IGNATIAN
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH
www.icceph.com
ISSN 2984-9942

OPTIMIZING THE READING SKILLS OF LEARNERS IN SAN IGNACIO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL THROUGH PROJECT SMILE

(**S**triving for **M**odernized and **I**nteractive **L**earners Reading Proficiency **E**nhancer)

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ABSTRACT

This study, completed in 2026, evaluated the effectiveness of Project SMILE (Striving for Modernized and Interactive Learners' Reading Proficiency Enhancer) in optimizing the reading skills of Grade 2 learners at San Ignacio Elementary School. Using a quantitative descriptive design with a pretest and posttest approach, the study involved 50 learners enrolled during School Years 2023–2024 and 2024–2025. Learners' reading profiles were measured through the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment, while a survey questionnaire assessed the perceived effectiveness of the intervention. Frequency, percentage, weighted mean, McNemar–Bowker chi-square, and Pearson chi-square tests were used to analyze the data. Project SMILE provided contextualized, differentiated, technology-assisted, and interactive activities, including guided reading, vocabulary and sight-word exercises, literacy games, digital presentations, printed materials, and parent-teacher support. Findings showed substantial improvements in learners' reading profiles. In School Year 2023–2024, 68% of the learners reached the At Grade Level category after the intervention, while 72% attained the At Grade Ready level in School Year 2024–2025. However, the pretest-posttest difference was not statistically significant in 2023–2024 (p = .125) but was significant in 2024–2025 (p = .024). Respondents perceived Project SMILE as effective in both school years, with overall means of 1.25 and 1.23, respectively. The relationship between perceived effectiveness and post-reading profile was significant in 2023–2024 (p = .001) but not in 2024–2025 (p = .143). Overall, the findings indicated that sustained, interactive, and learner-centered reading interventions supported improved reading proficiency, although statistical outcomes varied across implementation periods. These results support continued

implementation, refinement, monitoring, and wider application of the school-based intervention.

Keywords: *Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment, interactive reading intervention, Project SMILE, reading proficiency, technology-assisted instruction*

INTRODUCTION

Reading is an essential skill that supports learning across different areas, and children exposed to literacy-related activities and parental support with modelling and scaffolding of reading behaviors tend to develop reading skills more easily. Such support gives children the opportunity to learn at their own pace while gradually becoming more independent and confident readers. When reading is made a regular and meaningful part of a child's daily experience, it can help build not only reading proficiency but also a positive attitude toward learning.

Reading continues to be a challenge for many Filipino learners, especially in developing the skills they need to understand information, connect ideas, and make sense of what they read. This concern is also evident in classrooms, where some children can recognize words and read simple sentences but still find it difficult to explain, understand, or relate ideas from a text. This is a major concern especially in the elementary grades because this is where foundational skills are developed in preparation to higher grades. The results of the 2024 Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) (2024) which assessed Grade 5 learners, also reflect this national concern. In the Philippines, 27% of Grade 5 learners remained in the very low reading proficiency group in both 2019 and 2024. However, the percentage of learners who reached the highest reading proficiency level increased from 10% in 2019 to 14% in 2024. These results show that although some Filipino learners are improving, many still need continued support in reading. Because of this, it is important to strengthen reading skills during the early elementary years. Providing children with the right support at this stage can help them become more confident, independent, and capable readers as they move on to higher grade levels.

According to a column by Boo Chanco (2024) titled “Learning Poverty,” the World Bank defines learning poverty as the inability to read and understand a simple text by age 10. Learning poverty among 10-year-old Filipino children has reached a record high of 90 percent, which means that only one out of every 10 Filipino children can read at this age. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, learning poverty in the Philippines was already at 69.5 percent. However, the pandemic further worsened the situation, causing learning poverty to rise to as high as 90 percent.

