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Brigada Eskwela and Reading Coordination Practices in Bangbang Elementary School in Ifugao

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Abstract

Brigada Eskwela has long been recognized in the Philippine basic education system as a mechanism for strengthening school–community partnerships, while reading programs remain central to improving foundational literacy in the early grades. This qualitative case study examined how Brigada Eskwela initiatives and reading coordination practices were implemented and integrated in Bangbang Elementary School, a rural public school in Ifugao, Philippines. Guided by community-based education and literacy leadership frameworks, the study focused on the experiences of a Teacher II serving as Reading Coordinator and Brigada Eskwela focal person. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and review of reading and school activity records, and were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that Brigada Eskwela functioned not only as a school maintenance activity but also as a platform for community-supported literacy initiatives. Reading coordination practices were strengthened through volunteer engagement, learner profiling, and collaborative monitoring of reading progress. Challenges related to limited resources and time constraints were also identified. The study concludes that when Brigada Eskwela is intentionally aligned with reading programs, it contributes to sustainable literacy support and strengthens learner-centered practices in rural elementary schools.

Keywords: Brigada Eskwela, reading coordination, community engagement, rural education, literacy leadership



1. Introduction

Foundational literacy is widely recognized as a critical determinant of learners' long-term academic success, particularly during the early years of basic education when reading skills serve as the foundation for learning across all subject areas. Learners who fail to develop adequate reading proficiency at an early stage are more likely to experience persistent academic difficulties, reduced engagement, and limited educational opportunities in later years. In rural school contexts, however, effective reading instruction is often hindered by structural and contextual challenges, including limited instructional resources, multigrade classroom arrangements, insufficient parental involvement, and constrained access to age-appropriate reading materials. These conditions place additional demands on teachers, who must address diverse literacy needs within resource-constrained environments.

In response to these challenges, the Philippine Department of Education institutionalized Brigada Eskwela as a nationwide initiative aimed at strengthening school–community partnerships and promoting shared responsibility for school improvement and learner support. Rooted in the principle that education is a collective endeavor, Brigada Eskwela mobilizes parents, local government units, non-government organizations, and community volunteers to contribute time, labor, and resources in support of public schools. While the initiative is commonly associated with physical school preparation and maintenance, its broader potential lies in creating avenues for community engagement that can support instructional programs, including early literacy development.

Despite its widespread implementation, the role of Brigada Eskwela in supporting instructional initiatives—particularly reading interventions has received limited scholarly attention. Existing literature on community-based education suggests that when schools intentionally engage parents and community members in learning-related activities, learners benefit from increased instructional support, reinforced learning environments, and improved academic outcomes (Epstein, 2011; Sanders, 2019). However, there remains a need for context-specific studies that examine how such community engagement initiatives are operationalized at the school level and how they intersect with formal instructional coordination. This study addresses this gap by examining how Brigada Eskwela and reading coordination practices intersect in a rural elementary school setting, highlighting their combined role in supporting foundational literacy development.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Brigada Eskwela and School–Community Partnerships

Brigada Eskwela is grounded in the principle that education is a shared responsibility among schools, families, and communities. Studies indicate that community engagement initiatives enhance school readiness, resource mobilization, and stakeholder ownership (Bernardo et al., 2020). In rural contexts, such partnerships are particularly vital in compensating for limited institutional resources.

2.2 Reading Coordination and Early Literacy Development

Reading coordinators play a key role in organizing literacy programs, monitoring learner progress, and supporting teachers' instructional practices. Research emphasizes that systematic reading interventions, when supported by monitoring and collaboration, significantly improve learners' reading proficiency (Allington, 2014; Snow & Matthews, 2016).

2.3 Teacher Leadership in Literacy and Community Engagement

Teacher leadership has been shown to influence both instructional quality and stakeholder participation. Teachers who assume coordination roles often act as bridges between instructional goals and community support mechanisms (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Such leadership is particularly critical in rural schools, where teachers often perform multiple roles.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study research design to explore Brigada Eskwela and reading coordination practices within a real-life rural school context. The case study approach was appropriate for capturing the depth and complexity of school–community engagement and literacy coordination as they naturally occurred in Bangbang Elementary School, allowing for a contextualized understanding of how these practices supported reading instruction and learner development.

The study was conducted at Bangbang Elementary School in Hungduan, Ifugao, Philippines. The primary participant was a Teacher II who served as the school's Reading Coordinator and Brigada Eskwela focal person. The participant's dual role provided direct involvement in both instructional leadership and community engagement initiatives, making it possible to examine how Brigada Eskwela activities were aligned with reading program implementation and monitoring.

Data were collected using multiple qualitative sources to ensure depth and triangulation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Teacher II to elicit detailed accounts of experiences, practices, and challenges related to reading coordination and Brigada Eskwela implementation. In addition, Brigada Eskwela plans and accomplishment reports were analyzed to understand the scope and nature of community participation. Reading program records and learner reading profiles were also reviewed to examine how learner progress was monitored and how interventions were planned and implemented.

