

PROPOSED READING ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM FOR THE GRADE FOUR LEARNERS OF SAPANG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

Reading proficiency remains a foundational academic skill that enables learners to understand classroom instructions, access subject-area content, participate meaningfully in learning activities, and develop independent study habits. This study assessed the reading performance, reading difficulties, and reading needs of Grade 4 learners of Sapang Elementary School, Bayambang, Pangasinan, as a basis for a proposed Reading Enhancement Program. Specifically, it determined the learners' profiles, assessed their reading performance in word recognition, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, identified the reading difficulties they encountered, determined their reading needs based on the assessment results, and developed a proposed intervention program responsive to their literacy needs. The study employed a descriptive-developmental research design. The respondents were the 45 Grade 4 learners of Sapang Elementary School, selected through total population sampling or complete enumeration. Data were gathered using a profile sheet, a researcher-made reading performance assessment, and a reading difficulties and needs checklist, all of which underwent expert content validation before administration. Frequency counts, percentages, means, rankings, and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. Findings revealed that most respondents were 10 years old, and the sex distribution was nearly balanced, with slightly more male learners. The learners demonstrated an overall moderate level of reading performance, with word recognition as the strongest area and reading comprehension as the weakest. They also encountered significant reading difficulties, particularly in understanding unfamiliar words and in reading smoothly with proper pacing. Correspondingly, their reading needs were high, especially in vocabulary enrichment and guided reading activities to improve fluency. Based on these findings, the study proposed Project BASA-G4: Building Advanced Skills in Reading for Grade 4 Learners, a school-based reading enhancement program designed to strengthen vocabulary, fluency, word recognition, and reading comprehension.

Keywords: Reading Performance, Reading Difficulties, Reading Needs, Grade 4 Learners, Reading Enhancement Program, Sapang Elementary School

1. Introduction

Reading remains one of the most essential competencies in elementary education because it serves as both a literacy skill and a learning tool across subject areas. Learners who can read with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension, and who have strong vocabulary knowledge, are better able to understand instructions, access subject content, participate in classroom activities, and complete written tasks independently. UNESCO (2025) emphasizes that foundational skills include literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills, and that these core skills are essential for school success and lifelong learning. In this sense, reading is not simply a language subject outcome; it is a foundational academic capacity that influences learners' ability to succeed in mathematics, science, social studies, values education, and other learning areas.

The importance of reading is especially evident in the elementary grades, where children are expected to gradually move from learning to read to reading to learn. The World Bank (2022) defines learning poverty as the inability of children to read and understand a simple text by age ten, underscoring the importance of reading proficiency during the primary years. This benchmark

is relevant to Grade 4 learners because they are typically at the stage when reading is already expected to support comprehension of longer passages, written directions, informational texts, and content-area lessons. When reading ability remains weak at this stage, learners may struggle not only in English or Filipino but also in subjects that require comprehension of written problems, explanations, and instructions.

Reading development is multidimensional. It does not depend on word calling alone but on the interaction of several skills, including word recognition, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The Institute of Education Sciences and the What Works Clearinghouse identify reading interventions as necessary to help students in Grades 4 to 9 meet their reading needs, particularly when learners continue to experience difficulty beyond the early grades. This is important because two learners may both be classified as struggling readers but may need different forms of support. One learner may have difficulty recognizing words automatically; another may read slowly and without proper phrasing; another may decode words correctly but fail to understand the passage's meaning. Therefore, a school-based reading study must examine specific reading dimensions rather than assume that all learners experience the same difficulty.

Globally, reading difficulties remain a serious concern. The World Bank, UNICEF, and partner organizations reported that learning poverty worsened after pandemic-related school closures and disruptions, with many children unable to read and understand a simple text by age ten (World Bank, 2022; UNICEF, 2022). These findings show that reading gaps are not isolated classroom incidents but part of a broader foundational learning challenge. Although global figures should not be treated as direct equivalents of local school data, they justify the need for schools to assess their own learners' reading performance and identify needs before difficulties become more severe.

