

Project SEPI: Improving The Students' Reading Performance In The Brigada Bagbasa Program

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ABSTRACT: This study determined the effectiveness of Project SEPI in improving the reading performance of students at Baliwasan Senior High School during the implementation of Brigada Pagbasa program at five learning centers. The participants of the study were the 35 Grade 11 students; the top 8 performing learners in the pre-test were utilized for the qualitative part. The data were gathered through a mixed method. The quantitative one-group pretest-post-test design used the mean and paired sample t-test to measure the learners' reading performance in the treatment phases; and the qualitative part employed thematic analysis to interpret the transcribed interviews. The result showed that the oral word recognition of the students before the intervention was at frustration level. A remarkable increase was noted in the posttest where the students' oral reading performance improved. There was a significant difference in the reading performance of students before and after the implementation of the project SEPI. Lastly, the factors of reading difficulties of the learners are: learner factor, teacher factor, parent/guardian factor and language factor. The effectiveness of the project SEPI in improving the reading ability of students was their motivation to read. It was recommended that teachers may adapt the project SEPI to address the needs of the struggling readers.

KEYWORDS: Reading performance; Project SEPI; brigada pagbasa

I. CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

Brigada Pagbasa is a national reading movement that aspires to unite all education advocates and champions to help all Filipino children improve their reading abilities in the framework of collaboration. Moreover, it is a literacy program that intends to assist DepEd's ongoing enrichment and remediation efforts. It also functions as a social accountability platform that promotes community involvement and accountability by making sure that every community member is aware of their contribution to the education of the learners (DepEd Memorandum No. 062, s. 2022).

In 2019, the Department of Education (DepEd) signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with World Vision Development Foundation (WVDF) for Brigada Pagbasa Program. This is in support to the DepEd's goal to provide students' access to quality education and a partnership initiative in response to Hamon: Bawat Bata Bumabasa.

Brigada Pagbasa program is made to address the gaps in reading, because it was found out that the overall results of the national assessments of high school learners are still deficient in literacy skills, both in languages and content areas, more so in reading. The DepEd admitted, in the issuance of, that the actions put in place to improve the reading abilities of the students are still insufficient based on the results of the national assessments for learners (DM 173, s. 2019).

In the study of Hutameres (2023,1), the study found out that the posttest results of Filipino and English were significantly better than the pre-test. The number of learners under the levels of frustration (kaiguan) and instructional (instruksyunak) decreased, whereas the number of learners under the level of independent (malaya) increased. Therefore, Brigada Pagbasa is effective in improving the reading performance of the learners.

Systematic, Explicit Phonics Instruction is one of the innovations of Brigada Pagbasa as it focuses on the relationships between the letters of written language and the sounds of spoken language. Moreover, from a similar study being conducted, findings indicated that there could be an impact of phonics instruction on the reading of students who are determined to be at risk (Driesen, 2020,1). Thus, Explicit, Systematic Phonics Instruction is very beneficial to use for non-readers and struggling readers.

The Baliwasan Senior High School- Stand Alone is a pioneering, stand-alone, public secondary institution which operated on June 13, 2016. The school caters to students coming from major junior high schools (JHS) of the city and neighboring provinces.

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As a pioneering institution, the school envisions to produce well-equipped graduates who are prepared enough for the following outcomes: higher education, middle level skills development, entrepreneurship, and employment, hence, learners need to be developed holistically with the 21st century skills. One of those skills is reading skills.

However, based on the result of the pretest done by English teachers among grade 11 students, it revealed that there were thirty-five struggling readers out of 1300 students. Apparently, if this issue will not be addressed, the school will not be able to produce graduates who are efficient readers. It is important to look into this issue and do some interventions in order to improve the reading ability of the students.

Thus, this initiative is in line with the DepEd's adopt-a-school activities in the in-person reading context aligned with the DepEd common goal and thrust (OU-LAPP NO. 332, s. 2021), which highlights the implementation to promote literacy through the help of DepEd partners and volunteers; DepEd Order Memorandum no. 173, s. 2019 - Hamon: Bawat Bata Bumabasa.

