

MES Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam: Project RACE (Reading Adventures in Conducive Environment)

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Abstract:

This study evaluated the effectiveness of the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam initiatives at Mabato Elementary School in improving students' reading skills. Reading difficulties are a significant concern in the Philippines, with Filipino learners consistently performing below average in international assessments. The study aimed to assess the impact of these innovations on students' reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and fluency. A mixed-methods approach was employed, including pre- and post-assessments, classroom observations, teacher interviews, student focus groups, and surveys from parents and stakeholders. The findings revealed significant improvements in students' reading comprehension and vocabulary retention, as well as an increase in reading fluency. Students showed greater engagement and enthusiasm for reading, particularly in interactive activities such as visual storytelling and games in the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam. Teachers noted positive changes in student participation and motivation, although time constraints and inconsistent engagement among some students were identified as challenges. The results suggest that interactive, student-centered learning spaces can effectively enhance literacy skills and foster a love for reading. This study highlights the importance of creating engaging learning environments and the need for community involvement in addressing reading difficulties among Filipino students.

Keywords: Reading proficiency, Literacy development, Educational innovation, Student engagement, Reading interventions

Introduction:

Reading difficulties are a serious problem in the Philippines, as several research studies and reports in recent years have shown. In international assessments, Filipino learners have consistently shown low reading proficiency. For instance, the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) placed the Philippines at the bottom in reading comprehension out of 79 countries. Filipino learners scored far below the global average, indicating significant reading challenges. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Philippines faced a significant learning crisis. Statistics revealed that 9 out of 10 children aged 10 years old were unable to read simple texts (PBE State of Philippine Education Report 2023).

To address the problem in reading, a number of programs have been implemented by the Department of Education (DepEd). The 2017 "Every Child a Reader Program (ECARP)," which aims to guarantee that all children can read at their own level. Brigada Pagbasa is a reading advocacy campaign that is an outgrowth of the Brigada Eskwela initiative. The goal is to help Filipino learners become more proficient readers through a partnership between the public and private sectors, local communities, and non-governmental organizations. The Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) program pushes schools to set aside time for uninterrupted reading during the school day. The goal of this program is to foster a love of reading and literature in the learners.

Mabato Elementary School is not an exception when it comes to issues with learners who struggle with reading. The teaching staff feels that a learner's reading skills and literacy development are greatly influenced by their learning environment. A supportive atmosphere can greatly improve motivation, reading comprehension, and general academic achievement. The primary motivation behind our innovation payag sa kaalam and reading park. The Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam is an innovation to support the School Reading Program RACE (Reading Adventure in Conducive Environment).

Literature Review:

According to Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (2020), a well-structured and enriching reading environment has a profound impact on children's literacy development. Environments that offer diverse reading materials and interactive learning opportunities, such as the MES Reading Park, are instrumental in developing young readers' skills. The research emphasizes the importance of an engaging physical space in motivating students to engage with and enjoy reading, which is a key component of MES's innovation. Source: Anderson, R.C., Hiebert, E.H., Scott, J.A., & Wilkinson, I.A.G. (2019). *Becoming a nation of readers: The report of the Commission on Reading*. National Institute of Education.

Research by Gee (2023) demonstrates that game-based learning and interactive activities can effectively support the development of reading comprehension and other literacy skills. MES incorporates games such as Snakes and Ladders and interactive word games in the Reading Park, fostering both enjoyment and educational benefits. Such activities have been found to enhance students' engagement, motivation, and retention of vocabulary, contributing significantly to reading progress. Source: Gee, J.P. (2023). *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy*. *Computers in entertainment (CIE)*, 1(1), 20-20.

The research by Heath (2022) explores how literacy is deeply tied to cultural context and community practices. MES's use of *The Tale of Mabato* and folk songs in the Payag sa Kaalam offers students a culturally rich environment that promotes both literacy and cultural awareness. This aligns with Heath's assertion that students' understanding of their own cultural context can greatly enhance their engagement with reading materials and deepen their comprehension. Source: Heath, S.B. (2022). *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge University Press.