In the Philippine context, the need to strengthen reading is also recognized in policy and school practice. The Department of Education has emphasized learning recovery and foundational skills development through national programs aimed at addressing learning gaps. DepEd Order No. 013, s. 2023, the National Learning Recovery Program was adopted, which aims to support learners affected by learning disruptions and strengthen essential competencies. More recently, DepEd literacy remediation efforts have emphasized the importance of structured, learner-centered support, teacher capacity building, instructional materials, progress monitoring, and school-level intervention planning. These policy directions affirm that reading intervention should be organized, evidence-based, and responsive to learners' actual needs.

The present study is situated in Sapang Elementary School, Bayambang, Pangasinan. The uploaded manuscript identifies Sapang Elementary School as a public elementary school in Bayambang I District, Schools Division of Pangasinan I, and presents Grade 4 learners as the focus of the reading assessment. This local context is important because literacy concerns must eventually be understood at the school level, where teachers directly observe learners' reading behaviors, administer assessments, and design interventions. While national and international reports provide the broader rationale for reading improvement, a school cannot rely only on general data. It must determine the actual reading performance, difficulties, and needs of its own learners.

For Grade 4 learners at Sapang Elementary School, assessing reading performance is timely, as this grade level marks a critical transition point. Learners are expected to read not only short, familiar texts but also longer passages and subject-related materials that require comprehension, vocabulary understanding, and sustained attention. The manuscript emphasizes that reading performance should be examined in terms of word recognition, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, which are necessary for identifying learners' specific strengths and weaknesses. This approach is appropriate because interventions are more meaningful when based on diagnosed needs rather than broad assumptions about reading difficulty.

The study also responds to the practical problem that reading difficulty can affect academic confidence, participation, and performance across learning areas. Learners who struggle with word recognition may spend too much effort decoding individual words. Learners with weak fluency may read slowly and lose meaning before finishing the passage. Learners with limited vocabulary may fail to understand key ideas even when they can pronounce words correctly. Learners with poor comprehension may be unable to identify main ideas, make inferences, sequence events, or explain what they have read. These difficulties can reduce classroom engagement and limit independent learning.

Accordingly, this study assessed the reading performance, difficulties, and needs of Grade 4 learners of Sapang Elementary School as a basis for a proposed Reading Enhancement Program. Specifically, it examined learners' reading performance in word recognition, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension; identified the reading difficulties they experienced; determined their reading needs; and used the findings to inform a responsive school-based intervention. By grounding the proposed program in actual assessment results, the study aimed to provide evidence-based support for improving Grade 4 learners' reading competence, classroom participation, and academic readiness.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a descriptive-developmental research design to assess the reading performance, reading difficulties, and reading needs of Grade 4 learners of Sapang Elementary School as a basis for a proposed Reading Enhancement Program. The descriptive component was used to determine and present the existing reading condition of the learners in terms of their profile, word recognition, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, as well as the difficulties and needs that emerged from the reading assessment (Poserio, n.d.). This design was appropriate because descriptive research systematically presents the current status of a group or phenomenon without manipulating variables, making it suitable for identifying learners' actual reading strengths and weaknesses before any intervention is proposed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Poserio, n.d.). The developmental component was used to formulate a school-based reading enhancement program grounded in the descriptive phase's results. Developmental research is appropriate when the purpose is to design or improve programs, tools, or interventions to address identified educational needs (Richey & Klein, 2007). In this study, the developmental phase did not involve experimental testing of the program's effectiveness; rather, it focused on translating the identified reading gaps into a practical, needs-responsive intervention framework for Grade 4 learners (Poserio, n.d.). Thus, the descriptive-developmental design was suitable because it allowed the researcher to first establish an evidence-based picture of the learners' reading condition and then use the findings to develop a proposed reading enhancement program aligned with their actual literacy needs.

2.2 Participants

The study was conducted with the 45 Grade 4 learners of Sapang Elementary School, Bayambang, Pangasinan. They served as respondents because they were the specific group identified in the title, the statement of the problem, and the scope of the study (Poserio, n.d.). The learners were considered the most appropriate participants because the study focused on assessing their reading performance, reading difficulties, and reading needs in word recognition, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, as a basis for a proposed reading enhancement program (Poserio, n.d.). The study employed total population sampling, also known as complete enumeration, in which all members of the identified Grade 4 population were included. This sampling procedure was appropriate because the population size was small and manageable,

and the researcher intended to obtain a complete picture of the reading condition of all Grade 4 learners in the school (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Poserio, n.d.). By including all 45 learners, the study generated comprehensive school-level data on the learners' reading strengths, difficulties, and instructional needs. However, since the respondents came from one school, the findings were primarily intended to guide the proposed reading enhancement program for Sapang Elementary School and were not meant for direct generalization to all Grade 4 learners in other schools or divisions.