Given these circumstances, the purpose of this action research was to train and enhance the Grade 11 students' reading abilities through the conduct of the Brigada Pagbasa using the Project SEPI. Further, this also aimed to determine the effectiveness of the intervention made.

II. PROPOSED INNOVATION, INTERVENTION AND STRATEGY

Project SEPI (Systematic, Explicit Phonics Instruction) is a more organized support system that links the school with academic community members and stakeholders to manage the improvement and remediation of the school's reading program within the framework of the Brigada Pagbasa program. It is the contextualized DepEd National Adopt-A-School Program (OU-LAPP Memorandum No. 332, s. 2021) and the channeling platform on Brigada sa Pagbasa. It emphasized the use of reading volunteers, funders, and DepEd partners to enhance literacy through extended reading support at home. This is based on the DepEd Order 24, Section 2016), DepEd Memorandum no. 173, s. 2019, Hamon: Bawat Bata Bumabasa, DepEd Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan p.50, and DepEd Memorandum 032, s. 2020.

Project SEPI framework highlights the following methodology:

S-Systematic. The reading program was conducted systematically. Systematic means that the students began by learning one phonics sound at a time and worked their way through the entire set over time. This was accomplished by teaching students letter-sound correspondence in a predetermined order in a direct and methodical manner (Buckingham et al., 2019,1). Every new skill was progressively introduced by systematic teaching along a continuum that went from simple to more complex. Volunteer teachers who possessed the passion to help struggling readers taught these students to read systematically every Saturday using phonics.

E-Explicit. Teaching the students to read explicitly means that a letter-sound correspondence, or phonics skill, was introduced to students directly (The International Literacy Association, 2019,1). The volunteer-teachers of the Brigada Pagbasa taught the students to read directly using phonics instruction. Two essential instructional approaches within the explicit teaching system are direct instruction and modeling (Ashman 2021, 3).

P-Phonics. Teachers used a letter-sound correspondence. According to the study's findings, phonics education improved students' ability to recall words right after the lesson when compared to their pre-test and control word performance (Noltemeyer, 2013, 10). Likewise, in the study of Noltemeyer et al., (2013,1), results of the study indicate that the phonics instruction was effective at improving words recalled immediately following the instructional period compared to pre-test and control word performance.

I-Instruction. It entails provision, services, facilities and resources in teaching. The project SEPI was conducted in five learning centers. Volunteer teachers utilized charts, handout, powerpoint presentation in teaching. The delivery of instruction was carried out by making the students understand the connections between spoken and written language sounds, by teaching them the relationship between letters and sounds and by the blending of sounds to produce words. Teachers also emphasized the development of phonemic awareness, spelling, decoding, and letter sound.

Strategy

The researchers utilized Explicit Instruction. Explicit teaching is a system of step-by-step instructional approaches in which teachers examine the individual elements they are planning to teach and continually check for student understanding. Two essential instructional approaches within the explicit teaching system are direct instruction and modeling (Ashman 2021, 3). The focus of direct instruction lessons is not on how to present skills and concepts to students, but rather on what students know, don't know and where they need additional support. In most cases, direct instruction is presented to students in small,

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homogeneous flexible groups where instruction is individualized and adjustments within and between groups are made weekly based on analysis of ongoing student formative assessment evidence (Stockard et al., 2018). In the Brigada Pagbasa sessions, direct instruction was used wherein the instructional approaches are structured, sequenced, and led by teachers. Teacher applied the "I do, We do and You do" approach. Teachers demonstrated how to read; students read with the assistance of the teachers and then students read alone.

Explicit teaching and modeling occur when the teacher is activating the role of direct instructor and the primary goal is to help learners acquire basic information and skills, particularly information that is new or complex in nature. Examples of direct instructional methodologies can include lectures, multimedia presentations, convergent questioning, demonstrations, modeling, guided practice and feedback (Ashman 2021,3).

