Transforming Students' Reading Engagement through a Community-based Literacy Program

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Reading engagement, which includes reading attitude and leisure reading practices, is an important aspect of reading development. This non-cognitive aspect of reading has yet to be studied in a community-based literacy program.
This ethnographic study aimed to investigate the effect of a community-based literacy program on the reading engagement of its students and the key factors that influenced the transformation. Specifically, it looked into the *Balsa Basa* community-based literacy program situated in a remote area in the Bicol region. Twenty-four students in the community, together with their parents/guardians, participated in the workshops, interviews, and surveys. Results from quantitative and qualitative data show that the *Balsa Basa* program had positively transformed its students' attitudes towards reading and leisure reading practices. The key factors that contributed to the reading engagement transformation were the increase in the supply of printed materials, the abundance of pleasurable opportunities for reading, and the promotion of student empowerment (i.e., assignment of Little Teachers). The findings suggest that community-based literacy programs have the potential to influence students' reading development. It is recommended that such programs be developed in other communities to help address students' literacy needs.

Keywords: *community-based literacy program, reading engagement, reading attitude, leisure reading practices*

Introduction

Reading involves affective and behavioral dimensions (Kirsch et al., 2002), besides its more familiar cognitive component. Developing these dimensions is crucial since having a positive attitude towards reading and spending time to do leisure reading contribute to student reading performance (Brozo et al., 2007; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Kirsch et al., 2002). It is these variables that the present study looked into in a non-formal reading program, specifically a community-based one situated in a remote rural setting of the county.

Reading Engagement

Reading, according to Kirsch et al., does not only involve the cognitive dimension. It also "covers non-cognitive aspects, such as reading attitudes and practices" (Kirsch et al., 2002, p.107). In the same way, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) views reading as not only the ability to read and write, but as the ability to continuously learn and apply reading skills in real-life settings (OECD, 2003; OECD, 2019). The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which measures 15-year-olds' abilities to use their knowledge and skills in facing real-life challenges, uses reading engagement as one of the major variables in assessing students' reading performances. Reading engagement is defined as "the time that students report reading a diversity of material for pleasure and their interest in and attitudes toward reading" (Brozo et al., 2007, p.307).

In relation to a broader scope, engagement is also viewed as a construct comprising affective and behavioral components with an additional cognitive dimension (Fredricks et al., 2004; Parsons et al., 2014). Affective engagement deals with attitudes and emotions towards a task, while behavioral engagement focuses on time on task and active participation. On the other hand, cognitive engagement emphasizes self-regulation skills and metacognitive strategies in learning (Fredricks et al., 2004; Parsons, Nuland, & Parsons, 2014).

As part of reading assessment, reading engagement is valuable for student performance. Studies have shown that students' reading engagement is linked with reading achievement and is even a better indicator than socio-economic status (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Kirsch et al., 2002). Furthermore, Brozo et al. (2007) analyzed, using PISA results, the reading engagement of three countries and found consistent results saying that reading engagement is indeed associated with reading achievement. Students who were highly engaged in reading obtained higher reading scores in the test.

Components and Measures of Reading Engagement

Reading engagement can be divided into two components: reading attitude and reading practices. Reading attitude is defined as "a state of mind, accompanied by feelings and emotions, that makes reading more or less probable" (Smith, 1990, p.215). It includes the reader's interest and motivation to read (Kirsch et al., 2002).

On the other hand, reading practices encompass the frequency a reader engages in leisure reading, as well as the variety of texts read (Brozo et al., 2007; OECD, 2009). It is the behavioral component of reading engagement that can be observed when a reader immerses in various types of reading activities for pleasure (OECD, 2009). It "involves personal choice, choosing what one wants to read, and reading widely from a variety of sources—not just books" (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007, p.22).

Students' attitudes towards reading have been measured widely using rating scales. For instance, McKenna et al. (1995) made use of the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) in a nationwide measure of the children's attitudes towards reading in the United States. A similar scale was developed by Lim (2001) in the Philippines to estimate the attitudes towards reading of Grades 3-6 students. Following a 5-point scale, the Reading Attitude Scale consisted of 40 items which were divided into four subscales: home environment, school environment, goals, and self-concept as a reader.

While rating scales are mostly used in measuring attitudes towards reading, there have been more varied ways of gathering data on students' reading practices. In a survey on the leisure reading habits of youth in the United States, Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) asked the students to complete a 20-item questionnaire, mostly involving multiple-choice questions and a few open-ended items. Highlighted in some of the questions were the following components of leisure reading: kinds of reading materials, time dedicated to reading, reasons for reading, topics of interest, ways of obtaining reading materials, and the reason for not engaging in leisure reading if the previous items were not applicable. Similarly, in PISA 2009, reading practices were also measured through student-reported frequencies of reading different types of texts (OECD, 2009). In the Philippines, the National Book Development Board developed the Readership Survey to gather information regarding Filipinos' reading practices such as reading frequency and the types of reading materials read (NBDB, 2018).

