

ELEMENTS OF A RADIO-BASED LITERACY PROGRAM: TOWARDS A COMMUNITY-RESPONSIVE PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This is an exploratory study that looked into the radio-based literacy program of the College of Education of the University of the Philippines Diliman as a tool for enhancing and supporting literacy skills and practices of parents of grade two pupils from an urban poor community. It is based on Philippine setting and culture and focused on the design and the implementation of a radio-based literacy program. Descriptive research design was used in gathering and analyzing data that were collected through focus group discussions, individual interviews, and questionnaires. The study shows the program can produce significant educational results and can make a significant difference in family literacy skills and practices if its design, topic plotting, and content are carefully planned and utilized along the lines of literacy support for parents of young learners. Also, a radio-based literacy program is best used with other media of communication and with a strong support component in which learners and their parents engage in person to person mode of communication with literacy experts and teachers. The study implies that the radio program can be an effective instrument of social transformation. Also, a good and effective radio-based literacy program serves as an impetus for teacher education institutions to find innovative ways to help empower impoverished communities and families, as they work to support their children in carrying out academic tasks and roles.

Keywords: radio-based literacy, community-responsive pre-service education

INTRODUCTION

Few Filipino schoolchildren have access to high quality education services. This is the reality children face in the country, where more than half of the population lives below the poverty line. Policy makers and different stakeholders highlight access to quality education and effective classroom instruction as some of the basic rights of all children, making priority educational agenda the task of providing schoolchildren with adequate and appropriate early stimulation and intervention to increase their chances of developing literacy and succeeding in current and future school and academic activities.

Early intervention for schoolchildren had been shown to be effective in enhancing their academic development. Such intervention becomes more effective when it adheres to core principles and best practices, most importantly, those of family-centered orientation, natural environments, and collaborative team processes (Rivadelo, G., 2012). Empowering a community by transforming attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions, especially towards schooling and literacy, while providing its members with the necessary enabling experiences and competencies to carry out early intervention through the home, may level the playing field for families and schoolchildren from lower and higher economic groups.

In developing interventions to support schoolchildren's academic tasks and difficulties, different programs were launched by various stakeholders, among which is family literacy

from the education sector's end. Family literacy is an educational method based on a common belief that "improvement in literacy skills and overall academic performance will result from continuing education of children and their parents through planned child-parent interactions" (Chance, R., 2010). It is believed that training for parents on how to be the primary teacher and full partners in the education of their children should be provided, as parents are considered to be the primary support of schoolchildren in doing and performing their academic tasks.

The education sector makes use of various media to respond to the call of empowering families in their efforts to become the primary support of their children's education. Television shows on literacy and numeracy are being launched, many of which make use of the children's mother tongue for better transfer of learning. Radio is also used for this purpose, as it is considered one of the cheapest, yet effective, educational technologies available for education and development purposes in developing countries. In Pakistan, for instance, the National Broadcasting Corporation through their Open University has started educational programs on radio. Jumani (2009) studied the effectiveness of such educational radio program and the various strategies it applied for rural education in Pakistan, and has found that "the strategies of radio for rural education were appreciable because these infused mobility, widened horizons, and focused attention on the goals and problems of rural people, as it is also used to enhance literacy" (p.176). Radio broadcast was also used in Kenya to assist teachers and pupils in learning and improving their English written and oral skills. Odera (2011) notes that radio technology is "viewed by Kenyan teachers as a useful tool for teaching and learning languages like English, French, German and Kiswahili at all levels of education" (p. 961).

The University of the Philippines College of Education (U.P. College of Education) has designed a radio literacy program (*Radyo Edukado*) to help empower impoverished communities and families as they work to support their children's schooling and academic tasks. *Radyo Edukado* is a weekly radio show aired every Monday morning through DZUP (1602 at the AM mode), the university's local radio station. The content of the said program is aligned with the goals and course modules of the College of Education's National Service Training Program (NSTP). The NSTP serves as the extension course of the college's pre-service students, and allows for an alternative, more communitarian approach, in pre-service teacher education instruction. *Radyo Edukado*, or the radio-based literacy program, covers the course content of the college's NSTP program, and thereby serves as a medium where literacy is taught to the parents and the community, so they could in turn support their children's literacy learning and development.

The aims of the said radio-based literacy program is congruent with the objectives of an educational radio broadcast used in teaching and learning, which are also espoused by various education and media theorists, among them Bates (1984). Specifically, these objectives include the improvement of the quality of learning and education, the extension of educational opportunities through alternative or distance learning, the improvement of the quality of classroom instruction, and the teaching of literacy skills among underprivileged populations.