III. DISSEMINATION AND ADVOCACY PLANS

The researchers will coordinate with the teachers in English and Filipino at Baliwasan Senior High School and the Education Program Supervisor for English and Filipino pertaining to the Brigada Pagbasa. The researchers will also recommend for the continuous implementation of the Brigada Pagbasa to other senior schools under Baliwasan District. This can be done through the conduct of LAC sessions in schools or through In-service Training (INSET) where in the effectiveness of the Brigada Pagbasa in improving the reading ability of students will be included as one of the topics.

IV. ACTION RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of Project SEPI in improving the reading performance of senior high school students during the Brigada Pagbasa program.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following problems:

1. What is the reading performance of students in reading before the implementation of Project SEPI in Brigada Pagbasa?
2. What is the reading performance of students in reading after the implementation of Project SEPI in Brigada Pagbasa?
3. Is there a significant difference in the reading performance of students before and after the implementation of Project SEPI in Brigada Pagbasa?
4. What are the factors of reading difficulties as perceived by the Brigada Pagbasa beneficiaries?

V. ACTION RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

In this study, the researchers utilized a mixed method design. The quantitative part employed the one-group pretest and post-test design. It is a quasi experimental research design in which the same dependent variable is measured in one group of participants before (pretest) and after (posttest) a treatment is administered (SAGE, 2019). It determined the learners' reading performance and its significant difference in both phases after the pretest and posttest results are inferentially compared using the adopted Phil-IRI reading tool. Meanwhile, the qualitative part used the in-depth structured interview to determine the students' responses on the factors of reading difficulties and the effectiveness of the project SEPI in improving the reading performance of students.

Participants and/or Other Sources of Data Information

Thirty-five Grade I1 learners of Baliwasan Senior High School-Stand Alone, Zamboanga City Division, whose reading performance was under frustration level, 8 of those were taken as participants in the interview. They were determined using purposive sampling which represents the true characteristics of the population (Alchemer 2021,1). In qualitative part, the criteria of selection were (1) certified learner of the school for S.Y. 2023-2024 (2) only few words read or no words read per minute in the oral reading pre-test.

Research Instrument

The quantitative part employed the one-group pretest and post-test design. The researchers used a reading test on "Philippine Musicality" which was taken from Phil-IRI Form 1 Pretest for Grade V.

In addition, the researchers utilized phonics lessons every session, following the degree of difficulty level from simple to complex. Meanwhile, the qualitative part used the in-depth structured interview to determine the students' thoughts, emotions, and perceptions, particularly on the factors of reading difficulties and the effectiveness of the project SEPI in improving their reading ability.

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Data Gathering Procedure

By the Research Ethics Protocol, the researchers sought approval from the Schools Division Superintendent to conduct the study. After having the approval, the researchers administered the pre-test to the grade 11 students enrolled in Reading and Writing and Pagbasa sa Piling Larang classes. Those who were not able to pass the test were taken as samples of the study. In compliance to Research Ethics Protocol, the researchers obtained informed consent from the identified participants specifying their awareness to the purpose of the study and their agreement to participate in the Brigada Pagbasa program. Below are the phases of implementation of Project SEPI.

Table 1: Phases of Project SEPI implementation

Phase	Activity	Strategies	Duration
Phase 1	Advocacy	Orientation with stakeholders	March 9, 2023
Phase 2	Planning	- Meeting with the Reading Coordinator - Mapping of Possible Learning Centers & Scouting of Volunteers - Capacity Building - Meeting with the SPTA - Establishing Partnerships with Barangays through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)	2 nd week of March 2023 3 rd week of March 2023 4 th week of March 2023 1 st week of April 2023
Phase 3	Implementation	Tutorial sessions with non-readers/slow readers	2 nd week of April-2 nd week of December 2023
Phase 4	Monitoring and Evaluation	Monthly monitoring by the proponents	Monthly
Phase 5	Posttest and Recognition	- Giving of posttest - Recognition of the achievements	2 nd week of December 2023