Nevertheless, to address persistent learning gaps and challenges in reading proficiency, the Department of Education (DepEd) has instituted various policies and programs. The Every Child a Reader Program (ECARP) was advanced through DepEd Order No. 45, s. 2002, which established the policy that every child should become a successful reader and directed schools to develop school-based reading programs

(Department of Education, 2002). This initiative was further supported by the Hamon: Bawat Bata Bumabasa, also known as the 3Bs Initiative, through DepEd Memorandum No. 173, s. 2019 (Department of Education, 2019). More recently, DepEd Memorandum No. 001, s. 2024 established the implementation of Catch-Up Fridays, including the Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) activity, to address learning gaps and strengthen learners' reading proficiency (Department of Education, 2024). Collectively, these initiatives seek to equip learners with the necessary reading skills to become proficient and independent readers at their respective grade levels.

Analyzing the learners in remote areas shows a growing quantity of struggling or non-readers which is inevitable, especially at these trying times when various factors influence learners. There comes the limited vocabulary, unexposed reading materials, absence of a guardian to train them, and lack of contextualized materials that demotivate learners and slow down their potential skill in reading which may affect their absorption of knowledge and acquisition needed competencies in different learning areas. On one hand, it is also fulfilling to witness some grade-level learners have the comprehensive skills being imparted to them which ensure the progress and enrichment on their part to enable them to adapt to learning.

In San Ignacio Elementary School, reading is one of the identified Priority Improvement Areas during the conduct of the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA). The CRLA Pre-Test result in S.Y 2023-2024 in Grade 2 disclosed that out of 25 pupils tested there are 11 or 44% of the pupils fall under Transitioning; 8 or 32% of them fall on Emerging and 6 or 24% of them fall under developing. While during the S.Y 2024-2025 CRLA Pre-Test results shows that 11 or 44% of the pupils fall under Transitioning; 10 or 40% of them fall on Emerging and 4 or 16% of the pupils fall under developing. The CRLA Pre-Test results for Grade 2 pupils across two consecutive school years (S.Y. 2023–2024 and S.Y. 2024–2025) reveal notable patterns in learners' reading proficiency levels.

In S.Y. 2023–2024, most pupils were at the Transitioning level, showing developing foundational reading skills but still needing support. Some learners remained in the Emerging level with difficulties in basic reading skills, while those in the Developing level demonstrated better reading confidence and comprehension but still required enrichment.

In S.Y. 2024–2025, the number of pupils in the Transitioning level remained consistent, while the Emerging level increased, indicating more learners with limited reading readiness. Meanwhile, fewer pupils were classified under the Developing level, showing a decline in higher reading proficiency among learners.

The researcher as an elementary grade teacher gave her fullest service to assist the struggling readers to capacitate them with the needed knowledge and skills by not overlooking the learners who are also readers to equally provide them the necessary measures to enhance their given skill. Through the project, the researcher aimed to restore learners' enthusiasm and confidence in reading through integrative on-site interactions, with the support of partners and stakeholders in the community who shared the vision of providing reading materials and consistent monitoring of learners' progress.

The objective of this study was to monitor pupils' progress, optimize the active partnership of the school to its stakeholders in addressing the learning gaps, and cater to the needs of our learners.

Thus, the aforementioned rationale led the proponent to launch the pertinent and timely Project SMILE (**S**triving for **M**odernized and **I**nteractive **L**earners' Reading Proficiency **E**nhancer). The project was designed to provide contextualized materials and employ interactive strategies in conducting reading activities for identified learners. It was also intended to address the reading difficulties experienced by learners at San Ignacio Elementary School, particularly those in Grade 2 during School Years 2023–2024 and 2024–2025.

Research Questions

This study determined the effectiveness of Project SMILE (Striving for Modernized and Interactive Learners' Reading Proficiency Enhancer) in improving the reading profiles of Grade 2 learners at San Ignacio Elementary School during School Year 2023–2024 and School Year 2024–2025 through the implementation of Project SMILE.

Specifically, the study answered the following questions:

1. What is the Reading Profile of the Learners based on the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) before and after the Implementation of Project SMILE?

2. Is there a significant difference in the reading profile of the learners based on Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) before and after the Implementation of Project SMILE?