2.3 Instrumentation

The study utilized three main instruments to gather the data needed in assessing the reading performance, reading difficulties, and reading needs of the Grade 4 learners of Sapang Elementary School. First, a learner profile sheet was used to obtain basic demographic information about the respondents, particularly age and sex, which provided descriptive background data for interpreting the learners' reading condition. Second, a researcher-developed reading performance assessment was used to measure learners' reading performance in four domains: word recognition, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. The use of a reading assessment tool was appropriate because effective reading evaluation should identify specific areas of strength and weakness rather than treat reading as a single general skill (Institute of Education Sciences, 2022). Third, a reading difficulties and needs checklist was prepared to identify recurring reading problems and translate assessment results into instructional support needs. The checklist helped document difficulties such as weak word recognition, slow or labored oral reading, limited vocabulary, and weak text comprehension, which later served as basis for the proposed reading enhancement program. The instruments were developed in alignment with the title, statement of the problem, conceptual framework, and study variables to ensure that the data collected directly addressed the objectives of the study. The reading materials and items were prepared at a level suitable for Grade 4 learners and were arranged for straightforward administration, checking, and interpretation within the school context. To ensure relevance, clarity, and appropriateness, the instruments were subjected to expert content validation before administration. This validation process was important because content validation helps determine whether the items adequately represent the constructs being measured and whether the instrument is suitable for the intended respondents (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Overall, the instruments generated the exact data required by the study: learner profile, reading performance in the four selected domains, reading difficulties, and reading needs. More importantly, they provided the empirical basis for developing a reading enhancement program that is relevant, practical, and responsive to the actual literacy needs of the Grade 4 learners.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data gathered in the study were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools aligned with the descriptive-developmental nature of the research. Frequency counts and percentages were used to describe the profile of Grade 4 learners by age and sex, allowing the researcher to present the number and proportion of learners in each category. Means and descriptive statistics were used to determine learners' reading performance levels in word recognition, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, as these measures summarized learners' current reading condition in a clear and organized manner. Rankings were applied to identify the most common reading difficulties and the most urgent reading needs of the learners, particularly those requiring priority attention in the proposed Reading Enhancement Program. The same descriptive approach was used to interpret the results of the reading difficulties and needs checklist, ensuring that the proposed intervention was grounded in actual assessment findings rather than assumptions. Descriptive analysis was appropriate because the study aimed to assess existing reading conditions and develop a responsive school-based program, not to test the effectiveness

of an implemented intervention or establish cause-and-effect relationships (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). No inferential statistical test was necessary because the study focused on describing learners' reading performance, identifying difficulties and needs, and using the findings as a basis for program development.

3 Results

The results showed that the respondents in the study were 45 Grade 4 learners from Sapang Elementary School, and the study used total population sampling, or complete enumeration. In terms of age, most respondents were 10 years old, indicating that the learners were generally within the expected age range for Grade 4. The distribution by sex was nearly balanced, though there were slightly more male learners. This profile suggests that the respondents represented a typical Grade 4 classroom population and provided a suitable basis for assessing reading performance, reading difficulties, and reading needs within the school context.

In terms of reading performance, the Grade 4 learners manifested an overall moderate level. Among the four assessed reading domains, word recognition obtained the highest result, indicating that learners were relatively more capable of identifying printed words. However, reading comprehension yielded the lowest score, indicating that the learners had greater difficulty understanding, interpreting, and making meaning from what they read. This finding suggests that although the learners had developed some basic reading skills, their ability to use reading for deeper understanding and academic learning still required further strengthening.

The pattern of results also showed that learners' reading development was uneven. The manuscript specifically notes that word recognition was stronger, while fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension remained areas needing support. This means that the learners were not beginning readers without any reading foundation; rather, they had a developing reading base that needed systematic improvement. Their moderate performance in fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension suggests they may still struggle with longer texts, unfamiliar words, and passages that require interpretation and inference.

