

Factors Affecting Learners' Reading Proficiency In Classes Among Rural Elementary Schools

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Abstract — The study is aimed at determining the factors affecting pupil's reading proficiency in elementary schools. A descriptive-survey method of research was used in this study. The study utilized one (1) public elementary school, the San Juan Elementary School of Agdao, Davao City. The results revealed that the factor that significantly affects the reading proficiency is the teacher factor. The study concluded that the identified factors considered had a significant effect on the reading proficiency of the learners in classes. On the learners' information variable, the study revealed that gender, age, and family income do not affect the reading ability of the learners because the respondents of the study are from far- flung barangays and that this profile does not have any intervention as reflected in the PHIL-IRI test results. It was also found out that only teacher factor and pupil factor adversely affected the reading proficiency of the pupils. Further, it is recommended that the teachers who are considered as molders of the pupils' competencies especially on the ability to read, should find ways to bridge this gap by providing a lot of reading materials to the pupils and let the pupils borrow them for the parents or any of the family members to have a guide in teaching reading at home.

Keywords — Reading proficiency, elementary learners, teacher factor, descriptive-survey design

I. Introduction

Notably, children of today are the builders of the nation tomorrow and they are going to be the pillars of the country. Hence it is essential to ensure that each pillar is strong and to make it strong this needs education. Reading and writing serves as the major foundational skill for all school-based education. Family background is a powerful agent in creating the learning environment in which children are reared. Children with reading and writing difficulties still behave and perform many activities in a normal way due to their normal intelligence, but due to their surrounding environment, they may fail in scholastic skills and unknowingly undergo severe punishment by parents and sometimes by teachers (Snow et.al. 2019).

In addition, it is also mandated to protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and shall take appropriate steps to make such educational opportunities accessible to all. The latter mandate gave rise to new directions of the Philippine educational system by introducing new thrusts to promote the welfare of the students, teachers and administrators as well as to improve the entire system of education in the country. And thus,

reforms were initiated by the education sector and redirected the objectives of the system towards equity, quality, relevance and efficiency.

Consequently, the state established three pillars in the Philippine educational system, namely; the Department of Education (DepEd) for the basic education; the Technical Education and Skills Development authority (TESDA) for vocational and technical training; the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) for the tertiary or the higher level of learning. In response to the mandate of fostering patriotism, nationalism, accelerating social progress and promoting total human liberation and development, DepEd divided basic education into the elementary level and the secondary level. The former is responsible in instilling the sense of nationhood in the critical years of the child by developing Filipino civic and social values. The latter stage expands and enriches what was learned in the elementary stage including the learning of employable gainful skills and preparing the individual for tertiary education.

In effect, the Department of Education (DepEd) continues to find ways to bring children to school in order to complete their basic education, to equip the school-age population and young adults with skills, knowledge and values is to become caring, self-reliant, productive and patriotic citizens; to develop among learners the basic competencies in literacy and numeracy, the critical and learning skills and to be socially aware, patriotic and responsible citizens. It also supervises all basic institutions both public and private for the establishment and maintenance of complete, adequate and integrated system of education for which are relevant to the goals of national development.

One of the strategies adopted by the DepEd is the holding of multi-grade classes. A multi-grade class consists of two or more different grade levels inside a single-grade classroom handled by one teacher for an entire school year. This is offered in elementary schools located in distant and sparsely populated localities in the country. According to the former Secretary of Education, Armin Luistro (Philippine Daily Inquirer. 2011) that most of the learners attending multi-grade classes are learners who belonged to the isolated and financially challenged communities, are indigenous people, and are residents in far flung mountain communities and islands where schools are far apart from each other. This strategy of multi-grade classes, former Sec. Armin Luistro added, is part of the DepEd thrusts which is to democratize access to education and make the learning experience inclusive to as many sectors.

Unfortunately, many children struggle with reading. Difficulties in reading are commonplace. The 2021 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading Report Card shows that 69% of the 4th graders in this country do not read proficiently and 36% could not even read at a basic level. Even many of the much more optimistic individual state testing results commonly show 40% failure rates. The adult literacy data shows 50% of the adults in this country are in the lowest literacy levels 1 and 2 that lack necessary literacy skills to find and keep decent jobs. The bottom line is reading difficulties are commonplace.

Reading is difficult for many individuals. Your student is NOT alone with his or her reading difficulties! Romero and Romero (2019) appreciated that “reading is worth ones’ effort, worth the little expense it may entail if any to make us well-informed, gaining access to various areas of knowledge and learning of employable gainful skills in promoting total human liberation and development. In addition, Chall (2019) gives a variety of reasons why reading is fundamental in surviving today’s society, namely; as a vital skill in finding a job, develops the minds and imagination to be creative and help one to discover new things.

Moreover, reading is important because words spoken and written are building blocks of what we become in the future. Peoples, families, relationships and even cooperation of nations are built from words. Thompson et al. (2019), remarked that, “reading proficiency, as an ability founded in school, cannot be taken for granted, for the access to words to make sense depends on the reader's interest and intelligence to understand and comprehend which draw the reality of a reader to be strong or weak. This ability, McGinnis (2019) added, depends on the influence of the many factors surrounding the learner which include the teacher factor, learner factor, environment factor and home factor. These causal factors may be related to each other as was observed by Aranda (2019). “Family members who have good reading habits are those with enough reading materials available at home, thus, giving great influence on the learner’s reading motivation. Those who are motivated to read can easily understand and comprehend their lessons much more when the teacher manifests the same motivation too.”