While the studies mentioned above made use of self-reported estimates in measuring students' time spent on leisure reading, another method was practiced by Knulst and Kraaykamp (1998). They made use of a time budget method to gather a more precise account of the respondent's activities. In their study on leisure reading trends, respondents were asked to record all their activities, including reading, every quarter of an hour for seven full days (Knulst & Kraaykamp, 1998). Although it may be time-consuming and demanding for respondents, time-use diaries were reported by Robinson (1999, as cited in Wollscheid, 2014) as a more valid and reliable method of recording than the usual survey estimates which may cause over-approximation of the actual behavior.

Community-based literacy programs

Community-based programs are driven by a group of people that share common aspirations and aims. Also associated with local development, these programs promote the involvement of local community members and the use of local resources in contributing to the community's development (Binswanger-Mkhize et al., 2010). In the field of education, these programs involve not only home and school settings, but the whole community in addressing the educational needs of their students (Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, 2011).

Community-based literacy learning takes into consideration both physical and social features of its community and therefore centers on contextualized learning (Behrman, 2002). Specifically, in the studies of Ocampo (1991) and Law and Chia (2015), the following features were found in successful community-based literacy programs: (a) use of read-aloud, (b) access to literature, (c) child-centeredness as supported by incorporation of fun and relevant learning experiences, and (d) collaboration among program implementers.

Several key players comprise a community-based literacy program in nurturing a community of readers: parents, teachers, and program leaders. At home, children's attitudes towards reading and their leisure reading practices are influenced by their parents (Doležalová, 2015; Garces-Bacsal & Yeo, 2017; Hansen, 1973). Parents' literacy practices such as reading aloud to their children, bringing them to public libraries, providing educational resources, and valuing reading themselves are some of the ways on how they impact their children's reading attitude (Garces-Bacsal & Yeo, 2017), reading engagement (Ho & Lau, 2018), and reading achievement (Chiu & Chow, 2015; Foertsch, 1992; OECD, 2012; Pado, 1990). Furthermore, home educational resources, in general, are also positively correlated with reading engagement and reading performance (Ho & Lau, 2018). Students whose parents made investments in educational, cultural, and reading resources developed positive gains in reading enjoyment, reading diversity, and reading performance (Ho & Lau, 2018).

Other than parents, children's literacy development is also shaped by their teachers. Teachers' modeling and support, in the form of providing a wide collection of books, being a young

adult literature expert, and spending time reading with students, are the key factors in promoting student reading engagement (Daniels & Steres, 2011). In addition, maintaining good order in classrooms, utilizing of scaffolding strategies, and contextualizing learning practices contribute to students' reading engagement (Guthrie & Cox, 2001; Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Ho & Lau, 2018).

Lastly, the program leader is at the core of a community-based literacy program. The program leader's vision of the program and commitment to supporting it with time and resources are necessary for developing a strong literacy program (Guth & Pettengill, 2005). Similarly, Daniels & Steres (2011) found that with the program leader's making reading a priority, more time and resources were devoted to reading, which in turn created an impact on the students' desire to read (Daniels & Steres, 2011).

In the Philippines, various community-based literacy programs that target cognitive reading skills have been developed. Ocampo (1991) developed an early reading program for preschool children living in urban poor communities. Through highly contextualized learning, the program successfully increased the mean scores of the children in various early literacy skills (Ocampo, 1991). Similarly, Digo (2012) also developed the *TARA'T MATUTO,* a cross-age early reading intervention program to improve the early literacy skills of children such as book and print orientation, alphabet mastery, phonemic awareness, listening and reading comprehension.

The present study

While the significance of addressing the cognitive aspects of reading development has been evident in the studies mentioned above, a research gap remains in the field of targeting the non-cognitive aspects of reading development. The present study aimed to investigate the effect of a community-based literacy program on the reading engagement of its students and the key factors that influenced the reading engagement transformation. Findings could contribute to the development of more community-based literacy programs in addressing both cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of reading. Specifically, this paper sought to answer the following questions in an existing program called the *Balsa Basa* community-based literacy program (CBLP):

1. Did the *Balsa Basa* CBLP transform the attitudes towards reading and the leisure reading practices of the students?

2. How did the *Balsa Basa* CBLP transform the attitudes towards reading and the leisure reading practices of the students?

The *Balsa Basa* CBLP is a program founded in 2013 through the initiative of a public school teacher to reach out to children in remote parts of his community (Gan, 2019). Based in a small rural village in the Philippines, the program aims to make every child in the community into a reader by developing positive attitudes towards reading through meaningful reading practices. The program derives its name from the Filipino words *balsa* and *basa* which mean raft and reading, respectively, and is known for its use of a bamboo raft that navigates the river to bring literacy activities and materials to students who could rarely attend school. Inaccessible trails between their homes and school, and the families' educational perceptions were some of the major reasons for poor school attendance. These and factors such as availability of funding/resources and parents' educational attainment are some of the known contributors as to why children in isolated communities are more at a disadvantage compared to their counterparts in urban communities (Lamb et al., 2014).