3. What is the perceived effectiveness of the modernized and interactive reading enhancer for literacy?

4. Is there a significant relationship between the assessed effectiveness of the Project SMILE (Striving for Modernized and Interactive Learners Reading Proficiency Enhancer) and the post reading profile of the learners?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative–descriptive research design using a pre-test and post-test approach to determine the effectiveness of Project SMILE (Modernized and Interactive Reading Enhancer for Literacy) on the reading performance of learners. A quantitative design was appropriate for this study as it allowed for the objective measurement, numerical comparison, and statistical analysis of learners' reading

performance before and after the implementation of the intervention (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

The pre-test and post-test design was used to assess changes in learners' reading levels attributable to the intervention. This design is commonly utilized in educational research to determine the impact of instructional programs, particularly reading interventions, as it enables researchers to establish baseline performance and measure learning gains following exposure to the treatment (Fraenkel et al., 2019). By comparing learners' reading profiles before and after Project SMILE, the study was able to determine whether observed improvements were associated with the intervention.

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at San Ignacio Elementary School, Schools Division of the City of Ilagan, Isabela. San Ignacio, formerly Canapi, is a barangay in the City of Ilagan, in the province of Isabela. This represented 2.05% of the total population of Ilagan. The enrollment is fluctuating because of the uncontrolled variables and factors in the environment. It is one of the schools in Ilagan West District.

The school has 13 teaching personnel and two non-teaching personnel. San Ignacio Elementary School caters to a total of 362 learners ranging from kindergarten to Grade 6 in the S.Y 2023-2024 and a total of 363 learners in S.Y 2024-2025.

Selection and Description of Respondents

The subjects of this study are the Grade 2 pupils of S.Y 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 in San Ignacio Elementary School. The table on the next page shows the distribution of the respondents.

Table 1
Distribution of Respondents

Respondents	Male	Female	Total
Grade 2 (S.Y 2023-2024)	10	15	25
Grade 2 (S.Y 2024-2025)	13	12	25
TOTAL	**23**	**27**	**50**

The grade 2 pupils of S.Y 2023-2024 and S.Y 2024-2025 were heterogeneously grouped and the regular remedial periods indicated in the class program were used in the study.

Data Gathering Procedure

To properly conduct the study, the researcher asked permission from the Schools Division Superintendent and the School Principal. After approval was granted, the

researcher determined the teachers' availability to participate in the study. The pretest and posttest utilized the standardized Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) tool prescribed by the Department of Education (DepEd). The utilization of CRLA during the pre-test was essential in gathering reliable baseline and post-intervention data for Project SMILE. Since the project aimed to enhance learners' reading proficiency through modernized and interactive strategies, it was necessary to use a standardized and validated instrument to objectively measure learners' reading levels before and after the implementation of the intervention.

The pre-test was administered at the beginning of the first quarter to establish the learners' initial reading profile, while the post-test was conducted at the end of fourth quarter to determine any improvement in reading performance after the implementation of Project SMILE. Both assessments were conducted under consistent testing conditions to maintain reliability.

Between the pretest and post-test, the researcher administered Project SMILE. This intervention was proposed to determined and developed the mastery skills of the learners in the following domains: Listening Comprehension, Book and Print Knowledge, Vocabulary, Spelling, Grammar, Reading Comprehension and Study Skills. Moreover, it included the following features: (1) computer-aided interventions and enhancement and reading games with interactive Power Point Presentations; (2) reading one (1) story in the morning and in the afternoon; (3) reading the right learning materials based on the readers' reading levels, like Marungko, Fuller Approach, Basic Sight Words, and locally made reading materials like big books and story books.; (4) giving learners reading materials that match their learning level, created by the proponent and teachers in San Ignacio; (5) integrating five new words three times a week during extra help sessions or right before class begins; (6) a spelling bee to evaluate the students' accuracy in recognizing word; (7) reading of five Basic Sight Words everyday; (8) three videos and other digital supplemental reading materials with comprehension questions as part of Technoread.; (9) letter-sound correspondence technique and guided oral reading by the proponent; (10) recognizing the best improved reader and awarding every quarter according to their level of mastery; (11) using of interactive manipulatives and reading activities, including phonics board games, bingo words, snake and ladder CVC, word puzzles, word sticks, egg hunts, rhyming words, and more; (12) using of written materials such as modules, worksheets, drill and practice. Furthermore, it also includes interventions such as provision of learning materials and initiating parent-teacher partnerships, inclusion of teachers' professional development activities on strategies and techniques and crafting of contextualized materials for reading intervention and enhancement.

