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## Evaluating the Effectiveness of Apayao Literacy Engagement and Advancement Program (Apayao LEAP) on Early Literacy Development of Grade 3 Pupils

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### Abstract

*This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the Apayao LEAP (Literacy Engagement and Advancement Program) on the early literacy development of Grade 3 pupils at Atok Elementary School in Flora, Apayao. It examines the reading stage levels of these learners during their Grade 1 and Grade 2 years and investigates whether significant differences exist in their reading stage levels. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining both quantitative and qualitative insights to provide a comprehensive analysis. Quantitative data tracked changes in reading levels, while qualitative data were gathered through interviews and focus group discussions. This qualitative data was then analyzed using thematic analysis of the transcribed responses.*

*Findings revealed advancements in the reading levels of students, while also highlighting important perceptions and challenges. Despite these challenges, parents expressed a positive view of the guided reading program, describing it as a structured and engaging approach that provided the support their children needed to become confident readers. Teachers reported facing several challenges, including language barriers, a lack of parental involvement, insufficient teacher training, and a shortage of reading materials. Nonetheless, they proposed strategic improvements, such as strengthening community involvement, providing additional teacher training, supplying reading materials, offering asynchronous support, and fostering collaboration between home and school. The study concludes that although the Apayao LEAP program has the potential to improve literacy, its effectiveness can be further enhanced through collaborative and context-sensitive strategies.*

**Keywords:** Guided Reading, Apayao Literacy Engagement and Advancement Program (Apayao LEAP), Thematic Analysis, Early Literacy Development, Parent's Perception

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Guided reading is one of the widely accepted instructional approaches in early literacy education. The teacher guides learners in small-group sessions while reading and discussing texts (Abenojar, M. B., 2024). Guided reading helps teachers target specific reading needs while giving immediate feedback and scaffolding the student's fluency and comprehension. Independent reading differs from guided reading since, in guided reading sessions, the teacher has an opportunity to observe the behavior of each student in reading and intervene with strategies to enhance their skills in real time (Requiso-Jimenez, J., & Bascos-Ocampo, R., 2022). Guided reading can be a structured but flexible approach to support the development of individual progress for Grade 3 learners in Flora District who mostly fall within the emergent or beginning reading stages. Although guided reading can improve literacy skills in many nations, it is not implemented in many schools in the Philippine province of Apayao.

The impact of directed reading on fluency and comprehension goes beyond influencing a child's academics as it also touches on various aspects of social and cognitive development (Hutamares, M., 2023). Reading provides access to a world of information, opens vistas, and sparks curiosity, implying that children can learn many things by reading (Cadiz-Gabejan, A. M., & Quirino, M. C., 2021). Early measures of being informed and literate citizens might be founded for young learners in Flora District by guided reading. The Philippines could never be at a better time to improve educational standards. Low literacy rates and reading skill levels have left the nation far behind global set standards (Pascual, R. M., 2020, December 1). There is, therefore, a great need to unearth effective strategies that can salvage reading difficulties in early grades (Doromal, R., 2020). This study, focusing on guided reading, aligns with the Department of Education's mission of making quality education accessible to all learners, especially those in marginalized and underserved areas.

In addition to the setting for this study in Apayao, reading problems must be addressed since most pupils have socioeconomic challenges that will further deepen educational inequalities (Dizon, E. C., & Sanchez, R. D., 2021, August 9). According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, Apayao falls under one of the provinces with the highest poverty incidence. The more a student is unable to access good quality education and resources, the higher his or her rate of poverty incidence. Thus, literacy brings not only academic success but also a means to break away from poverty for these young learners (Roda, A. A., 2023). It is hoped that the outcome of evaluating the effectiveness of Apayao LEAP on the literacy development of elementary learners will ultimately prove the need for literacy interventions in the promotion of educational equity in rural communities.

The Apayao Literacy Engagement and Advancement Program (LEAP) is a comprehensive reading intervention initiative of the Schools Division of Apayao. It was developed to address reading gaps and enhance or advance the reading skills among learners in both elementary and secondary schools based on their reading needs, such as stage, specific reading levels, and degree of reading difficulties across all grade levels. This program aims to improve the reading skills of learners who fall under frustration and instructional levels. It enhances the overall literacy levels of learners and fosters a culture of reading and learning.