There are public schools where multigrade classes exist because some areas have limited class populations, especially those in the far flung barangays. This is done in cognizance and in keeping with rights of equal opportunities and the constitutional mandate of Education for All (EFA). The National Achievement Tests (NAT) in 2018 revealed that the combination classes of schools in San Juan Elementary school showed poor performance which was way below the national passing percentage of 75%. The same performance was shown in the District Reading Test. The poor performance was attributed to the decrease in the Mean Percentage Scores (MPS) in English and Filipino most especially in reading skills and in the absence of critical thinkers are reflected in the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (PHIL-IRI) test result.

The researcher, as a teacher of Grade III in one of the schools of the San Roque District of Agdao, Davao City would like to undertake a research and investigate the factors that affect learner’s reading proficiency. Likewise, it will also determine which of the factors influence most the reading proficiency of the learners, so that through the findings of the investigation, the teacher can devise a technique how the learners can be helped in developing their reading skill and abilities, with an end in view of improving their reading performance and in creating a positive attitude towards reading.

This study is conducted in San Juan Elementary School of Agdao District, Davao City. The respondents to this study are the learners of Grade 3 numbering about 300. Since the respondents

are all minors, an informed consent was signed by parents who permitted their children to participate in the study.

Observers of rural education research have termed it “scant,” noting that the area has received much less attention than urban education (Sherwood, 2019). The most comprehensive recent review of research on rural education is undoubtedly that of Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, and Dean (2019). Systematically examining studies that appeared over a number of years, Arnold and associates developed a research agenda for rural school improvement including improving students’ “opportunity to learn,” promoting teacher quality and professional development, and strengthening the capacity of rural schools and districts to improve student achievement.

In a rather provocative exchange, commentators challenged this agenda, implying that it ignored the “meaningfulness” of rural life (Howley, Theobald, & Howley, 2019). In a response, one of the original authors and a colleague restated the underlying premise of their review:

All children and schools, including those in rural settings, deserve access to the very best information about high-quality and effective schooling.... It is no longer adequate, in this day and age of research sophistication, to argue the value and success of rural education based solely on belief in and passion for rural communities. Nor is it adequate to argue that rural education is too unique to be the subject of rigorous research, or that scientific inquiry and sound decision making are not relevant to rural education and communities. We must move beyond these beliefs and philosophical conjectures toward more rigorous research-based knowledge that gives us the information needed to direct and improve rural educational systems (Cicchinelli & Dean, 2019).

The present work shares this philosophical orientation and research aim, focusing on the improvement of reading skills of elementary students in rural settings.

Reading Research. Reading experts stress that early development of reading has a long-term impact on a child’s future. Some (Stanovich, 2019) have used the term “Matthew effect,” using the Biblical quotation that the “rich get richer and the poor get poorer,” to describe the cumulative effects of good or poor reading skills on later academic success. A large body of empirical evidence demonstrates that children who can read fluently in first grade have much more success throughout their school careers. Early reading fluency results in exposure to much greater volume of material, and thus also produces a strikingly greater accumulation of vocabulary, language skills, and general knowledge (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2019; Gough & Juel, 2021; Juel, 2019; Stanovich, 2019)

An even larger body of research, spanning several decades, has documented the importance of systematic and explicit instruction in promoting reading achievement. In a review of the literature, Arrasmith (2022) defined explicit reading instruction as being unambiguous and clear, leaving a student “no need for inference or difficulty in understanding instruction.” Examples of strategies used in such programs include clear instructional targets, modeling, guided and independent practice with corrections, and assessments embedded within the instruction.

Arrasmith defines systematic curriculum as a “logical, research-based sequence of educational activities.” Systematic curricula include a comprehensive scope and strategic sequence of instruction, and a consistent instructional format. Individual studies as well as extensive meta-analyses show that curricula that embody these elements consistently produce larger achievement gains (Murphy, 2019; Smith et al., 2021; Snider, 2020; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 2019; Stanovich, 2019).

This analysis focuses on the implementation of one well-established systematic and explicit reading program, Reading Mastery (RM), which is part of the Direct Instruction (DI) corpus of curricula. The DI model was first developed about four decades ago based on work with preschoolers in an “at-risk” population (Engelmann, 2018). All DI programs seek efficiency and effectiveness of instruction through program design, organization of instruction, and positive student-teacher interaction. The approach attempts to control all the major variables that impact student learning through the placement and grouping of students into instructional groups, the rate and type of examples presented by the teacher, the wording that teachers use to teach specific concepts and skills, the frequency and type of review of material introduced, the assessment of students’ mastery of material covered, and the responses by teachers to students’ attempts to learn the material.

The programs are constructed according to a small-step design that teaches isolated skills and concepts in separate tracks that are systematically integrated with skills and concepts in other tracks in increasingly sophisticated applications. For this reason, lessons do not focus on a single skill or topic. Instead, only about 10% of a lesson’s contents are new. The rest of the lesson is devoted to reviewing and applying skills and concepts that were introduced in previous lessons. Placement in the program is a critical factor in the program’s success as appropriate placement allows students to learn new concepts and skills each day (Collins & Carnine, 2019; Engelmann, 2019; Engelman & Carnine, 2019; Gersten, Darch, & Gleason, 2019; Huit, Monetti, & Hummel, 2019). A number of meta-analytic studies indicate that students who receive reading instruction in this approach have higher levels of reading achievement and stronger growth in reading skills over time than students in other curricula. These results appear with all of the measures typically used to measure reading achievement, including reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2019; Hattie, 2019; Herman et al., 2019).