For complete and valid data collection, the survey questionnaires that measured the learners' perceived effectiveness of Project SMILE were personally administered and retrieved by the researcher. This ensured a high retrieval rate and minimized the risk of incomplete or unanswered items. The researcher also provided clear instructions and clarified questions when necessary to ensure that respondents fully understood each statement before answering. The purpose and instructions of the questionnaire were thoroughly explained, and the respondents were encouraged to answer all items truthfully.

Through this systematic data gathering procedure, the researcher was able to obtain accurate, valid, and dependable data necessary for analyzing the effectiveness of Project SMILE in improving learners' reading proficiency.

Statistical Treatment of Data

The following statistical tools were used to attain accurate and reliable data analysis and interpretation of the data:

Frequency and Percentage Count. These were used to determine and describe the reading level of the learners based on the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) before and after the implementation of Project SMILE. This statistical tool provided a summary of the number and percentage of learners under each reading level category.

McNemar–Bowker Chi-Square Test. This test was employed to determine whether there was a significant difference in the reading profile of the learners before and after the implementation of Project SMILE. Since the same group of learners was assessed at two different periods and the reading profile consisted of more than two categories, the McNemar–Bowker Chi-Square Test was considered appropriate.

Weighted Mean. This was utilized to determine the perceived effectiveness of Project SMILE (Striving for Modernized and Interactive Learners Reading Proficiency Enhancer) as assessed by the respondents. The weighted mean provided the average rating for each indicator and the overall effectiveness of the intervention.

Pearson Chi-Square Test of Association. This test was used to determine whether a significant relationship exists between the assessed effectiveness of Project SMILE and the learners' post-reading profile based on the CRLA results. It examined the association between the categorical variables and determined whether the observed relationship was statistically significant. This statistical test is widely used in educational research to examine associations between categorical variables such as reading levels and intervention exposure (Field, 2018). In this study, the Chi-Square Test was appropriate because learners' reading performance was classified into categorical levels, and the objective was to determine whether changes in these categories were independent of or associated with the intervention.

Moreover, the Chi-Square Test of Independence is particularly useful in intervention-based studies where the goal is to determine whether observed differences in learning outcomes are statistically significant rather than due to chance. Its application strengthened the rigor of the study by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of Project SMILE in improving learners' reading performance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. What is the Reading Profile of the Learners based on the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) before and after the Implementation of Project SMILE?

Table 2
Learners' Reading Profile Based on the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) Before and After the Implementation of Project SMILE (S.Y. 2023–2024)

Reading Profile	Before		After	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Emergent	8	32.0	0	0
Developing	6	24.0	1	4.0
Transitioning	11	44.0	7	28.0
At Grade Level	0	0	17	68.0
Total	25	100.0	25	100.0

The table presents the learners' reading profile based on the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) before and after the implementation of Project SMILE for the school year 2023–2024. Prior to the intervention, 11 or 44% of the learners are classified as Transitioning followed by eight or 32% who are Emergent, and six or 24% of them are Developing. No one is at grade level ready. These results indicate that a majority of the learners have not yet reached grade-level reading proficiency and still requires substantial support to enhance their reading skills.

After the implementation of Project SMILE, a remarkable improvement is noted. The data show that only 4% of the learners remained in the Developing level, 28% progressed to Transitioning, and a majority of 68% reached the At Grade Level category. This shift suggests that Project SMILE has a positive impact on enhancing learners' reading performance, as shown in the movement from low level to high level.

