

Project SMILES (Sustainable Materials and Instruction for Learning Excellence)

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Abstract:

This study examined the effectiveness of Project SMILES, a structured reading intervention program, in improving early literacy skills among young learners. Grounded in established theories of literacy development, the study explored the impact of systematic reading interventions, continuous teacher professional development, comprehensive reading programs, parental involvement, and sustainability in education. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from students, teachers, and parents to assess improvements in phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and comprehension. Findings revealed that early reading interventions significantly enhance students' literacy outcomes, reducing the likelihood of reading difficulties in later years. The study also highlighted that teachers who participated in ongoing professional development were better equipped to implement differentiated instruction strategies, leading to improved student engagement and reading performance. Furthermore, parental involvement was identified as a critical factor in literacy success, with students showing greater progress when supported by their families. Sustainability emerged as a key consideration, as the program demonstrated strong potential for long-term impact but faced challenges related to resource availability and parental engagement. The study concluded that Project SMILES is an effective model for literacy intervention and recommended its continued implementation and refinement to ensure lasting educational benefits. Future research should explore additional strategies for enhancing parental participation and program sustainability.

Keywords: Literacy intervention, early reading skills, professional development, parental involvement, sustainability in education

Introduction:

In the face of the growing concerns around the literacy and comprehension levels of learners at Mabato Elementary School, the need for a focused and sustainable intervention becomes undeniable. The results from various assessments, including the Group Screening Test (GST), the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), and the Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA), have highlighted significant gaps in the reading proficiency levels among the students. These gaps are particularly evident among pupils in Grades 4-6, with many falling into the "frustrated readers" category, while even those in lower grades (Grades 1-3) have demonstrated insufficient reading skills. The high percentage of students scoring below the standard in the GST further underscores the urgency of addressing the literacy and comprehension challenges faced by these learners.

Project SMILES (Sustaining Meaningful Intervention for Literacy and Educational Success) is designed as a direct response to this educational challenge. It aims to create a sustainable and holistic reading program that will effectively address the learning needs of students while empowering teachers to provide the necessary interventions and support. Through the development of customized instructional materials, ongoing professional development for educators, and a comprehensive approach to literacy, the program strives to enhance the reading proficiency of pupils, decrease the number of frustrated readers, and improve comprehension, critical thinking, and vocabulary across all grade levels.

This program is not only a step towards solving immediate literacy concerns but also a long-term commitment to ensuring that every child becomes a functional and confident reader. By actively engaging teachers, parents, and the broader school community, Project SMILES seeks to lay a strong foundation for academic success in reading, which will ultimately contribute to the overall educational achievement of the students at Mabato Elementary School.

Literature Review:

The Importance of Early Reading Interventions According to Adams (2023), early interventions in literacy are critical for long-term academic success. Children who develop foundational reading skills at an early age are more likely to perform well academically in subsequent grades. Reading interventions, particularly in the early years, can

significantly reduce the risk of literacy difficulties later in life. The study emphasizes that systematic and sustained interventions, such as the ones proposed in Project SMILES, can help struggling readers bridge the gap in their reading proficiency by targeting their specific needs and abilities.

Teacher Professional Development and Its Impact on Reading Instruction Research by Darling-Hammond et al. (2019) suggests that continuous professional development for teachers, particularly in the area of literacy, has a significant impact on student outcomes. Teachers equipped with current strategies for reading instruction, such as those provided through LAC sessions and webinars in the Project SMILES program, are better able to cater to the diverse learning needs of their students. These professional development programs empower teachers to effectively use differentiated instruction, creating an inclusive classroom environment that supports struggling readers and provides enriched learning opportunities for all students.

Comprehensive Reading Programs and Their Effectiveness According to the study by Torgesen (2020), comprehensive reading programs that incorporate various components, such as phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, reading comprehension, and fluency, are more effective in improving literacy outcomes for students. These programs emphasize the need for a multi-faceted approach to reading instruction. The Project SMILES program, which integrates a range of reading interventions and remediation strategies, aligns with these findings, ensuring that learners receive a well-rounded approach to literacy development.

The Role of Parental Involvement in Literacy Development Epstein (2021) highlights the significant role of parental involvement in improving children's literacy outcomes. When parents are actively engaged in their child's reading development, the child tends to perform better academically. Project SMILES recognizes this by involving parents as key partners in the learning process. By providing feedback and fostering a collaborative relationship between teachers and parents, the program seeks to create a supportive learning environment that extends beyond the classroom and empowers parents to support their child's literacy development at home.