It is towards this endeavor that this particular study is undertaken. The U.P. College of Education wants to be informed of the essential elements and factors related to the design and implementation of an effective radio-based literacy program. Inasmuch as previous studies have pointed to some of these elements, this research aimed to put into context the discourse and study of a radio-based literacy program to help ensure that any similar efforts of this kind in the future will be appreciative of and favorable to the Philippine context. It is also hoped

that the College of Education's pre-service teacher education, through the NSTP (extension service undergraduate course) and the *Radyo Edukado* (radio-based literacy program), will succeed in serving the underprivileged communities to help in the country's efforts towards social transformation.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive research design was used in gathering and analyzing data for the study. This includes interview, questionnaire, and focus group discussion. The area of study was a public school in Quezon City, Philippines whose grade two students and parents were part of the U.P. College of Education's NSTP Program. The content and course modules of the NSTP Program focused on the teaching of literacy skills, and the same was simultaneously aired through the college's radio-based literacy program *Radyo Edukado*. The program aimed to teach the parents of the students how to teach basic literacy knowledge and skills so they could provide support to the literacy development of their children.

The participants were the following: (1) mothers, grandmothers, and other relatives of grade two public school students (where the most number of non-readers were registered) who were part of the NSTP program of the U.P. College of Education; (2) three (3) members of the DZUP radio technical staff; (3) members of the U.P. College of Education's radio-based literacy program (*Radyo Edukado*) team; and (4) the two (2) hosts of the radio program.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The study found the following to be the vital elements of an effective radio-based literacy program: well-designed program, smooth delivery, appropriate and relevant topic and content, available technical support, and other assistive components. Research questions related to each of the element focused on the following: PROGRAM DESIGN – the script, transition and sequence of topics, design and quality of the program, and areas of improvement; DELIVERY– language of the hosts and guests, flow of topics and discussions; TOPIC AND CONTENT – substance of topics discussed, timeliness of the topics; relevance to children's learning and education, and relevance to family and community learning of literacy practices; TECHNICAL ASPECT – quality in the airing of the radio-based literacy program; and SUPPORT COMPONENT – human resource support in terms of involvement of education pre-service students and their teachers; degree and quality of accommodation of the recipient school, the families, and the community; collaboration between the recipient school and the teacher education institution; collaboration with other media resources; and financial support from funding agencies for sustainability of a radio-based literacy program.

Table 1 summarizes the results gathered from the interviews of, and the FGDs with, parents and from the survey and interviews of the radio-based literacy program (*Radyo Edukado*) team, technical staff of the DZUP radio station, and the program hosts.

The research findings are consistent with the literature and previous studies done on the use and role of media in the teaching of literacy (Bates, 1984; Jumani, 2009; Chance, 2010; Odera, 2011). The findings also support existing literature that showed radio literacy programs to be the most viable in the teaching of literacy, as it is considered one of the most affordable technologies available for education and development purposes in developing countries. The research data also highlighted congruence with the objectives of an educational radio broadcast used in teaching and learning, which include the improvement of the quality of learning and education, the extension of educational opportunities through

alternative or distance learning, the improvement of the quality of classroom instruction, and the teaching of literacy skills among underprivileged populations (Bates, 1984).

Table 1. The Elements of an Effective Radio-Based Program: Research Results and Findings

<i>Elements of a Radio-Based Literacy Program</i>	<i>Research Findings/Data</i>
<i>PROGRAM DESIGN</i> (the script, transition and sequence of topics, design and quality of the program)	<i>STRENGTHS:</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - coherent script - the inclusion of the teaching of literacy content and skills and of social concerns and issues related to the education of children made the program a very helpful and effective one - good flow, transitions, sequence of topics - hosts did recap of previous topics and episodes and challenged listeners to participate - involvement of teachers and students in the program
<i>DELIVERY</i> (language of hosts and guests, flow of topics and discussions,)	<i>PROBLEM AREAS:</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to improve in terms of fluidity in discussions - program promotion in social networking sites - the need to incorporate exciting segments like trivia, contest, music, interesting and popular guests
<i>TOPIC AND CONTENT</i> (substance, timeliness, and relevance of topics to children's education, parents'/communities' involvement, parents' perceptions of and practices in teaching their children at home)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - delivery was clear though a bit fast - one hour program is not enough - language of the hosts and guests was calm and polite - language was easy to understand even if topics were complicated - topics were delivered and discussed using language that even schoolchildren can understand - topics were discussed in a fun and witty way
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - topics were relevant to children's education (literacy skills and content such as reading, writing, numeracy were incorporated in the program and were discussed) - information was easy to understand - topics were relevant and have helped teach parents of the schoolchildren new ways of teaching or tutoring their children at home - it made the parents more confident in teaching their children at home - it gave parents ideas on how to motivate children, and for them to avoid using corporal punishment when teaching their children at home - topics were highly informative and it helped that experts were the ones discussing the topics - afforded parents opportunity and venue to meet new friends, other parents, the teachers, and the pre-service education students - made parents learn new things from experts - has motivated children themselves in reminding their parents about such parents role in their education (the kids were the ones reminding parents that the program was about to air) - has sparked a new interest in books and in reading among children and their parents, too

