Teaching Opportunities Prioritizing Illiteracy (TOPI) Framework: Local Government Intervention to Improve Literacy in Basic Education

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Abstract

In 2022, the World Bank's report unveiled a staggering learning poverty rate of 91% in the Philippines, signaling a profound challenge for nearly 9 out of 10 ten-year-old children in mastering basic reading skills. Simultaneously, an assessment at the start of the 2022-2023 academic year in Cabagan, Isabela, utilizing the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) and Early Grade Assessment (EGRA), spotlighted significant obstacles in reading proficiency. The findings painted a stark picture: 70.69% of Grades 4 to 6 pupils struggled with English reading, 66.20% faced hurdles with Filipino texts across Grades 3 to 6, and 40.04% of Grades 1 and 2 pupils lacked foundational reading abilities.

In response, the Local Chief Executive of the Municipal Government of Cabagan, Isabela, Philippines expanded its flagship Literacy Program - Teaching Opportunities Prioritizing Illiteracy (TOPI), intensifying efforts of the Department of Education to fortify pupils' reading competencies. Sixty-five (65) Reading Teachers were mobilized under TOPI to conduct reading sessions with the pupils. Employing a descriptive design with a single-group pretest-posttest methodology, the study aimed to assess TOPI's impact on reading skills within a single cohort. After six months of intervention, the Post-test, employing the same tools used during the Pre-test, revealed a noteworthy decrease in reading difficulties. Notably, 38.35% of pupils in Grades 4 to 6 still faced English reading challenges, while 32.88% grappled with Filipino reading across Grades 3 to 6, and only 1.16% remained non-readers in Grades 1 and 2. These results underscore the potential of TOPI Intervention to drive transformative change, as literacy is a cornerstone for economic growth, innovation, and sustainable development.

Keywords: Basic Education, Literacy, Reading, Local Government, TOPI

Themes: Global Issues in Education, Education Theory and Practice, Child and Family Education

Introduction

In 2018, Municipal Mayor Christopher A. Mamauag echoed a resolute commitment: "No one will be left behind." This pledge marked the beginning of his mission to ensure every Cabagueño's inclusion in the Municipality of Cabagan's ongoing progress and development. With a vision to elevate literacy rates and create employment opportunities for licensed teachers, he conceptualized the Teaching Opportunities Prioritizing Illiteracy (TOPI) initiative. Initially launched with a single volunteer teacher tasked to identify and engage illiterate individuals, the project primarily targeted indigent residents, predominantly aged over fifty, residing in remote barangays.

Mayor Mamauag's dedication led to the employment of five licensed professional teachers to spearhead the program. Officially commencing in 2019, Project TOPI saw notable success, graduating twenty-one individuals who received certificates and financial aid from the Municipal Government. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated an indefinite postponement of the project, prompting adaptation measures. Subsequently, Project TOPI evolved into the municipal government's flagship literacy program, aiming not only to address illiteracy but also to enhance awareness among Cabagueños regarding the municipality's essential services.

During a Local School Board meeting in 2022, alarming data was presented to the Municipal Mayor showing that 70.69% of Grades 4 to 6 pupils struggled with English reading, 66.20% faced hurdles with Filipino texts across Grades 3 to 6, and 40.04% of Grades 1 and 2 pupils lacked foundational reading abilities. Recognizing the profound impact of the pandemic on student literacy, the Mayor, in consultation with the local school board members, acknowledged the urgent need to bolster reading sessions for pupils. To address this pressing concern, the Municipal Mayor expanded Teaching Opportunities Prioritizing Illiteracy (TOPI).

Collaborating closely with the Department of Education, the Mayor sought to leverage Project TOPI as a platform to mitigate the number of struggling readers within the municipality. However, given the municipality's limited resources, hiring additional teachers posed a significant financial challenge. To overcome this hurdle, the Mayor forged a partnership with the Department of Labor and Employment – Government Internship Program (DOLE-GIP). He deployed the DOLE-GIP interns stationed in Cabagan, mostly Licensed Professional Teachers and College Graduates, to assist in the TOPI Program. Their goals were to reduce the number of struggling readers and to increase the number of independent readers.

While basic education is mainly under the jurisdiction of the central government through the Department of Education (DepEd), Local Government Units (LGUs) supplement this responsibility by contributing to public basic education via the Special Education Fund (SEF). Mandated by the Local Government Code of 1991, the SEF is primarily sourced from a portion of real property taxes collected by LGUs. Managed by the Local School Board (LSB) at the municipal or city level, the SEF is utilized to enhance basic education services within LGU jurisdictions. This includes funding infrastructure development, teacher training, procurement of learning materials and equipment, special education services, and other educational initiatives. The SEF serves as a crucial mechanism to support the improvement of public education and ensure equitable access to quality education for all Filipino learners. However, in Cabagan, the SEF was not always enough to address all the challenges and needs of the education system.

The TOPI Program witnessed a substantial boost through various initiatives. Notably, the Local Chief Executive allocated additional funds, amplifying the program's resources. Furthermore, the deployment of DOLE-GIP Interns as reading teachers augmented the teaching force, enhancing student support. Additionally, a strategic partnership with the Synergeia Foundation Inc., renowned for its expertise in empowering reading teachers, enriched the TOPI program's educational governance framework, ensuring comprehensive and effective implementation.

Methodology

The study utilized a descriptive design with a single-group pre-test and post-test approach to evaluate the outcome of TOPI Intervention on pupils' reading skills in the Municipality of Cabagan. For the purpose of this study, "struggling readers" represent pupils who are non-readers and those who are considered to be at the frustrated level.

The implementation of the Teaching Opportunities Prioritizing Illiteracy (TOPI) Framework represents a meticulously orchestrated effort to enhance reading proficiency in basic education. This narrative expounds upon the structured deployment of the TOPI Framework, delineating critical steps, strategic initiatives, and evaluative measures undertaken in the pursuit of educational advancement.

The foundational step in this initiative entailed the collaboration with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) to recruit 65 adept reading teachers via the Government Internship Program (GIP). These educators underwent rigorous capacity-building programs, meticulously designed and facilitated by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) specializing in educational pedagogy and literacy enhancement. This preparatory phase was instrumental in equipping educators with the requisite skills, methodologies, and instructional strategies vital for effective literacy instruction.

A pivotal Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was subsequently formalized between the Local Government Unit (LGU) and the Department of Education (DepEd), delineating the strategic deployment of reading teachers to public schools. This MOA epitomized collaborative governance, harmonizing efforts between governmental bodies to optimize resource allocation and synergize educational initiatives.