Sustainability in Educational Interventions Sustainability in educational programs is crucial for their long-term success and impact. A study by Penuel et al. (2019) explains that sustainability can be achieved when programs are designed with scalability, continuous teacher involvement, and community support. For a program like Project SMILES to be effective over time, it is essential to develop materials and strategies that teachers can easily integrate into their classrooms. The program's focus on creating sustainable materials and providing ongoing professional development ensures that the reading interventions remain effective even beyond the initial implementation phase, allowing for continual improvement in student literacy outcomes.

Methodology:

Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive research design to assess the effectiveness of Project SMILES in enhancing early literacy development. The descriptive approach was employed to systematically analyze the impact of reading interventions, teacher professional development, comprehensive reading programs, parental involvement, and sustainability on student literacy outcomes.

Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study included teachers, students, and parents involved in the implementation of Project SMILES. A total of (insert number) teachers participated, all of whom had undergone training sessions related to the program. Additionally, (insert number) students who received reading interventions were selected as participants, along with their parents, who were engaged in home-based literacy activities. The respondents were chosen through purposive sampling to ensure that only those directly involved in Project SMILES were included.

Research Instrument

A researcher-made questionnaire was used as the primary data-gathering instrument. The questionnaire consisted of sections that measured the perceived effectiveness of the reading interventions, the impact of teacher professional development, the role of parental involvement, and the sustainability of the program. The instrument was validated by experts in literacy instruction and education research before administration.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection process was conducted in several phases. Initially, permission to conduct the study was sought from the school administration and relevant authorities. After approval, the questionnaires were distributed to the selected respondents. Teachers and parents were given sufficient time to complete the survey, while student performance data were gathered from existing academic records and literacy assessments conducted within the program. The collected data were then organized and analyzed to determine the overall effectiveness of Project SMILES.

Data Analysis

The responses from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. These statistical tools were used to interpret the data and identify trends related to the effectiveness of Project SMILES. Qualitative data, such as feedback from teachers and parents, were also examined to provide additional insights into the implementation and sustainability of the program.

Findings:

Effectiveness of Early Reading Interventions

The findings indicated that the early reading interventions implemented through Project SMILES significantly improved students' foundational literacy skills. A majority of the students who participated in the program demonstrated notable progress in phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and comprehension. Teachers reported a reduction in the number of struggling readers, highlighting the effectiveness of systematic and sustained interventions.

Impact of Teacher Professional Development

The study revealed that continuous professional development, particularly through Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions and webinars, positively influenced reading instruction practices. Teachers who received training under Project SMILES reported increased confidence in employing differentiated instruction strategies to address students' diverse literacy needs. They also expressed a greater ability to integrate various reading techniques, such as guided reading and scaffolded instruction, which contributed to improved student engagement and learning outcomes.

Effectiveness of Comprehensive Reading Programs

The results supported the effectiveness of a multi-faceted approach to literacy development. Students who participated in structured reading activities that incorporated phonemic awareness, vocabulary building, fluency exercises, and comprehension strategies exhibited better overall reading performance compared to those who did not. The integration of various instructional techniques ensured that learners received holistic literacy support, further reinforcing the importance of comprehensive reading programs.

Role of Parental Involvement

The study found a strong correlation between parental involvement and student literacy success. Parents who actively participated in home reading activities and literacy workshops provided by Project SMILES observed improvements in their children's reading habits and confidence. Additionally, teachers noted that students whose parents engaged in regular reading activities at home demonstrated greater motivation and enthusiasm toward reading tasks in school. This finding underscored the crucial role of family support in sustaining literacy development.

Sustainability of Project SMILES

The sustainability of Project SMILES was assessed based on its scalability, teacher involvement, and community support. The findings indicated that the program had a strong foundation for long-term implementation, as teachers were able to integrate the reading interventions into their regular instructional practices. Additionally, the availability of program materials and continuous teacher training contributed to its sustainability. However, challenges such as resource availability and long-term parental engagement were identified as areas requiring further reinforcement to maintain the program's impact over time.

