

Assessment of Project SARA (Strengthening and Advocating Reading for All) as a Multi-Phase Reading Remediation Program

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Abstract

This study assessed the effectiveness of Project SARA (Strengthening and Advocating Reading for All), a multi-phase reading remediation program implemented at Sara Central Elementary School in Sara, Iloilo, during School Year 2024–2025. Conceptually, the program viewed reading development as a progressive and supported process involving meaningful interaction among learners, texts, teachers, and the home environment. The study employed a descriptive quantitative design and purposively selected 118 Grades 4 to 6 learners identified at the frustration reading level from a total enrolment of 444. The DOLCH Basic Sight Words assessment, supported by oral reading rubrics, was administered before and after the intervention. Frequency counts and comparative analysis were used to determine changes in learners' reading performance. Results showed that the number of learners requiring remediation decreased from 118, or 26.57% of the total enrolment, to 28, or 6.31%, after the intervention. All 17 Grade 6 participants reached the passing level, while remediation needs declined from 44 to six learners in Grade 5 and from 57 to 22 learners in Grade 4. Teachers also observed improvements in decoding, sight-word recognition, fluency, comprehension, confidence, motivation, and participation. However, irregular attendance and limited home reading support remained barriers to sustained progress. The study concludes that Project SARA effectively improved foundational reading competencies through progressive instruction, differentiated activities, continuous assessment, and teacher guidance. Sustaining regular remediation sessions, strengthening parental involvement, expanding instructional resources, providing teacher training, and considering program replication are recommended. The study supports SDG 4—Quality Education and SDG 17—Partnerships for the Goals by promoting inclusive literacy support and school–home collaboration. It contributes to educational, community, and institutional sustainability by supporting responsive and evidence-based literacy programs.

Keywords: Decoding, Differentiated Instruction, DOLCH Basic Sight Words, Literacy Intervention, Parental Involvement, Project SARA, Reading Remediation

1. Introduction

Reading is a foundational competency that enables learners to understand written information and participate effectively across academic subject areas. Despite continuing literacy initiatives, many Filipino learners experience difficulties in decoding, fluency, word recognition, and comprehension. These concerns have encouraged schools to establish structured and differentiated remediation programs for learners performing below the expected reading level. Project SARA, or Strengthening and Advocating Reading for All, is a localized, multi-phase reading remediation program implemented in a school district in Iloilo. It provides progressive instruction in phonemic awareness, blending and word families, sight-word and sentence reading, and short-story reading with comprehension. Through targeted instruction, regular assessment, teacher guidance, and parental participation, the project seeks to address learners' varying literacy needs and strengthen the culture of reading within the school community.

Reading is essential to learning because it allows individuals to obtain, interpret, and construct meaning from written texts. The ultimate purpose of reading is to extract and construct meaning from all kinds of text (Snow, Citation2002). Vygotsky, (1978) has stressed that children learn best when learning is functional and relevant. This perspective supports a whole-to-part or whole-language process that promotes both understanding and enjoyment of written language (Weaver, 1988). Reading is also understood as a complex interaction between the reader and the text (Hughes, 2007). It involves more than merely pronouncing written words because learners must decode linguistic symbols and understand the information being communicated. According to Cline, Johnstone & King (2006) reading is decoding and understanding written text. Despite continued attempts to improve literacy, many Filipino learners remain challenged by reading comprehension and fluency, as reflected in national assessments and international benchmarking studies. Consequently, addressing reading difficulties remains among the major priorities identified in the Department of Education's (DepEd) 2018 Phil-IRI Manual, particularly in the early and intermediate grades where essential literacy skills are developed. Project SARA was established in response

to these concerns. It provides structured instruction, targeted remediation, differentiated learning activities, guided reading sessions, and continuous monitoring. It also recognizes teachers and parents as important literacy partners in supporting learners who require sustained reading assistance.