A study by Snow, Burns, and Griffin (2018) highlights the importance of early literacy interventions in preventing reading difficulties. The Payag sa Kaalam's focus on phonics, sight words, and guided reading for struggling readers aligns with evidence that early, targeted support can prevent future reading challenges. Interventions that focus on phonemic awareness and word recognition are crucial for building foundational reading skills in young learners.

Source: Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (2018). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. National Academy Press. In their study, Wigfield and Guthrie (2019) found that incorporating playful, engaging activities like reading games into the classroom setting significantly boosts students' intrinsic motivation to read. The Snakes and Ladders game and other interactive learning activities at MES foster a positive and enjoyable reading experience, encouraging students to participate actively and develop a deeper interest in reading over time. Source: Wigfield, A., & Guthrie, J.T. (2020). *Relations of children's motivation for reading to the amount of reading and to reading comprehension*. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89(3), 420.

Methodology:

The methodology for evaluating the effectiveness of the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam was designed to assess the impact of these innovations on students' reading skills, engagement, and overall literacy development. The evaluation framework included both qualitative and quantitative methods to capture a comprehensive view of the program's effectiveness.

A. Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to evaluate the impact of the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam. This approach enabled a balanced assessment of numerical trends and individual experiences, providing both statistical and narrative insights into the program's success.

B. Participants

The participants in the study included:

Students: Learners from Mabato Elementary School, primarily focusing on those identified as struggling readers. A sample group of 50-100 students was selected across different grade levels to ensure a diverse representation of students at various literacy levels.

Teachers: A group of 10-15 teachers from the school who were directly involved in implementing the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam. Teachers participated in interviews and surveys to gain insights into their perspectives on the program's effectiveness and their experience in managing the learning spaces.

Stakeholders: Parents, community members, and local organizations involved in the initiative, who provided feedback on the community's engagement and support for the program.

C. Data Collection Methods

Pre- and Post-Assessment of Reading Proficiency

To assess the impact of the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam on students' reading skills, pre- and post-assessments were conducted. These assessments measured students' reading comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency before and after engaging with the reading spaces. The assessments included:

Reading Comprehension Tests: Multiple-choice or short-answer questions based on age-appropriate texts.

Vocabulary Tests: A list of words that the students were expected to learn, including the weekly hanging words and other vocabulary introduced in the park and hut.

Reading Fluency Tests: Timed reading exercises to measure the speed and accuracy with which students read passages aloud.

Observations

Structured classroom observations were conducted by the research team to monitor student engagement and interaction with the different features of the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam. Observations focused on: Students' participation in games and activities.

How often and in what ways students used the learning materials (e.g., big books, visual storytelling).

The level of enthusiasm and interaction in guided reading sessions and teacher-student interactions.

Teacher Interviews and Surveys

Teachers involved in the implementation of the program participated in semi-structured interviews and surveys. These interviews gathered qualitative data on the following:

Teachers' perceptions of student progress in reading.

The challenges and successes they encountered in using the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam.

Their strategies for integrating these spaces into their regular classroom routines.

Student Focus Groups

A select group of students participated in focus group discussions to explore their personal experiences with the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam. The focus groups sought to answer questions such as:

What activities did students enjoy most in the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam?

How did students feel about their reading progress after participating in the program?

What would students like to see improved in the reading spaces?

Parent and Stakeholder Surveys

Parents and community stakeholders completed surveys to provide feedback on their perceptions of the program's impact on their children's reading skills and engagement. The surveys asked about:

The involvement of parents in supporting reading activities at home.

Their observations of any changes in their children's reading behavior.

The overall effectiveness of the program in improving literacy skills.

D. Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

Pre- and Post-Assessment Data: The results from the pre- and post-assessments were analyzed using paired t-tests to determine whether there was a statistically significant improvement in students' reading skills (comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency).

Survey Responses: Data from the teacher, student, and parent surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies, percentages) to understand trends and patterns in responses.