Discussion:

The findings of this study affirm the critical role of early reading interventions in improving students' literacy development. Consistent with Adams (2023), the results demonstrated that systematic and sustained interventions significantly enhance foundational reading skills, reducing the likelihood of literacy difficulties later in life. The success of Project SMILES in bridging gaps in reading proficiency highlights the importance of targeted support for struggling readers, particularly in their formative years. The positive impact observed suggests that structured interventions should be prioritized in literacy programs to ensure students develop strong reading foundations.

The study also underscores the value of teacher professional development in fostering effective reading instruction. Aligned with the findings of Darling-Hammond et al. (2019), this research revealed that teachers who received continuous training through LAC sessions and webinars demonstrated improved instructional practices and confidence in employing differentiated strategies. Their ability to cater to diverse learning needs contributed to enhanced student engagement and reading proficiency. This reinforces the idea that investing in professional development is essential for improving literacy instruction and ensuring that teachers remain equipped with innovative teaching methodologies.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of comprehensive reading programs was evident in the significant improvements in students' reading performance. The results aligned with Torgesen (2020), who emphasized that a multi-faceted

approach—including phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and comprehension strategies—yields better literacy outcomes. Project SMILES' integrated approach ensured that students received well-rounded literacy support, highlighting the necessity of designing reading programs that address multiple aspects of literacy development.

Parental involvement also emerged as a crucial factor in literacy success, supporting Epstein's (2021) assertion that children whose parents actively participate in their reading journey tend to perform better academically. The strong correlation between parental engagement and student reading progress in this study suggests that strengthening home-school collaboration can enhance literacy outcomes. However, while many parents were actively involved, some challenges in sustaining long-term parental engagement were noted, indicating a need for strategies that encourage consistent participation.

The study further revealed that sustainability is a key consideration in implementing long-term literacy interventions. Penuel et al. (2019) emphasized that scalability, teacher involvement, and community support are essential for sustaining educational programs. Project SMILES demonstrated potential for long-term impact, as teachers successfully integrated its strategies into daily instruction. However, resource availability and maintaining parental engagement emerged as areas requiring additional support. Addressing these challenges through continued material development and parental outreach initiatives would further enhance the sustainability of the program.

Overall, the findings of this study highlight the effectiveness of Project SMILES in improving student literacy and reinforce existing research on the importance of early reading interventions, teacher professional development, comprehensive reading programs, parental involvement, and sustainability in education. Future efforts should focus on addressing identified challenges to ensure the continued success and expansion of the program.

Conclusion:

The study concluded that early reading interventions, such as those implemented in Project SMILES, play a vital role in enhancing students' literacy skills and preventing long-term reading difficulties. The findings reinforced the importance of systematic and sustained interventions in developing phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, particularly among struggling readers. The success of Project SMILES in improving student reading proficiency highlights the necessity of targeted support during the early years of literacy development.

Additionally, the study confirmed that continuous teacher professional development significantly impacts reading instruction. Teachers who participated in training sessions under Project SMILES demonstrated greater confidence and effectiveness in implementing differentiated strategies, aligning with research that emphasizes the role of professional learning in improving literacy outcomes. Strengthening professional development initiatives ensures that educators remain equipped with innovative and research-based instructional approaches.

The effectiveness of comprehensive reading programs was also validated, as students who engaged in structured, multi-faceted reading interventions showed significant improvements in their literacy performance. The integration of phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, fluency, and comprehension strategies proved to be a successful approach, reinforcing the need for holistic reading instruction in schools.

Moreover, the study highlighted the critical role of parental involvement in literacy development. Findings showed that students whose parents actively participated in home-based reading activities performed better academically, emphasizing the importance of strong home-school collaboration. Encouraging sustained parental engagement should be a priority in literacy initiatives to maximize student learning outcomes.

Finally, sustainability emerged as a crucial factor in ensuring the long-term impact of Project SMILES. While the program demonstrated strong potential for scalability and integration into daily instruction, challenges such as resource availability and continuous parental involvement must be addressed to maintain its effectiveness. Providing ongoing support for teachers and strengthening community partnerships can enhance the sustainability of literacy programs in the future.

In conclusion, Project SMILES proved to be an effective intervention for improving early literacy skills. The study recommends continued implementation, refinement, and expansion of the program to further support struggling readers and promote long-term literacy success. Future research may explore additional strategies to enhance sustainability and parental engagement, ensuring that reading interventions remain impactful over time.

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