This study is anchored from the Schema Theory by Rummelhart as cited by Ortony (2019) which gives an overview on how information is shaped and stored into the readers’ mind through reading. The theory expounded that any text spoken or written does not by itself carry meaning. This text only provides directions as to how a reader should retrieve or construct meaning from previously acquired knowledge. Comprehending words, sentences, and the entire texts requires the ability to relate the materials to one’s own stored knowledge. Effective reading is a combination of the non-visual information already stored or organized in the brain and the present visual information printed on the page.

The Schema Theory is supported by the Field Theory of Kurt Lewin, as mentioned by Tulio (2020), which advocated that to predict a behavior, the person and his environment have to be considered as one constellation of independent factors. The notion of field refers to (a) all aspects of individuals in relationship with his surroundings and conditions, (b) the apparent influence to a particular behavior by the individual's needs and personality, and (c) the individual's motivating forces at a particular point in time. In this theory, Lewin postulated that any behavior is the result of the equilibrium between driving and restraining forces in the field where the individual is situated. The increase of the driving forces might increase the performance of a given behavior and the increase of the restraining forces decreases the performance of a given behavior. Thus, to maintain the equilibrium for a given behavior one has to decrease the restraining forces found in the environment to have the continuum of a behavior.

Based on the two theories, the learner's reading proficiency is the particular behavior the child needs to achieve and the field of combination classes the Grade III learners are in.

The schematic diagram on the next page showed the conceptual flow of the study anchored from the theories of Rummelhart's Schema Theory cited by Ortony (2019) and of Kurt Lewin's Field Theory cited by Tulio (2020). The learner's ability in reading as shown in their reading proficiency performance in the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory conducted yearly to all grades one to four learners in all public elementary schools in the country. The result gives an overview on how reading ability is shaped and stored into the readers' mind through the teachers.

The theory expounded that any text spoken or written does not by itself carry significant meaning, but the comprehension or understanding of what is being read. This text only provides directions as to how a reader should retrieve or construct meaning from previously acquired knowledge. Comprehending words, sentences, and the entire texts requires the ability to relate the materials to one's own stored knowledge. The selected factors which included the teacher, learner, environment and the home are the forces that influence the reading proficiency of the learners in the field of reading performance of the Grades III in the San Juan Elementary School in Agdao District, Davao City. Any of these selected factors can be a driving force or a restraining force as mentioned in the Field Theory of Kurt Lewin. This study investigated which of the factors can be the driving force or the restraining force which equilibrium resulted to the reading ability of the learners.

The diagram shows the independent and dependent variables of the study and its expected effect. The independent variables are the selected factors consisting of the teacher factors, the learner factor, the environment factor and the home factor. These factors are independent because they stimulate the dependent variable which is the reading proficiency.

The gender, age and the family income of the learners and the age, sex, educational attainment, teaching experience and relevant trainings of the teachers are taken into consideration in the study because these can also be forces which equilibrium result into the behavior of the

learners and teachers which are considered too as factors affecting the reading proficiency. The learner's and the teacher's profiles were seen by the researcher as the intervening variables that could interfere with the relationship of the factors and the reading proficiency of the Grades III classes of schools in San Juan Elementary School, Agdao District, Division of Davao City.

II. Methodology

The study made use of the descriptive-survey design. The said design according to Good and Scates as cited in Seleger and Shohamy (2021) is an appropriate design whenever the objects of any class vary among themselves and one is interested in knowing the extent to which different conditions affect these objects. The word survey signifies the gathering of data regarding the present conditions. In this study the researcher wanted to determine which of the factors affect the pupils reading proficiency using a survey questionnaire.

The study was conducted to the classes of Grades III of San Juan Elementary School in the Agdao District of the Division of Davao City. This school is located in the barangay of Agdao, Davao City. The classrooms of these classes were typical to a public elementary school of the DepEd. It was situated in a crowded area and the security of the classroom was not very good, the teachers were hesitant to leave their teaching materials and visual aids in the classroom, though the rooms were well ventilated and free from disturbances. The teachers handling the classes were mostly not from the barangay itself but from other parts of the city who used to go to school driving their own motorcycle or were sent off by their spouses. The school was usually supervised by a principal. The respondents of the study were all the Grades III learners in classes and all the teachers handling the classes.

The instrument used in the study was patterned from a standardized questionnaire by Weigfield and Guthrie (2017) and the teacher questionnaire based from the International Education Association (IEA) Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS, 2006) and international research project sponsored by the International Association for Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IAEEA). The said questionnaires which the researcher had patterned were slightly modified or revised to suit the Philippine setting and the comprehension of the respondents. The revised and modified adopted questionnaire underwent strict evaluation and review by the panel before it was pilot tested in Agdao District. Permission was granted by the supervisor of the District for the researcher to conduct the dry-run of the questionnaire to 15 teachers of the pupils each from Grades III.

The raw data from the pilot test conducted was then brought by the researcher to her adviser who after seeing them advised the researcher to bring the said raw data to the assigned statistician. The assigned statistician interpreted the responses and tested the validity by means of the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient with a validity result of 0.916 interpreted as valid and reliable. The questionnaire for the parents of the pupils was with vernacular translation for better understanding of what is

being asked. The researcher humbly asked the Phil- IRI results from the district supervisor and then submitted it to the statistician together with the data gathered from the respondents of the different instruments.