In administering the pre-assessment of Apayao LEAP, assessments are conducted according to grade levels. For Grades 1–2 Filipino, the Apayao LEAP starts with Stage 1, Level 1, but if the learner exhibits mastery of the competencies, they progress one level at a time. For Grades 1–3 English, the same approach is applied. For Grades 3–7 Filipino and Grades 4–7 English, the results of the PHIL-IRI Pretest are considered. All learners who fall in the Non-Reader, Frustration, and Instructional Level categories in the PHIL-IRI take the LEAP Assessment.

Therefore, Apayao LEAP incorporates guided reading as a key strategy to enhance early literacy development among elementary learners. Guided reading involves providing structured and intentional support to small groups of students as they read texts suited to their instructional level. Through Apayao LEAP, teachers help learners improve their reading fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary skills by modeling effective reading strategies, encouraging critical thinking, and facilitating discussions about the texts. This approach also promotes collaboration between teachers and parents, empowering families to support literacy practices at home. By integrating guided reading into its framework, the program aims to build a strong foundation for lifelong learning and literacy success.

Finally, this study shows empirical findings on guided reading that may encourage advocacy for broader implementation of this method in rural districts throughout the Philippines. In this context, the effectiveness of the Apayao Literacy Engagement and Advancement Program (Apayao LEAP) on literacy development among elementary learners will be evaluated. The aim is to investigate whether guided reading can significantly enhance the literacy development of Grade 3 learners at Atok Elementary School in the Flora District of Apayao.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Generally, this study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the Apayao Literacy Engagement and Advancement Program on Early Literacy Development in Elementary Pupils.

Specifically, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the reading stage level of Grade 3 pupils when they were in Grade 1 and Grade 2?
2. What challenges do educators face in implementing the Apayao LEAP effectively?
3. What are the parents' perceptions of their involvement in the Apayao Literacy Engagement and Advancement Program?
4. What strategies can be implemented to enhance the effectiveness of the Apayao Literacy Engagement and Advancement Program?

### 1.2 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Sociocultural theory, as developed by Vygotsky, assumes that learning is founded on social experiences, which are deeply influenced by the cultural contexts and their accompanying social interactions. On this basis, knowledge has to be constructed together and in communication and collaboration, so a distinction cannot be made for individual learning concerning such social environments (Tzuriel, D. 2021). This theory can be reflected by guided reading, the pedagogy that encourages interaction in a classroom with others, with learners learning in collaboration with teachers and learners. Sharing of ideas with peers creates a conducive collaborative environment; more than just sharing of ideas, learners are in the capacity of learning each other's insights

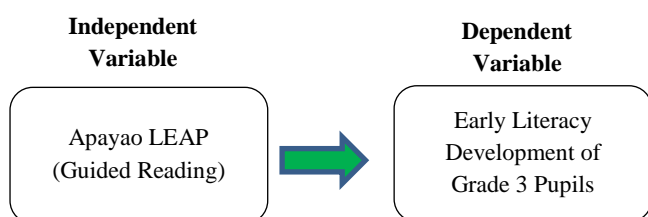
and experience to create or support the view that 'understanding increases with dialogue'. During guided reading, scaffolding occurs as the teacher acts as a facilitator by conducting discussions, asking questions, and allowing learners to articulate their thought processes.

As argued sociocultural theory, points to the role of social environments that can be attributed to individuals in the development of their cognitive abilities. Guided reading sessions provide a community of learners in which, in real-time, learners can share their insights, ask questions, and receive feedback (Rahmatirad, M. (2020). This community of learners' aspect not only fosters a sense of belonging but also encourages risk-taking within learning, as learners are more comfortable expressing themselves in a supportive group.

According to schema theory, any comprehension of a text is significantly based on the reader's knowledge, experience, or frame of reference known as schemas. The schemas are structural mental holdings that enable the connecting of new information with previously existing knowledge to facilitate easier and more meaningful learning (Peltier, C., Sinclair, T. E., Pulos, J. M., & Suk, A. 2019). It means that whenever a learners read any text, it will be the interaction of numbers of already existing schemas based on experience prior knowledge and cultural context. Guided reading exploits this and asks the learners to activate and develop the schemas before, during, and after reading.

The Interactive Reading Model asserts that reading is an active, dynamic process with constant interaction between the reader, the text, and prior knowledge. In this model, effective reading comprehension is not a result of passive decoding of words. Still, it is rather an engaged process of meaning construction as the reader progresses through the text (Duke NK, Cartwright KB, (2021, May 7). This model supports guided reading for many reasons. It encourages the active participation of learners in skills such as predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing.