Prior to the implementation phase, meticulous pre-test utilizing assessment tools were administered across public schools. The Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) was used for assessing Grades 4 to 6 English Reading Skills and Grades 3 to 6 Filipino Reading Skills. As for Grades 1 and 2, the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) was utilized. These pre-tests served as a baseline assessment, offering invaluable insights into students' initial reading proficiency levels and guiding targeted intervention strategies.

The implementation phase of the TOPI Framework was characterized by a structured intervention spanning six months across public elementary schools in Cabagan. This intervention, spearheaded by trained reading teachers, employed a pull-out approach from mainstream classes to deliver personalized and focused reading sessions. These sessions were meticulously crafted to enhance decoding, comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary skills among students.

Following the intervention period, a comprehensive post-test assessment was conducted, employing the same standardized Phil-IRI and EGRA tools. Quantitative data gleaned from pre-test and post-test assessments facilitated a robust evaluation of the TOPI Framework's efficacy in improving reading outcomes. Shifts in post-test scores were meticulously analyzed to discern the extent of improvement or regression in reading abilities, thereby informing evidence-based adjustments and refinements to educational strategies.

The culmination of this endeavor was marked by the institutionalization of the TOPI Framework within the Municipal Education Office (MEO). This institutionalization phase entailed the integration of TOPI's principles into extant educational frameworks, securing sustained funding mechanisms, fostering endur-

ing partnerships for advocacy and sustainability, and championing literacy promotion at local and national platforms.

Results and Discussions

At the beginning of the School Year 2022-2023 and before the implementation of the TOPI Program, 2,115 pupils from Grades 4 to 6 were subjected to the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) Group Screening Test (GST). Pre-test results showed that 70.69% of the pupils struggle to read in English. These pupils were then subjected to the TOPI Intervention. After six months of the intervention, another Phil-IRI Assessment was conducted, and results showed that only 38.35% remained as struggling readers. Below are the detailed reading assessment results conducted before and after the TOPI Program was implemented:
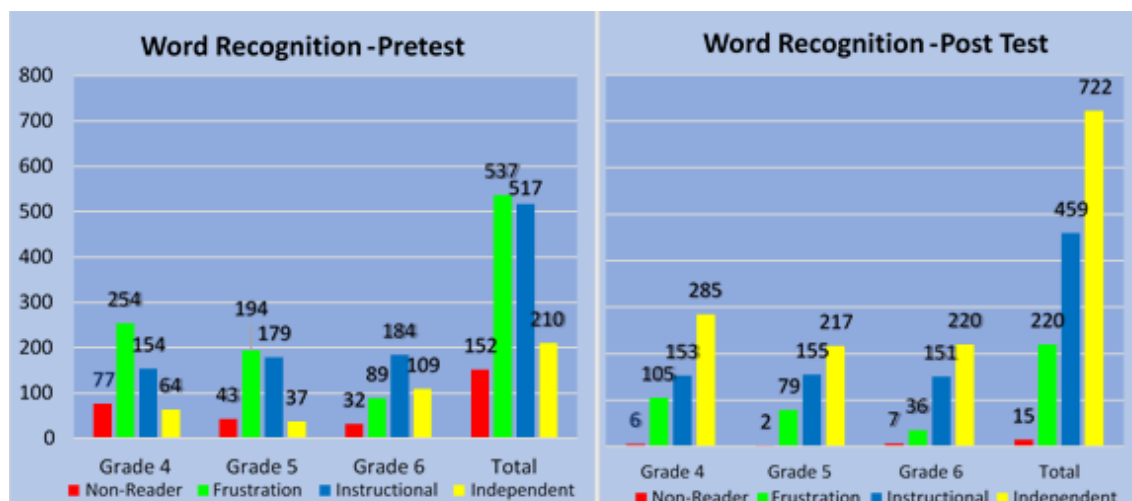

Figure 1: Word Recognition (English)

Figure 1 illustrates the number of pupils from different Grade levels and their corresponding level of performance in reading (English): Non-Reader, Frustration, Instructional, and Independent Readers. Figure 4 compares the number of Non-readers, Frustration, Instructional, and Independent readers in the Pretest and post-test assessment for Word Recognition. As seen in the graph, out of 1,416 pupils tested, there were 152 non-readers in the Pretest, and only 15 non-readers were recorded after the Post-test, meaning there is a decrease of 137 or 88.96% in the number of non-readers. There is also a significant decrease in the number of pupils under the Frustration level, with 59.03%, from 537 to 220 pupils. A modest decrease of 11.41% in the Instructional level and a dramatic increase of 206% in the number of pupils under the Independent level, from 210 to 722.
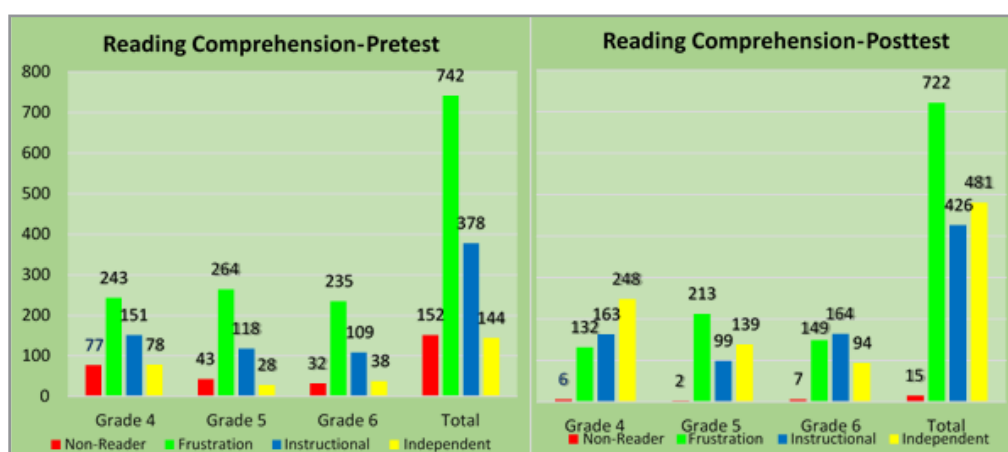