To determine the reading level of the pupils, the following computation is used:

- A. Word Recognition (WR): $\frac{\text{No. of major miscue (M)}}{\text{No. of words in the passage (N)}} \times 100 = \% \text{ of M}$
 $\% \text{ correct} = 100\% - \% \text{ of M}$
- B. Comprehension (C): $\frac{\text{No. of correct answers}}{\text{No. of questions}} \times 100 = \% \text{ of CR}$

The Phil-IRI Oral Test Criteria used:
 Word Recognition

Level	WR		Comprehension
Independent	97-100%	and	80% - 100%
Instructional	90- 96%	and	59% - 79%
Frustration	89 below	or	58% - below

In answering specific questions on the factors of reading and on the reading proficiency level of the pupils which are questions no. 1 & 2, the researcher utilized the weighted mean. While the percentage with rank was used in answering questions no. 3 which are for the information variables of the learners. And in answering questions no. 4 & 5 which are questions on relationships, the Pearson Product Moment Coefficient of Correlation (r) was employed.

III. Results and Discussion

Reading proficiency of learners in reference to frustration level, instruction level, and independence level

The results showed that of the 321 grade 3 tested, most pupils belong to frustration level. This implies that there were only a few respondents who were proficient in reading. Thus, this further implies that the learners in the classes of San Juan Elementary School, Agdao District mostly belong to the frustration level and that they need closed supervision and follow-up by their teachers and parents in order to become a proficient reader.

Factors in reading of learners in terms of teacher factor, pupil factor, environment factor, and home factor

There are four factors in the study identified to have influenced the reading proficiency of the pupils. These are teacher factor, pupil factor, environment factor, and home factor and are

treated one after the other based on their frequency. The result implies that the identified factors had a different frequency level or degree of influence because each factor is assumed to have relevance and has a material effect on the pupil's reading proficiency. Teacher Factor assumes the biggest rank and has the most influence on the learners' reading proficiency.

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Information variables of learners in terms of gender, age, and family income

. It showed that out of 321 respondents, 50.47% were females and 49.53% were males. This implies that the majority of the respondents were females because based on the ratio of males to females, it was evident that males were fewer than females. Sex was relevant in this study because it has been observed that females love reading more than males.

The highest age of the pupils was 10 years old because of the 321 respondents, it was 28.08% and the lowest age of the pupils was 8 years old because it was only 5.05% of the total population. The common age of the pupils who belong to grade III were 10 years old. Age matters in this study because the bigger the age of the pupils the more mature he is in grasping the lesson and the readier he is in learning the lesson depends upon his maturity and most of the time this was determined by his age.

Results show that most of the respondents have an income of below 5,000 which is 76.92% of the total population because these respondents are from far flung barangays. This implies that most of the pupils were poor because their parents had low income. The source of livelihood in this area where the combination classes were located was just farming and so it is evident that their income was only 5,000 and below. However, there were also pupils whose parents had a family income of 20,000 and above or 1.58% of the total respondents because the occupations of these parents were Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW).

Significant relationship between the factors of reading and the reading proficiency of learners

Based on the result on the t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means computation, it showed that the teacher factor, pupil factor had a low degree to negative correlation on the pupils reading proficiency while environment factor and home factor have no correlation on the pupil's reading proficiency. This implies that these two factors were highly correlated to the reading proficiency of the pupils.

In other words, the more frequent were the factors affecting reading the higher was the proficiency and the less were the factors affecting reading the lower was the proficiency. It was found out that environment factor as one of the variables in this investigation had little effect on the reading proficiency of the pupils because it showed low degree to positive correlation.

Discussion

A strong relationship between the Department of Education and rural schools is also important. Teachers should be assisted through training by the Department of Education on how to teach and assess reading. This could be accomplished by offering an early grade reading assessment tool to aid teachers in assessing learners' reading development at various intervals.

In addition, there are literacy intervention programs sponsored by the Department of Education at public schools. Programs like this should be introduced to the rural communities to support the rural schools. A strong relationship between the school and parents is recommended. As the results of the study revealed that the majority of parents are not educated, the schools should organize parents' meetings where the importance of reading at home is emphasized. This could be achieved by emphasizing the role of the community versus the individual family. There should be a reading community service that assists learners after school. This community mini-library should hire local people who could assist as librarians and should allow local learners to borrow reading material.

IV. Conclusion

The factors affecting pupils' reading proficiency, based on the result of the study, are highly laid in the hands of a teacher. Therefore, it can be said that teachers are the most important and the most potent tool in the education system. With the furor over teachers and education growing annually, it would be good to take a long, hard look at the future, to see what must be done to attract bright, creative, and talented men and women to the teaching profession.

One good place to start is to elevate the pay structure of teachers to a respectable level of livelihood, and place the welfare of the teachers in the top of the priorities of the government that will help attract the cream-of-the-crop individuals to the teaching profession. In this case, the pupil's reading proficiency would somehow be improved and the result of this study would be changed from frustration level to independent level. And if this independent level in reading is achieved, that would be the time to say that the pupils can be competent in their other subjects and in the end they can have a better performance in the school.

The age, gender, and family income of the pupils in this study are not the determining factors in achieving reading proficiency as found in this study because the respondents of this investigation were from far flung barangays and that they have no access to reading materials in

the environment, and in the home. But when they have no school, pupils of these classes were used to run errands by their parents like gathering firewood, baby sitting with their younger brothers and sisters, tending their tamed animals in the meadow, weeding and tilling the soil in the farm, and some were doing the laundry. So there were really no other avenues for them to engage in reading except when they were in school.

Another reason for this is that most parents do not have follow-up with the reading progress of their children in school. Thus, the low reading proficiency results of the respondents of this study were all attributed to the home and environment factor because they have not done any intervention to improve the reading proficiency of their children. That is why pupils also despite their age, gender, and family income were not also aware or even cared to aspire good performance in reading.