In the implementation phase, the researchers administered a pre-test to grade 11 students enrolled in Reading and Writing classes. Those who were not able to pass the test were taken as samples of the study. Then, the proponents obtained informed consent from the identified participants specifying their awareness to the purpose of the project and their agreement to participate in the Brigada Pagbasa program for 7 months. The proponents gave an overview during the orientation program. The Brigada Pagbasa through the Project SEPI was implemented to the identified beneficiaries at five (5) Learning Centers such as Baliwasan Barangay Hall, San Jose Gusu Barangay Hall, Sinunuc Barangay Hall, Kampung Islam Barangay Hall and Seaborne where the Memorandum of Agreement (MOU) has been signed and accomplished by the School Head and the Partner Agencies.

Individualized instruction was applied to the participants weekly by the volunteer-Teachers, Pre-service Teachers and SPTA Officers. Systematic, Explicit Phonics Instruction in English was applied for six months. After the implementation of the intervention, a structured one-on-one interview was conducted among the 8 participants. They were permitted to share their ideas, feelings, and opinions regarding the factors of reading difficulties and the effectiveness of the project SEPI in improving their reading ability. Following this was the conduct of the posttest reading assessment and interview. Next, the proponents did the analysis and interpretation of data. For the qualitative data, the researchers did the transcription of responses and the coding of data using a thematic analysis and lastly, awarding of certificates to students and volunteers was conducted.

Statistical Treatment

To indicate how the data were analyzed and reported, the following specifications for the quantitative and qualitative methods were used. For Research Problem 1 and 2, the mean percentage was employed to describe the level of Grade 11 students' reading performance. For Research Problem 3. Paired t-test was used to determine if there was a significant difference in the reading performance of students before and after the implementation of project SEPI. For Research Problems 4 & 5. Thematic analysis was used on the transcribed data to describe the factors affecting the reading difficulties of the participants and the effectiveness of the project SEPI.

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VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reading Performance before the intervention.

Table 1 shows the pre-test mean percentage of the Grade I1 students in reading.

Table 1: Reading Performance of Grade I1 students Before the Reading Intervention.

Assessment	Pre-Test	
	MP	Description
Oral Word Recognition	11.91	Frustration

Legend: Word Recognition: 89%-below-Frustration; 90%-96%-Instructional; 97%-100-Independent

It can be gleaned from the table that in the pre-test, the mean percentage of oral word recognition is 11.91%, described as frustration. This result implies that the Grade I1 learners could hardly read the words in the reading passage correctly. Araim's (2016,1) study shared a similarity and deduced that when students read at their frustration level, they had lower comprehension scores and reported feeling more negative emotions toward reading. Likewise, Nevenglosky, Cale, and Aguilar (2019,1) argue that while some level of frustration is necessary for learning and growth, excessive frustration can have negative effects on reading development and should be minimized. Hence, project SEPI was employed.

Reading Performance after the intervention.

Table 2 shows the posttest mean percentage of the Grade I1 students in reading.

Table 2: Reading Performance of Grade I1 students After the Reading Intervention.

Assessment	Post-Test	
	MP	Level Description
Oral Word Recognition	80.54	Frustration

Legend: Word Recognition: 89%-below-Frustration; 90%-96%-Instructional; 97%-100-Independent

It can be gleaned from the table that in the posttest, the mean percentage of oral word recognition is 80.54%, described as frustration. It can be noted that after the intervention, oral word recognition has soared to a mean percentage of 80.00%, described as frustration level. This finding suggests that the Grade I1 students can read with the guidance from a teacher through the project SEPI framework. This result implies that Project SEPI has helped in developing the reading ability of the students. Moreover, they can recognize words with the guidance from the teacher and reading support under the project SEPI.

The findings support Petscher et al., (2017, 3) whose finding indicated that students receiving the intervention made greater gains in reading than students who did not receive the intervention.

Testing the difference in the reading performance of senior high school students during the Brigada Pagbasa program using the Project SEPI.

