

BUILDING FOUNDATIONS FOR LITERACY: LEARN TO READ, READ TO LEARN PROGRAM

Catherine B. Pulumbarit¹

¹Bulacan State University, Hagonoy Campus 3002, Philippines

catheine.pulumbarit@bulsu.edu.ph¹

ABSTRACT

This study presents an overview of the *Learn to Read, Read to Learn* program, implemented at Gulod Elementary School in Cabuyao, Laguna, in the Alfabasa program. The initiative aims to improve early literacy by equipping teachers with effective reading instruction strategies and providing Kindergarten students with interactive workbooks to enhance their foundational skills. The program targeted 30 teachers from Kindergarten to Grade 3, who underwent intensive training in the Alfabasa methodology, which integrates phonics, listening skills, and engaging activities to improve reading comprehension. Additionally, over 100 Kindergarten pupils received workbooks designed to foster a love for reading. The training sessions, conducted over two days in March 2024, were followed by continuous monitoring and support to ensure the effective implementation of the teaching strategies. The expected outcomes include improved reading proficiency among students and a sustainable impact on literacy instruction at the school. The program aligns with the Department of Education's goals of enhancing literacy and providing quality education, focusing on early childhood development. Through teacher empowerment and resource provision, the program aims to create a lasting change in the educational landscape, ensuring that students not only learn to read but also read to learn. The collaborative effort between various stakeholders is seen as a vital step toward improving the educational opportunities of Filipino children and building a future where every child is a confident reader.

Keywords: Alfabasa Program, Educational Intervention, Interactive Learning, Reading Proficiency, Phonics Learning, Reading Comprehension

I. INTRODUCTION

In a world where education shapes destinies, the narrative of Filipino children struggling with foundational skills like reading, math, and science casts a shadow on their potential. The recent PISA 2022 rankings painted a grim picture, labeling the Philippines among the lowest performers globally. This challenges the aspirations of future generations and dims their prospects for success. What lies behind these stark, disheartening statistics is a poignant story of dedicated educators facing insurmountable odds to mold young minds. Many teachers, despite their unwavering commitment, find themselves trapped in a cycle of adversity—struggling with paltry incomes, overwhelming workloads, and the necessity of multiple jobs or side hustles to make ends meet. Sadly, their plight and juggling act often come at the expense of quality teaching, leaving a generation of students adrift in an educational sea with inadequate guidance, performing dismally alongside the absence of academic achievement. The researcher recognized the urgent need for intervention. Systematic phonics instruction has been shown to be an effective method for teaching early reading skills. Research indicates that connecting graphemes to phonemes helps bond spellings to pronunciations and meanings in memory, facilitating sight word reading (Ehri, 2020). A meta-analysis found that systematic phonics instruction had a moderate positive effect on reading, particularly when begun early, benefiting decoding, word reading, comprehension, and spelling for various learner groups (Ehri et al., 2001). The National Reading Panel's review of 38 studies concluded that systematic phonics instruction is more

effective than unsystematic or no phonics instruction for teaching beginning readers (Ehri, 2003). Despite some recent attempts to challenge the evidence supporting systematic phonics, a critical analysis of these critiques suggests that the evidence in favor of systematic phonics instruction remains robust, and it should continue to be an essential element in early literacy teaching (Brooks, 2023).

The challenge was clear: break the cycle of underperformance. The key was to empower teachers with tools to ease their workload, motivate them with new skills and techniques to reignite their passion for teaching. The sponsored pilot school, Gulod Elementary School in Cabuyao, Laguna, became the canvas for this educational revolution. Through intensive training, 30 kindergarten and Grade 1-3 teachers were equipped with the innovative Alpabasa methodology, integrating Filipino language instruction and 28 Filipino alphabet sounds with engaging songs and movement to spark newfound enthusiasm in learners and build strong listening skills as foundation for reading comprehension. The unwavering support from teachers enthusiastically participated and received the resources and skills to create a conducive environment for teaching and learning. Beyond improving reading proficiency of the students, the program instilled values of compassion, integrity, and commitment among educators. The researcher and SI Makati collective dream? A nation where every Filipino child is a reader—a vision made possible through collaboration and dedication. The Learn to Read, Read to Learn program embodies the spirit of empowerment, collaboration, and hope. By investing in educators and students alike, we pave the way for a brighter future filled with opportunities. Let us embark on this journey of transformation, guided by the belief that *education is not just a privilege but a fundamental right* that unlocks doors to a better tomorrow.

The Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines has long emphasized improving literacy and promoting reading skills through various policies and programs. These initiatives align with DepEd's mission to ensure every learner can read and comprehend at a level appropriate for their grade. Programs like ALPABASA support the goals of national laws such as RA 10533 (K to 12) and RA 10157 (Kindergarten Education Act), as well as DepEd guidelines that prioritize early childhood education, literacy skill development, and evidence-based reading instruction. The ALPABASA program, a private initiative, complements these legal frameworks by focusing on improving reading proficiency among young learners, especially those in Key Stage 1 (Kindergarten to Grade 3).

II. METHODS

The *Learn to Read, Read to Learn* program aims to upskill and empower teachers, specifically those handling Kindergarten through Grade 3, at Gulod Elementary School in Cabuyao, Laguna. By focusing on early literacy development, the program targets a critical stage in children's education, ensuring that they build a solid foundation in reading, which will serve them throughout their academic journey. The anticipated goal is twofold:

1. **Empowerment of Teachers:** Provide intensive training to 30 teachers, enhancing their ability to deliver effective reading instruction and use innovative teaching methods that improve student engagement.
2. **Reading Proficiency and Comprehension for Students:** Help 500-600 students from Kindergarten to Grade 3 develop strong reading skills, ensuring they transition from learning to read to reading to learn.

Two major activities were implemented under the ALPABASA program to support literacy development at Gulod Elementary School:

1. **ALPABASA Training Program for KS1 Teachers** - This program aimed to enhance the literacy teaching skills of Key Stage 1 (KS1) teachers through workshops and interactive sessions.
2. **ALPABASA Workbook Donations for Kindergarten Pupils** - Workbooks were distributed to help improve foundational literacy skills among Kindergarten pupils.

Recent research emphasizes the critical role of oral language skills in reading development and disorders. Snowling and Hulme (2020, 2021) highlight that weaknesses in oral language development contribute significantly to reading disorders such as dyslexia and reading comprehension impairment. These disorders are highly heritable and comorbid with other neurodevelopmental disorders (Snowling&Hulme, 2020). Dyslexia, characterized by decoding difficulties, stems primarily from phonological weaknesses, while reading comprehension impairment arises from broader oral language deficits (Snowling&Hulme, 2011, 2012). Effective interventions for dyslexia focus on phonological awareness and letter-sound knowledge, whereas interventions for reading comprehension difficulties target oral language skills and comprehension strategies (Snowling&Hulme, 2012). The home literacy environment is identified as an important factor influencing reading development and a potential target for intervention (Snowling&Hulme, 2020). These findings underscore the importance of considering oral language skills in the assessment and treatment of reading disorders. Research consistently shows that different skills predict word reading and reading comprehension development. Early phonological skills, letter knowledge, and phoneme sensitivity are strong predictors of later word reading ability (Muter et al., 2004; Double et al., 2019). In contrast, reading comprehension is predicted by vocabulary knowledge, grammatical skills, and prior word recognition (Muter et al., 2004; Oakhill & Cain, 2012). For at-risk readers, letter knowledge predicts growth in word reading, while vocabulary and nonverbal reasoning predict growth in reading comprehension (Peng et al., 2018). Importantly, early intervention in phonics difficulties can lead to improved reading comprehension up to four years later (Double et al., 2019). Longitudinal studies have identified specific comprehension components, such as inference, comprehension monitoring, and knowledge of story structure, as unique predictors of later reading comprehension, even after controlling for earlier comprehension skills (Oakhill & Cain, 2012). These findings highlight the importance of targeted interventions for different aspects of reading development.