Figure 2: Reading Comprehension (English

Reading comprehension is a reader's ability to understand the explicit and implicit meaning of a text or piece of writing. In Reading Comprehension, compared to the results during the pretest, as gleaned from Figure 2, there is a modest decrease of 2.70% or 20 in the number of pupils in the Frustration level, an increase of 12.69% or 20 in the number of pupils under Instructional level. It is also evident that there is a tremendous increase in the number of pupils under the Independent level, with 234.02% or 337, from 144 to 481 pupils.
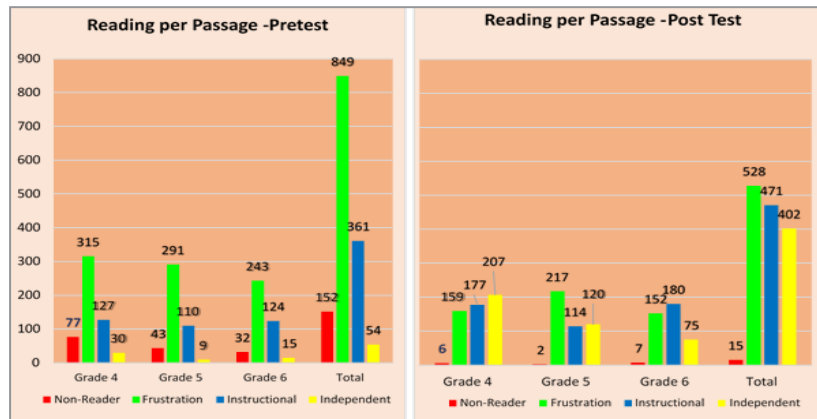
Figure 3: Reading Per Passage (English)

Figure 3 reveals that there is a decrease in the number of pupils at the Frustration level, 37.81%, which is 321 pupils, a noticeable increase of 90, or 24.93 %, at the Instructional level, and a tremendous increase of 644.44 %, or 348 pupils, at the Independent level.
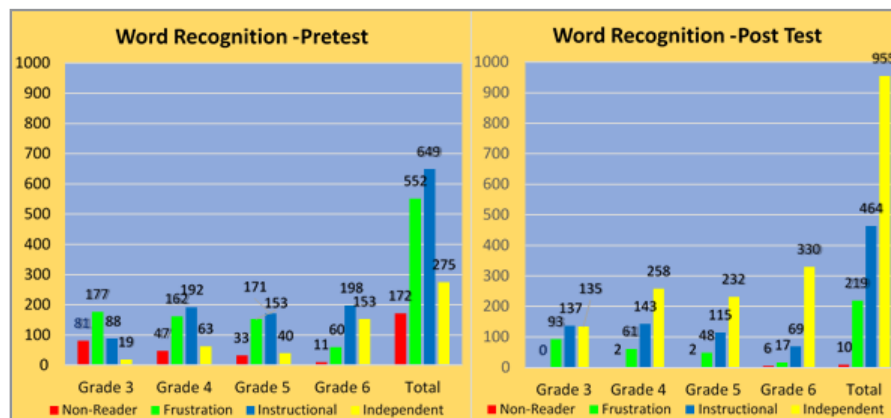

Figure 4: Word Recognition (Filipino)

Figure 4 shows the distribution of pupils with respect to their reading level in Filipino. For Word Recognition, as shown in the graph, there is an immense decrease in the number of Non-readers from 172 to 10 pupils, corresponding to 94.19 %. There is also a notable decrease in Frustration readers, with 333 or 60.33% of pupils. A slight decrease of 28.51% or 185 pupils in the Instructional level and an exceptional increase of 247.27% or 680 pupils to the Independent Level. This shows that the majority of the pupils can read words independently.
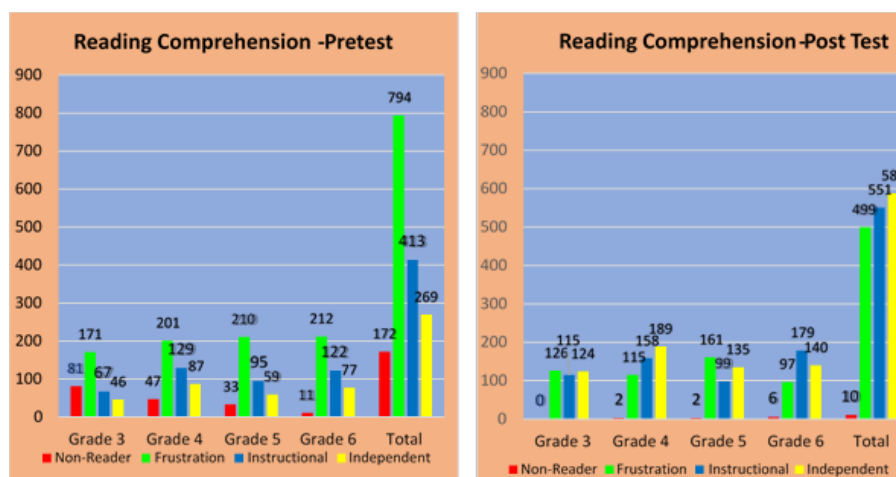

Figure 5: Reading Comprehension (Filipino)

As for Reading Comprehension in Filipino, as shown in Figure 5, there was a significant decrease in the number of Frustration readers from 794 recorded during the pre-test to 499 after the post-test, 37.15% or 295 pupils. There is also a significant increase in the number of pupils in the Instructional level from 413 to 551, 20.82 % or 129, and a whooping increase of 118.59% or 269 pupils in the Independent readers.
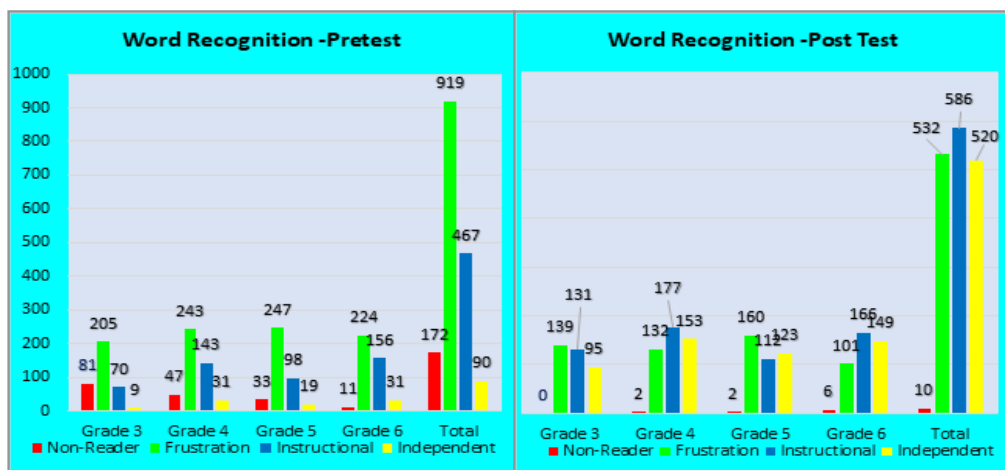