### 1.3 Research Paradigm



**Figure 1. Research Paradigm**

This research paradigm highlights the relationship between the independent variable, Apayao Literacy Engagement and Advancement Program, and the dependent variables, Literacy Development of Elementary Pupils, specifically for Grade 3 learners. For this study, Apayao LEAP (Literacy Engagement and Advancement Program), is a guided reading literacy-focused intervention designed to enhance the foundational reading skills of elementary learners. This guided reading includes structured learning activities, culturally relevant teaching strategies, and differentiated instructional methods tailored to address the unique learning needs of learners in Apayao. This targeted approach directly support key components such as phonemics awareness, vocabulary development, fluency, and reading comprehension. By integrating these components, Apayao LEAP strives to address reading gaps and improve reading skills among primary school

learners depending on their individual reading needs, such as stage, specific reading levels, and degree of reading difficulty throughout all grades. Concerning the dependent variable, the Early Literacy development of elementary learners, which includes their ability to read fluently and understand text. This aspect is measured through key indicators such as improved phonemic awareness, enhanced vocabulary, and better reading comprehension. As Grade 3 is a critical stage for mastering foundational literacy skills, implementing guided reading – through this Apayao LEAP is expected to significantly influence learners' literacy growth. Therefore, the paradigm is appropriate for assessing the effectiveness of the guided reading strategy (Apayao LEAP) on early literacy outcomes.

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHODS / EXPERIMENTAL DETAILS / METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Research Design

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative research methods to gain comprehensive insight into how effective the Apayao Literacy Engagement and Advancement Program is.

The quantitative part was used to examine the reading stage level of Grade 3 pupils when they were in Grade 1 and Grade 2 through post-test assessments. It allows the analysis of any progression in literacy outcomes.

In addition, the qualitative design was used in this study to gather insights about the experiences of teachers and the perceptions of parents through focus group discussions. Teachers will be asked to share their perceptions of how the Apayao Literacy Engagement and Advancement Program (Apayao LEAP) influences learner engagement, learning strategies, and overall literacy development. This approach will allow for an in-depth understanding of the specific strategies and teaching practices that contribute to learner improvement. Through methods such as teacher interviews and parents' perceptions/ feedback. It will provide rich, descriptive information that complements the quantitative findings, which will offer a robust and well-rounded evaluation of the Apayao Literacy Engagement and Advancement Program's impact on early literacy development among elementary learners.

### 2.2 Locale of the Study

The research was conducted in Flora, whose municipality is under the jurisdiction of the province of Apayao, Philippines. The said municipality has four high schools and 17 elementary schools. The distinct school has different educational exposures for children because of circumstances such as the school environment, teaching methods, or availability of reading materials among others. This will consider the very specific context of Atok Elementary School and check how effective the Apayao Literacy Engagement and Advancement Program on Early Literacy Development of Grade 3 pupils is and if such strategies lead to improvements in literacy development for the young learners. The other way around, analysis of the effectiveness of Apayao LEAP in that locale opens opportunities for looking into its contribution to improvements in learning results for learners. The results of this study would be useful in pointing to the effectiveness of the Apayao LEAP and areas where modifications could be made relative to the specific pupil populations of the region. Therefore, understanding these dynamics can not only contribute to early literacy intervention



literature but also provide practical recommendations for teachers and policymakers looking to build or improve reading proficiency in a regional area.

### 2.3 Respondents of the Study

Respondents of the study were Grade 3 learners, Grade 3 parents and 3 Teachers from Grade 1 to 3 of Atok Elementary School within Flora District. These learners represent the diverse cultural and educational context of Flora municipality. The participation of this group will give an understanding of the reading fluency and comprehension of the learners, especially as regards the guided reading strategies being implemented in their classrooms.

### 2.4 Research Instrument

The researcher used the Apayao LEAP tool to assess the reading level of Grade 3 learners and create a questionnaire based on a standard questionnaire by Hansen, K. E. 2016. The said questionnaire which the researcher to pattern is slightly modified or revised to suit the Philippine setting and the comprehension of the respondents. The revised and modified adopted questionnaire will undergo strict evaluation and review by the panel before it will be pilot tested in Atok Elementary School, Flora, Apayao.

In addition to the quantitative survey, the study incorporated qualitative data through interviews with the teachers of Atok Elementary School from Grade 1 to Grade 3 and the parents of Grade 3 learners. Thematic Analysis was used in the semi-structured interviews which will allow for in-depth exploration of individual experiences with guided reading practices and their perceived impact on literacy development. The interviews were conducted in a relaxed and comfortable setting, encouraging participants to share their thoughts and feelings candidly. Researchers will use open-ended questions to facilitate discussion and probe deeper into specific areas of interest, such as the challenges faced during reading activities or the strategies that learners found most effective. The interviews were audio-recorded with the parents and later transcribed for analysis. This dual approach of combining surveys with interviews provide a comprehensive understanding of the guided reading intervention's effects, enriching the overall findings of the study.