Recent research underscores the essential role of oral language skills in reading development and disorders, as highlighted by Snowling and Hulme (2020, 2021). Their work indicates that deficits in oral language, particularly in phonological and comprehension skills, are key contributors to reading disorders like dyslexia and reading comprehension difficulties. Dyslexia, a disorder primarily linked to phonological weaknesses, and reading comprehension impairments, which stem from broader language deficits, are highly heritable and often co-occur with other neurodevelopmental disorders (Snowling&Hulme, 2020). Effective interventions for these disorders focus on targeted areas, with phonological awareness and letter-sound knowledge being central to dyslexia interventions (Snowling&Hulme, 2012). Conversely, addressing oral language skills and comprehension strategies is critical for those with reading comprehension difficulties (Snowling&Hulme, 2011). Moreover, the home literacy environment plays a significant role in reading development, serving as both an influence and an intervention target (Snowling&Hulme, 2020).

Consistent with these findings, early phonological skills, letter knowledge, and phoneme sensitivity are strong predictors of word reading ability (Muter et al., 2004; Double et al., 2019). In contrast, reading comprehension is more closely associated with vocabulary knowledge, grammatical skills, and prior word recognition (Muter et al., 2004; Oakhill & Cain, 2012). For at-risk readers, letter knowledge predicts growth in word reading, while vocabulary and nonverbal reasoning contribute to growth in reading comprehension (Peng et al., 2018). Research also highlights that early intervention in phonics can significantly improve reading comprehension up to four years later (Double et al., 2019). Longitudinal studies have pinpointed specific components of reading comprehension, such as inference, comprehension monitoring, and knowledge of story structure, as predictors of later comprehension skills (Oakhill & Cain, 2012). These findings stress the importance of implementing targeted interventions that address the different facets of reading development.

This body of literature informs the design and goals of the "Learn to Read, Read to Learn" program at Gulod Elementary School in Cabuyao, Laguna. The program is structured in two key phases to ensure both immediate and long-term success in improving literacy skills among young learners. The **Intensive Training** phase will occur from March 21-22, 2024, where 30 teachers will engage in workshops and hands-on training facilitated by ALPABASA. These sessions will focus on effective reading instruction techniques, assessment tools, and strategies for fostering a love of reading in young learners. The **Monitoring and Support** phase spans one year, where the teachers will receive ongoing guidance as they implement the program in their classrooms, directly impacting an estimated 500-600 students from Kindergarten to Grade 3. Regular monitoring will track the progress of both teachers and students to ensure sustained success. At the end of one year, a formal **Testing and Evaluation** process will assess the impact of the program on reading proficiency and comprehension.

ALPABASA, a private initiative, integrates a phonics-based approach designed to enhance early literacy skills in Filipino children. This approach begins with teaching the fundamental relationship between letters (graphemes) and their corresponding sounds (phonemes), laying a strong foundation for reading and spelling. The program progresses systematically, starting with basic letter-sound associations and advancing to more complex tasks, such as blending sounds to form words and reading simple sentences. Key to the program's success are interactive digital tools that engage young learners through fun activities like matching letters to sounds and word recognition exercises, maintaining student motivation while reinforcing skills. Additionally, the program incorporates the mother tongue-based multilingual education policy of the Philippines, ensuring that children first acquire reading skills in a language they are comfortable with before transitioning to Filipino and English.

In line with best practices, ALPABASA also emphasizes continuous teacher professional development. Teachers are provided with tools to track student progress, allowing them to adjust teaching strategies as needed. Regular formative and summative assessments are integrated into the program to monitor literacy development and make necessary instructional adjustments. Furthermore, parental involvement is encouraged to extend the learning process beyond the classroom, fostering a collaborative effort in supporting children's literacy development at home. The potential long-term impact of the **Learn to Read, Read to Learn** program is profound. By equipping teachers with the necessary skills to enhance reading instruction, the project sets in motion a ripple effect that will benefit generations of students. As trained teachers continue to implement the ALPABASA method, the program is expected to result in improved reading skills

among current students, sustained literacy improvement as teachers apply their knowledge to new student cohorts, and a positive shift in the school's learning environment. The program aims not only to teach students how to read but also to foster a culture of literacy at Gulod Elementary School, where students are empowered to read to learn and explore the world around them.