Figure 6: Word Recognition (Filipino)

With regard to their performance in Reading per passage, it was observed, as shown in Figure 6, that there was a tremendous decrease of 387 or 42.11% in the number of pupils under the Frustration level. Also, the number of pupils under the Instructional level rose steadily, with 25.48% or 119 pupils. There was a gigantic increase of 477.77% or 430 pupils under the Independent level.
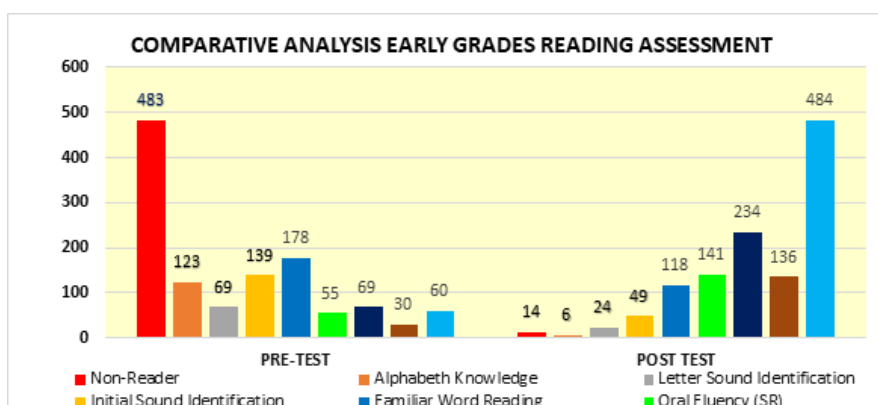

Figure 7: Early Grade Assessment (Grades 1 and 2)

Figure 7 presents the Comparative analysis of the Early Grades Reading Assessment conducted on all 1,206 Grade 1 and Grade 2 pupils in the district. As gleaned in the graph, there is a huge decrease in the number of non-readers, with 469 or 97.10%. Only 6 learners were assessed with alphabet knowledge, and 24 can identify letter sounds. Most pupils were assessed as comprehension learners in storytelling and local materials.

Overall, it is fortunate to note a steady decrease in the number of Non–Readers and Frustration readers and an increase in the number of Instructional and Independent Readers.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Sustainability
Because our study lacked sophisticated analytical and statistical tools, our conclusions were drawn solely from pre-test and post-test outcomes. Our findings suggest that by integrating the municipal government's TOPI Program with the Department of Education's "Bawat Bata Bumabasa" (3Bs) reading program, we can mitigate the number of struggling readers, foster independent reading habits, and elevate overall literacy rates. Despite inherent limitations, such as the absence of a control group for comparison, the TOPI Intervention offers valuable insights into the pivotal role of local government action in enhancing reading skills and improving literacy rates within the municipality.

The TOPI Framework encompasses key components that contribute to its effectiveness in improving reading skills in basic education:

Teachers
The Teachers component within the TOPI Framework is a multifaceted approach that involves various categories of educators to effectively improve students' reading skills. This component encompasses existing teachers from the Department of Education

(DepEd), teachers hired through the National Government Internship Program of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE-GIP), local government-hired teachers, and community partners trained as reading partners.

a. Existing Teachers from DepEd:
These are the teachers already working within public schools in the Municipality of Cabagan, Isabela, under the DepEd. They play a crucial role in the TOPI Framework by receiving specialized training and support to enhance their capacity in teaching reading effectively.
Training programs for existing DepEd teachers may include workshops on modern teaching methodologies, incorporating literacy strategies into subject areas, using technology for reading instruction, and fostering a reading culture in classrooms.

b. Teachers hired through DOLE-GIP:
The TOPI Framework also involves the recruitment and hiring of additional reading teachers through the DOLE-GIP. These teachers are recent graduates or young professionals passionate about education and literacy.

The DOLE-GIP teachers undergo intensive capacity-building programs focused on literacy instruction, classroom management, assessment strategies, and student engagement techniques. They are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to contribute effectively to the reading intervention.

c. Local Government-Hired Teachers:
The local government of Cabagan, Isabela, may hire additional reading teachers as part of its commitment to improving reading skills in basic education. These teachers work in collaboration with DepEd and DOLE-GIP teachers to implement the TOPI Framework. Local government-hired teachers receive similar training and professional development opportunities as other teachers within the TOPI Framework. They contribute to the overall effort of providing quality reading instruction to students.

d. Community Partners Trained as Reading Partners:
In addition to certified teachers, the TOPI Framework involves community partners who are trained as reading partners. These individuals may include volunteers, parents, retired educators, or local community members with a passion for literacy.
Reading partners undergo training sessions on supporting reading activities, facilitating reading groups, providing literacy support outside of school hours, and promoting reading at home and in the community. They serve as valuable resources in extending reading support beyond the classroom.

The integration of various categories of educators, including existing teachers, DOLE-GIP teachers, local government-hired teachers, and community partners as reading partners, enhances the reach and impact of the TOPI Framework. By leveraging the expertise and commitment of a diverse range of educators and stakeholders, the TOPI Framework strives to create a comprehensive and sustainable approach to improving reading skills and fostering a culture of literacy in the Municipality of Cabagan, Isabela.

Outcomes
The Outcomes component focuses on measuring the impact of reading interventions through the use of standardized assessment tools such as the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) and Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA). Additionally, this component emphasizes the important roles of the Department of Education (DepEd), Local Government Unit (LGU), and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) in measuring these outcomes and improving or using other assessment tools as needed.

Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI):
Phil-IRI is a widely used assessment tool in the Philippines designed to evaluate students' reading skills, including fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. It provides valuable insights into students' reading levels and areas of strength and improvement. The DepEd plays a crucial role in administering Phil-IRI assessments to students before and after the implementation of the TOPI Framework. Trained educators within DepEd conduct the assessments and analyze the results to determine students' reading proficiency levels.

Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA):
EGRA is an internationally recognized assessment tool used to measure foundational reading skills among early-grade students. It assesses skills such as letter recognition, phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. The LGU and partnering NGOs collaborate to integrate EGRA assessments into the evaluation framework of the TOPI Framework. Trained assessors conduct EGRA assessments to gather data on students' early-grade reading abilities and track progress over time.

Roles of DepEd, LGU, and NGOs:
DepEd: The DepEd is responsible for overseeing the administration of Phil-IRI assessments, analyzing assessment data, and reporting on reading outcomes. They collaborate with LGU and NGOs to ensure the alignment of assessment tools with national educational standards and guidelines.

LGU: The LGU, in partnership with DepEd and NGOs, provides support and resources for administering EGRA assessments and other evaluation activities. They contribute to data collection efforts, monitor progress, and coordinate with schools to facilitate assessment processes.

NGOs: NGOs specializing in education and literacy play a vital role in providing training and capacity-building support for educators and assessors involved in Phil-IRI and EGRA assessments. They may also offer technical assistance in data analysis, evaluation design, and reporting on reading outcomes.

Improvement or Use of Other Assessment Tools:
The partnership between DepEd, LGU, and NGOs allows for flexibility in assessment strategies. If Phil-IRI and EGRA assessments do not fully capture the desired reading outcomes or if additional data is needed, stakeholders may explore and implement other assessment tools. Continuous monitoring and evaluation processes enable stakeholders to identify gaps, strengths, and areas for improvement in assessment methods. They can then make informed decisions about adjusting assessment tools, incorporating supplementary assessments, or developing custom assessments tailored to specific reading goals. By leveraging the strengths of Phil-IRI and EGRA assessments and fostering collaboration among DepEd, LGU, and NGOs, the TOPI Frame-

work ensures a robust evaluation framework for measuring reading outcomes. This collaborative approach allows stakeholders to gather comprehensive data, track progress, identify interventions, and make evidence-based decisions to improve reading skills among students in the Municipality of Cabagan, Isabela.

Partnerships:

The Partnerships component is fundamental to its success, as it involves collaboration with various stakeholders at the national, local, and community levels. Emphasizing partnerships with key entities such as the Department of Education (DepEd), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Local Government Unit (LGU), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Barangay Government, and other stakeholders is crucial in implementing effective reading interventions and fostering a culture of literacy. The roles and contributions of each partner are as follows:

Department of Education (DepEd):

DepEd is a pivotal partner in the TOPI Framework, providing guidance, expertise, and resources related to educational policies, standards, and curriculum. DepEd collaborates with the local government and NGOs to align reading interventions with national educational goals, curriculum frameworks, and standards. This ensures that interventions are integrated seamlessly into existing educational programs. DepEd also plays a key role in training educators, monitoring progress, and evaluating reading outcomes using standardized assessment tools such as Phil-IRI and EGRA.

Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE):

DOLE's involvement in the TOPI Framework is through the Government Internship Program (GIP), which facilitates the hiring of reading teachers and education professionals. Through DOLE-GIP, recent graduates and young professionals passionate about education are recruited and deployed as reading teachers in collaboration with LGU and DepEd. This partnership helps address the need for skilled educators and enhances the workforce in education.

Local Government Unit (LGU):

The LGU, specifically the Municipality of Cabagan, Isabela, plays a central role in coordinating and implementing the TOPI Framework at the local level. LGU provides leadership, funding, and logistical support for reading interventions, including the hiring and training of reading teachers, provision of educational materials, and coordination with barangay governments and community stakeholders.

LGU collaborates with DepEd, DOLE, NGOs, and other partners to ensure the successful implementation and sustainability of reading programs and initiatives.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):

NGOs specializing in education, literacy, and community development are valuable partners in the TOPI Framework. NGOs provide technical expertise, training, capacity-building programs, and resources for educators, reading partners, and community members involved in literacy initiatives. They also play a role in advocacy, fundraising, and outreach efforts to raise awareness about the importance of literacy and mobilize community support for reading programs.

Barangay Government and Other Stakeholders:

The partnership extends to barangay governments, community leaders, parents, and other stakeholders who contribute to creating a supportive environment for reading and literacy. Barangay governments can support reading initiatives by providing venues for literacy activities, organizing community reading programs, and engaging parents in promoting reading habits at home. Other stakeholders such as businesses, civic groups, and academic institutions may also contribute resources, expertise, and volunteer support to enhance reading interventions and expand their reach within the community.

By fostering strong partnerships with national government agencies like DepEd and DOLE, collaborating closely with LGU and NGOs, and engaging barangay governments and community stakeholders, the TOPI Framework creates a network of support and collaboration aimed at improving reading skills, fostering a culture of literacy, and empowering communities through education in the Municipality of Cabagan, Isabela.

Institutionalization of the Municipal Education Office:

The Institutionalization of the Municipal Education Office component within the TOPI Framework is crucial for ensuring the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of reading interventions and literacy initiatives in the Municipality of Cabagan, Isabela. This component focuses on three key aspects: budget allocation, policy enactment, and the implementation of specific initiatives such as Books on Wheels, Community-Based Reading Festival, and home-based one-on-one reading sessions.

Budget Allocation:

Institutionalization begins with the allocation of sufficient budgetary resources to support ongoing reading programs, initiatives, and capacity-building efforts within the LGU through the Municipal Education Office (MEO). The LGU, through the institutionalization of its MEO, secures funding for hiring reading teachers, acquiring educational materials and resources, conducting training programs, and organizing literacy events. A dedicated budget for the TOPI Framework ensures continuity and stability in implementing reading interventions, addressing resource gaps, and scaling up successful initiatives.

Policy Enactment:

Institutionalization involves the enactment of policies and guidelines within the MEO to formalize and institutionalize reading interventions as integral components of the education system. Policies may include guidelines for implementing evidence-based reading strategies, integrating literacy goals into curriculum frameworks, establishing reading proficiency benchmarks, and conducting regular assessments of reading outcomes. The MEO collaborates with DepEd and other relevant agencies to align policies with national educational standards and guidelines, ensuring consistency and coherence in reading initiatives.

Initiatives:

Books on Wheels: The Books on Wheels initiative involves the creation of mobile libraries or book delivery services that bring reading materials directly to schools, communities, and underserved areas. This initiative promotes access to books and reading resources, encourages reading habits, and supports literacy development among students and community members.