### 2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher asked permission from the Schools Division Superintendent of Apayao, Public Schools District Supervisor, School Head, Teachers, and Parents to conduct the study. As soon as the request is approved, the respondents of the study was identified. Then the researcher meets them for the former to explain the study. Moreover, participants were assured of the

confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Data collection involved administering assessment to the Grade 3 learners to analyze their reading stage level when they were in Grade 1 and Grade 2, as well as their current reading level to assess changes in learners' literacy development over time and after participation in the Apayao LEAP. This well-planned methodology ensures that the researcher collects quantitative information regarding the fluency and understanding of the reading by the learners promptly.

Interviews was conducted with teachers to understand the challenges they faced in implementing the Apayao Literacy Engagement and Advancement Program as a guided reading effectively. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted allowing for open-ended responses to facilitate a deeper understanding of common challenges and successes.

Focused group discussion was used to gather data on parents' perceptions of their involvement in the Apayao Literacy Engagement and Advancement Program. The interview process includes conducting single sessions in a comforting and convenient place to reduce any tension among the participants. Open-ended questions were administered during these interviews with participants so that their involvement in guided reading, whether benefits or challenges is highlighted. Audio recordings of these sessions was made and transcribed for extensive analysis. The combination of this survey questionnaire and interview responses makes the data varied in all respects, so the effect of guided reading on Grade 3 learners' reading performance can be known to a greater extent.

### 2.6 Statistical Treatment Data

This study answers the research questions and provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of Apayao LEAP on Early Literacy Development of Grade 3 pupils of Atok Elementary School, Flora, Apayao.

In quantitative analysis, Frequency is used to show how many learners were at each reading stage level from Grades 1, 2 and 3, highlighting changes over time. This helps determine if there was progression in their reading abilities as a result of the Apayao LEAP.

Thematic Analysis was used to analyze the interview data in identifying recurring challenges and parents' perceptions of their involvement in the Apayao Literacy Engagement and Advancement Program.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1. Reading Levels of the Grade 3 pupils**

Stage	Reading Level		Frequency		
			Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3
4	1.2	Simple Sentence in a Story	0	0	9
3	2	Combining More Than Two Words	0	6	0
2	6	Silent Letter Words	3	2	0
	5	Sight Words	3	1	0
	4e	Consonant-Vowel-Consonant-Vowel (CVCV)	1	0	0
	4d	Consonant-Consonant-Vowel-Consonant (CCVC)	0	0	3
	3	Consonant-Vowel-Consonant (CVC)	0	3	0

	2	Vowel-Consonant (VC)	2	0	0
	1	Consonant-Vowel (CV)	1	0	0
TOTAL			12	12	12

The developmental trajectory of Grade 3 pupils' reading levels, assessed from Grade 1 to their current stage, reveals the impact of foundational literacy instruction and guided reading interventions. In Grade 1, all learners operated within Stage 2, concentrating on letter-sound recognition, silent words, sight words, and basic word structures like CV, VC, and CVCV patterns. This initial phase aligns with Ehri's (2005) description of the pre-alphabetic and partial alphabetic stages, where learners develop phonological awareness and connect letters with sounds. Furthermore, Adams (1990) underscores the predictive nature of these early phonemic skills, particularly the recognition of consonant-vowel combinations, for subsequent reading success, establishing the foundational importance of the learners' Grade 1 performance.

By Grade 2, notable progress was observed, with six learners advancing to Stage 3 Level 2, enabling them to combine more than two words into short phrases—a crucial step toward reading fluency. However, some learners remained at lower Stage 2 levels, highlighting the varied pace of literacy development. Chall (1983) categorized this period as the transition from decoding to fluency, noting that consistent exposure to structured reading tasks and practice is essential for uniform progress. The continued presence of learners at the silent word and CVC levels suggests the necessity of differentiated instruction, a strategy supported by Snow et al. (1998), who argue that early identification and tailored interventions for struggling readers can mitigate long-term literacy deficits, especially in high-risk or rural populations.