The reviewed literature identifies systematic instruction, progressive skill development, learner engagement, differentiated teaching, and sustained support as major components of effective reading intervention. The National Reading Panel (2000) identified systematic phonics instruction, guided oral reading, and explicit comprehension strategy instruction as effective approaches to improving reading performance. Similarly, Ehri (2005) emphasized that direct instruction in decoding and comprehension, combined with repeated exposure to print, can accelerate the development of struggling readers. Differentiated instruction is also essential because learners enter remediation programs with different literacy levels, backgrounds, and learning needs. Bernardo (2019) highlighted that successful literacy interventions depend considerably on teachers' ability to select and implement strategies appropriate to learners' reading abilities. Project SARA reflects these principles through four progressive instructional phases. Its phonemic-awareness phase is consistent with Adams (1990) and Torgesen (2002), who emphasized that recognizing, segmenting, blending, and manipulating phonemes contribute to later reading success. These abilities help learners connect spoken language with written symbols. The blending and consonant-vowel-consonant word-family phase is supported by Ehri (1998) and Chall (1996), who identified systematic phonics and decoding instruction as important to word recognition and spelling accuracy. Repeated practice in blending sounds and recognizing word patterns promotes automaticity during the early stages of reading. The sight-word and sentence-reading phase develops learners' automatic recognition of frequently used words. Fry (2000) and Nation (2017) explained that mastery of high-frequency words reduces the cognitive effort required for word identification, allowing learners to focus more closely on sentence meaning and comprehension. The reading-enrichment phase uses short and meaningful texts to develop fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. This phase corresponds with the comprehension and vocabulary-development practices discussed by Duke and Pearson (2002), particularly the use of texts that encourage understanding, inference, reflection, and language development. Meaningful and frequent engagement with texts further strengthens reading development. Allington (2013) argued that learners achieve greater reading gains when they are provided with extensive opportunities to read and perform purposeful literacy activities. This position aligns with Guthrie and Wigfield's (2000) concept of engaged reading, which emphasizes motivation, relevance, and learner choice. Teacher guidance and scaffolding are therefore necessary to ensure that learners not only read frequently but also understand and reflect on the material.

At the global level, evidence on literacy instruction supports structured phonics, guided reading, vocabulary development, comprehension teaching, and regular opportunities to engage with meaningful texts. These practices establish the broader instructional foundation of Project SARA. At the national level, the Department of Education has responded to continuing literacy difficulties through programs such as the Every Child a Reader Program (ECARP) and Project ROAR (Reach Out and Read). These initiatives emphasize school-based reading instruction, learner assessment, progress monitoring, and appropriate remediation. Their objectives are consistent with Project SARA's emphasis on structured, teacher-led intervention. At the local level, studies (Pardo, 2021; Santos, 2022) have shown that school-based reading interventions can improve learners' fluency and comprehension, particularly when teacher mentoring and home-reading activities are included. However, large class sizes, insufficient resources, irregular attendance, and inconsistent parental involvement may limit program effectiveness. Within a school district in Iloilo, Project SARA applies national literacy priorities and evidence-based instructional practices to the needs of intermediate-grade learners. Its localized design allows teachers to identify struggling readers, provide appropriate intervention, monitor their progress, and adjust instruction based on learners' performance.

The study is conceptually grounded in the view that reading develops through meaningful interaction among the learner, the written text, instructional support, and the learner's social environment. The position of Vygotsky, (1978) emphasizes that learning becomes more effective when activities are functional, relevant, and supported by appropriate guidance. Applied to reading remediation, this perspective highlights the role of teachers in scaffolding literacy tasks until learners can perform them more independently. The whole-to-part orientation discussed by (Weaver, 1988) supports the use of meaningful language experiences while progressively developing specific reading skills. At the same time, the interactive view presented by (Hughes, 2007) recognizes that reading involves the active construction of meaning rather than the mechanical recognition of words alone. Project SARA translates these perspectives into a progressive instructional sequence. Learners first develop awareness of sounds, proceed to blending and word recognition, acquire automaticity in reading sight words and sentences, and eventually apply these competencies when reading short texts for meaning. Each stage provides a foundation for the succeeding level and allows teachers to adjust instruction according to the learner's demonstrated needs.

Existing literature provides substantial evidence supporting systematic phonics, guided oral reading, sight-word recognition, comprehension instruction, differentiated teaching, and meaningful literacy engagement. Local studies also indicate that school-based interventions can improve reading performance. However, program outcomes may vary

according to attendance, teacher implementation, available resources, learner readiness, and home literacy support. Although studies (Pardo, 2021; Santos, 2022) documented the benefits of local reading interventions, there remains a need to assess the effectiveness of a specific multi-phase program that moves systematically from phonemic awareness to reading comprehension. There is also a need to determine whether structured remediation can reduce the number of non-readers and frustration-level readers among intermediate-grade learners. Evaluating Project SARA through pretest and posttest performance and teachers' assessments can provide evidence regarding its effectiveness, implementation strengths, and continuing challenges. Such an assessment is necessary for refining instructional practices, strengthening parent-supported literacy activities, improving progress monitoring, and determining whether the program can be sustained or adopted in other schools.