To achieve their goal, the *Balsa Basa* CBLP carried out various activities such as: (a) the *Balsa Basa*, the use of bamboo raft in bringing literacy activities to far-flung areas; (b) the Walk for Knowledge, the trekking activity to get to the remote parts of the community; (c) reading time, the dedicated time for reading in school every day, usually done at the school's designated reading stations; (d) home-based reading corners, or establishing learning/reading spaces at home; and (e) a reading festival, the celebration of students' talents and skills in the field of literacy.

Moreover, the goals were addressed through the collaborative efforts of its community members including the program leaders, teachers, parents, students, barangay officials, and external support from local government and non-government units. Parent volunteers and students from Grades 4 to 6 called Little Teachers were given training and workshops to equip them in conducting literacy activities for younger children. Additionally, partner organizations funded the program's activities and resource materials. Figure 1 displays some of the photos taken when they used the balsa to bring reading activities to families in an isolated area.

Figure 1

Photos of the Balsa Basa Activity in Action

Throughout the program's development and implementation process, the following key features were found to contribute to the success of the program: (a) community-centeredness, (b) community involvement, and (c) a strong sense of commitment (Gan, 2019). With a sense of ownership among its key players, the program centered on the community's needs and anchored on the strengths and capabilities of its local

resources. Community involvement was also evident as the majority of community members took part in the development and implementation process. Lastly, a strong sense of commitment among the program leaders and the teachers was vital in sustaining the program despite the obstacles that the program encountered.

Method

Design

To determine the changes in the students' reading engagement brought about by the *Balsa Basa* CBLP, an ethnographic study following a mixed-methods approach was used. Ethnography allows the researcher to gain an insider's perspective of a particular community and its program (Angrosino, 2007).

Since the study was conducted in the fifth year of the *Balsa Basa* CBLP's implementation, a retrospective design was utilized to gather data on the students' reading engagement before the program even began in the community (2013). The data was compared against the students' reading attitudes and leisure reading practices during the study's implementation (2018) to determine changes if there were any. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were incorporated to gain a deeper understanding of the transformation of students' reading engagement through workshops, interviews, and surveys.

Locale

The study was conducted in Brgy. San Jose, Donsol, Sorsogon, Bicol (Region V) where the *Balsa Basa* CBLP was founded. The community is found along the Donsol River, 18 kilometers away from Donsol town proper. Getting to this village from Metro Manila takes about 13 hours of travel via bus and motorcycle (*habal-habal*) public transport. Motorcycles became the primary mode of transportation in entering the community after the construction of the hanging steel bridge in 2017. Prior to it, people used to cross the river on foot or by raft. Brgy. San Jose has a population of 478

people, based on the 2015 census by Philippine Statistics Authority. Bikol is their primary language, particularly the Donsol Miraya dialect, while Filipino and English are their additional languages. Agriculture, specifically copra farming, is their primary source of livelihood.

Sample

A total of 24 Grade 5 to Grade 11 students, together with their parents, participated in the study. Among the 24 students, eight were in high school ranging from Grade 7 to Grade 10, nine were in Grade 6, and seven were in Grade 5. The age range of the students was 10 to 17 years old.

Only 19 parents/guardians participated in the study, since some of the student participants were siblings, making the number of parents fewer than the sample of students. Among the adult participants, there were 15 mothers, two fathers, one aunt, and one grandfather. Ten parents were able to attend elementary school, while nine (mostly the younger ones in the group), were able to finish up to high school. Most of them were housewives, four were farmers, one was a daycare worker, and the remaining one was a local government official.

Purposive sampling technique was used to identify the students who had been living in the community since 2013. Before 2013, there was still no *Balsa Basa* CBLP and these students could be interviewed about their recollection of that period. At the same time, they also participated in the start-up of the program from 2013 onwards. Those selected also had been living with a parent/ guardian who was also willing to participate in the study.

Instruments

Information about the transformation of the students' reading attitudes and leisure reading practices was obtained using the following instruments: (a) Students' Reading Engagement Workshop Guide, (b) Students' Reading Engagement - Interview Guide for Parents, (c) Reading Attitude Scale, and (d) Time Budget Form.

The Students' Reading Engagement Workshop Guide was used to gather qualitative data, with supporting quantitative estimates, regarding the transformation of the students' reading engagement between two timestamps. It contained the following parts: (a) a motivation activity in the form of drawing and game, to set the context or reference point (2013/2018); (b) answering of open-ended questions regarding attitudes towards reading and leisure reading practices based on Lim (2001) and Hughes-Hassell & Rodge (2007), respectively; and (c) a group sharing activity.

Some of the sample questions were the following:

- What is reading for you?

- How do you feel whenever you read?

- What kinds of reading materials do you read?

- Where or how do you obtain your reading materials?

- Why do you read?