These results are affirmed by several related studies. According to Reutzel and Cooter (2019), structured and systematic reading programs that integrate interactive and multimodal literacy tasks significantly improve reading fluency and comprehension among elementary learners. Similarly, National Reading Panel (2000) emphasized that focused reading interventions and explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies can elevate learners' reading levels effectively. Additionally, Reinke et al. (2014) and Baydik (2011) found that reading interventions that include visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities address diverse learning styles, which Project SMILE successfully incorporated through computer-aided and PowerPoint-based literacy activities.

Moreover, Vygotsky's (1978) Social Development Theory supports the concept that learners acquire literacy skills best through guided participation and social interaction,

which aligns with Project SMILE's collaborative and interactive approach. In addition, Fountas and Pinnell (2017) highlighted that reading interventions tailored to the learner's current literacy stage yield measurable growth in reading proficiency—a finding consistent with the observed transition of learners from "Emergent" to "At Grade Level" after the project's implementation.

In contrast, studies such as that of Guthrie et al. (2012) note that reading interventions may show limited improvement if not sustained over time or integrated into daily learning practices. However, the results of Project SMILE demonstrate that consistent implementation and teacher-guided activities can overcome this limitation.

Overall, the merged data confirm that Project SMILE was effective in improving the learners' reading profiles, reducing the proportion of struggling readers and increasing the number of learners performing at grade level. The improvement signifies the importance of continuous, engaging, and technology-enhanced literacy interventions in promoting reading success among elementary learners.

Table 3
Learners' Reading Profile Based on the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) Before and After the Implementation of Project SMILE (S.Y. 2024–2025)

Reading Profile	Before		After	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Emergent	10	40.0	1	4.0
Developing	4	16.0	3	12.0
Transitioning	11	44.0	3	12.0
At Grade Ready	0	0	18	72.0
Total	25	100.0	25	100.0

The table presents the learners' reading profile based on the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) before and after the implementation of Project SMILE for the school year 2024–2025. Prior to the implementation, 11 or 44% of the learners are categorized as Transitioning, followed by 10 or 40% of them as Emergent, and four or 16% of the respondents are Developing. No one is at grade level ready. This distribution indicates that a large proportion of learners are still below grade-level proficiency, requiring continuous support to enhance foundational reading skills such as decoding, fluency, and comprehension.

After the two grading periods of structured implementation of Project SMILE, the learners' reading performance demonstrated significant improvement. A considerable number 72% advanced to the At Grade Ready level, while only 4% remained Emergent, 12% Developing, or 12% Transitioning. This marked increase in reading proficiency highlights the positive impact of Project SMILE's structured literacy interventions, which emphasized differentiated reading instruction, guided practice, and meaningful reading experiences. The results suggest that the extended duration of two grading periods allowed sufficient time for learners to practice, reinforce, and internalize essential reading

skills, thereby contributing to the substantial improvement in their overall reading performance.

The findings affirm the effectiveness of structured and interactive reading interventions. Foreign studies further affirm these results. The Johns Hopkins University Center for Research and Reform in Education (2018) found that one-to-one tutoring and structured classroom instructional approaches, especially those emphasizing phonics, significantly improve reading outcomes for struggling readers. This mirrors the intervention methods used in Project SMILE, which combined individualized monitoring with interactive classroom literacy activities. The results also parallel the study of Moreau (2015) , which found that technology-supported reading interventions provide a stimulating and interactive learning environment that promotes reading interest and comprehension among learners.

Locally, Gatcho and Caliwag (2019) reported that remedial and enhancement programs in the Philippines, such as individualized reading recovery and literacy games, yield significant improvements in learners' reading fluency and comprehension. The "zero non-reader" advocacy of Philippine schools aligns with this, highlighting that structured interventions, combined with teacher coaching and family support, can transform emergent readers into proficient ones.

Furthermore, Ciampa (2015) emphasized that literacy games and interactive activities sustain learner engagement and motivation—both essential to reading success. The findings of the present study support Ciampa's conclusion that gamified and technology-assisted reading programs can effectively enhance comprehension and fluency.