<p><i>TECHNICAL ASPECT</i> (quality in the airing of the program, preparation of scripts)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - scripts should be prepared on an appointed schedule and time to give the hosts and guests enough time to study them and to prepare for airing - consistent effort to ensure quality airing
<p><i>SUPPORT COMPONENT</i> (human resource, collaboration between recipient school and teacher education institution, collaboration with families and communities, collaboration with other media resources, financial support)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the hosts, the radio-based literacy program team from the U.P. College of Education, the U.P. pre-service education students of the NSTP Program were all very committed to this endeavor - more parents are needed to collaborate with the teacher-educators so they could be helped in their efforts to teach and tutor their children at home - the recipient school should be more supportive of this project - the community leaders could be tapped for collaboration - the need to sustain the airing of the radio-based literacy program even during school breaks and vacation - the need to collaborate with other media resources for collaboration - the need for funding in order to sustain the project (parents did not have radio equipment and the College of Education has to provide them with these)

The radio-based literacy program of the University of the Philippines' College of Education, *Radyo Edukado*, was well-received and appreciated by the recipient school's parents, families, and community. The program design, delivery, topic and content, technical aspects, and support component, which are considered to be the elements of an effective radio-based literacy program, were rated highly by the intended recipients.

It is interesting to note, however, that the research has additional data to contribute to the growing literature on radio-based literacy programs. These data center on the highly positive effect the program *Radyo Edukado* has on the parents' perceptions of, and practices in, teaching and motivating their children to learn when they are in their homes. There were remarkable changes in parents' views and perspectives on literacy practices at home and in their behaviors towards providing support to their children's literacy learning and development. This provides hope for, as well as insights to, the pre-service education students and the teacher education institutions, as they craft curriculum and instruction towards increasing involvement of parents, families, and communities in the literacy education and development of schoolchildren.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research findings show that a radio-based literacy program greatly helps impoverished families and communities develop their own literacy, change their perceptions and views on literacy practices, and also alter their behaviors towards providing support to their children's literacy learning and development.

The researchers have also found another major element for an effective radio-based literacy program: the active participation of family members who serve as tutors of their children in the home or the involvement of people, families, and community in the teaching of literacy to schoolchildren. This element is brought about by the openness with which the radio program is aired in order to elicit questions from the parents, teachers, students, and other stakeholders themselves. Such questions were immediately addressed by the guest experts in the radio episodes of *Radyo Edukado*. This element bridges pre-service teacher education and the communities and families, which is very much needed in communitarian and familial

empowerment towards literacy development. It also connects and aligns teacher education curriculum and instruction with communitarian needs, and gives context and meaning to teacher education as it contributes to efforts of transforming society. Thus, from a purely radio-based literacy program, the University of the Philippines' College of Education's *Radyo Edukado* program has become a Radio-Based Family Literacy Program catering to familial and communitarian literacy needs and concerns.

It is being recommended that this kind of program be sustained and developed into a large-scale national project, for it to reach wider national audience with similar needs as the parent participants in this study. Everyone who will have an important role in pursuing this program must be serious about it, keeping in mind the important educational problem or issue that they wish the radio-based literacy program will help them solve and must be committed in making a substantial and sustained effort to this end. The radio broadcasting project should not be viewed as a mere auxiliary activity owing to its capability to reach a very large number of audience using highly affordable and effective resources. The commitment should be broad-based so that support for the project will continue.

It is further recommended that a radio-based family literacy program aligns radio content, language, and substance with the parents', communities', and even schools' needs, capabilities, and resources. Moreover, the need to collaborate with other education and media resources is being recommended and encourages, as these will provide a strong supporting teams of field workers who can engage the learners, their parents and families in the most important mode of person to person communication.

It also is recommended that consequent research efforts focus on a deeper analysis of the listening and learning behavior and the characteristics and nature of the target audience in order to understand parents', families', and communities' perspectives and beliefs on literacy knowledge and literacy practices.

Finally, and from the teacher education institutions' end, it is hoped that the radio-based family literacy program be included in the pre-service teacher education curriculum as a model or best practice of teacher education's effort to reach out to children, their families and their communities, in its goals of helping transform the larger society into a nation of educated people.

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