To validate students' answers, the Students' Reading Engagement - Interview Guide for Parents was utilized. It contained questions parallel to the ones given to the students but taken from the perspective of their parents.

The Reading Attitude Scale, a 40-item pictorial rating scale adapted from Lim (2001), was used to gather quantitative data on the students' reading attitude in 2018. Meanwhile, the Time Budget Form was administered to the students to guide them in recording their leisure reading time over three days. This was utilized to gather a more precise account of students' activities rather than by simply asking for estimates from them (Knulst & Kraaykamp, 1998).

Procedure

Initial entry and coordination with the community was done during the pre-data gathering phase. The researcher was introduced as a volunteer/researcher in the community and became a participant observer. She joined the various activities of the program while conducting the study.

The data collection phase was conducted throughout a three-week-immersion in the community and by cluster of participants. With the students, data collection procedures were divided into two sessions. First, the discussion of their current (2018) reading engagement and the administration of the Reading Attitude Scale were done. Second, the retrospective discussion of their previous (2013) reading engagement and the orientation on the use of the Time Budget Form followed. For ease of management, the 24 students were divided into three batches.

In the workshop, the incorporation of activities such as Paint Me a Picture and drawing was utilized to enhance data collection since merely recalling of events by the students regarding their attitudes towards reading and leisure reading practices in 2013 signified a limitation. The activities helped the students collectively recall the context that they experienced. Then, they were asked to write their responses to each of the questions on the answer sheet provided before proceeding to a group sharing activity. Through this, they were able to express their answers individually first before hearing others' responses.

In guiding the students to accomplish the Time Budget Form, a sample day record was done together with the researcher as they recorded their activities that day. Also, students were asked to seek help from their parents regarding the time. The majority of the students were able to log their daily activities with the corresponding time. However, out of the 24 respondents, six students were not able to record their time correctly (i.e., incomplete start and end time, invalid time). These Time Budget Forms were considered void, and these students' parents were asked to fill in the information instead. It is important to note that there is a limitation on the use of the Time Budget Form. Living in a remote community such as in this study's setting, regular checking of the time is not practiced by the adults, more so by the children. People in the community normally go about their daily routine one activity/task after the other without really being conscious of the time.

With the parents, the interview regarding their children's reading engagement transformation was conducted in groups. Unlike the individual writing activity that the students had before the group sharing, the group interviews with the parents were done in a casual conversational manner. They were invited to come by batch according to how their children were grouped, resulting in three groups of six to seven people each.

Data Analysis

To determine the transformation of the students' attitudes towards reading and leisure reading practices from 2013 to 2018, workshop and interview transcripts were analyzed using the constant comparative method. It is a method of coding and recoding data to identify emergent patterns and themes (Silverman & Patterson, 2015). Students' and parents' answers were coded manually to identify the emergent patterns under each subcomponent of reading attitudes and leisure reading practices separately. The percentages of patterns in 2013 and 2018 were compared and the discussion regarding this matter was deepened by the qualitative information gathered. The Reading Attitude Scale and the Time Budget Form were analyzed by getting the mean of the raw score and the mean of the time spent on leisure reading, respectively, to further validate the transformation.

Results and Discussion

Using a mixed methods approach, the study investigated how the *Balsa Basa* CBLP transformed the reading engagement of the students in a remote community. It also looked at the key factors involved in the transformation.

Students' Reading Engagement Transformation through the *Balsa Basa* CBLP

Students' Attitudes towards Reading

The following subcomponents of their attitudes towards reading were compared between pre-program implementation (2013) and five years since implementation (2018): (a) general attitude, (b) reading attitude at home, (c) reading attitude in school, (d) goals for reading, and (e) self-concept as readers.

2013 Context. Looking back to the time before the inception of the *Balsa Basa* CBLP, the majority of the students shared that their general attitudes towards reading were negative. Only 29% expressed feelings of happiness when reading. At home, 58% of them were more likely to engage in reading because of extrinsic reasons such as obedience to parents or avoidance of punishment, 8% of them were less likely to read because they preferred other activities like playing, and the rest expressed neither positive nor negative attitude towards reading because they had no reading materials at home to begin with.

> Student: *Nagbabasa ako noon sa bahay kasi pag hindi ako bumabasa pinapagalitan ako ni mama kaya nagbabasa ako sa bahay.* [I read at home because if I don't, I would be reprimanded.]

In school, 83% of them enjoyed reading and participating in the reading activities that they had because they were learning and having fun. However, a few students recalled a negative attitude towards reading in school due to boredom. Regarding their goals for reading, the majority of the students mentioned that their goals were externally regulated as they were invited, told, or forced to engage in reading. A third of them had more self-determined goals as they valued the activity as an opportunity to gain more knowledge and skills, while 21% of them had no goals due to the lack of reading materials and interest. Lastly, in terms of their self-concept as readers, 88% of the students viewed themselves as below average or as slightly poor readers because of the following reasons: they were still developing their skills, they had a few reading materials to use, they were still young, and they were not fond of reading. On the other hand, 12% of them believed that they were slightly good readers.