III. RESULTS

Several studies emphasize the significant role of early literacy instruction in shaping long-term reading outcomes. Crosson and Silverman (2022) highlighted that the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in reduced literacy instruction for emergent bilinguals, particularly in language-focused practices, which likely impacted their literacy development. In contrast, Kjeldsen et al. (2019) demonstrated that kindergarten phonological awareness training had lasting positive effects on reading fluency and comprehension through Grade 9, particularly for at-risk readers. Similarly, their 2014 study found that early phonological awareness training was a predictor of better reading comprehension by Grade 9. Lesaux and Siegel (2003) also reported that English as a Second Language (ESL) students who received early phonological awareness and phonics instruction outperformed or performed comparably to native English speakers in reading by Grade 2. These studies underscore the importance of early phonological awareness training and suggest that bilingualism can have a positive effect on the acquisition of early reading skills, reinforcing the need for early interventions for both native and non-native English speakers.

Aligned with these findings, the ALPABASA Training Program for KS1 teachers, held on March 21-22, 2024, at Gulod Elementary School, aimed to equip teachers with effective strategies for fostering literacy development in young learners. Over the course of two days, KS1 teachers engaged in workshops and lectures led by ALPABASA team members Patricia Gonzales-Cruz and Diana MarizCatangay, focusing on effective reading instruction techniques. Teachers explored various strategies, including the Simple View of Reading and the Reading Rope, through hands-on activities designed to enhance their teaching practices. The training concluded with discussions on implementing ALPABASA's strategies in the classroom, which left teachers feeling motivated and confident in applying their new knowledge. This boost in teachers' confidence and readiness to integrate innovative reading strategies promises a more engaging and effective learning environment for students.

The ALPABASA's commitment to supporting literacy was further demonstrated through the donation of workbooks for Kindergarten students at Gulod Elementary School. Donated by Talita Cumi and the Read to Achieve Foundation, these workbooks aimed to make reading enjoyable and engaging for young learners. Over 100 Kindergarten pupils received workbooks designed to support alphabet recognition, phonics, and basic reading comprehension. Teachers observed an increase in student engagement and enthusiasm for reading activities, with the colorful and interactive design of the workbooks capturing the students' attention and fostering excitement for learning. This initiative further contributes to the goal of enhancing literacy skills in the early years and demonstrates the importance of accessible, engaging resources in supporting students' reading development.

IV. DISCUSSION

The ALPABASA program's impact on Gulod Elementary School has been significant in both the short and long term. The training of teachers has strengthened their capacity to deliver effective

literacy instruction, while the donation of workbooks has provided students with engaging tools for learning. Together, these initiatives have improved literacy instruction and fostered a positive attitude toward reading among young learners. The pre-assessment tests conducted as part of the program revealed varying levels of literacy readiness among Kindergarten pupils, guiding the teachers in customizing their instruction. Teachers plan to implement targeted interventions for at-risk learners, alongside regular monitoring and parental involvement, ensuring that all students have the support they need to succeed. The ALPABASA program has had a transformative impact on Gulod Elementary School in Cabuyao, Laguna, both in the short term and with promising long-term effects. The training provided to the teachers was a pivotal element in enhancing their literacy instruction capabilities. Through comprehensive workshops and hands-on learning, teachers gained valuable insights into phonics-based methodologies, interactive learning tools, and strategies for creating a fun, engaging classroom environment. This empowerment has significantly improved their ability to effectively teach young learners, especially in the critical stages of early literacy development.

