Investigating Functional Reading Literacy and Dropout Rate

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the relationship of functional reading literacy and dropout rate. The reading assessment of pupils in the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) and the annual reported dropout rate in the four consecutive school years – (2014 – 2018) were used and applied for the conduct of research. Documentary and data analysis method of research was applied in this study. Qualitative interpretation was done to identify the functional reading classification of students as: frustration, instructional, independent, and non-reader. The status and relation of school dropout rate and functional reading literacy was also investigated. It was revealed that majority of the students fall under the instructional category (33.45%), only a quarter (26.54%) is independent readers. The rest need immediate reinforcement and attention for them to be independent readers. This study found out that functional reading literacy does not directly relate to students' dropout rate. Careful analysis of the data showed that decreasing dropout rates were noted while students' functional reading literacy pegged at various levels.

Introduction

The high percentage of dropouts is one of the major problems that public elementary and even secondary schools in the Philippines have confronted for many years. It is a perennial problem ever since that the country has insurmountable rate of reported student dropouts. Chareonrat (2016) has stated that the escalating dropout percentage of students is considered a priority in many educational entities. Many factors have contributed to its worsening condition such as poverty, family problems, peer influence, juvenile delinquency, and other vices that involve students. Rizal (2015) has affirmed that poverty reduction could be address through education in the light of enhancing human resources quality.

The Department of Education (DepEd) has initiated programs to address and look for a long-term solution for dropout reduction. The most popular is the Dropout Reduction Program (DORP) Implementation in Strong Republic Schools (SRSs) in line with the goal of the *Philippine Education for All (EFA) 2015* to improve the retention of students who are already enrolled in the public schools. DORP aims to identify major risk factors which prevent students from completing

formal education; to identify appropriate intervention for students-at-risk of dropping out (SARDO); to formulate Dropout Reduction Plan in the school and division levels; and to conduct Student Tracking System (DepEd Memorandum No. 553 s. 2008)

Public schools are required by the DepED to put up the Student Tracking System is one of the important components of the *Three-Year School Improvement Plan.* It traces out-of-school youth within the community to encourage them to study again. It is done by a special committee of every public elementary and secondary schools before the opening of classes. In addition, Kleebbua (2015) has opined that extracurricular activities could aid in enhancing students' reading and writing skills.

Causes of dropout rate escalation may not be only of those which mentioned external factors but include the condition of the school facilities and learning atmosphere as well. Teachers within the school may also be potential contributors. The way the teacher performs the teaching-learning process which students may not be motivated and learning seems to be bored may be a factor of their dropout. Furthermore, the relationship and treatment of learners to one another may have psychological and emotional effects that may cause their dropout from school. If there is a bully classmate, who always hurts and threats others, this is also may cause fear for students to come to school.

The performance reading level or literacy of a child may also be a possible factor of his school dropout. If the child basics reading does not progress well, the child is not competent enough to follow the curriculum and automatically his comprehension and analysis are affected. Thus, learning is a struggle for him which possibly he may quit his study.

The problem in the increase of dropout rate has always been associated with reading literacy of learners. The competencies taught in the classroom require comprehension. If learners do not have strong foundation in reading, it would be difficult for them to attain the learning objectives. Learners may opt to dropout schooling if they could not read and learn the subject matter and if their teachers retained them because they failed the test. These could possibly have psychological and emotional impact to them to feel disheartened and uninterested to pursue their studies.

A study by Jarjoura (1996) has found out that those who dropped education for personal reason were likely to exhibit offensive behavior and those who left with economic struggle appeared less inclined to offend than those who graduated independently from indigent lifestyle. Based on a national representative probability sample, the study revealed that the propensity to engage in delinquency after early school dropout is dependent on the reason for leaving and the poverty status of the youth involved.

The problem of early school dropout indicates opinions of failing students to achieve academically and graduate from school. The issue then may not only be on how to better prepare them for schooling, or even how schools are kept relevant and responsive to their diverse needs. Some students may fail merely within the academic system. However, they are forced to remain for their belief that only schools can generally provide the kind of formal education and credentials

required for successful endeavor to work and into adulthood (Dorn, 1996; Reich and Young, 1975; Swadener, 1995).

Importantly, school-related issues are revealed as determinants of dropouts outshined family-related, work-related and other motives (Dalton et al., 2009; Rumberger, 2004b). However, high percentage of the literature keeps attuned on factors which are not related to the school, instead to pupils themselves and their families. Many studies hint at the importance of school accessibility from the residence which is an aspect related to students, their families, schools and teachers, as well as the community. A considerable number of studies have focused only on one or some of these types of aspects (Ekstrom et al., 1986). Indeed, the majority of research on early school dropouts is anchored to specify personal and social issues of potential dropouts that may differently categorize them from graduates, so as to create a kind of an equivalent model and standard for those at risk, for whom targeted intervention programs and measures can then be devised and initiated (Vizcain, 2005).

In Philippines, the government has prioritized reading and writing. Government, non-government offices, and other organizations have initiated various activities in the National Reading Month celebrated during November spearheaded by Department of Education.