Teaching performance of the teacher in teaching reading is influenced by his educational qualification and experience. Therefore, the more experienced the teacher, the better the performance. The higher educational qualification a teacher has the more strategy and techniques he has in teaching reading.

In the context of the study, the author (researcher) believes that literacy is a strategy for improving rural life and a weapon to fight poverty. The results of this study identified factors that may be regarded as barriers to learners' reading performance. Having this information is likely to assist the key stakeholders who are responsible for the reading performance of learners in rural schools. The stakeholders are parents, teachers, and the Department of Education. The author argues that the reading performance of rural learners requires a strong parent-teacher interaction. Teachers as professional partners are expected to play a major role in establishing this relationship. Teachers are encouraged to discover creative ways to involve parents in their children's reading. It seems this can be accomplished by keeping parents informed about their children's reading struggles and successes. As a result, frequent communication between the teacher and the parent is likely to keep parents informed about what is going on at school with regard to the child's reading performance. Teachers should not just communicate bad information about learners' reading performance with parents; good information about learners' progress should also be shared with parents so that parents can celebrate their children's accomplishments.

The author believes that discussing a learner's accomplishment in reading can help to establish a positive connection, so that for example when a teacher has to disclose something unpleasant it is less damaging to the parent-teacher-learner relationship. Teachers are more likely to stay in touch with parents if they share progress reports about their children's reading achievement. The author believes that collaboration should be encouraged not only between parents and teachers, but also among parents. Teachers, for example, could help foster the link between illiterate and literate parents so that the literate parents can assist the illiterate parents' children. This could be useful for parents who are neighbors.

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Investigating Teachers' Perceptions Of Information And Communication Technology (ICT) Integration In Language Teaching: Issues And Challenges

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Abstract — At a minimum, learning in the 21st century requires the integration of ICT. Despite the need for ICT established in different literatures, this seems not to translate to actual usage in classrooms. Using qualitative-phenomenological research design, this study investigated teachers' perception of the integration of information and communication technology or ICT in language instruction, with emphasis on the issues and challenges that may arise during the integration. Purposive sampling was used to identify teachers who were interviewed using a researcher-made and validated questionnaire. The study found that language teachers generally have a positive outlook on ICT integration in language teaching. However, it should also be noted that interviewed teachers expressed concern about equity and access. Even with a generally positive perception of the integration of ICT in language teaching of language teachers, they emphasized the concerns about the availability of ICT materials and resources inside the classroom. The language teachers' perspective implicated the readiness and willingness to incorporate technology into the classroom. This may be considered an important springboard for the effective integration of ICT into language instruction. This poses a challenge to allocate resources in providing information and communication technology upgrades to schools.

Keywords — : *Information and Communications Technology, language teaching, ICT integration in language*

I. Introduction

Information and communication technology (ICT) is becoming a crucial instrument in education, especially when teaching languages. As pointed out by Ghavifekr (2015) ICT integration will help teachers meet the global need for technology-based teaching and learning tools and facilities in place of traditional teaching techniques.

Ghavifekr (2015) reported that in Malaysia ICT is considered as one of the key components that will alter the nation for future growth. As a matter of fact, the Ministry of Education has

included the value of technology-based teaching and learning in the national curriculum for schools in its most recent Education Blueprint (2013-2025).

One of the significant benefits of ICT integration in language teaching is its ability to enhance student engagement. According to Gikas and Grant (2013), the use of ICT tools, such as interactive whiteboards, online games, and multimedia, can help students stay focused and motivated during lessons. As from the words of Kuo (2009) ICT tools can provide opportunities to motivate learners, which can improve student participation and elevate interest in learning.

Another advantage of ICT integration in language teaching is that it prepares students for life in the 21st century. Students that master ICT skills are prepared to take on issues in the future with the right understanding (Grimus, 2000). According to Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000), the usage of ICT can aid students in gaining the skills necessary for the present globalization. This is due to the fact that ICT may support students in expanding their knowledge and information, improving their motivation, and developing their abilities (Grabe & Grabe, 2007; Hussain et al., 2011).

Thamarana (2017) conducted a research study of 85 English instructors in India to determine their attitudes regarding the usage of ICTs in the classroom. The study's findings show that 47.06% of male and female respondents agreed with the claim that ICT will have an impact on how students learn English in the classroom.

Despite the numerous benefits of ICT integration in language teaching, there are also several challenges that teachers may encounter. One significant challenge is the lack of technical skills and training among teachers (Gikas & Grant, 2013). Tondeur, et al. (2007) claims that there is a gap between the proposed ICT curriculum at the macro-level and the actual use of ICT in the classroom. This demonstrates that the aspirations of national educational authorities to foster ICT integration in schools do not easily result in concrete changes in instructional practices at class level. Teachers need to be proficient in using ICT tools to effectively integrate them into language teaching. However, not all teachers have access to adequate training and support in using these tools (Abel, et al., 2022).

The possible distraction that ICT gadgets may provide is another difficulty. During class, students could be enticed to utilize their gadgets for non-educational activities like social networking or gaming (Manzoor, 2023). Due to the potential detrimental effects on learning and engagement, teachers may need to closely supervise how their students use technology in the classroom.

The confluence of both positive and negative benefits of ICT integration in language teaching leads one to reflect on some teachers' adavance toward its classroom application. The study of Merillo, et al. (2019) is an exemplification of this. Despite the study's findings of the positive teachers' attitudes toward ICT usage in language teaching, it recommended further research on investigating the factors or challenges hindering teachers from incorporating ICT in

instructions (Merillo, et al., 2019). Additionally, Abel, et al. (2022) said that the perspectives of teachers are essential for successful ICT integration and a key factor in determining whether or not they use technology in the classroom.