Community-Based Reading Festival: The Community-Based Reading Festival is a regular event organized by the MEO in collaboration with schools, barangay governments, NGOs, and community stakeholders. The festival celebrates reading, storytelling, and literacy achievements, showcasing student work, performances, and interactive reading activities. It fosters a love for reading, promotes community engagement, and raises awareness about the importance of literacy.

Home-Based One-on-One Reading Sessions: This initiative involves pairing students with reading mentors or volunteers for personalized one-on-one reading sessions conducted at home or in community settings. Trained mentors provide individualized support, encouragement, and guidance to improve students' reading skills, comprehension, and confidence. Home-based sessions also involve parents and caregivers, promoting family involvement in supporting children's literacy development.

By institutionalizing the Municipal Education Office's commitment to literacy through budget allocation, policy enactment, and targeted initiatives such as Books on Wheels, Community-Based Reading Festival, and home-based reading sessions, the TOPI Framework creates a sustainable framework for promoting reading skills, fostering a culture of literacy, and empowering communities through education in Cabagan, Isabela.

Building on these findings, we have developed the TOPI Theory of Change, depicted in Figure 8. This paradigm aims to unleash the potential of learners, paving the way for a brighter and more literate future for all.
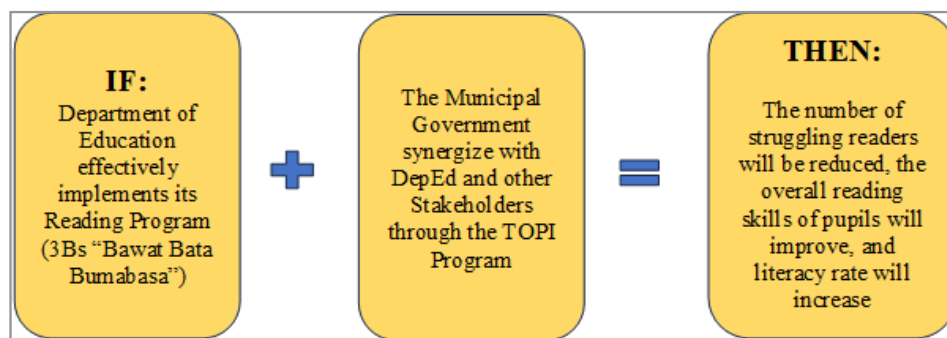

Figure 8: TOPI Theory of Change

Figure 9 on the following page illustrates the Pillars that will support the Improved Reading Skills of pupils and Increased Literacy Rate in the Municipality of Cabagan. Pillar 1: The Department of Education "Bawat Bata Bumabasa" (3Bs) Initiative explicitly states the three components that are critical to the design, implementation, and sustainability of powerful reading instruction: professional development that equips educators with a solid knowledge base; effective instructional tools that are aligned to the knowledge base; and school systems that support and nurture the 3Bs implementation.

The DepEd Framework for the "Bawat Bata Bumabasa" Initiative requires the participation and support of the community and stakeholders. This is where the Pillar 2: Municipal Government of Cabagan plays a crucial role. Through the TOPI program, the Municipal Government elicits the participation of the community and stakeholders. The TOPI Program, as shown in Figure 9, also has 3 essential components, namely: Institutionalization of the Municipal Education Office; Deployment of the DOLE-GIP Interns and Municipal-Government-Hired Reading Teachers; and Fostering Partnerships with external partners who are at the forefront of promoting quality education.

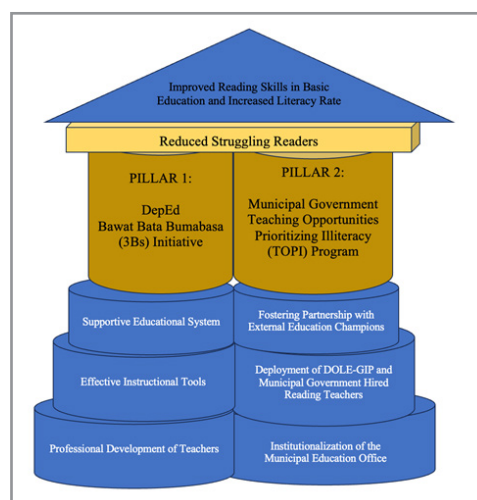**Topi Theory of Change Conceptual Framework**

Figure 9: TOPI Conceptual Framework

The institutionalization of the Municipal Education Office is the Municipal Government of Cabagan's driving mechanism to ensure the TOPI Program's sustainability. With the established Municipal Education Office, all internal and external stakeholders involved in improving pupils' reading skills are mobilized, funds are allocated, and needed resources are provided. The deployment of DOLE-GIP Interns and Municipal-Government-Hired Reading Teachers are force multipliers ensuring that struggling readers regularly engage in reading sessions. The partnership of the Municipal Government of Cabagan with Synergeia Foundation is also essential for technical assistance and capacity development of reading teachers.

The strong foundations of both pillars from DepEd and Municipal Government of Cabagan are indispensable in reducing the number of struggling readers, thus improving the reading skills of pupils and elevating the overall literacy rate in the municipality.

Implementation of the Topi Theory of Change
The intervention process flow, shown in Figure 10, aims to create a comprehensive and collaborative approach to reducing struggling readers and increasing independent readers in the municipality of Cabagan.
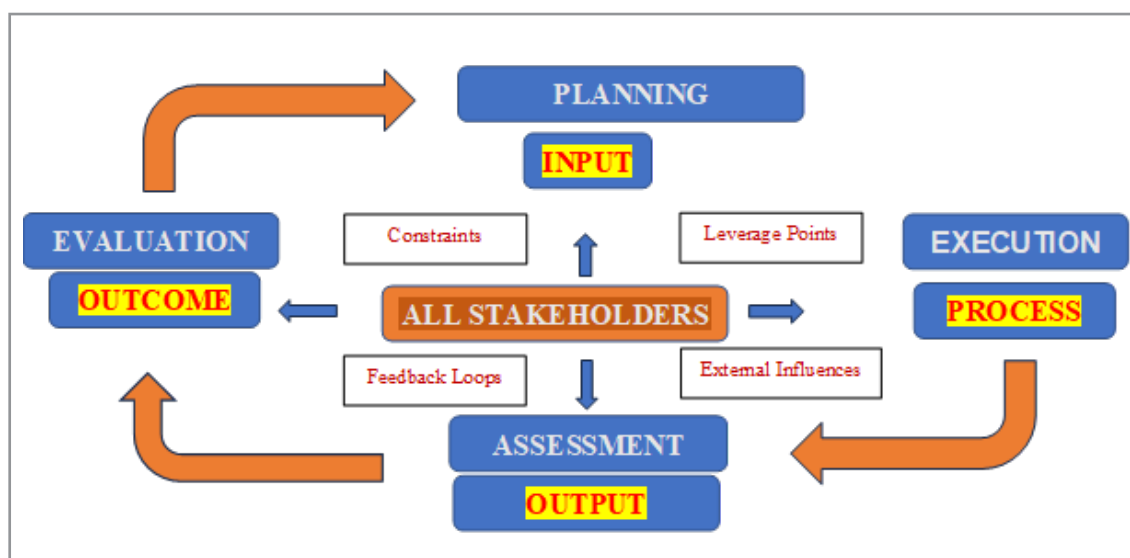