Therefore, the results affirm both local and international researches that systematic, interactive, and sustained reading interventions can significantly enhance literacy development among elementary learners. The successful outcomes of Project SMILE demonstrate that when reading instruction is explicit, engaging, and scaffolded, learners are more likely to progress from emergent and developing levels to proficient reading levels.

2. Is there a significant difference in the reading profile of the learners based on Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) before and after the Implementation of Project SMILE?

Table 4
Results of the Test of Significant Difference in the Reading Profile of the Learners Based on Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) Before and After the Implementation of Project SMILE

School Year	Group	Significance X^2	Decision	Remarks
2023-2024	Reading Profile of the Learners Based on Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) Before and After the Implementation of Project SMILE	.125	Accept Ho	Not Significant
2024-2025	Reading Profile of the Learners Based on Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) Before and After the Implementation of Project SMILE	.024	Reject Ho	Significant

Table 9 reveals the significant difference in the reading profile of the learners based on Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) before and after the Implementation of Project SMILE using Chi-square (**McNemar test**) -test at .05 level of significance.

As shown in the table for the group reading profile of the learners based on Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) before and after the Implementation of Project SMILE for SY 2023-2024, the significance X^2 -value is greater than .05 which resulted to the acceptance of the null hypothesis. There is no significant difference in the reading profile of the learners based on Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) before and after the Implementation of Project SMILE for SY 2023-2024.

Since the Chi-squared value is not significant, this means that there is no substantial difference in the reading profile of the learners based on Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) before and after the Implementation of Project SMILE for SY 2023-2024.

For the group reading profile of the learners based on Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) before and after the Implementation of Project SMILE for SY 2024-2025, the significance X^2 -value was less than .05 which resulted to the rejection of the null hypothesis. There is significant difference in the reading profile of the learners based on Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) before and after the Implementation of Project SMILE for SY 2024-2025.

Furthermore, since the Chi-squared value is significant, this means that there is a substantial difference in the marginal proportions between the reading profile of the learners based on Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) before and after the Implementation of Project SMILE for SY 2024-2025.

Hence, the reading profile of the learners based on Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) in the Implementation of Project SMILE is not effective for SY 2023-2024, however, it showed significant effect for SY 2024-2025. This result supports the view of Reutzel and B. Cooter (2019) that effective reading interventions, when properly implemented and consistently monitored, can enhance learners' reading performance. Likewise, Fountas and Pinnell (2017) emphasized that systematic literacy instruction and continuous assessment are essential in improving reading proficiency. Therefore, the significant gains recorded in SY 2024–2025 may be attributed to improved implementation practices, increased learner engagement, and sustained intervention efforts, highlighting the potential effectiveness of Project SMILE in enhancing reading outcomes. This result supports the view of Reutzel and B. Cooter that effective reading instruction requires appropriate assessment, systematic instructional strategies, and continuous monitoring of learners' progress.

Furthermore, Slavin et al. (2008) found that effective reading programs can contribute to improved reading outcomes when instruction is systematic, well-structured, and supported by evidence-based approaches. Similarly, Ciampa (2015) emphasized that effective literacy interventions should respond to learners' specific needs and provide appropriate instructional support to develop reading skills.

3. What is the perceived effectiveness of the modernize and interactive reading enhancer for literacy?

Table 5
Respondents' Perception On The Effectiveness Of Project Smile

Project SMILE Features	2023-2024		2024-2025	
	Mean	Description	Mean	Description
1. Computer-aided reading interventions and enhancement activities through interactive PowerPoint presentations (PPTs), games, and reading exercises	1.00	Effective	1.00	Effective
2. Reading of one (1) story in the morning and one (1) story in the afternoon	1.00	Effective	1.60	Not effective
3. Use of appropriate reading materials such as Marungko, Claveria Approach materials, big books, storybooks, and other reading resources	1.00	Effective	1.00	Effective
4. Provision of learner-level reading materials developed by the proponent and teachers of San Ignacio	1.52	Not effective	1.48	Effective