The context of functional reading literacy and dropout rate is a crucial inquiry that the researchers have identified in the following research questions which this study seeks to answer:

1. What are the categories of most of the pupils' functional literacy?
   a. frustration;
   b. instructional;
   c. independent; and
   d. non-reader
2. What is the status and relationship of school dropout rate and functional reading literacy for four consecutive years, 2014-2018?

Literature review

Literacy has been defined and evolved throughout the centuries. Its meaning has been contextualized and considered based on people's interpretation within their community and ethnic group. In general impression, literacy is considered the ability to write and read one's name and address and in another, the ability to write a word or simple sentence in local dialect and any language. The cognizance of the language, culture, environment, and individual context has defined formally the technical interpretation of literacy (Harman, 1970). Therefore, literacy is a contextual ability and self-defined based on a group of people and it depends on demographic condition of a particular place. The Literacy Research Center of the University of Pennsylvania has conceptualized and defined literacy based on the following principles: literacy is a complex phenomenon that involves knowledge, skills, habits, and attitudes; literacy may be initiated and promoted in the home, school and workplace, and in cultural, social, political and religious institutions of each society; and definitions of literacy are not universal, but rather are relative to the social, economic and personal needs of the members of any particular group in a society.

Sibayan (1987) stated that useful literacy has to be specialized literacy, i.e., a person must be literate in a certain subject or at least a subject that is job-oriented.

Literacy determines the academic performance of students. Performing different school tasks and activities across all learning areas needs the reading ability and comprehension of students. Those students with weak reading and numeracy abilities will often dropout school. An individual's employment outcome is significantly affected by strong literacy skills. When they drop out of school, their access to many profitable, knowledge-based jobs may be limited. Aritini (2014) reported that improvement in literacy skills has something to do with the difficulty of text-related activity. Vongkrachang and Chinwonno (2015) also cited that more social interaction for students would allow them to see perspectives and to socially construct information. Also, short story reading contributes to the comprehension of students (Izadi and Zare-Behtash, 2016).

Functional literacy is more important beyond some people think, and it is a pillar of a student's potential to academic and professional success. This study has proposition that functional reading literacy of children contributes to the increase of pupils' dropout in school. Therefore, the researchers pursued to determine its validity through the conduct of documentary and data analysis method of research to determine their significant relationship and draw up the appropriate school reading intervention and dropout reduction program for the school respondent.

Methodology

This study employed a document analysis which was a data-based strategy to identify the status and relation of studied variables. The researchers looked for the needed documents and data to answer the problems and came up with proper findings and conclusions. Proper communication was observed through writing a letter of consent and approval from the school head for the legality and recognition of the research. For the authenticity of documents purposes, the researchers were hands-on in gathering those documents. The researchers personally approached the school personnel responsible for the documents and asked some verification. Diplomacy was observed in dealing with communication in respect for their rights and since this study dealt with the documents and data concerned about the reading performance of pupils and school's dropout rate, careful planning and procedure were crafted for the utmost confidentiality of the research.

Participants

The respondent school was a public elementary school located in an urban depressed area, classified as big school with an annex school just established in 2016. Included in the study are the records of students in the Grades II – VI for the years 2015- 2018, who underwent reading assessment by the DepEd's Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI).

The school environment and children were vulnerable to vices and juvenile delinquencies as previously mentioned capable to create untoward effect to their scholastic performance and make them at-risk of dropping out school. Disadvantaged children should be given much attention in order to increase completion rate (Nkurunziza and Hooimeijer, 2017). Also, a study by Setiasih

(2014) who concluded that acquisition and development of English literacy can take place in and outside of the school.

Respondents are mostly from poor families, whose parents have low educational attainment and laissez-faire parenting style which have significant effect to the poor reading performance of pupils based on the conducted action research done by the school involved in this study. The presence of parents and their efforts regarding their children's literacy activities are vital (Johari et al., 2013). The promotion of literacy takes place at home and at school (Setiasih, 2014).

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and discussion of the study and some relevant information about the school respondent. The data gathered were analyzed based on documentary analysis research method and interpreted through application of appropriate statistical treatment.

RQ1: What functional reading literacy most of the pupils are classified (frustration, instructional, independent, and non-reader?

The school respondent has significant rate of pupils with frustration and instruction for the school years 2014- 2018 as illustrated in the table below. This rate affects the performance of the school academically in the division and national achievement tests.

To make the Phil-IRI results simplified and more comprehensive, a table of summary was prepared below to cover the last four consecutive school years of pupils' functional reading literacy assessment.