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis process that involved systematic coding, categorization, and theme development. Patterns and meanings were identified across interview transcripts and documentary sources to generate coherent themes explaining the integration of Brigada Eskwela and reading coordination practices. To ensure analytical rigor and credibility, findings were continuously compared across data sources, and themes were refined through iterative analysis and reflective interpretation.

4. Results and Findings

The analysis yielded four major themes describing the integration of Brigada Eskwela and reading coordination practices in the school.

Theme 1: Brigada Eskwela as a Platform for Literacy Support

The participant emphasized that Brigada Eskwela extended beyond physical school preparation and became an avenue for supporting reading initiatives. One response stated, "*Hindi lang paglilinis ang Brigada Eskwela; dito rin kami nakakakuha ng tulong para sa reading corner at mga aklat.*" Another response added, "*Sa tulong ng mga magulang at volunteers, nakapag-ayos kami ng lugar na nakatuon sa pagbabasa.*"

These responses indicate that Brigada Eskwela functioned as an effective resource-mobilization platform that went beyond routine school preparation activities to support literacy-related

infrastructure and learning materials. Through the participation of parents, local officials, and community volunteers, the school was able to improve reading corners, organize learning spaces, and acquire or refurbish books and basic instructional resources needed for reading programs. Such collective efforts addressed material shortages that commonly affect rural schools and created more conducive environments for literacy instruction, particularly for early-grade learners and those requiring remediation.

This finding aligns with Epstein's (2011) framework on school-family-community partnerships, which underscores shared responsibility in supporting learners' academic development beyond classroom instruction. Epstein argues that when schools actively engage communities as partners, learning support becomes more comprehensive and sustainable. Related studies further suggest that community-mobilized resources contribute to improved instructional environments and increased stakeholder ownership of educational initiatives (Bernardo et al., 2020; Sanders, 2019). In the context of rural elementary education, Brigada Eskwela exemplifies how structured community participation can directly strengthen literacy programs by complementing school-based efforts with material and social support.

Theme 2: Reading Coordination through Learner Profiling and Monitoring

The participant described systematic learner profiling as central to reading coordination. One response noted, *"May malinaw kaming tala kung sino ang non-reader, frustration level, at independent reader."* Another response stated, *"Mas madali ang pagplano ng intervention kapag alam namin ang antas ng pagbasa ng bawat bata."*

These practices allowed reading interventions to be more targeted and responsive to individual learner needs through the systematic use of reading profiles and progress records. By identifying learners' reading levels such as non-reader, frustration, instructional, and independent levels, teachers were able to design appropriate interventions that matched learners' specific competencies. Continuous monitoring enabled teachers to track incremental progress, adjust strategies when necessary, and provide timely remediation or enrichment. This systematic approach reduced the reliance on generalized instruction and ensured that struggling readers received focused support, while more proficient readers were given opportunities to advance at an appropriate pace.

This finding is consistent with Allington's (2014) assertion that effective reading instruction depends on structured monitoring and individualized support, particularly in the early grades where foundational literacy skills are developed. Allington emphasizes that frequent assessment and responsive instruction are essential in preventing long-term reading difficulties. Supporting studies similarly highlight that early identification of reading challenges, coupled with targeted interventions and ongoing progress monitoring, significantly improves reading outcomes and helps close achievement gaps (Snow & Matthews, 2016). In rural elementary contexts, such structured monitoring becomes especially important, as it maximizes limited instructional time and resources while ensuring that no learner is overlooked.

Theme 3: Community and Volunteer Involvement in Reading Programs

The participant highlighted the role of parents and community volunteers in supporting reading activities. One response shared, *"May mga magulang na tumutulong sa pagbabasa lalo na sa remedial sessions."* Another response explained, *"Sa Brigada Eskwela nagsisimula ang pakikipag-ugnayan sa komunidad para sa reading program."*

Community involvement significantly expanded instructional support beyond what teachers alone could provide, particularly for struggling and beginning readers. Through the participation of parents, local volunteers, and community members, additional reading sessions, remedial support, and one-on-one assistance became possible, especially during Brigada Eskwela–initiated activities and follow-up literacy programs. This shared instructional effort helped address gaps in learners' reading skills by providing more frequent practice, individualized attention, and emotional encouragement, which are often difficult to sustain in multigrade and resource-constrained classrooms. Moreover, community participation fostered a supportive learning environment where reading was reinforced not only as a school task but also as a shared community value, thereby increasing learners' motivation and confidence.