This study aimed to investigate teachers' perception of the integration of information and communication technology or ICT in language instruction, with emphasis on the issues and challenges that may arise during the integration. The study's goal is to investigate how different elements, such as teachers' technical proficiency, pedagogical understanding, and stakeholder support, influence how they see the use of ICT in language instruction.

Additionally, the purpose of this research is to explore the manner in which various variables, such as teachers' technical proficiency, pedagogical understanding, and stakeholder support, influence how they see the use of ICT in language instruction.

Finally, this study seeks to identify the difficulties instructors have when incorporating ICT into language instruction and how they overcome them.

ICT Integration in Education. Mahboudi, et al. (2017) articulated that a new generation of learners who have acquired information and communication technology (ICT) since childhood has carved space into educational centers, and what sets them apart from the generation of learners that came before them and their teachers is their use of ICT. Prensky (2001) added that this difference was so significant that the nature of education itself must fundamentally change to accommodate the skills and interests of these new breeds of learners, he regards as digital natives.

The rapid rise of ICT over the last two decades has made it one of the most important topics of debate among researchers of education because ICT may foster a dynamic and progressive teaching and learning environment (Ghavifekr, et al., 2014). In the past years, ICT's rapid development has helped with improving education quality by incorporating the Learning Management System. This is because in most nations, technology has replaced traditional means of information sharing. The way people think, work, and live has completely altered as a result of advancements made possible by technology integration today (Grabe, 2007).

In education, Ghavifekr and Wan (2015) defined integration of Information, Communication, and Technology (ICT) as that pertaining to the use of computer-based or computer-based communication that incorporates into the daily classroom instructional process. Additionally, the concept generally means technology-based teaching and learning process that closely relates to the utilization of learning technologies in schools (Ghavifekr & Wan, 2015). Meanwhile, Ghavifekr, et al (2014) articulated that Integration of ICT in education refers to the incorporation of information and communication technology (ICT) in the teaching and learning process. This involves the use of modern tools and facilities to provide a dynamic and proactive learning environment. The aim is to improve the quality of education by enhancing the teaching and learning process through the use of technology. This includes the use of computers, software,

networks, satellite links, and related systems that allow people to access, analyze, create, exchange, and use data, information, and knowledge in ways that were almost unimaginable.

Similarly, Tondeur, et al. (2006) defined the concept of integration of ICT in education as that referring to the use of technology, such as computers, tablets, and other digital devices, to enhance teaching and learning". The goal is to create a more interactive and engaging learning environment that prepares students for the digital age. This can involve using educational software, online resources, and multimedia tools to support student learning. This is somewhat synonymous with the definition of ICT integration in education by Mahboudi et al., (2016) which says that the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as computers, tablets, smartphones, and the internet to enhance teaching and learning processes. Their study further explains that said concept can include using digital tools for research, collaboration, communication, multimedia presentations, and online assessments. The ultimate aim of ICT integration is to improve the quality of education by making it more engaging, interactive, and accessible to students.

Jamieson-Procter et al., (2013) ICT integration in schools, specifically in classrooms, is vital because of the fact that students are familiar with technology and they will learn better within a technology-based environment. This means that using technology in education makes a significant contribution to the pedagogical aspects, where the use of ICT will result in effective learning with the aid and support of ICT elements and components (Jamieson-Procter et al., 2013). Jorge et al., (2003) claims that technology-based tools and equipment help students study nearly all subject areas, including mathematics, physics, languages, the arts, and other important topics. Moreover, ICT offers assistance and supplementary support for both instructors and students when it comes to successful learning using computers as learning aids (Jorge et al., 2003).

The review on the application of computers in education inside and outside of Iran by Mahboudi, et al. (2016) enumerated several benefits of integration of ICT can bring to the teaching and learning process in schools. Some of the benefits include: (1) Improved student engagement: This means that the use of digital tools such as multimedia presentations, interactive simulations, and educational games can make learning more engaging and interactive for students. (2) Enhanced collaboration: ICT tools such as online discussion forums, wikis, and shared documents can facilitate collaboration among students and between students and teachers. (3) Increased access to information: The internet provides a vast amount of information that can be used for research and learning purposes. (4) Personalized learning: ICT tools can be used to tailor instruction to individual student needs, interests, and abilities.

Tondeur, et al. (2006) added that the use of ICT in education has several potential benefits. Some of these potential benefits are improved student engagement and motivation, enhanced learning outcomes and academic achievement, increased access to educational resources and information, more personalized learning experiences, and improved teacher professional development opportunities.

Moreover, Finger & Trinidad, (2002) communicated that ICT may be applied in a variety of ways to enhance teaching and learning in a variety of topic areas. This means that a technology-based approach to teaching and learning provides a variety of engaging methods, such as educational videos, stimulation, data storage, database use, mind-mapping, guided discovery, brainstorming, music, and the World Wide Web (www), will enhance and deepen the learning experience.

Although several researches present positive influence of ICT in education, it should be noted that the effectiveness of ICT integration in education depends on several factors, including the quality of teacher training and support, the availability of resources, and the development of a shared vision for how ICT should be used in the classroom (Tondeur, et al., 2008).

In addition, Dudeney (2010) said that technology-based teaching and learning can make many changes in the classroom only if proper planning and policy making are placed. In the same vein, Chan (2002) said that national ICT policies can serve several crucial purposes. Such important functions include provision of a rationale to a set of goals, and a vision of how education systems run if ICT is integrated into teaching and learning process, and they can be beneficial to students, teachers, parents and the general population of a given country. She further cited Malaysian policy under the Ministry of Education on ICT integration which revolves around three policies. The first policy insists that all students are given the opportunity to use ICT. This is aimed to reduce the digital gap amongst the schools. The second policy focuses on the role and function played by ICT in education. Besides that, the third policy stressed the use of ICT for accessing information, communication, and as a productivity tool (Chan, 2002).