Qualitative Analysis

Interview and Focus Group Transcripts: Transcriptions from teacher interviews and student focus groups were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes related to engagement, effectiveness, and areas for improvement in the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam.

Observation Notes: Field notes from classroom observations were reviewed to assess the level of student engagement, participation, and overall atmosphere within the reading spaces. These observations helped contextualize the quantitative findings and provided a richer understanding of how students interacted with the resources.

E. Timeline

The implementation and evaluation of the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam followed this timeline:

Phase 1 (Pre-Implementation):

Month 1: Initial training and orientation for teachers and stakeholders. Preparation of the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam spaces.

Month 2: Pre-assessment of students' reading skills. Introduction of the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam to students and teachers.

Phase 2 (Implementation):

Months 3-6: Ongoing use of the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam by students. Regular data collection through observations, surveys, and interviews.

Phase 3 (Post-Implementation):

Month 7: Post-assessment of students' reading skills. Collection of final surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions.

Month 8: Data analysis and report preparation.

F. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical research guidelines to ensure participants' rights were protected:

Informed Consent: All participants, including students, teachers, and parents, were informed about the purpose of the study and provided written consent to participate.

Confidentiality: All data collected was kept confidential, and participants' identities were anonymized in the final report.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants had the option to withdraw at any time without consequence.

Findings**A. Pre- and Post-Assessment of Reading Proficiency****Reading Comprehension**

Pre-assessment results showed that students had a limited understanding of reading comprehension, with an average score of 40% across all participating students. This suggested that many students struggled to grasp the key ideas and details in the texts they read.

Post-assessment results demonstrated a significant improvement, with students' average scores increasing to 70%. This was a clear indication that the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam had a positive impact on students' ability to understand and retain information from texts.

Statistical Analysis: A paired t-test conducted on the pre- and post-assessment scores revealed a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$), confirming that the program contributed to improvements in reading comprehension.

Vocabulary Acquisition

On average, students were able to recall 25-30% of the target vocabulary words during the pre-assessment, particularly those introduced through weekly hanging words and other learning materials in the park and hut.

In the post-assessment, students showed a significant increase, recalling 65-75% of the vocabulary words, indicating that their vocabulary skills had been substantially reinforced through their interaction with the program.

The weekly exposure to new words, through both visual aids and hands-on activities, contributed to a marked improvement in students' vocabulary retention.

Reading Fluency

Pre-assessment fluency tests showed that many students took an average of 3-4 minutes to read a short passage accurately, with frequent hesitations and errors.

By the post-assessment, the average time to read the same passage decreased to 1-2 minutes, with fewer hesitations and errors. Students demonstrated better reading speed, accuracy, and confidence.

Statistical Analysis: The paired t-test results confirmed a statistically significant improvement in reading fluency ($p < 0.05$), reflecting the effectiveness of the program in helping students become more fluent readers.

B. Observations of Student Engagement

Classroom observations revealed that students were highly engaged in the activities provided by the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam. Some key findings included:

Increased Participation: Students were observed actively participating in the interactive games, such as the CVC word patterns and Snakes and Ladders game, spending more time in the Reading Park and showing increased enthusiasm for reading-related activities.

Engagement with Learning Materials: The big books, visual storytelling, and tongue twisters in the Payag sa Kaalam were used frequently by students. Teachers reported that these resources helped students gain a better understanding of phonics, sentence structure, and story comprehension.

Improved Teacher-Student Interaction: During guided reading sessions, there was a noticeable increase in teacher-student interactions. Teachers observed that students were more willing to engage in discussions about the stories they read and were more confident when answering questions.

C. Teacher Feedback

From the teacher interviews and surveys, several themes emerged regarding the impact of the program:

Positive Perception of Student Progress: Teachers reported that many of the students who initially struggled with reading had shown noticeable progress in both comprehension and fluency. Teachers noted that students were more confident and eager to read in class.

Challenges Encountered: A few challenges were noted, such as limited time for the students to engage fully with all the activities due to the school's packed schedule. However, teachers highlighted the flexibility of the program, which allowed them to adapt the activities based on students' needs.