In their Grade 3 post-assessment, a significant majority—nine learners—achieved Stage 4 Level 1.2, demonstrating the ability to read simple sentences within a story. This represents a significant milestone, indicating the acquisition of basic fluency and reading for meaning, consistent with Adams' (1990) view of sentence-level reading as a gateway to comprehension and content learning. However, three pupils remained at Stage 2 Level 4d, focusing on CCVC word patterns. Their slower progression may be influenced by instructional gaps, home literacy environments, or individual learning challenges. As Reimers and Schleicher (2020) emphasize, programs like Apayao LEAP must be context-sensitive, addressing the unique needs of rural learners to ensure equitable outcomes for all. The findings suggest that while Apayao LEAP appears generally effective, targeted remediation and extended guided reading time may be necessary for learners who continue to experience difficulties.

#### A. The Challenges Educators face in implementing the Apayao LEAP effectively

**Table 2. Challenges Educators face in implementing the Apayao LEAP effectively**

Core Ideas	Subtheme	Theme
Language diversity <b>T1</b> Communication gaps <b>T2</b>	Language Barriers	Implementation Challenges
Lack of teacher training <b>T1</b> Limited Teacher Training <b>T2</b>	Insufficient Teacher Training	Implementation Challenges
Limited Learning Resources <b>T3</b> Lack of Resources <b>T2</b> Resource constraints <b>T3</b>	Shortage of Reading Materials	Implementation Challenges
Parent availability, literacy gap <b>T1</b> Lack of family involvement <b>T2</b> Weak home-school partnership <b>T3</b>	Lack of Parental Involvement	External Factors Hindering Success
T- Teacher		

The table shows teachers' challenges in effectively implementing the Apayao LEAP. Interviews conducted with educators revealed that (1) Language Barriers, (2) Insufficient Teacher Training, (3) Shortage of Reading Materials, and (4) Lack of Parental involvement challenges teachers in implementing the Apayao Literacy Engagement and Advancement Program (ALEAP).

Language Barrier is one of the major challenges faced by teachers in implementing the Apayao LEAP as a guided reading program. Apayao is home to diverse indigenous groups whose native language differs significantly from the medium of instruction used in formal education, often Filipino and English. This difference in language creates difficulties for learners in understanding and engaging during guided reading sessions, as they find it hard to relate unfamiliar vocabulary and structures to their linguistic backgrounds. As Teacher 1 noted, "There are language barriers and multilingual instruction challenges," while Teacher 2 echoed, "Language barriers are one of the challenges we encounter." These reflections highlight how the use of non-native languages in reading instruction contributes to learner disengagement. Research has shown that using learners' first language significantly enhances literacy development and reading comprehension (Ball, J. 2011). In the absence of teaching materials and strategies suited to the linguistic context of learners in Apayao, guided reading initiatives are likely to miss their goals, highlighting the importance of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching methods.

**Insufficient Teacher Training** is a significant challenge in the Apayao LEAP. Many teachers lack specialized training in differentiated reading instruction, assessment techniques, and strategies for addressing diverse literacy levels, which are essential components of effective guided reading. Teacher 1 shared, "*There's a lack of training, and we are overloaded with responsibilities,*" while Teacher 2 mentioned, "*We face*

challenges like teacher training.” These comments reflect the teachers’ struggle to keep up with the demands of literacy instruction without proper preparation and ongoing support. Research it has shown that continuous, targeted teacher training significantly improves literacy outcomes, as it equips teachers with essential pedagogical skills and confidence (Piper, B., Zuilkowski, S. S., & Dubeck, M. M. 2018). Without such training, even well-structured literacy programs often fall short, especially in under-resourced areas like Apayao.

Shortage of Reading Materials, according to teachers, is a critical challenge in the implementation of Apayao LEAP. Atok Elementary School, located in a remote area, faces limited access to leveled, age-appropriate, and culturally relevant reading resources. This shortage hampers teachers' capacity to deliver differentiated instruction and slows down students' reading progress. As Teacher 3 pointed out, “*Limited resources and lack of technology*” are among the primary barriers. Similarly, Teacher 2 identified “*lack of limited resources*” as a consistent challenge. According to the Department of Education’s early-grade reading assessments, inadequate access to quality reading resources contributes to low reading proficiency among Filipino learners. Furthermore, research conducted by Buenafe, R., 2020 emphasizes that the absence of contextualized and mother-tongue-based reading resources in Indigenous communities’ further delays literacy development. These issues underline the pressing necessity for improved allocation of resources to ensure the effective implementation of guided reading.