This finding supports Sanders' (2019) assertion that sustained community engagement enhances learning opportunities by extending instructional support beyond formal classroom structures and reinforcing school-based interventions. When parents and community members are actively involved in literacy initiatives, learning becomes more consistent across school and home contexts, leading to greater reinforcement of reading skills. Related studies further emphasize that community-supported literacy programs contribute to improved learner outcomes by strengthening accountability, providing additional learning time, and promoting shared responsibility for children's education (Epstein, 2011; Bernardo et al., 2020). In rural education contexts, such sustained engagement is particularly critical, as it compensates for limited institutional resources and supports the continuity of literacy interventions.

Theme 4: Challenges in Sustaining Literacy and Community Engagement

Despite positive outcomes, challenges were identified. One response stated, "*Limitado ang oras ng mga guro at volunteers para sa tuloy-tuloy na reading intervention.*" Another response added, "*Kulang pa rin ang reading materials lalo na sa mas mataas na antas.*"

These challenges reflect broader structural constraints that directly affect the sustainability and effectiveness of literacy programs in rural school settings. Limited instructional time, competing administrative responsibilities, and insufficient access to reading materials and learning spaces constrained the consistent implementation of reading interventions. In addition, reliance on volunteer participation, while valuable, introduced variability in program continuity, as community members' availability often depended on seasonal work and family obligations. Such conditions made it difficult to sustain regular reading sessions and systematic learner monitoring, particularly for learners requiring long-term support. These constraints indicate that while school- and community-initiated efforts can address immediate needs, they are often insufficient to maintain sustained instructional impact without stable institutional backing.

Similar challenges have been widely documented in rural education research, emphasizing that contextual limitations can undermine the long-term viability of literacy initiatives if left unaddressed. Azano and Stewart (2016) argue that rural schools frequently operate within conditions of resource scarcity, geographic isolation, and limited professional development opportunities, all of which affect program continuity and instructional quality. Related studies further suggest that effective and sustainable literacy interventions require policy-level support that ensures adequate staffing, provision of age-appropriate reading materials, and ongoing capacity-building for teachers and volunteers (Snow & Matthews, 2016; Allington, 2014). These findings underscore the importance of institutional commitment and coherent policy frameworks to complement community-driven

initiatives such as Brigada Eskwela, enabling rural schools to move from short-term interventions toward sustainable, long-term literacy development.

5. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Brigada Eskwela, when intentionally aligned with reading coordination practices, can function as a powerful mechanism for supporting literacy development in rural elementary schools. By integrating community participation with systematic reading interventions, the school was able to extend instructional support beyond the confines of the classroom and create additional learning opportunities for struggling readers. This approach reflects research on community-based education, which emphasizes that meaningful parental and community involvement contributes to improved literacy outcomes by reinforcing learning in both school and home contexts (Epstein, 2011; Sanders, 2019). In rural settings where instructional resources are often limited, community-supported initiatives such as Brigada Eskwela serve as critical platforms for mobilizing human and material resources in support of foundational learning.

Teacher leadership emerged as a crucial factor in aligning community resources with literacy goals. Consistent with York-Barr and Duke's (2004) model of teacher leadership, the Teacher II serving as Reading Coordinator acted as a bridge between instructional priorities and community engagement efforts. Through leadership in planning, coordination, and monitoring, the teacher ensured that Brigada Eskwela activities supported reading initiatives rather than remaining solely focused on school maintenance. Similar studies have shown that teacher leaders play a vital role in sustaining literacy programs by guiding collaborative practices, fostering shared commitment, and linking instructional strategies with available community support (Allington, 2014; Hallinger, 2011).

Moreover, the collaborative nature of Brigada Eskwela strengthened stakeholder ownership of reading programs, reinforcing the notion that literacy development is a shared responsibility among teachers, parents, and the wider community. When stakeholders perceive themselves as active contributors to learners' reading development, programs are more likely to be sustained and valued (Bernardo et al., 2020). However, sustaining these initiatives over time requires continuous capacity-building, access to appropriate reading materials, and consistent institutional support. Research on rural literacy initiatives highlights that without ongoing professional development and policy-level backing, school-community partnerships risk losing momentum and impact (Azano & Stewart, 2016; Snow & Matthews, 2016). These findings underscore the need for systemic support to ensure that Brigada Eskwela-supported reading programs remain effective and sustainable in rural education contexts.

6. Conclusions

This study provides evidence that Brigada Eskwela and reading coordination practices, when intentionally integrated, enhance literacy support and learner-centered instruction in rural elementary schools. Through strong teacher leadership and community engagement, reading programs become more responsive and sustainable. To maximize impact, schools should align Brigada Eskwela initiatives with instructional priorities, particularly early literacy development.

7. Implications and Recommendations

Teachers are encouraged to integrate community-based initiatives into reading programs to extend instructional support. School leaders should institutionalize mechanisms that align Brigada Eskwela with literacy goals. Education authorities may strengthen policies and professional development programs that support community-engaged literacy instruction in rural schools. Future research

may involve multiple school sites or mixed-methods approaches to examine the long-term impact of Brigada Eskwela-supported reading programs on learner achievement.

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