Figure 10: TOPI Theory of Change Process Flow

Table 1: TOPI Intervention Design

INPUTS:	PROCESSES:	OUTPUTS:	OUTCOMES:
Pillar 1: Department of Education Component 1: Teachers Professional Development Component 2: Effective instructional tools Component 3: Supportive School System Pillar 2: Municipal Government through the TOPI Program: Component 1: Institutionalization of the Municipal Education Office Component 2: Deployment of DOLE-GIP Interns and Municipal Government Hired Reading Teachers Component 3: Partnerships with External Education Champions	Pillar 1: Department of Education Bawat Bata Bumabasa Initiative Pillar 2: Municipal Government Teaching Opportunities Prioritizing Illiteracy (TOPI) Program	- Reduced struggling readers - Motivated and Engaged Students - Better Teacher-Student Relationships - Increased Access to Reading Materials - Enhanced Parental Awareness and Involvement - Strengthened Community Support -Strengthened partnership between Municipal Government and Department of Education – Cabagan District -Established partnership with external partners	-Improved Reading Skills -Higher Academic Achievement - Lifelong Love for Reading - Improved Communication Skills - Enhanced Critical Thinking - Reduced Dropout Rates - Increased Literacy Rates in the Community

PLANNING	EXECUTION	ASSESSMENT	EVALUATION
Setting goals, objectives, and strategies	Implementation of the TOPI intervention	Measure of TOPI program's output	Assessment of TOPI program outcomes and impacts

Constraints:
Limited Funding; Insufficient Teacher Training; Lack of Access to Reading Materials; Socioeconomic Disparities; Cultural Resistance to Change
Leverage Points:
Curriculum Design and Content; Teacher Training and Professional Development; Family and Community Engagement Programs; Access to Library Resources; Targeted Support for At-Risk Students
External Influences:
Government Policies and Funding; Socioeconomic Conditions; Cultural Norms and Values; Technological Advancements; Educational Research and Best Practices
Feedback Loops:
• Positive Feedback: Improved reading skills lead to increased motivation and engagement, further enhancing reading proficiency. • Negative Feedback: Inadequate resources or curriculum can lead to poor reading outcomes, resulting in decreased motivation and engagement.

Table 1 shows that inputs are identified and allocated during the Planning Phase. This involves determining the resources, materials, and activities required for the program. Inputs vary from every stakeholder. From the municipal government, establishing the Municipal Education Office and allocating funds are critical in institutionalizing support for education. The highlight of the municipal government intervention is the provision of force multipliers referred to as the TOPI Reading Teachers. The TOPI intervention shall be an added pillar to the existing pillars of the Department of Education's reading program, which comprises teachers' competency training, use of effective instructional tools, and school systems that support the reading program. The active participation during the planning phase of other stakeholders, such as Parents/Guardians, Students, and External Partners, is crucial to ensure their ownership and commitment to the program. The Municipal Government can facilitate this through the TOPI Program.

The Execution Phase involves carrying out the activities and interventions designed to reduce struggling readers. The key implementing stakeholder is the Municipal Government of Cabagan, in collaboration with the Department of Education. The conduct of Phil-IRI Group Screening Test (GST) to determine the data of struggling readers in the Municipality is to be performed by the Department of Education – Cabagan District to all enrolled students. After the assessment, the District Reading Coordinator reports the data to the Municipal Education Office to schedule the deployment of TOPI reading teachers. The School Heads, Reading Coordinators in each public school, and the deployed TOPI reading teachers must work together to ensure that the TOPI Program caters to the targeted students.

The Assessment Phase is an integral part of the program and is conducted to measure the program's outputs. It involves collecting data and information to evaluate the immediate results generated by the program's processes. The Program's Output will be measured based on the pre-test data gathered during the Execution Phase. The identified Non-Readers or students who cannot recognize and sound out letter-sound connections for single consonants, consonant blends, and others will be assessed to determine their reading levels after the intervention.

The Phil-IRI determinants to assess the reading levels of the students are as follows:

DETERMINING INDEPENDENT, INSTRUCTIONAL, AND FRUSTRATION READING LEVELS		
Independent	95% accuracy or above	The student can read the text on his/her own with ease. Very few errors are made during reading and the student easily understands what is read. Reading at this level boosts confidence and improves fluency skills (e.g. expression). Reading text at the independent level is ideal for independent and silent reading.
Instructional	90-95% accuracy	The student needs the support of the teacher or parent. This is the level in which new vocabulary and concepts are introduced and where the greatest progress in reading occurs. Using text at the student's instructional level is ideal for guided reading groups.
Frustration	Below 90% accuracy	Decoding words, vocabulary and concepts are too difficult for the student. You may wish to read the text to the student so he/she can be exposed to high level vocabulary as well as listen to a fluent reader.

Other assessment indicators such as motivated and engaged students, better teacher-student relationships, increased access to reading materials, enhanced parental awareness and involvement and strengthened community support will also be measured using qualitative assessment through interviews and feedback. Assessment helps monitor progress, identify strengths

and weaknesses, and make necessary adjustments during the program's implementation.

The Evaluation Phase is a broader and more comprehensive process that assesses the program's outcomes and impacts. It involves analyzing the data collected during the assessment phase to determine the program's long-term effects. Evaluation of the TOPI Program focuses on understanding the changes and improvements in reading comprehension of the students, higher academic achievement, lifelong love for reading, reduced dropout rates, and increased literacy rates in the community. Evaluation helps to determine the effectiveness of the program and its alignment with the initial goals and objectives. It is also necessary to identify the constraints, leverage points, external influences, and feedback loops. Identifying the constraints during the planning phase helps set realistic goals for the TOPI Theory of Change. Knowing the leverage points helps maximize the effectiveness of the program. Adopting and leveraging external influences also helps align the program with the community's and educational system's needs and expectations. Feedback loops are mechanisms that will be utilized to collect data and information to evaluate the progress of the program.