> Student: *Di ko pa masyadong naiintindihan ang binabasa ko.* [I still can't comprehend what I was reading.]

> Student: *Hindi ako magaling kasi nagsisilaba pa ako noon.* [I was not a good reader because I still read syllable by syllable.]

2018 Context. During the fifth-year implementation of the program, the students expressed more positive attitudes towards reading in general. All of them shared positive feelings when reading. At home, there was also an increase in the percentage of the students from 58% to 79% who were more likely to read. A small portion of the group read at home only when asked by their parents and/or teachers. Concerning their reading attitude in school, all students responded positively. Aside from learning and having fun, the students also emphasized the significance of reading in helping them succeed in school and in helping their fellow students.

> Student: *Parang nasasabik ako na magbasa kung ano-ano pa ang susunod na mangyayari sa kwento na aking binabasa.* [I get excited, I want to know what's going to happen next in the story that I'm reading.]

> Parent: *Noon, parang natatakot sila, parang maiiyak na. Pero ngayon, parang ang saya nila.* [Before, they looked afraid, like they were about to cry. But now, they seem to enjoy reading.]

> Parent: *Dati talaga parang ano, mahirap pa-anuhin 'yong mga bata. Ngayon naumpisahan na 'yong Balsa Basa, na-encourage na rin sila magbasa.* [It was very difficult to make the kids read before. But when the *Balsa Basa* began, they were encouraged to read.]

The percentage of the students who had self-determined goals for reading increased from 33% to 92%. Some of their reasons for reading were developed into the following: to widen their knowledge, to teach other kids, to improve their reading skills, to succeed in school, and to have a bright future. On the other hand, a few students remained dependent on externally regulated goals. Lastly, more students had developed a positive self-concept as a reader as 71% of them rated themselves as slightly good readers, believing that their skills had improved.

> Student: *Nagbabasa ako kasi gusto kong madagdagan pa aking kaalaman.* [I read because I want to learn more.]

Student: *Para maabot 'yong mga pangarap natin sa buhay at para makatulong sa pamilya.* [So we can reach our dreams in life and we can help our family.]

Figure 2 displays the percentages of the emergent themes analyzed under the subcomponents of reading attitude. These qualitative changes were further supported by their reading attitude mean scores based on the Reading Attitude Scale. Results show that students' reading attitude mean scores ranged from 3.9 to 4.7 and based on the scale, these scores indicated a positive reading attitude. Collectively, the overall reading attitude of the students was 4.4 indicating a general positive reading attitude among the 24 students in the study.

Figure 2

Students' Attitudes towards Reading in 2013 and 2018
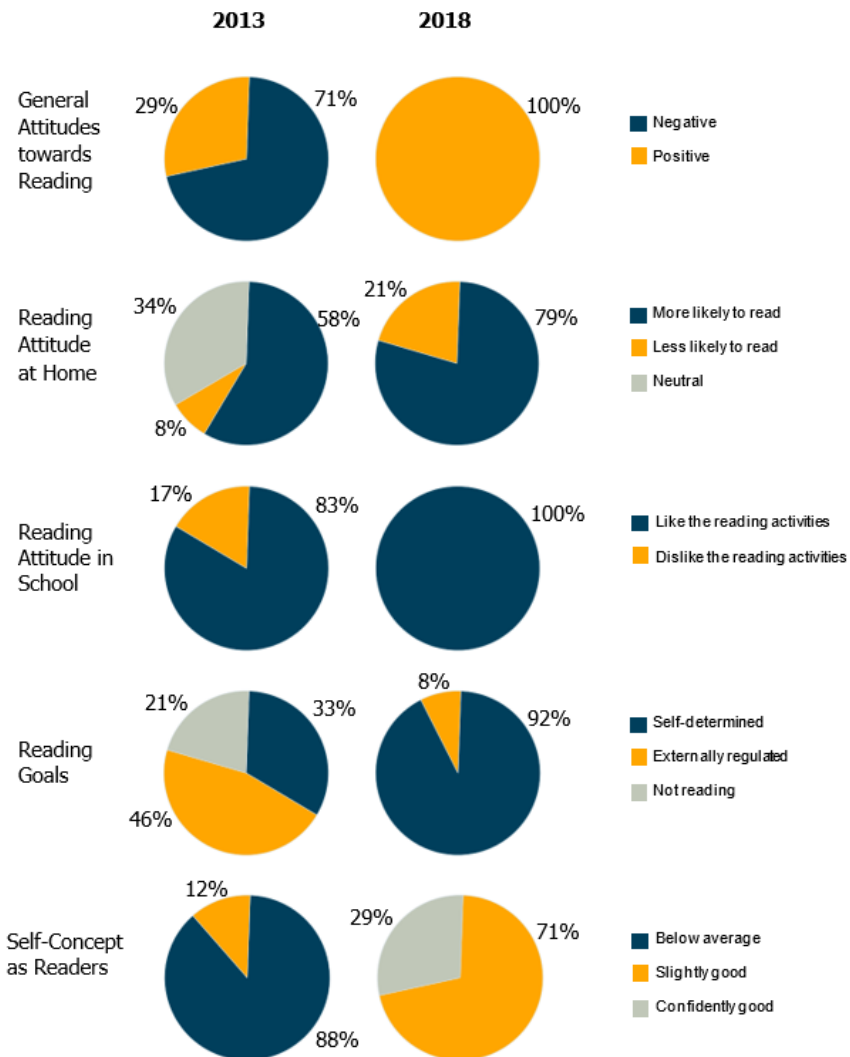
Students' Leisure Reading Practices