Table 1. Summary of pupils' functional reading literacy (SY 2014 – 2018)

Classification	No. of Students	Rank
School Year 2014 - 2015		
Frustration	1548	2
Instructional	1904	1
Independent	1295	3
Non-Reader	167	4
School Year 2015 - 2016		
Frustration	1860	2
Instructional	1945	1
Independent	1489	3
Non-Reader	980	4
School Year 2016 - 2017		
Frustration	668	3

Instructional	997	1
Independent	768	2
Non-Reader	348	4
School Year 2017 - 2018		
Frustration	682	3
Instructional	789	2
Independent	918	1
Non-Reader	485	4

The four year data revealed that most of the pupils belong to instructional level of those who can read but there are mispronounced words and with poor comprehension, which is 33.46%, next is *Frustration,* pupils who are slow readers and without comprehension, that has 28.25%; next is *Independent,* pupils who are fast readers with comprehension, which is 26.54%; and the *Non-Reader,* pupils who cannot interpret sounds of words and even letters, that has 11.75%.

It means that only a quarter of the total population of pupils belongs to the readers with good comprehension or independent readers. Most pupils need a crucial reinforcement and guided reading instruction especially the alarming rate of non-readers which needs immediate attention.

RQ2: What is the status and relation of school dropout rate and functional reading literacy based on the results of statistics for four consecutive years, 2014-2018?

The table below shows the annual reported dropout rate of the school respondent for School Years 2014- 2018.

Table 2. The school dropout rate

School Year	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	Total
Dropout Rate	8.71	4.62	0.14	0.39	13.86

The school respondent dropout rate reported annually seems unpredictable. Since the school respondent is located in a depressed area where pupils belong to the marginalized family, vulnerable to vices influenced by their peers, and other unhelping scenarios, cases of dropouts were attributed to many factors.

In this study, dropout rates were compared and attributed to the poor functional reading literacy of pupils. The researchers assumed that functional reading literacy impacts dropout rate as supported by related researches and studies mentioned in the previous discussion. Functional reading literacy and dropout rate do not yield any consistent correlation or relationship. In this study, the poor functional reading literacy of pupils of the school respondent clearly establishes unpredictable dropout rates in the last four consecutive school years.

The first three periods of the coverage of the study, School Year 2014 – 2015, 2015 – 2016, 2016 – 2017, when dropout rate was pegged highest at 8.71%, majority of the students are

classified as instructional reader. It was only in the School Year 2017 – 2018 where most students are noted to be independent readers.

As students' dropout rate continued to improve, from 8.71% in School Year 2014 – 2015 to 0.39% in School Year 2017 – 2018, no significant relation was established with the students' functional reading literacy. Classification of students under four categories remained inconsistent and unpredictable.

Students identified to be under the non-reader category were ranked last among four levels, regardless of high or low dropout rates. This study further investigates that the two variables, students' functional reading literacy and dropout rate, do not exhibit a high degree of relationship or seriously affecting one and another.

While students under the nonreader category were ranked last during the covered period of study, mechanisms are in placed to improve their reading ability. The following activities and intervention may help improve functional reading literacy of pupils:

Strategic Plan. The school has to determine goals and develop various long term programs to address poor functional reading literacy of pupils and dropout rate.

Remedial Program. The school shall intensify the conduct of remedial reading program to strengthen the pupils' functional reading literacy.

Trainings and Seminars. Teachers have to attend various trainings and seminars to upgrade their pedagogical skills in teaching reading.

Reading Programs and Activities. The school has to be creative and innovative in the conduct of reading programs and activities to motivate pupils to read and to inculcate them the values of reading. According to Anugkakul (2015), learning language strategies could be utilized towards efforts of enhancing learners' reading ability.

The participating school has to be serious in implementing their remedial reading program. The development of reading mechanism and its inclusion in the three-year development plan are necessary for the long-term strategic endeavor so that appropriation of enough budget if necessary will be included in the school budget and liquidation. Proper and regular monitoring of the school reading program is very important to check and continuously update the reading status of pupils. Development of monitoring tools for the conduct of school remedial reading program has to be done for measuring and evaluating purposes. In the long run, Ko and Wang (2013) have suggested that there has to be a provision for students to develop critical literacy along with their discrete language skills.

On the other hand, for reducing dropout rate, the conduct of home visit for the prospect dropouts, as stated in the DepEd circular and memorandum, may be helpful and has to be adopted by the participating school and teachers. This would assist in understanding the family background, economic condition, and even the environmental factors that would be critical to the student's disengagement from the school.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the gathered findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

First. Pupils' functional reading literacy and dropout rate do not have significant relation and impact.

Second. Majority of students fall under the instructional category and only a quarter is independent readers regardless of high or low dropout rates.

Third. Students classified under the nonreader category are ranked last, despite favorable and improving dropout rates.

As dropout rate eventually improves, students' functional literacy remains unstable and unpredictable. It was found out that functional reading literacy and dropout rate do not have significant relation. No implication could be noted at the alarming rate of dropouts of the participating school in the last four consecutive years. Immediate response and necessary measure need to be taken seriously to improve reading performance of pupils and to reduce dropout rate. Reading is a fundamental skill that cannot be attained and achieved in one session or in a day but it needs a long and sufficient time of development.

Students may dropout from school due to numerous factors. This study presents concrete evidence on dropout rate and students' functional reading literacy: as their ability improves, the dropout rate may be high or low. Moreover, high dropout rate could not be equated to the presence of students who are nonreaders.

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