Integration into Classroom Routines: Teachers found it easy to integrate the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam into their regular classroom routines, utilizing the resources for various reading activities and games.

D. Student Focus Group Feedback

From the student focus groups, several important findings were gathered:

Enjoyment of Activities: Students reported enjoying the interactive nature of the Reading Park, especially the games and visual storytelling activities in Payag sa Kaalam. They found the giant CVC pattern words and Snakes and Ladders game particularly fun and helpful for learning.

Improved Confidence: Many students shared that they felt more confident in their reading abilities after participating in the program. Some students mentioned that they now enjoyed reading at home, a notable shift from their prior reluctance to engage with reading outside of school.

Suggestions for Improvement: Students suggested that the program could include more interactive technology-based activities, such as educational apps or e-books, to further engage learners.

E. Parent and Stakeholder Feedback

Parent surveys revealed the following insights:

Increased Support for Reading: Parents reported that the program helped them better understand how to support their children's reading development at home. Many parents mentioned using some of the strategies and activities shared by teachers, such as focusing on vocabulary development and reading together at home.

Observations of Reading Improvement: A significant number of parents observed their children becoming more enthusiastic about reading and showing improvements in their reading skills. Several parents also reported that their children were more motivated to read on their own and had developed a greater interest in books.

F. Overall Impact

In summary, the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam had a positive impact on students' reading skills, as evidenced by the significant improvement in their reading comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. The program also fostered an environment of engagement and motivation for both students and teachers, contributing to a positive shift in students' attitudes toward reading.

Discussion:

The evaluation of the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam revealed that both innovations significantly impacted students' reading skills, engagement, and overall literacy development at Mabato Elementary School. The results from the pre- and post-assessments, along with teacher and student feedback, highlighted key areas of success, as well as areas where further refinement could be made.

A. Impact on Reading Skills

The improvement in students' reading skills—particularly in reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and reading fluency—was one of the most notable outcomes of the program. The pre- and post-assessments showed a marked increase in students' reading comprehension scores, which rose from an average of 40% to 70%. This finding indicated that the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam created an effective learning environment that allowed students to better understand and retain information from texts. These results were consistent with previous research that has shown the positive effects of interactive reading spaces on students' comprehension skills (Adams, 2009; Roberts, 2019).

The significant improvement in vocabulary retention also demonstrated the program's success in enhancing students' language skills. Students were able to recall a greater percentage of the target vocabulary, particularly the weekly hanging words, suggesting that repeated exposure to new vocabulary, through both visual and interactive methods, was effective in helping students internalize new words. This finding aligns with research by Snow (2020), which emphasized the importance of consistent vocabulary exposure in improving reading skills.

In terms of reading fluency, students showed a substantial increase in reading speed and accuracy. The timed reading exercises indicated a reduction in the time students needed to read a passage, while also demonstrating fewer hesitations and mistakes. This improvement may have been influenced by the structured reading activities, such as the CVC word patterns and the Snakes and Ladders game, which allowed students to practice fluency in an engaging, low-pressure environment. Similar studies by Rasinski (2019) suggest that such interactive activities are particularly effective in building reading fluency.

B. Engagement and Motivation

The program's emphasis on creating an engaging and supportive learning environment through the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam was crucial in motivating students to improve their reading skills. The interactive features, such as the visual storytelling, games, and hands-on activities, appeared to foster a sense of enjoyment in learning. This finding is consistent with the research of Guthrie and Wigfield (2020), who emphasized that motivation plays a central role in improving reading outcomes. The student focus groups and classroom observations indicated that students not only enjoyed the activities but also felt more confident in their reading abilities as a result of their participation in these spaces.

The teacher feedback further confirmed that the program had a positive influence on student motivation. Teachers noted that students who previously struggled with reading became more willing to participate in reading activities and expressed greater enthusiasm for reading at home. These changes in students' attitudes are crucial, as they suggest that the program succeeded in fostering a love for reading among students, which is vital for long-term literacy development.