Based on the collected data, the leisure reading practices of the students improved from 2013 to 2018. The percentages of the students' answers about the following subcomponents of their leisure reading practices were examined: (a) types of materials read, (b) circumstances when they read, (c) places where they read, (d) people whom they read with, and (e) how they obtain their reading materials.

2013 Context. The students in the community reported reading only four types of reading materials: Alphabet posters/flashcards, textbooks, storybooks, and magazines. Alphabet posters/flashcards were most used because, according to them, they were just learning how to read. Textbooks were more frequently read than storybooks because the latter was not yet widely available at that time.

> Student: *Dati walang storybook sa paaralan namin, puro libro sa paaralan lang.* [There were no storybooks in school before, only textbooks were available.]

In terms of the circumstances when they read, the majority of the students only read when they were prompted by their parents, 33% of them read occasionally with no definite schedule, and 29% of them read when they were in class. Home and school were the two places recalled by the students as spaces for reading. Most read at home, especially since they were still being taught by their parents and there was no reading time in school yet. A lot of them also mentioned school, specifically the classroom, as a place for reading. Correspondingly, parents and teachers resulted as the students' top reading companions. In terms of obtaining their reading materials, the majority of them borrowed from the school's library or their teachers, while others borrowed from their friends or received books as gifts from their parents.

2018 Context. After five years, the materials read by the students became more diverse as comics, e-books, pocketbooks, and other reading materials such as dictionaries and encyclopedias were added to the list. From alphabet poster/ flashcards, the top reading material of the majority shifted to storybooks. Comics were mostly mentioned by the elementary students while e-books were highlighted more by the high school respondents.

> Parent: *Noon, ano lang, ABCD, libro sa eskwelahan. Ngayon, marami na, may library na.* [Before, they only had alphabet flashcards and textbooks. Now, they have plenty of materials to read, and there's already a library.]

The instances when they read also increased as 50% of the students mentioned that they read occasionally during their free time. Although the percentage of the students who highlighted reading in class decreased, 46% and 21% of the students reported that they were reading during the program's Reading Time and *Balsa Basa*, respectively. Their top places for reading remained their home and school, but the students were able to share more details regarding their reading spots. Additional spots such as on the raft and "anywhere" were reported. To them, anywhere meant on the streets, under the tree, on the raft, as long as they had something to read. Interestingly, parents and teachers became the least answered reading companions. Students shifted to having their friends and siblings as their reading buddies. One of the reasons why they read more often with their siblings was for them to teach their younger siblings how to read. An increase in the preference for reading alone was also observed.

> Parent: *Marami nang lugar kung saan sila magbasa. Ngayon, may library, may kalsada, may balsa.* [Now there are plenty of places where they can read. There's the library, the streets, and the balsa.]

> Student: *Mas gusto ko nang magbasa mag-isa para makapag-concentrate ako.* [I prefer to read alone so I can concentrate.]

Lastly, most still obtain reading materials from the school's resources, but there was an increase in the percentage of the students who obtained their reading materials by borrowing from school/ teachers, borrowing from friends, and receiving
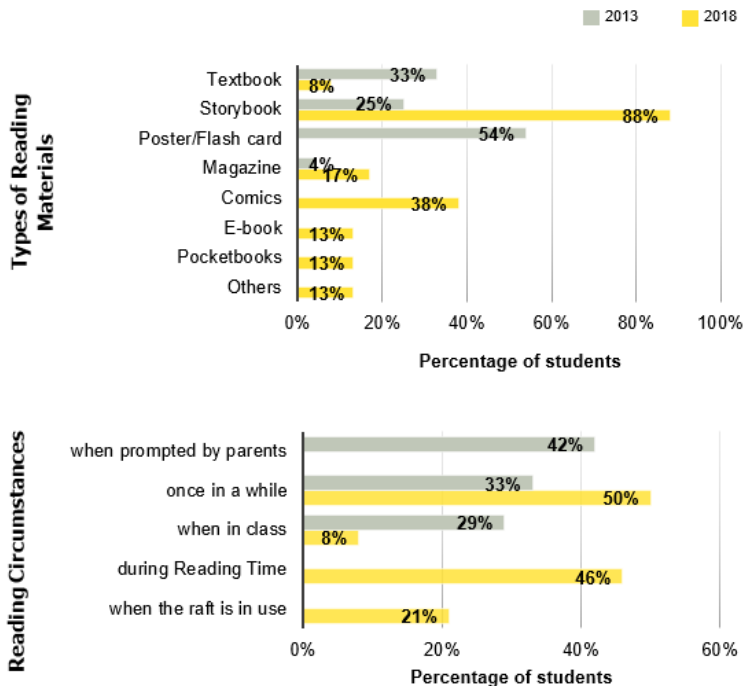
them as gifts from parents/relatives. Specifically, they borrowed from the program leader or browsed through the books located in some of the school's reading stations. The number of students who said that their parents/relatives were buying or giving them books also doubled. Borrowing from friends was still practiced but had advanced to sharing of e-book files through mobile phones. All of these changes in the leisure reading practices of the students, especially the expansion of reading materials and the frequency of engaging in reading, were confirmed by their parents in the interview.