The study primarily supports SDG 4 – Quality Education, particularly the goal of providing inclusive and equitable learning opportunities. Project SARA addresses the needs of learners who have not yet developed the reading competencies expected at their grade levels. Through early identification, differentiated instruction, guided remediation, and continuing assessment, the program seeks to prevent struggling readers from being further disadvantaged in other areas of learning. The project also contributes to SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals through collaboration among teachers, school administrators, learners, and parents. Project SARA recognizes that sustained literacy development requires coordinated support within the school and at home. Strengthening these partnerships can improve learner participation, reinforce reading practice, and support the continuity of remediation activities.

The study contributes primarily to educational sustainability by examining a structured intervention that schools may sustain, refine, and integrate into regular literacy programs. Its progressive instructional phases and assessment-based approach can support the continued delivery of appropriate reading assistance to learners with varying needs. It also supports community sustainability because literacy development requires the participation of families and the broader school community. Parental involvement in home-reading activities can extend learning beyond formal remediation sessions and strengthen shared responsibility for children's literacy development. From an institutional sustainability perspective, the assessment can help schools make evidence-based decisions regarding teacher training, intervention materials, scheduling, learner monitoring, and program expansion. The findings may guide the establishment of more responsive and sustainable literacy systems within the school district. The study also has multidisciplinary relevance because reading competency affects learning in language, mathematics, science, social studies, technology, and other academic fields. Strengthening learners' ability to decode, comprehend, and interpret written information therefore supports their broader academic participation and long-term educational development.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to assess the effectiveness of Project SARA, or Strengthening and Advocating Reading for All. The design allowed the researchers to examine the implementation and outcomes of the program in its actual school setting. Quantitative data were obtained from learners' pretest and posttest reading assessment results to determine changes in their reading performance after participating in the intervention.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Sara Central Elementary School in Sara, Iloilo, where Project SARA was implemented during School Year 2024–2025. The school implemented the program to address the reading difficulties of intermediate-grade learners through structured remediation, differentiated activities, regular monitoring, and collaboration among teachers, learners, and parents.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The primary respondents were 118 learners from Grades 4 to 6 who were identified as performing at the frustration reading level based on the pretest results. Reading teachers, the school head or reading coordinator, and parents were also involved in the implementation, monitoring, and support activities of the program.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was used to select learners who directly required reading remediation. Eligibility for participation was based on the results of the initial reading assessment. Learners classified at the frustration level through the DOLCH Basic Sight Words pretest were included as beneficiaries of Project SARA. This procedure ensured that the intervention was directed toward learners with identified difficulties in word recognition and other foundational reading competencies.