Lack of parental involvement surfaced as another prominent theme, with teachers expressing concerns regarding parent availability, literacy gaps, limited family engagement, and weak home-school partnerships. Teacher 1 observed that “Lack of parental support hinders success. It seems that parents do not have time to teach their children, especially in reading.” Teacher 2 corroborated this, stating, “Yes, parental support hinders its success,” while Teacher 3 added, “Yes, low parental involvement in children’s education.” Many parents face limited availability due to work or socio-economic responsibilities, which impedes their active participation in their children's education. Moreover, in under-resourced communities, parental literacy gaps may further restrict their capacity to offer meaningful academic support at home. This absence of involvement, combined with weak collaboration between parents and educational institutions, curtails students' opportunities to reinforce and apply literacy skills outside the classroom. Research by Aquino et al. (2020) and Mendoza et al. (2021) emphasizes that insufficient parental engagement and inadequate home-school partnerships represent critical barriers to early literacy success in rural communities. These challenges underscore the importance of developing strategies to enhance parental engagement and strengthen communication between home and school to support early literacy development.

## B. Parent’s Perception on Guided Reading (Apayao LEAP)

**Table 3. Parents’ Perception of Guided Reading (Apayao LEAP)**

Core Ideas	Subtheme	Theme
The program helps improve children's reading <b>P1</b> . Increases children's motivation to read <b>P3</b>	Enhancing reading skills and motivation through guided reading	Parental Involvement
Took an active role in the child’s reading <b>P4</b> Guides and motivates the child to read <b>P8</b> <b>Reading Facilitator P1</b>	Parental Guidance	Roles and Responsibilities
Lack of time due to work responsibilities, <b>P6</b> Lack of time limits the ability to supervise <b>P1</b>	Time Constraints due to Work	Barriers to Involvement
Workload limits the ability to help <b>P1</b> Lack of home reading materials <b>P9</b> Illiterate parents struggle to help <b>P4</b> Some parents cannot teach reading <b>P3</b> Uncertainty about the proper teaching method <b>P6</b>	Parental Support Limitations	Factors Influencing Engagement
Observed improvement in reading skills, <b>P10</b> Children enjoy reading more in <b>P12</b> The child has become more confident reading <b>P3</b> Vocabulary recognition has improved <b>P6</b> Increased interest in reading <b>P9</b>	Improvement in Reading Skills	Impact of Involvement
Limited reading resources at home, <b>P4</b>	Limited Access to Reading Resources	Challenges Encountered
P- Parent		

Enhancing reading skills and motivation through guided reading, Apayao LEAP plays a significant role in enhancing children's reading skills by encouraging both skill growth and motivation, especially through the active engagement of parents in guided reading sessions. Research shows that parental involvement is a key factor in promoting early literacy, as it extends the learning environment beyond the classroom and reinforces reading habits at home (Smith, J., & Brown, L. 2020). Guided reading strategies led by parents provide structured and personalized support that helps children decode words, understand texts, and build fluency, which are essential components of reading proficiency (Lee, A., & Kim, H. 2019). Furthermore, when parents regularly participate in reading activities with their children, it fosters a positive emotional bond with reading, which boosts children’s motivation and enthusiasm for books. White (2021) further supports this by emphasizing that parental encouragement

and shared reading experiences create a sense of achievement and enjoyment in children, motivating them to read more frequently. Altogether, it indicates that programs involving guided parental engagement not only enhance fundamental reading abilities but also promote lasting motivation to read, which is essential for long-term academic achievement.

Parental Guidance, the core ideas—taking an active role in a child's reading (P4), guiding and motivating the child to read (P8), and acting as a reading facilitator (P1)—highlight the critical influence of parental involvement in early literacy development. These roles illustrate how parents act not only as supporters but also as facilitators who influence their children's reading habits and perspectives. Active engagement includes setting reading routines, providing access to books, modeling reading behaviors, and offering encouragement. Research by Sénéchal, M., & LeFevre, J. A. 2002 and Bus, A. G., van IJzendoorn, M. H., & Pellegrini, A. D. 1995 consistently shows that children whose parents are actively involved in their literacy practices demonstrate higher reading achievement and more positive attitudes toward reading. By guiding and motivating children to read, parents contribute to a nurturing literacy environment, fostering both skill acquisition and a lifelong love for reading (Niklas, F., & Schneider, W. 2013).