Table 2: Test of Significant Difference in the reading performance of senior high school students before and after the intervention

Phase	n	mean	df	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Pre-Test	35	11.91	34	70.422	0.00	Significant
Pos-Test		80.54				

*Significance at 0.05 level

Based on table 2, the p-value of the pre-test and posttest results of students in reading is 0.00. which is lower than the 0.05 level of significance, shows that there is a significant difference and that it means the results on pre-test and posttest did vary. The table further illustrates a remarkable increase in the posttest weighted mean from 11.91 to 80.54. This indicates that the employment of the project SEPI is beneficial to the improvement of the reading performance of the students. The finding supports Hicks (2018,1) whose finding of a similar study revealed that there was a significant difference in the reading achievement scores of the students before and after the intervention was implemented.

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The analysis of the factors of reading difficulties has emerged into four themes: learner factor, teacher factor, Parent/Guardian Factor and language factor.

Theme 1. Physical defect factor

The first participant expressed loss of interest and motivation to pursue reading. When asked, "What are the reasons?" "Nawalan ako ng tiwala sa sarili ko sa pagbasa kasi natatakot ako magbikas ang mga salita, nabubulol a, maiksi kasi dila ko". Wala rin gumagabay sa akin kung tama ba ang pagbasa ko o hindi. " The reasons given by the participant was translated into English. "I lost my confidence to read because I was petrified of pronouncing the words. I am not sure of how the words are pronounced correctly. I stammer. My tongue is short. Since, there is no one to monitor me if I am doing right, I stopped reading". Another participant affirmed that he had the same experience as the first participant. He explained that it was due to his defects. Just like with the first participant, he too claimed to have a short tongue that caused him to stutter. He further elaborated that he can face the challenges of having a short tongue, and it's fine to stammer at pronouncing the words, but what made it difficult was the fact that he is being bullied every time he is asked to read or speak in front of the class. When the researcher further asked how the feeling of being bullied was, the respondent replied, "Maka trauma og makaulaw labi na kanang kataw-anan ko sa harap sa mga tao, mao na nawala ko gana og dili na ko mobasa. Halos dili na pod ko gusto mo eskwela." It was revealed that the learner beneficiary was bullied because of his physical defect that has caused him to traumatic experience. The humiliation he felt, especially when he was laughed at in front of many students, led him to lose the desire to read.

In addition, another aspect of physical defect that caused student to lose interest in reading is because of eye problem. One of the participants said: "Lumuluha ang aking mga mata sa tuwing akoy bumabasa." In English, it is translated "My tears fell down every time I read. The participant further explained that it made her feel uncomfortable and that her parents did not take her to an eye specialist because they didn't have the financial capacity to pay for a check-up. So the learner decided to stop reading unless it is compulsory or the teacher asked her to read. In effect, she lacked practice in reading. Consequently, she failed to learn how to read difficult words. The finding shows that physical defect affects the reading performance of students. The study of Rohimah (2021,1) supports the finding that physical weakness can affect reading difficulties.

Theme 2. Teacher Factor

Five out of 8 participants claimed that the lack of a teacher's motivation to engage them in reading activities and other reading exposures were the main reason that they did not pursue reading. In addition, the beneficiaries of the Brigada Pagbasa expressed that teachers did not conduct any pre-assessment and post-assessment as basis for monitoring as regards to the reading progress. Moreover, one participant shared that there is lack of moral support given to the students. Teachers are always not available to teach reading and instructional materials are likewise insufficient. In the school where she was enrolled during her Elementary days, teachers met the students twice a week only. The teachers prioritize other. The finding implies that teachers' motivation is very significant for students to read; teacher who lacks motivation to students makes the students dull and passive. Manguilimotan et al., (2024, 1) support the finding whose results in their study have shown that reading ability is affected by motivation.