5. Integration of five (5) new vocabulary words three times a week during remediation sessions or before class	1.72	Not effective	1.44	Effective
6. Conduct of spelling bee activities for assessing word recognition accuracy	1.00	Effective	1.00	Effective
7. Daily reading of five (5) basic sight words	1.68	Not effective	1.00	Effective
8. Viewing of three (3) videos and utilization of digital supplemental reading materials with comprehension questions through Technoread	1.72	Not effective	1.32	Effective
9. Administration of letter-sound correspondence activities and guided oral reading sessions	1.00	Effective	1.40	Effective
10. Recognition and awarding of the most improved reader every quarter based on mastery level and reading progress	1.00	Effective	1.12	Effective
11. Utilization of interactive manipulatives and reading activities, including phonics board games, word bingo, snakes and ladders, word puzzles, word sticks, egg hunts, and rhyming word activities	1.00	Effective	1.00	Effective
12. Use of printed instructional materials such as modules, worksheets, drills, and practice exercises	1.40	Effective	1.36	Effective
Mean	1.25	Effective	1.23	Effective

The table shows the mean ratings and corresponding descriptive interpretations for each feature of the intervention. The data provide an assessment of how the various components of Project SMILE contributed to the enhancement of learners' reading skills, engagement, and literacy development. Through these ratings, the effectiveness of the program's modernized and interactive reading strategies was evaluated and compared across the two school years.

The data reveal that the implementation of the Modernized and Interactive Reading Enhancer for Literacy is perceived as generally effective during School Years 2023–2024 and 2024–2025. The computed overall mean scores of 1.25 for 2023–2024 and 1.23 for 2024–2025 both fall under the "Effective" description, indicating that the reading intervention strategies consistently produced positive outcomes.

Features such as Computer-Aided Interventions and Enhancement through Reading Games and Interactive PowerPoint Presentations, the use of appropriate reading materials (e.g., Marungko and Claveria approaches), and spelling and sight word drills remained highly effective across both school years. These results suggest that the integration of technology and interactive reading tools successfully captured learners' interest, improved word recognition, and enhanced reading fluency.

Meanwhile, a few components—such as Reading one story for morning and afternoon and Viewing of digital supplemental reading materials—showed slightly lower effectiveness in SY 2024–2025. This may imply the need for adjustments in instructional timing, material variety, or learner engagement techniques. Despite these variations, the overall consistency in ratings demonstrates that the intervention continued to meet its literacy enhancement goals and supported sustained reading improvement among learners.

Overall, the findings affirm that modernized and interactive approaches to reading instruction foster learner motivation, comprehension, and participation, making them viable tools for literacy development in early education settings. The findings are consistent with the literature emphasizing the value of interactive, systematic, and learner-centered approaches in improving reading outcomes. Slavin et al. (2008) reported that structured reading programs, particularly those incorporating phonics, small-group instruction, and evidence-based instructional approaches, can produce positive effects among struggling readers. Similarly, Ciampa (2015) found that digital reading programs can enhance learners' reading motivation and comprehension, particularly when interactive and technology-assisted features are incorporated into literacy instruction. These findings support the positive perception of the respondents toward Project SMILE, as its use of interactive PowerPoint presentations, reading games, digital materials, and structured reading activities may have increased learners' engagement and supported the development of their reading skills.

4. Is there a significant relationship between the assessed effectiveness of the Project SMILE (Striving for Modernize and Interactive Learners Reading Proficiency Enhancer) and the post reading profile of the learners?

Table 6
Results of the Test of Significant Relationship between the Assessed Effectiveness of Project SMILE & the Post Reading Profile of the Learners

School Year	Group	Significance X^2	Decision	Remarks
2023-2024	Assessed Effectiveness of the Project SMILE (Striving for Modernized and Interactive Learners Reading Proficiency Enhancer) and the Post Reading Profile of the Learners	.001	Reject Ho	Significant
2024-2025	Assessed Effectiveness of the Project SMILE (Striving for Modernized and	.143	Accept Ho	Not Significant

	Interactive Learners Reading Proficiency Enhancer) and the Post Reading Profile of the Learners			

Table 9 reveals the significant relationship between assessed effectiveness of the Project SMILE and the post reading profile of the learners using Chi-square (**Pearson**) - test at .05 level of significance.