Time Constraints Due to Work, Parents' involvement in this Apayao Literacy Engagement and Advancement Program (LEAP), a guided reading initiative, identified time constraints due to work responsibilities as a significant barrier to their involvement. Many parents expressed that their demanding work schedules (P6) limited their ability to supervise and engage in their children's reading activities at home (P1). This aligns with the research of DeJong, G. (2019) that highlight the time limitations, particularly among working parents, can hinder effective participation in educational programs. Such constraints often prevent parents from consistently supporting their children's literacy development, even when they are willing and motivated to do so. This underscores the need for flexible engagement strategies, such as offering reading sessions outside of working hours or providing asynchronous support tools for parents.

Parental Support Limitation, Parents expressed several challenges that limit their capacity to effectively support their children's reading development. Many cited their demanding workloads, which reduce the time and energy available to assist with reading activities at home. Research supports that socio-economic demands, such as long work hours or multiple jobs, can impede parents' ability to participate actively in their children's education (Gadsden, V. L., Brooks-Gunn, J., & Jackson, A. (2012). The lack of home reading materials further restricts opportunities for children to practice literacy skills outside the classroom. According to Neuman and Celano, disparities in access to books and print materials in low-income communities significantly affect children's reading proficiency.

Additionally, some parents acknowledged their own literacy limitations or lack of confidence in teaching reading, which hinders their ability to engage meaningfully in their child's learning. This aligns with studies showing that parents with limited literacy skills may feel inadequate or anxious about supporting their children's reading (Sénéchal, M., & LeFevre, J. A. (2002). A common concern among participants was uncertainty about the correct teaching methods, highlighting a need for clearer guidance and support from teachers. Research indicates that parents are more likely to support home literacy activities when they receive structured guidance and training from schools (Van Steensel, R., McElvany, N., Kurvers, J., & Herppich, S. (2011). These factors collectively illustrate that while parents are willing to be involved, various socio-economic and educational barriers impact the extent and quality of their engagement in the Apayao LEAP initiative.

Improvement in Reading Skills, Parents reported significant improvements in their children's literacy development as a result of their active participation. Many observed marked progress in their children's reading skills (P10) and vocabulary recognition (P6), attributing these gains to the consistent home-based reading support encouraged by the program. They also noted a visible increase in their children's enjoyment of reading (P12) and overall interest in books (P9), which align with studies showing that guided reading paired with parental involvement enhances both reading proficiency and motivation Lee, A., & Kim, H. (2019). Furthermore, parents observed a boost in their children's reading confidence (P3), a finding supported by White (2021), who emphasized that parental encouragement fosters self-assurance in young readers. These perceptions highlight how structured parental engagement, as promoted in LEAP, not only strengthens technical reading skills but also nurtures a positive and confident reading identity in children.

Limited Access to Reading Resources, Parents participating in the Apayao LEAP, identified limited access to reading resources at home (P4) as a significant challenge to supporting their children's literacy development. This lack of materials hindered their ability to consistently engage in reading activities, reducing opportunities for children to practice and reinforce their reading skills outside of school. The concern aligns with findings by Neuman and Moland (2019), who emphasize that the availability of age-appropriate reading materials at home is critical for fostering early literacy development. In the absence of adequate resources, even the most well-meaning parental involvement might prove ineffective, especially in rural or low-income areas. This situation underscores the necessity of initiatives like LEAP, which not only offer educational support but also work to fill the resource gaps that affect reading participation at home.

### C. Strategies to Improve Guided Reading Implementation in Apayao LEAP

**Table 4. Strategies to Improve Guided Reading Implementation in Apayao LEAP**

Challenge	Strategy
Insufficient Teacher Training	Additional Teacher Training
Shortage of Reading Materials	Provision of Reading Material
Lack of Parental Involvement	Strengthen Community Involvement
Time Constraint due to Work	Provision of Asynchronous Support
Parental Support Limitation	Foster Home-School Collaboration



Additional Teacher Training, based from the teachers' interview, this is critical need for continuous, relevant, and practical professional development for teachers. Teachers consistently mentioned that initial guided reading training was beneficial; however, the fast-evolving educational environment and the varied needs of classrooms require continuous, specialized training. They indicated a demand for more focused training that is easily accessible and specific to their classroom situations. According to Bernardo A.B. 2019, continuous professional development in literacy instruction is critical for Filipinos teachers, particularly in multicultural contexts like Apayao. Similarly, the Department of Education highlights the importance of capacity-building programs to ensure that teachers are equipped with the necessary skills and methodologies to improve learners' reading performance. Additional training equips teachers with updated teaching strategies and boosts their confidence, ultimately resulting in improved literacy outcomes.