Figure 3 shows the percentages of the students' answers in 2013 and 2018 contexts based on the subcomponents of leisure reading. In addition, the leisure reading average time of the 24 students gathered in 2018 based on the Time Budget Form provided supplemental data about their leisure reading habits. Data shows that the average leisure reading time of the students ranged from 1.40 minutes/day to 65 minutes/day. While the reading
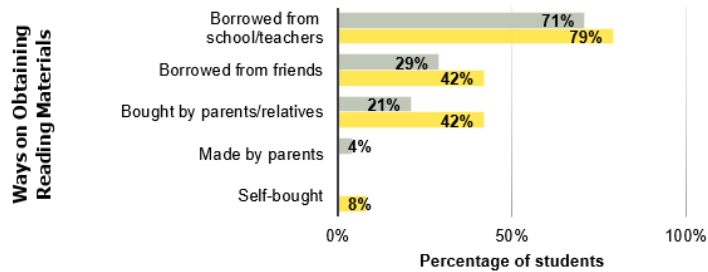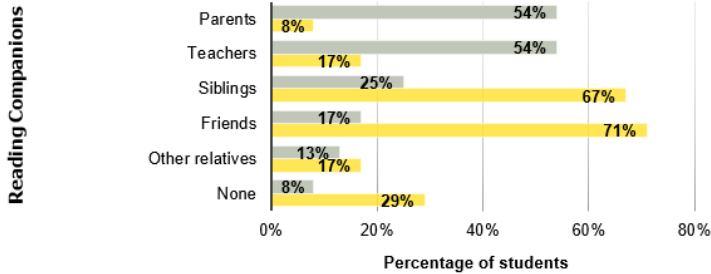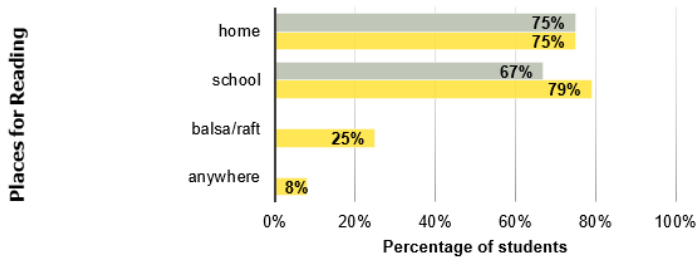
attitude mean scores of the students were homogenous, their average leisure reading time was found to be variable. This shows that although all students had positive reading attitudes based on the Reading Attitude Scale, their attitudes did not necessarily translate to actual time spent on leisure reading. A possible cause of this was the difficulty encountered by the students in logging in their time spent on reading using the Time Budget Form. Other than this, interview transcripts with the parents also gave additional insight regarding this matter. Their children's leisure reading time had increased but not to a great extent because their children still had other chores to do, and they had relatively limited materials to read. Taken together, the overall mean of the 24 students' leisure reading time was 26 minutes/day. Other data from the Time Budget Form confirmed that students did read storybooks, comics, dictionaries, e-books, that they read mostly with friends or alone, and that they read mostly at home and in school.

Figure 3

Students' Leisure Reading Practices in 2013 and 2018

Places for Reading
- home: 75% / 75%
- school: 67% / 79%
- balsa/raft: 25%
- anywhere: 8%

Percentage of students

Reading Companions
- Parents: 54% / 8%
- Teachers: 54% / 17%
- Siblings: 25% / 67%
- Friends: 17% / 71%
- Other relatives: 13% / 17%
- None: 8% / 29%

Percentage of students

Ways on Obtaining Reading Materials
- Borrowed from school/teachers: 71% / 79%
- Borrowed from friends: 29% / 42%
- Bought by parents/relatives: 21% / 42%
- Made by parents: 4%
- Self-bought: 8%

Percentage of students

Program Factors Affecting Students' Reading Engagement

Through the implementation of the *Balsa Basa* CBLP, the students' reading engagement was positively transformed as evidenced by the shift to a more positive attitude towards reading and improvement in the leisure reading practice of the students. Although the changes could not be solely attributed to the community-based literacy program, three interrelated key factors of the program were consistently highlighted by the students and the parents that contributed to reading engagement: (a) increase in the supply of printed materials, (b) abundance of pleasurable opportunities to engage in reading, and (c) promotion of student empowerment.