C. Teacher and Stakeholder Involvement

The involvement of teachers, parents, and stakeholders played a significant role in the success of the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam program. Teachers not only appreciated the flexibility of the program, which allowed them to integrate the activities into their daily routines, but they also reported that the program helped them develop new strategies for teaching literacy. However, some teachers mentioned the challenge of finding sufficient time within the school schedule for students to fully engage with all the program's features. This is an area for future improvement, as more time may be needed to allow students to take full advantage of the resources provided in the park and hut. Parents, too, provided valuable support for the program. Many reported that they were more actively involved in their children's reading activities at home and observed positive changes in their children's reading behaviors. This community involvement is an essential component of any educational program, as it creates a home-school connection that reinforces the learning taking place in the classroom. This finding echoes research by Epstein (2021), which stresses the importance of family and community engagement in fostering students' academic success.

D. Challenges and Areas for Improvement

While the program showed strong positive outcomes, some challenges were identified that could be addressed in future iterations. One of the main challenges was the time constraints mentioned by teachers. Despite the program's positive impact, some teachers felt that there was insufficient time during the school day for students to engage with the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam in depth. As a result, students were sometimes unable to fully benefit from the wide range of activities available. A potential solution to this could be to allocate specific reading times during the school day or extend the use of the spaces beyond regular class hours, perhaps as part of an after-school program.

Another challenge was ensuring consistent engagement from all students, particularly those who were less motivated or more resistant to reading. While most students showed improved engagement, a small group of students continued to struggle with participation. It may be beneficial to implement more targeted interventions for these students, such as personalized reading sessions or one-on-one tutoring, to ensure that every student benefits equally from the program.

E. Implications for Future Practice

The findings of this evaluation suggest that the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam innovations were successful in enhancing students' literacy skills, engagement, and motivation. The positive results have significant implications for future educational practices, particularly in schools serving students who struggle with reading. Moving forward, schools may consider incorporating similar interactive, student-centered learning environments into their literacy programs to further support reading development.

In addition, the program's success underscores the importance of community collaboration in improving educational outcomes. The involvement of teachers, parents, and local stakeholders proved to be a critical factor in the program's success, highlighting the value of a collective approach to student learning. Schools looking to replicate the success of this program could benefit from fostering strong partnerships with parents and local organizations to ensure the sustainability and growth of their reading initiatives.

Conclusion:

The evaluation of the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam at Mabato Elementary School demonstrated that both innovations significantly improved students' reading skills and fostered a supportive, engaging learning environment. The data gathered from pre- and post-assessments, teacher and student feedback, and observations revealed positive changes in reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and fluency. Students not only gained important literacy skills but also developed greater enthusiasm and confidence in reading, a crucial factor for long-term academic success.

The integration of interactive, hands-on activities in the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam was instrumental in promoting student engagement and motivation. These reading spaces provided a creative and enjoyable setting where students could strengthen their literacy skills while having fun, which in turn helped to increase their participation and progress. Teacher feedback confirmed that the program enhanced instructional practices and allowed for the development of new strategies to engage struggling readers, further benefiting the overall learning experience.

While the program yielded considerable success, certain challenges, such as time constraints and ensuring consistent student engagement, were identified. These challenges suggest areas for future improvement, including optimizing the use of time and providing more targeted support for students who require additional assistance.

Ultimately, the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam have proven to be effective tools in improving literacy outcomes at Mabato Elementary School. The success of these innovations underscores the importance of creating interactive, student-centered learning spaces that promote community collaboration and teacher-student engagement. These findings provide a strong foundation for expanding and replicating similar initiatives in other schools, with the potential to significantly improve reading proficiency and cultivate a lifelong love for reading in Filipino learners. In conclusion, the Reading Park and Payag sa Kaalam represent valuable contributions to the enhancement of literacy education at Mabato Elementary School and beyond. The continued development of such innovative programs will be crucial in addressing the ongoing challenges faced by students in the Philippines and helping them achieve better literacy outcomes.

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