Moreover, Mahboudi, et al., (2008) identified several factors that can contribute to the effectiveness of ICT integration in education. These include: (1) Adequate infrastructure which means that schools need to have access to reliable electricity, internet connectivity, and appropriate hardware and software to support ICT integration. (2) Teacher training which pertains to teachers' need to be trained on how to effectively use ICT tools in their teaching practices. (3) Curriculum alignment which refers to the use of ICT tools which should be aligned with the curriculum goals and learning objectives. (4) Student-centered approach which refer to the necessity to be student-centered of the ICT tools. This means that they should be used to facilitate active learning, collaboration, and critical thinking. (5) Ongoing evaluation which necessitates that the effectiveness of ICT integration should be regularly evaluated through formative and summative assessments.

Consequently, the failure of ICT integration in education may depend on the following reason. These reasons include the lack of infrastructure, insufficient teacher training, resistance to change, inadequate curriculum alignment, and lack of evaluation.

The study of Peeraer and Van Petegem (2012) claims that to ensure successful ICT integration in primary schools, it must be emphasized that promoting better learning outcomes

depends heavily on teachers. Thus, it was recommended in the study of Hamidi et al., (2011) teachers of today should always be ready and well-equipped with ICT competencies and must have a positive attitude toward providing ICT-based learning opportunities for students to improve their learning quality.

Sabiri (2019) added one of the most challenging issues for ICT integration was the lack of time to cover the syllabus and the appropriate use of ICT. The contradiction of opinions between the teachers and student-teachers was found as another impediment for integrating ICT into teacher training programs.

Mahboudi, et al. (2017) found that teachers are frequently considered to be the most important influence on classroom learning and, as such, play an invaluable role in ensuring that pupils use ICT effectively inside the school. Consequently, the study recommended that Iranian EFL teachers are advised to consider what the computer industry offers for their classrooms, and should consequently motivate their students to use them efficiently and wisely after necessary training.

The study of Al-Senaidi, Lin, and Poirot (2009) about the “Barriers to adopting technology for teaching and learning in Oman” found that teachers’ confidence, access to ICT, inappropriate training, lack of time to use technology properly, technical faults as serious determinants to ICT integration. Moreover, the study of Ghavifekr, et al. (2015) recommended that further studies can be made based on what barriers teachers are facing in using ICT in their daily classrooms in schools.

Language Learning and ICT Education. Language learning, as defined in the study of Jeong, et al. (2021), refers to the process of acquiring a new language or improving one’s proficiency in a language that is not their native tongue. This can involve learning the grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and other aspects of the language, as well as developing skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Language learning can take place in a variety of settings, including classrooms, online courses, immersion programs, and social interactions with native speakers.

The study by Otroshi and Bourdet (2012), enumerated several positive effects of the use of ICT in language learning which can include: (1) Increased motivation which can be achieved by the use of digital tools such as multimedia presentations, educational games, and online discussion forums that can make language learning more engaging and motivating for students. (2) Enhanced collaboration which can be attested by how ICT tools such as wikis, shared documents, and video conferencing can facilitate collaboration among students and between students and teachers. (3) Improved language skills. This pertains to the effective use of ICT tools such as speech recognition software, online dictionaries, and language learning apps that can help students to improve their language skills. (4) Personalized learning. ICT tools can be used to tailor instruction to individual student needs, interests, and abilities. Lastly, increased access to authentic materials: This pertains

to the use of a vast amount of authentic materials such as news articles, videos, and podcasts for language learning purposes.

The study of Panangalage & Pasqual (2008) found that ICT also benefits students by developing their confidence in using ICT and developing competency to be more successful in the future high technological world and Ahmadi, Keshavarzi, & Foroutan, 2011 said benefits include positive significance of ICT in student learning achievement in subjects such as Mathematics, Science, and English Language.

Huong Thi Bao Dinh (2015) noted that English as a Foreign Language teachers used ICT in general for powerpoint and word processors and sometimes as language dictionaries and online videos to support their teaching. Unfortunately, the use of ICT as tutorials and drills as web-based activities was very low. Worth noting further that most of the faculty had never used any online communication tool or channel to assist their teaching and students' learning, though they used ICT for email communication.

Chan (2002) reported that in the Malaysian Policy of integration of ICT into schools, browser-based teaching-learning materials in English language was included in its pilot-project, she concluded the success of such project depends on the support from many stakeholders, including all agencies in the educational system and sufficient funds to establish and maintain ICT in the schools. She added that the continuing professional development for teachers, school heads, and other educational personnel must be instituted.

II. Methodology

Neubauer, et al., (2018) articulated that phenomenology seeks to explain the significance of the experience in terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced. In simpler terms, phenomenology, as an approach, is focused on examining the phenomena from the viewpoint of the individuals who have experienced them so as to understand their essence.

The use of phenomenological approach in this research can provide rich and detailed insights into how teachers experience and make sense of the integration of ICT in language teaching. The findings of this study can contribute to the development of more effective strategies for supporting teachers in integrating ICT into their language teaching practices.