The Teaching Opportunities Prioritizing Illiteracy (TOPI) Framework represents a significant milestone in the pursuit of enhanced literacy development. Its structured implementation and systematic approach not only serve as a beacon of educational advancement within the local community but also hold the potential for broader implications and replicability in other municipalities across the nation. The recommendation for an in-depth study of TOPI's impact on the community is underscored by several crucial factors that elucidate its importance and potential for wider adoption and adaptation.

Firstly, conducting an in-depth study of TOPI's impact on the community provides a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the framework's efficacy and effectiveness. By delving into the qualitative and quantitative data derived from TOPI's implementation, researchers and stakeholders can glean insights into the tangible outcomes, challenges encountered, and best practices observed. This deep-dive analysis enables informed decision-making, evidence-based adjustments, and strategic refinements to further optimize the literacy development program.

Secondly, an in-depth study of TOPI's impact serves as a catalyst for continuous improvement and innovation within the literacy development landscape. By critically evaluating the framework's outcomes, researchers can identify areas of strength, areas for improvement, and potential areas for expansion or diversification. This process of iterative refinement fosters a culture of learning, adaptation, and enhancement, ensuring that TOPI remains at the forefront of literacy development initiatives and continues to evolve in response to emerging needs and evolving educational paradigms.

Furthermore, the insights derived from an in-depth study of TOPI's impact have broader implications beyond the local community of Cabagan. The lessons learned, best practices identified, and challenges addressed can serve as valuable knowledge assets that can be shared, disseminated, and replicated by other municipalities facing similar literacy challenges. This knowl-

edge transfer fosters a spirit of collaboration, cross-pollination of ideas, and collective learning, ultimately leading to the widespread adoption and adaptation of effective literacy development frameworks nationwide.

Moreover, an in-depth study of TOPI's impact serves as a cornerstone for evidence-based advocacy and policy formulation. The robust data, compelling narratives, and tangible outcomes derived from the study provide stakeholders, policymakers, and advocacy groups with compelling evidence of the transformative power of structured literacy development programs. This evidence, in turn, can inform policy discussions, resource allocation decisions, and strategic investments in education, leading to the prioritization of literacy development as a national agenda.

Lastly, the recommendation for an in-depth study of TOPI's impact on the community aligns with the broader goal of creating a replicable model for literacy development. By comprehensively documenting TOPI's journey, from conceptualization to implementation to impact assessment, researchers can distill key success factors, implementation strategies, and sustainability mechanisms that underpin its effectiveness. This blueprint for success can then be shared, adapted, and replicated by other municipalities, empowering them to embark on similar transformative journeys and catalyzing nationwide efforts towards comprehensive literacy development.

In essence, the recommendation for an in-depth study of TOPI's impact on the community is rooted in its potential to catalyze continuous improvement, foster knowledge sharing and replication, inform evidence-based advocacy, and create a replicable model for literacy development that transcends geographical boundaries. By embracing this recommendation, stakeholders can unlock the full potential of TOPI as a transformative force in advancing literacy, education, and community development.

The sustainability of the TOPI Program hinges on the establishment of a comprehensive Manual of Operations, a process that unfolds through several strategic steps:

Systems Mapping and Analysis: The initial phase involves conducting an exhaustive systems mapping exercise. This identifies key stakeholders, delineates their roles, and unveils the interconnected factors influencing reading skills within basic education. Furthermore, it entails a meticulous analysis of the current state of the education system, encompassing curriculum, teacher capacity, resources, parental involvement, and community support. A holistic and sustainable approach to upgrading reading skills can be crafted by pinpointing leverage points and potential intervention areas.

Curriculum Enhancement: Collaborative efforts with curriculum developers, educational experts, and teachers are undertaken to review and enrich the existing reading curriculum. This involves integrating evidence-based instructional strategies, research-based reading programs, and best practices. Alignment with national reading standards is ensured, fostering a balanced approach to reading instruction encompassing phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency.

Teacher Capacity Building: Professional development programs are designed and implemented to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills in teaching reading. Training encompasses effective instructional strategies, assessment techniques, differentiation, and technology integration. A culture of continuous learning and collaboration is fostered through communities of practice, peer coaching, and mentoring.

Access to Quality Resources: Adequate resources are allocated to ensure access to a diverse range of high-quality reading materials. Partnerships with publishers, libraries, and community organizations are forged to expand availability and diversity. Resources are regularly updated to meet evolving student needs and curriculum requirements.

Parental and Community Engagement: Initiatives are developed to engage parents and the community in supporting reading skills development. Workshops, seminars, and literacy events educate parents on reading importance and provide strategies for supporting their child's reading at home. Collaboration with community organizations and local businesses promotes reading initiatives and provides additional resources.

Monitoring and Evaluation: A robust monitoring and evaluation system is established to track reading skills improvement. Various assessments, including standardized, formative, and classroom-based, are conducted regularly to gauge student proficiency. Data analysis identifies trends, areas for improvement, and intervention effectiveness.

Continuous Improvement and Sustainability: Feedback, data analysis, and stakeholder input inform continuous program improvement. Progress updates, successes, and challenges are communicated transparently to stakeholders. A long-term sustainability plan, encompassing funding, capacity-building, and integration into the broader education system, ensures the enduring success of reading initiatives [1-5].

Ensuring the sustainability of the TOPI Program holds paramount importance for several compelling reasons. Firstly, it guarantees a lasting impact on students, fostering strong reading skills essential for lifelong success and ensuring equitable access to quality education for all, irrespective of socio-economic status or location. Moreover, sustaining the program enables continuous monitoring and improvement, facilitating adjustments to enhance effectiveness and address emerging challenges [6-10].

Additionally, it promotes community involvement and ownership, fostering collaboration among stakeholders and aligning program goals with community needs. From a pragmatic standpoint, sustainability ensures cost-effectiveness in the long run by minimizing the need for frequent reinvention and reducing associated expenses. Finally, aligning with global Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4, underscores the program's role in advancing universal education and lifelong learning opportunities worldwide. In essence, ensuring the sustainability of the TOPI Program is vital for its enduring impact, equity, continuous enhancement, community engagement, cost-effectiveness, and alignment with global development agendas [11].

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