Being in a remote community, students' access to printed materials before the *Balsa Basa* CBLP began was limited to school textbooks, informational posters/flashcards, and a few magazines. Through the program's drive to turn every student into a reader, the community began investing in more varied types of reading materials, with children's storybooks as the top priority. Storybooks were mainly in Filipino and English, but other teacher-made materials were in their local dialect. If in the context of 2013 the students highlighted "*kasi wala kaming libro o magazine sa bahay kaya hindi ako nagbabasa*" [since we did not have books or magazines at home, I did not read], they repeatedly mentioned in the 2018 context that "*nagbabasa po ako sa bahay kasi iyon po ang pampalipas ko ng oras, may babasahin na kami sa*

bahay" [I usually read at home because that's my pastime, we already have something to read to at home.] This finding supports previous research (Law & Chia, 2015; Ocampo, 1991) that access to literature is an important feature of a successful community-based literacy program. It also adheres to the claim of Garces-Bacsal & Yeo (2017) and Ho & Lau (2018) that the availability of educational resources contributes to students' reading engagement. Figure 4 shows a photo of a home-based reading corner in the community where literacy materials are made available at home.

Figure 4

Photo of a Home-based Reading Corner

Besides the availability of more printed materials, various opportunities for the students to engage in reading were provided by the program, especially by the leaders and teachers. Activities were developed in schools, at home, and in the different parts of the community. Parents also confirmed in an interview: "Noon*, nagbabasa sila 'pag gabi. Pinapabasa namin muna pagkakain. E ngayon, 'pag nag-recess, nagbabasa na diyan, tapos alas dose din. Kahit walang pasok, pag nilabas 'yong kariton at balsa, nagbabasa na sila. Dati naman, wala.*" [Before, they used to read at night. We asked them to read after dinner. But now, they read when it's recess time, even during lunch time. Even when there's no school, once the mobile library and the *balsa* is out, they will read. It was not like that before.] This finding confirms the association between teachers' literacy practices and students' reading engagement (Daniels & Steres, 2011; Guthrie & Cox, 2001; Guthrie & Davis, 2003).

Lastly, one of the answers that also kept emerging in the workshops and interviews was the role of Little Teachers that the students from Grades 4 to 6 assumed in the program. Through this assignment of roles and responsibilities to the students, they became more engaged and confident in reading, and they began to value reading even more. Some students emphasized: "gusto *kong nagbabasa dahil makakatulong ito sa pag-aaral namin*" [I like reading because it helps me in my studies]; "*gusto ko ang mga ginagawa namin dahil nakakatulong sa ibang bata*" [I like what we're doing because we're able to help other students.] Figure 5 shows a photo of the Little Teachers facilitating the Reading Time for their younger peers.

Figure 5

Photo of the Little Teachers Leading the Reading Time

Conclusion

This study investigated the transformation of the students' reading engagement brought about by the *Balsa Basa* CBLP. Results revealed that the program has positively transformed the students' reading engagement as shown by the shift to a more positive reading attitude and improvement in the leisure reading habits of the students. Although positive effects could not be solely attributed to the program, students' reading engagement in terms of the following has been observed to improve over time: (a) reading attitude at home, (b) reading attitude in school, (c) goals for reading, (d) self-concept as readers, (e) types of materials they read,

(f) circumstances when they read, (g) places where they read, and (h) how they obtain their reading materials.

The results of this study indicate that a community-based literacy program can help develop the affective and behavioral aspects of students' reading development, albeit in a remote and low-resource setting. Specifically, the opportunities to engage in literacy activities and access to literacy materials are crucial in fostering a positive attitude towards reading and in developing a leisure reading habit. Empowerment through an assignment of roles and responsibilities is also beneficial to students' reading development. Looking at the bigger picture, Brgy. San Jose, Donsol is just one of the many remote communities in the country that have limited access to literacy materials. It is hoped that more developmentally-appropriate literacy materials and sustainable reading programs will be in place in each community.

Recommendations

It is recommended that communities, especially the ones in remote areas, develop their own literacy programs to help address the literacy needs of their students. Parents and community members, other than teachers, may be involved in the literacy development of the students.

Teachers are highly encouraged to provide their students with access to a variety of printed materials, literacy activities, and empowerment opportunities. These will enable students' reading engagement development.

Mobilization of funds and resources may begin within the community. Community members may contribute any kind of resources and/or services to get the program started. It is recommended that they build on what is readily available in their context.

Future studies may look into the impact of a community-based literacy program on other literacy variables such as oral language and reading comprehension. They may also investigate the roles that each key player performs in a community-based literacy program.

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