The study further revealed that the learners experienced significant reading difficulties. The most notable difficulties involved understanding the meanings of unfamiliar words and reading smoothly with proper pacing. These findings indicate that vocabulary and fluency were major barriers affecting the learners' reading development. Difficulty in understanding unfamiliar words may limit comprehension, while difficulty in reading smoothly may affect learners' ability to maintain meaning across sentences and paragraphs. These results show that the reading difficulties extended beyond word recognition to more complex reading processes.

Correspondingly, the learners manifested a high level of reading needs. The most needed forms of support were vocabulary enrichment activities and guided reading activities to improve fluency. Based on these findings, the study proposed a school-based Reading Enhancement Program for Grade 4 learners of Sapang Elementary School. The program was designed to address vocabulary development, fluency improvement, word recognition, and reading comprehension. Overall, the findings support the need for a structured, practical, and responsive reading intervention that directly addresses the learners' actual reading difficulties and strengthens their ability to use reading as a tool for learning across subjects.

4. Discussion

The findings confirm that the Grade 4 learners of Sapang Elementary School had a developing but still insufficient reading foundation. Their overall reading performance was moderate, with word recognition as the strongest domain and reading comprehension as the weakest. This pattern suggests that many learners could identify printed words but still experienced difficulty deriving meaning, interpreting ideas, and using reading as a tool for

learning. This finding is consistent with the view that reading is not limited to word calling; it requires integrating decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension so that learners can construct meaning from texts (Institute of Education Sciences [IES], 2022). The result also supports the broader argument that reading is a gateway skill because learners who cannot read with understanding may struggle across subject areas that require written instructions, explanations, and text-based tasks (World Bank, 2022).

The relatively stronger result in word recognition implies that the learners had already developed some basic literacy foundation. However, the lower reading comprehension score indicates that recognizing words did not automatically lead to understanding. This finding is important because comprehension is the purpose of reading. Learners may pronounce words correctly but still fail to understand unfamiliar vocabulary, identify main ideas, make inferences, or explain what they have read. UNESCO (2025) identifies literacy as one of the foundational skills needed for school success and lifelong learning, which supports the interpretation that reading comprehension must be strengthened if learners are to participate meaningfully in later academic tasks. The manuscript also emphasizes that Grade 4 is a critical transition stage because learners are expected to move from learning to read toward reading to learn.

The high level of reading difficulties further explains why the learners' overall reading performance remained moderate. The most notable difficulties involved understanding unfamiliar words and reading smoothly with proper pacing. These difficulties point to weaknesses in vocabulary and fluency, both of which are closely connected to comprehension. The IES practice guide on reading interventions for Grades 4–9 stresses that reading support should address students' specific reading needs rather than rely on a single general approach for all struggling readers (IES, 2022). Thus, the finding implies that the learners need differentiated activities: vocabulary-building for those who struggle with word meanings, guided oral reading for those who need fluency support, and comprehension strategy instruction for those who need help understanding texts.

The identified reading needs were consistent with the learners' reading difficulties. Since vocabulary enrichment and guided reading activities emerged as the most needed forms of support, the proposed reading enhancement program should prioritize repeated exposure to meaningful words, contextualized vocabulary exercises, oral reading practice, teacher-guided reading sessions, and comprehension activities. The World Bank's learning poverty framework defines learning poverty as the inability to read and understand a simple text by age 10, highlighting the urgency of strengthening reading skills before learners move to more demanding grade levels (World Bank, 2022). In this study, learners' high reading needs indicate that intervention should not be delayed, as unresolved reading gaps may affect participation, confidence, and achievement in other subjects.

Overall, the findings justify the development of a school-based Reading Enhancement Program for Grade 4 learners of Sapang Elementary School. The proposed program is appropriate because it is grounded in actual assessment results rather than assumptions. The manuscript states that the program was developed in response to learners' assessed reading performance, difficulties, and needs, particularly in vocabulary, fluency, word recognition, and comprehension. This supports the conclusion that the proposed intervention should be structured, practical, and responsive to the learners' actual literacy condition. Since reading development affects present academic participation and future learning outcomes, the study contributes to school-level literacy planning by providing evidence for targeted reading support, teacher-guided remediation, and continuous monitoring of learner progress.

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