2.5 Research Instrument

The primary research instrument was the DOLCH Basic Sight Words assessment, which contains frequently used words that learners are expected to recognize automatically. The pretest was used to determine learners' initial reading levels and identify those who needed remediation. The instrument was validated by experienced reading teachers and English coordinators within the district. It followed the standards of the Every Child a Reader Program (ECARP) to maintain alignment with Department of Education literacy benchmarks. The same assessment tools were administered during the pretest and posttest to ensure a consistent basis for comparing learners' performance. Rubrics were also used to assess oral reading fluency, pronunciation, and comprehension accuracy, allowing the researchers to consider both numerical scores and observed reading performance.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Before the intervention, teachers administered the pretest to establish the learners' baseline reading levels and identify those requiring remediation. The parents of the selected learners were subsequently invited to an orientation, during which the program procedures were explained and parental consent was secured. Project SARA involved daily reading sessions, guided oral reading, and differentiated activities based on the learners' identified reading needs. Teachers served as facilitators, mentors, and assessors throughout the implementation. The intervention consisted of four progressive instructional phases represented by separate reading packets. The first phase focused on phonemic awareness by developing learners' ability to recognize, distinguish, and manipulate sounds. The second phase concentrated on blending and consonant-vowel-consonant word families to improve decoding, word formation, and recognition of common word patterns. The third phase introduced DOLCH basic sight words and sentence-reading activities to strengthen automatic word recognition, accuracy, and fluency. The fourth phase used short stories to develop comprehension, vocabulary, and oral reading fluency. The pre-implementation phase was conducted in June and involved the initial assessment, profiling of learners, and assignment of appropriate interventions. Phonemic-awareness activities were implemented from July to August, followed by blending and word-family instruction from September to October. Sight-word and sentence-reading activities were conducted from November to December, while short-story reading and comprehension activities were implemented from January to February. The post-assessment was administered in March to determine learners' reading growth and identify those who continued to require remediation. Assessments were also administered after each instructional phase to monitor learners' progress and allow teachers to adjust their strategies. Throughout the program, teachers collaborated with parents and learners to encourage continuous reading engagement in school and at home. The pretest results, posttest results, phase assessments, and teacher records were subsequently compiled for analysis.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The study used simple descriptive statistical techniques to analyze the collected data. Frequency counts were employed to determine the number of learners classified under the different reading levels and the number who required remediation. The pretest and posttest results were also compared to identify changes in learners' reading performance after the implementation of Project SARA. These techniques provided a concise summary of the data and enabled the researchers to determine patterns of improvement and continuing remediation needs among the participating learners.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical procedures were observed throughout the study. Parental consent was secured before the identified learners participated in the remediation program and related assessments. Approval from the appropriate school authorities was also obtained before data collection and program implementation. The assessment and intervention procedures were conducted under the supervision of teachers and school personnel to protect the welfare and educational interests of the participating learners.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Reading Performance Before and After Project SARA

3.1.1 Baseline Reading Performance of Learners

The pretest was administered to 444 learners from Grades 4 to 6. Of this number, 326 learners, or 73.42%, passed, while 118 learners, or 26.57%, were identified as needing reading remediation. Grade 4 had the greatest remediation need, with 57 of 154 learners, or 37.01%, performing below the expected level. Grade 5 had 44 of 143 learners, or 30.77%, requiring intervention, while Grade 6 had 17 of 147 learners, or 11.56%. Among the entire population, 46 learners were classified at the pre-primer level, 29 at the primer level, 10 at the Grade I level, 12 at the Grade II level, and 21 at the Grade III level. These results showed that many learners, particularly in Grades 4 and 5, were reading at foundational levels below their expected grade placement. The baseline findings demonstrated the need for structured and differentiated reading intervention. The National Reading Panel (2000) identified systematic phonics instruction, guided oral reading, and comprehension strategy teaching as effective approaches to improving reading achievement. Likewise, Ehri (2005) emphasized that repeated exposure to print and direct instruction in decoding and comprehension can accelerate the

development of struggling readers. The differences across grade levels also support Bernardo (2019), who highlighted the importance of adapting instructional strategies to learners' specific reading levels and backgrounds.

3.1.2 Changes in Learners' Remediation Needs

After the implementation of Project SARA, the number of learners requiring remediation decreased from 118 to 28, representing only 6.31% of the total enrolment. Grade 6 achieved the greatest improvement, as all 17 learners initially identified for remediation reached the passing level, resulting in no remaining learners requiring intervention. In Grade 5, the number decreased from 44 learners, or 30.77% of the grade-level enrolment, to six learners, or 4.20%. Grade 4 also improved, with the number requiring remediation declining from 57 learners, or 37.01%, to 22 learners, or 14.28%. Although Grade 4 retained the largest number of learners needing further support, all three grade levels demonstrated considerable improvement following the intervention. The decline in remediation needs indicates that the program's progressive instructional structure effectively addressed several foundational reading difficulties. Its phases in phonemic awareness, blending, word recognition, sentence reading, and comprehension correspond with evidence-based approaches to literacy development. Adams (1990) and Torgesen (2002) emphasized the importance of phoneme recognition and manipulation, while Ehri (1998) and Chall (1996) supported systematic phonics and decoding instruction. The improvement in sight-word and sentence reading is also consistent with Fry (2000) and Nation (2017), who explained that automatic recognition of frequently used words allows learners to devote greater attention to meaning and comprehension.