Provision of Reading Materials, Teachers pointed out that even with their best efforts to provide high-quality instruction, the inadequate presence of suitable materials continues to pose a significant obstacle to the effective implementation of guided reading. When inquired about how to tackle the resource issues within Apayao LEAP, many respondents emphasized the value of solutions driven by the community. Teacher 1 proposed, *"Create locally crafted learning materials."* Teacher 2 also advised, *"Motivate community members to contribute reading materials"* as a way to address the shortage of resources. Teacher 3 mentioned the necessity of pursuing external funding to bolster the program, stating, *"To mitigate resource limitations, it's important to seek additional funding from private organizations."* According to Allington (2002), noted that classrooms that provide diverse, leveled reading materials, including culturally relevant texts, tend to show better student outcomes in reading. Similarly, Neuman and Celano (2001) found that access to print materials significantly influences students' literacy development. Schools with a rich supply of print resources outperformed those with limited materials in various literacy measures. Therefore, investing in the creation and distribution of appropriate reading materials is essential for the success of guided reading.

Strengthening community involvement is an essential approach to tackle the issues identified by both parents and educators regarding the implementation of guided reading (Apayao LEAP). Common obstacles to effective literacy instruction include limited parental availability, a shortage of reading resources, and inadequate support from teachers. Involving the wider community—such as local leaders, elders, youth volunteers, and NGOs—can help overcome these challenges by offering additional assistance, promoting a reading culture, and aiding in the creation and distribution of localized reading resources. Community reading initiatives, storytelling events, and learning hubs can complement classroom teaching and motivate parental involvement even when time is constrained. Research by Palaruan, E. C., & Robles, R. (2021), active community involvement enhances literacy initiatives in the Philippines by fostering shared responsibility and sustaining local reading programs. Furthermore, the Department of Education advocates for school-community partnerships as a key component of effective reading interventions, especially in disadvantaged areas. Strengthening these collaborations ensures that literacy development is a collective endeavor that extends beyond the classroom setting.

Provision of asynchronous support is vital for addressing the time limitations that parents face due to their work obligations. Numerous parents put in long hours or participate in demanding jobs, which restricts their ability to actively engage in fostering their children's literacy skills at home. Asynchronous support—such as reading kits to take home, audio-visual resources, literacy apps for mobile devices, or printed handbooks—enables parents to help with their children's guided reading practices at times that are convenient for them. These tools empower parents to take part in their child's education without the necessity of being present in real-time, thereby making support more attainable and practical in low-income or remote areas. A study by Reyes-Chua et al., asynchronous learning tools in the Philippine setting have proven effective in supporting home-based education by offering flexibility and enabling family involvement despite scheduling challenges. Furthermore, UNESCO emphasizes that when families are provided with easy-to-use, flexible learning resources, children's reading engagement and performance improve significantly, even in marginalized communities.

Fostering home-school collaboration is a crucial approach to tackle the difficulties faced in guided reading within the Apayao LEAP. Successful guided reading relies not just on what happens in the classroom but also on the support provided at home, which can be challenging when communication between educators and parents is inconsistent or weak. By enhancing the partnership between schools and families—through regular meetings, reading workshops, home-based assignments, and open channels of communication—both sides can coordinate their efforts to foster the child's literacy growth. This cooperation is particularly vital in areas like Apayao, where parents may feel unprepared to help their children due to language or educational obstacles. Research by Alampay and Jocson highlights that strong home-school partnerships in the Philippine context lead to improved reading outcomes and increased parental confidence in supporting learning at home. Furthermore, UNESCO underscores that collaborative relationships between teachers and families create supportive learning environments, especially for marginalized learners [53]. Nurturing this collaboration guarantees that guided reading is a joint effort between schools and homes, leading to its overall success.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The Apayao LEAP has had a positive effect on the early literacy development of Grade 3 pupils, with most learners demonstrating significant advancements from basic decoding skills to reading at the sentence level. Nevertheless, the program's implementation is hindered by systemic and contextual obstacles, especially concerning teacher capacity, the language used for instruction, and family involvement. Teachers lack sufficient ongoing professional development to meet the varied needs of their learners. While parents are eager to participate, they face limitations due to work commitments, gaps in their own literacy, and a shortage of resources.

The effectiveness of Apayao LEAP relies on a comprehensive, community-focused strategy that aids teachers, strengthens parental involvement, and guarantees learners are provided with suitable resources and teaching that align with their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. If these structural and supportive deficiencies are not tackled, the advantages of the program might not be fairly experienced by all learners.



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## DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author hereby declare that generative AI technologies was used in generating ideas or editing of this manuscript such as Gemini, Chat GPT and others.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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