Theme 3. Parent/Guardian Factor

Two out of eight (8) participants have affirmed that their parents/guardians are illiterate. The parents are so much dependent to the teachers which resulted to delays in reading activities and practice. One participant explained, and the researchers quoted "Dugay ko nagkasugod mo practice og basa kay wala akong ginikanan. Gibiyaan mi sa among mama pag priso sa among amahan og sa lola lang mi nagapuyo. Dili pod kabalo mobasa ang among lola. Mao na walay nagatudlo nako magbasa. Maayo na lang katong Grade IV na ko nay auntie nako nga teacher nag tudlo sa ako". It was explicitly stated that the child was denied to read at an early age because no one in her family was available to teach her. Her mother left them for another man while his father was in jail. Her lola, who stands as their guardian, is also illiterate. Hence, the learner never practiced how to read until Grade IV. It was her aunt who was a teacher who taught her how to read upon discovering that she did not know how to read at the age eleven. The results show that parents lack support to their children . Similary, Jabbar and Warraich (2021) also highlight factors related to family affecting the reading habits of children. Similarly, Al-Khalaf, and Gehlot (2020,136) reported the unawareness of parents regarding the extensive use of read-aloud and silent reading to build confidence among their children to support their reading comprehension.

amily and teachers affecting children's reading habits

Theme 4. Language Factor

It was revealed during the interview that Brigada Beneficiaries affiliated to Tausog and Bisaya are more likely to mispronounce the words. Their accent and enunciation are far different from those of other tribal or religious groups. There are

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some letters that they could hardly pronounce, like R, L, or use the letter interchangeably, such as the E, and I. This scenario led these learners to also be bullied and, as an effect, made them withdraw from participating in any school activities, including reading. The finding implies that students are affected by their mother tongue. Gilakjani (2016,2) emphasized that good pronunciation leads to learning while bad pronunciation promotes great difficulties in reading.

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This action research aimed to examine the reading performance level of students at Baliwasan Senior High School-Stand Alone before and after the employment of project SEPI (Systematic Explicit Phonics Instruction). The result showed that the oral word recognition of the Grade II students before the intervention was at frustration level. A remarkable increase was noted in the posttest where Grade II students' oral reading performance improved. There was a significant difference in the reading performance of the Grade II students before and after the intervention of the project SEPI. Lastly, the factors of reading difficulties of the learners are: learner factor, teacher factor, Parent/Guardian Factor and language factor. Finally, the project SEPI (Systematic Explicit Phonics Instruction) was found effective because the students have improved their performance after the intervention was applied. With the continued implementation of this project, the reading performance of struggling readers is believed to improve more. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are formulated: DepEd officials may strengthen the reading programs implemented in all levels. School heads are encouraged to craft a program that focuses on reading intervention to uplift the reading proficiency of the learners. The teachers may adapt the project SEPI to address the needs of the struggling readers at the classroom level. The parents should assist and motivate their children to spend time in reading daily and monitor their children's learning progress.

Action Plan

ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVES	STRATEGY/ IES	PERSONS RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE	RESOURCES	SUCCESS INDICATORS
Information Dissemination	To inform and disseminate the result of the action research (AR) to the administrators, teachers, for the adoption of the project SEPI among Grade 11 students.	Presentation of the findings of the study in the Learning Action Cell (LAC) session.	Researchers Administrators Teachers	November 2024	Hard-bound copy of the Action research Project SEPI reading materials	Informed and disseminated the result of the action research
Mentoring	To assist the volunteers of the Brigada Pagbasa in the utilization of project SEPI,	Conduct mentoring with the volunteer in the utilization of the project SEPI	Researchers Administrators Teachers	December 2024	Handout/ Lesson Plans Powerpoint presentation	Utilization of the handout/ reading Materials
Monitoring	To monitor the implementation of project SEPI.	Brigada Pagbasa sessions	Administrators Teachers Volunteers	Monthly	Handout/ Lesson Plans Powerpoint presentation	Improved reading performance of the students
Evaluation	To evaluate the outcome of the project SEPI	Gather the needed data for the evaluation	Researchers Administrators Teachers Students Volunteers	May 2025	Evaluation Sheet Students' Scores	Re-adoption of the Project SEPI

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