3.2 Teachers' Evaluation of Project SARA

3.2.1 Instructional Strengths and Learner Development

Teachers observed that the structured reading sessions increased learners' exposure to purposeful reading activities. Learners who initially experienced difficulties in decoding and recognizing sight words demonstrated improvements in fluency, confidence, motivation, and participation. Teachers identified consistent daily practice, paired reading, guided oral reading, and differentiated activities as important components of the learners' progress. The four progressive reading packets enabled instruction to move systematically from phonemic awareness to short-story reading and comprehension. These observations indicate that reading improvement was supported not only by the sequence of instructional content but also by sustained learner engagement and teacher guidance. Allington (2013) argued that learners make greater reading gains when they receive extensive opportunities to read and participate in meaningful literacy activities. This finding also reflects Guthrie and Wigfield's (2000) concept of engaged reading, which emphasizes motivation, relevance, and active participation. The teachers' use of differentiated activities further supports Bernardo (2019), who emphasized that literacy interventions are more effective when strategies are matched to learners' abilities and backgrounds.

3.2.2 Continuing Remediation Needs and Implementation Challenges

Despite the overall improvement, 28 learners continued to require reading remediation after the intervention. Most of these learners were in Grade 4, where 22 remained below the expected reading level, while six were in Grade 5. Teachers identified irregular attendance and limited home reading support as continuing barriers to learner progress. These conditions reduced some learners' opportunities for consistent practice and reinforcement outside the classroom. The remaining remediation needs suggest that reading development requires continuous, adaptive, and closely monitored intervention. Studies (Pardo, 2021; Santos, 2022) similarly found that school-based reading programs can improve fluency and comprehension but may be affected by insufficient resources and inconsistent parental involvement. Continued phase assessments, teacher mentoring, differentiated instruction, and stronger home-school collaboration are therefore necessary for learners who require longer or more intensive support.

3.3 Overall Effectiveness of the Multi-Phase Reading Remediation Program

The pretest and posttest findings showed a substantial reduction in the number of learners requiring remediation across Grades 4 to 6. The decrease from 118 learners before the intervention to 28 learners after its implementation demonstrated that Project SARA improved the reading performance of most participating learners. The strongest outcome was recorded in Grade 6, where all identified learners progressed to the passing level. Improvements in Grades 4 and 5 further showed that the intervention benefited learners with different levels of reading difficulty, although some continued to require additional remediation. Overall, the findings indicate that a structured, multi-phase remediation program can support the progressive development of word recognition, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The instructional progression from basic sound recognition to meaningful text comprehension reflects the approach discussed by Duke and Pearson (2002), in which learners develop deeper understanding through engagement with appropriate and meaningful reading materials. However, sustained outcomes depend on consistent attendance, continuing teacher guidance, regular assessment, differentiated support, and active parental involvement.

4 Conclusion & Recommendations

Project SARA was effective in improving the reading performance of Grades 4 to 6 learners, as shown by the reduction in the number requiring remediation from 118 in the pretest to 28 in the posttest. Its four-phase instructional sequence supported the progressive development of phonemic awareness, decoding, sight-word recognition, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The findings further indicate that early identification, differentiated instruction, consistent teacher guidance, and continuous assessment are essential in helping struggling learners progress toward the expected reading level.

Project SARA should be sustained through regular reading remediation sessions, daily or weekly reading clinics, continuous assessments after each instructional phase, and stronger parental participation in home-based reading activities. Schools should also provide capacity-building programs for reading teachers, develop additional phonics, vocabulary, story-reading, and comprehension materials, and consider adopting the program in other schools within the district based on the demonstrated improvement in learners' reading performance.

The findings were limited to 118 Grades 4 to 6 learners identified at the frustration reading level in Sara Central Elementary School and were analyzed primarily through pretest and posttest results using simple descriptive statistics. Learners' irregular attendance, varying readiness, and limited or inconsistent home reading support may also have affected their participation and progress during the intervention. Therefore, the findings represent the outcomes of Project SARA within the specific school setting and implementation period covered by the study.

Compliance with ethical standards

The study complied with institutional ethical standards and received approval from the appropriate school authorities. Participation was voluntary, and informed parental consent was secured for the Grades 4 to 6 learners before data collection and intervention activities. Learners' identities and assessment results were treated confidentially and used solely for research purposes. The researchers declare no conflict of interest, acknowledge the contributions of the school administrators, teachers, parents, and learners, and accept responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, originality, and copyright ownership of the study.

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