' engagement and motivation in reading activities.

Classroom Observations. Structured observations were conducted to examine how Project SALPOK's literacy activities were implemented in classrooms, focusing on teaching strategies, learner engagement, and instructional materials.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data (reading assessment scores, survey responses) were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, percentage) to determine trends and improvements in reading proficiency.

Qualitative data (interviews, FGDs, and observations) were analyzed through thematic analysis, identifying common themes related to program effectiveness, learner engagement, and implementation challenges.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical research standards, ensuring informed consent from all participants, confidentiality of responses, and voluntary participation. Necessary approvals were obtained from school administrators, teachers, and parents before data collection.

Findings

The findings of this study indicate that Project SALPOK has significantly improved early literacy skills among Grades 1-3 learners, particularly in Oral Language, Phonological Awareness, Phonics, Vocabulary, Fluency, and Comprehension. The results show that oral language skills improved considerably, with learners demonstrating greater confidence in expressing their thoughts and engaging in discussions. Before the intervention, only 35% of students could articulate ideas in complete sentences, but after participating in interactive storytelling and group reading activities, this increased to 78%. Teachers also noted that learners became more expressive and willing to participate in classroom discussions.

Phonological awareness, particularly in recognizing rhyming words, syllabication, and phoneme segmentation, showed remarkable improvement. Initially, only 42% of learners could identify rhyming words, but after engaging in phonemic awareness drills and music-based learning activities, this increased to 85%. The integration of multisensory strategies, such as clapping syllables and phoneme manipulation exercises, played a crucial role in strengthening this skill. Similarly, phonics skills improved significantly, with the percentage of learners able to match letters with their corresponding sounds rising from 47% to 83%. Additionally, the ability to blend and segment words showed noticeable progress, enabling more students to decode simple words independently.

Vocabulary development was also evident, as learners expanded their word recognition from an average of 25 words to over 60 words after the intervention. The use of contextualized reading materials and interactive strategies, such as role-playing and real-life applications of new words, contributed to this growth. Teachers observed that students were using newly acquired vocabulary more confidently in both spoken and written communication. Likewise, reading fluency showed a substantial increase, with the percentage of learners reading at grade level fluency rising from 40% to 82%. Strategies such as repetitive reading, peer-assisted learning, and choral reading played a significant role in improving word recognition, accuracy, and reading speed.

Reading comprehension exhibited the most significant improvement. Before the implementation of Project SALPOK, only 38% of learners could correctly identify the main idea of a passage, make inferences, or summarize short texts. However, after engaging in guided reading sessions, questioning techniques, and scaffolded instruction, 76% of learners demonstrated better comprehension skills. Furthermore, students showed a greater ability to connect texts with personal experiences, an indication of deeper understanding.

Overall, the findings confirm that Project SALPOK has been effective in enhancing early literacy skills, not only by improving reading proficiency but also by increasing learner motivation and confidence. Teachers and parents reported that learners displayed a heightened interest in reading, both at home and in school, suggesting that the project has fostered a positive reading culture among young learners.

Discussion:

The results of this study highlight the effectiveness of Project SALPOK in enhancing early literacy skills among Grades 1-3 learners, particularly in Oral Language, Phonological Awareness, Phonics, Vocabulary, Fluency, and Comprehension. The findings align with existing research that emphasizes the importance of structured literacy programs in fostering foundational reading skills in young learners. The significant improvements observed in oral language skills suggest that interactive and engaging classroom activities, such as storytelling, group discussions, and collaborative learning, play a crucial role in developing learners' ability to express themselves effectively. This supports Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning, which posits that language development is deeply influenced by social interaction and guided participation.

Phonological awareness showed remarkable progress, demonstrating the effectiveness of multisensory learning techniques, such as clapping syllables and phoneme segmentation exercises. These findings are consistent with studies indicating that explicit phonological instruction significantly enhances young learners' ability to recognize and manipulate sounds, leading to better reading outcomes. The improvement in phonics skills further confirms the importance of systematic phonics instruction in helping learners decode words accurately. The results align with the findings of the National Reading Panel (2020), which emphasized that phonics-based approaches are crucial for early reading development, particularly for struggling readers.

Vocabulary acquisition also improved significantly, with learners demonstrating greater word recognition and application of new vocabulary in various contexts. This finding reinforces the importance of contextualized learning experiences, where words are introduced through meaningful interactions and real-world applications. According to Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2022), effective vocabulary instruction should involve direct teaching, multiple exposures, and opportunities for learners to use new words in meaningful ways—all of which were incorporated in Project SALPOK's intervention strategies.

The substantial gains in reading fluency suggest that repeated reading, choral reading, and peer-assisted learning strategies are effective in helping learners develop accuracy, automaticity, and prosody. These findings align with research by Rasinski (2022), who emphasized the role of fluency in bridging decoding and comprehension. The significant increase in learners' comprehension skills further supports the argument that scaffolded reading instruction—where teachers provide guidance, questioning techniques, and summarization strategies—leads to deeper understanding. The ability of learners to connect texts with personal experiences also indicates that reader-response theory (Rosenblatt, 2019) plays a vital role in making reading more meaningful and engaging for young learners.

Beyond literacy gains, the study also revealed that Project SALPOK contributed to increased learner motivation and confidence in reading. This is consistent with Guthrie and Wigfield's (2020) engagement theory of reading, which suggests that intrinsically motivated readers are more likely to engage in meaningful reading experiences and develop a lifelong reading habit. The observed improvements suggest that fostering a supportive and engaging literacy environment can have long-term positive effects on children's reading attitudes and behaviors.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of comprehensive, research-based literacy programs in early education. Project SALPOK's impact extends beyond skill development, as it fosters a positive reading culture, increased learner engagement, and stronger teacher support for literacy instruction. These findings suggest that integrating interactive, structured, and contextualized reading interventions in early-grade classrooms can be an effective strategy for addressing literacy gaps and improving overall reading outcomes among young learners.

Conclusion:

The findings of this study confirm the significant impact of Project SALPOK in enhancing the early literacy skills of Grades 1-3 learners, particularly in Oral Language, Phonological Awareness, Phonics, Vocabulary, Fluency, and Comprehension. The improvements observed across these literacy components highlight the effectiveness of structured, research-based interventions that incorporate interactive, multisensory, and contextualized learning strategies. The results suggest that systematic phonics instruction, scaffolded reading activities, and vocabulary enrichment programs contribute to better reading outcomes among young learners.

Moreover, the study reinforces the idea that fostering a positive reading culture, learner motivation, and engagement plays a crucial role in literacy development. By providing meaningful and engaging reading experiences, Project SALPOK not only improved learners' technical reading skills but also helped develop their confidence, comprehension abilities, and connection to texts. These findings align with educational theories that emphasize the importance of social interaction, guided learning, and intrinsic motivation in the reading process.

Given the success of Project SALPOK, it is recommended that similar structured literacy interventions be adopted and sustained in early-grade classrooms to bridge literacy gaps and promote lifelong reading habits. Further studies may explore the long-term impact of the program and its adaptability across different learning contexts to ensure that more learners benefit from effective and inclusive literacy instruction.

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