The participants are language teachers from Paquibato District in Davao City. They are currently teaching English or Filipino in elementary schools from the said district. The schools from said district are far from the downtown of the city from which the district belongs, and the supply of electricity is expected to be intermittent and students coming from said schools have little to no access to technology. This study used purposive sampling in selecting the research participants of this study. Creswell (2008) stated that in qualitative research, the principle of purposive sampling is best applied. This indicates that the reason the researcher chooses particular

people and study locations is so that they may help clarify the research topic and the study's main phenomena.

Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling in which people are sampled because they have experience of the phenomenon being studied. Contrary to probability sampling in which each element in the population has a known nonzero chance of being selected through the use of a random selection procedure, this non-probability sampling does not involve known non-zero probabilities of selection. Subjective methods are used to decide which elements should be included in the sample. The population, further, may not be well denoted (Lavrakas, 2008).

Participants in this study included five (5) teachers who were all identified from distance classes during the pandemic. They are coded T1 for the first teacher-participant, T2 for the second teacher-participant, T3 for the third teacher-participant, T4 for the fourth teacher-participant, and T5 for the fifth teacher-participant.

III. Results and Discussion

Perception of teachers on integrating ICT in Language Teaching

This study aimed to investigate the perceptions of the perception of teachers on the integration of ICT into language teaching. Through different interviews conducted, the following were found:

1. *Positive perception of ICT integration.* Teachers have a generally positive perception of integrating ICT in language teaching. Some even believe it to be highly beneficial and transformative while some believe it can make language
2. *Integration of ICT and language teaching poses equity and access concerns.* While there are positive perceptions of the integration of ICT in language teaching, some teachers express concerns about equity and access as there are disparities in access to technology. Teachers recognized the good intentions behind the integration of ICT in language teaching, however, there remained a challenge to access and equity as some teachers admit to having limited access.
3. *Integration of ICT in language teaching enhanced learning.* ICT provides access to different ideas that could help enhance knowledge of learning capabilities among students. Teachers perceive the integration of ICT in language teaching as something that can open opportunities to develop language learning.

Perceived issues and challenges in the integration of ICT in classroom

1. *Access and equity are prevalent.* Getting the full benefit from the integration of ICT in the classroom remains distant because not everyone has access to ICT. It is worth noting that the challenges in access to ICT do not only reside in students but also teachers as some of the interviewed teachers are teaching in far-flung areas of Davao City where the stability of the supply of electricity remains an issue.
2. Issues on digital literacy and skills remained unresolved. Teachers and students' lack of access to ICT is not only the issue, the skills necessary for the effective integration is also a problem. Teachers recognized the insufficient digital and literacy skills prevalent among teachers and students. Some teachers even reported that some teachers are adamant about the use of ICT tools.
3. There is a lack of institutional support and investment. Coupled with the lack of access by some teachers is the problem of the lack of institutional support. Teachers emphasized that support and investment from institutions are important to realize the endeavor of digitalization of teaching language. A teacher interviewed even articulated that teachers and students may only be resistant to the use of ICT tools because there are no ICT tools they can use and there are no institutions that can provide it for them.

Discussion

The positive perspective of language teachers towards ICT integration in language teaching suggests that there is a readiness and willingness to incorporate technology into the classroom. This positivity can serve as a strong foundation for the effective integration of ICT into language instruction.

The idea that ICT may be revolutionary and extremely helpful for learning languages implies that educators are hopeful about the possibilities for better educational results. This suggests that ICT may improve language acquisition and make it more effective and enjoyable when used properly.

Despite the positive outlook, the expressed concerns about equity and access imply the need for strategies and policies that ensure all students have equal access to ICT resources. Addressing these concerns will be essential in making ICT integration truly inclusive.

The lack of ICT materials and resources in the classroom raises questions about whether schools and other organizations should spend money on the equipment and infrastructure needed for successful ICT integration. Ample resource allocation is necessary for the success of its implementation.

IV. Conclusion

For students who were not able to join remote classes due to a lack of internet access or devices, or because they had to take on additional jobs and home responsibilities during this time, teachers found other creative ways to connect. Many reached out via text and arranged phone calls and even some home visits with proper social distancing.

Unfortunately, creating and sustaining strong student-teacher relationships can be difficult. Even before remote learning began, the large class sizes, hectic pace of the school day, and impossibly busy student and teacher schedules often impeded the type of personal connections we know are critical to student success.

Though many students missed their extracurricular activities, some found that the reduction in structured activities, along with the shorter school day, and lack of commute, resulted not just in more sleep, but in more playtime, downtime, and family time. Time spent serves as a protective factor in keeping kids mentally and physically healthy.

In a pre-COVID world, some students didn't find out their homework for the night until class that day. During remote learning, the students appreciated being recognized as whole people with varying home lives and multiple commitments and needs.

Flexible approaches to whole class instruction can also benefit students. We heard from one student that during a class held on Zoom, the teacher shared a lesson and then dismissed students as soon as they could demonstrate that they understood the concept.

Educators have an exciting opportunity now to redesign lessons and pare learning goals down to those that are essential in each subject area. Even when students face comprehensive end-of-year exams, for example, in advanced placement courses, a deeper focus on key concepts and critical thinking skills, such as use of evidence to back a claim, logical reasoning, and clear communication, may prove more beneficial to students than covering in a more cursory way all of the possible content that might show up on the test.

All of these experiences are validated by the researcher and are likely not new to most educators. But hearing them directly from students during this potentially transformational moment for our educational system serves as an important opportunity for reflection. We encourage schools to invest time in these first few weeks of school to listen deeply to the students. Conduct a survey to find out what worked and did not work for them during remote learning. Then, embrace those learnings as you redesign and reimagine what you can offer students that best supports their journey to become balanced, healthy, and engaged learners — wherever that learning is happening.

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