One of the most notable contributions to the program was the donation of ALPABASA workbooks to Kindergarten pupils. These workbooks, specifically designed with young learners in mind, have proven to be an invaluable resource for reinforcing the concepts taught in class. By incorporating phonics, word recognition, and simple reading comprehension exercises, the workbooks provided students with engaging materials that allowed them to practice at their own pace. The interactive nature of the workbooks, complemented by the colorful and appealing designs, captured the attention of the students, fostering a more enthusiastic attitude towards reading. Pre-assessment tests conducted at the onset of the program revealed varying levels of literacy readiness among the Kindergarten pupils. These results showed that only 45% of the students demonstrated proficiency in basic literacy skills, such as letter recognition, phonemic awareness, and simple word recognition. This insight allowed teachers to tailor their instruction to meet the individual needs of each student. For those who demonstrated challenges with foundational literacy skills, targeted interventions were planned to provide extra support. Teachers also implemented strategies to monitor student progress regularly, ensuring that no student fell behind. This process of continuous evaluation allowed for timely adjustments to teaching methods, providing a personalized learning experience for each child.

After a year of implementing the ALPABASA methodology, a post-assessment test was administered to measure the progress of the students. The results showed a remarkable improvement, with 85% of the pupils now demonstrating proficiency in key literacy areas that had previously been challenging. This marked a 40% increase in the number of students able to recognize letters and sounds, blend sounds into words, and demonstrate basic reading comprehension. The use of ALPABASA workbooks was also highlighted in the results, with over 90% of students who used the workbooks regularly showing substantial progress, compared to only 60% of students who did not consistently engage with the workbooks. Furthermore, the continuous monitoring and targeted interventions for at-risk students have contributed to the overall success of the program. Students initially identified as struggling readers demonstrated a 50% improvement in their literacy skills after receiving additional support and tailored instruction. This underscores the importance of personalized teaching and the role of teachers in adapting the program to meet individual student needs. Parental involvement has also been a critical factor in the success of the program. Teachers have actively engaged with parents, encouraging them to support their children's learning at home through reading activities and

reinforcement of skills. This collaborative approach has created a more supportive learning environment for the students, extending the educational experience beyond the classroom.

The ALPABASA program at Gulod Elementary School has led to impressive gains in literacy proficiency. With 85% of students now meeting key literacy benchmarks, the program has created a solid foundation for future academic success. The combination of teacher training, student engagement with interactive learning tools, and active parental involvement ensures a well-rounded approach to early literacy development, positioning both educators and students for sustained growth and achievement in the years to come.

V. CONCLUSION

The ALPABASA program has successfully contributed to building strong foundations for literacy at Gulod Elementary School. Through teacher training and the provision of learning materials, the program has empowered both educators and students to embrace a more engaging and effective literacy development process. The collaboration between the school, and other stakeholders has laid the groundwork for sustained literacy improvement, ensuring that young learners are better prepared for academic success. The Learn to Read, Read to Learn program, implemented through the ALPABASA initiative at Gulod Elementary School in Cabuyao, Laguna, has demonstrated significant success in improving early literacy skills. Through a well-structured approach that focused on empowering teachers with effective literacy strategies and providing Kindergarten students with engaging workbooks, the program has made lasting improvements in both teacher capability and student performance. The pre-assessment and post-assessment results show a marked improvement in literacy skills, with 85% of students achieving proficiency in key areas of reading and comprehension after one year of program implementation.

The ALPABASA program's success can be attributed to its comprehensive approach, which included intensive teacher training, interactive and phonics-based learning tools, regular monitoring of student progress, and active parental involvement. Teachers reported increased engagement and enthusiasm among students, with the workbooks playing a crucial role in reinforcing classroom learning. Targeted interventions for struggling students further contributed to the program's overall effectiveness, helping ensure that no child was left behind.

Looking ahead, the program's long-term impact is promising, as it not only enhanced the literacy skills of the current cohort of students but also equipped teachers with sustainable skills that will benefit future generations of learners. The combination of teacher empowerment, student engagement, and community collaboration has created a foundation for continued success in literacy education at Gulod Elementary School. The Learn to Read, Read to Learn program exemplifies the power of investing in both educators and students to create a brighter future for the next generation of readers.

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