For SY 2023-2024, the significant X^2 -value on the assessed effectiveness of the Project SMILE and the post reading profile of the learners is less than .05 which resulted to the rejection of the null hypothesis. There is significant relationship between the assessed effectiveness of the Project SMILE and the post reading profile of the learners.

For SY 2024-2025, the significance X^2 -value for SY 2024-2025 on the assessed effectiveness of the Project SMILE and the post reading profile of the learners is greater than .05 which resulted to the acceptance of the null hypothesis. There is no significant relationship between the assessed effectiveness of the Project SMILE and the post reading profile of the learners for SY 2024-2025.

The results indicate that the assessed effectiveness of the Project SMILE by the learners did not influence their post reading profile for SY 2024-2025; however, it does for the SY 2023-2024.

It can be concluded that the relationship between the perceived effectiveness of Project SMILE and the learners' post-reading profile varied across the two school years. While a significant relationship was observed in SY 2023–2024, indicating that learners' perceptions of the program were associated with their reading outcomes, no significant relationship was found in SY 2024–2025. These results imply that although Project SMILE was generally perceived as effective, other factors may have also contributed to the learners' reading performance.

Conclusions

The findings revealed that Project SMILE helped improve the reading proficiency of learners. In both school years, many learners progressed from the Emergent, Developing, and Transitioning levels to the At Grade Ready Level categories after the implementation of the intervention. Project SMILE is effective in improving the reading levels of the learners, particularly as shown by the substantial gains in both school years and the statistically significant improvement observed in the second year. These results suggest that the effectiveness of Project SMILE became more evident with continued and sustained implementation. The consistently favourable learner appraisal of the intervention, with overall ratings interpreted as "Effective" in both school years further supports the value of its interactive, technology-assisted, and learner-centered reading strategies. Project SMILE had a significant effect on learners' reading outcomes, showing that its impact became stronger over time. The steady improvement in reading levels

proves the effectiveness of the intervention with learners engagement and positive attitudes as key to improving literacy.

Recommendations

In light of the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The Department of Education should institutionalize Project SMILE or adopt similar evidence-based, technology-integrated reading interventions within the national literacy framework. Given the significant association between interactive strategies and improved reading performance, integrating structured, differentiated, and multimedia-supported reading programs into the K–12 curriculum may help address persistent literacy gaps across grade levels. DepEd must also consider allocating resources for digital materials, instructional tools, and monitoring systems to ensure consistent implementation nationwide.

2. The school administrators should establish sustainable literacy development programs by conducting regular capacity-building workshops and professional development training focused on interactive, data-driven reading instruction. Training should include the use of digital platforms, gamified learning tools, formative assessment strategies, and differentiated instruction techniques to ensure that teachers are equipped to address diverse reading needs effectively. Administrators are further encouraged to create a school-wide literacy action plan that includes periodic evaluation of intervention outcomes.

3. The CRLA Coordinator should continue conducting regular and accurate assessments of learners' reading abilities using the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA). The assessment results should be utilized in identifying learners' reading needs, planning appropriate interventions, monitoring progress, and providing timely feedback to teachers, school heads, and parents. In view of the findings that Project SMILE was effective in improving learners' reading levels, the continued implementation and enhancement of Project SMILE is recommended, particularly for learners identified as Emergent, Developing, and Transitioning.

4. Teachers must implement systematic and continuous reading assessments to monitor learners' progress and adjust instructional strategies accordingly. The use of differentiated and technology-assisted interventions—such as interactive PowerPoint-based activities, multimedia storytelling, digital fluency drills, and contextualized reading materials—should be sustained to maximize engagement and comprehension gains. Teachers should also maintain proper record keeping to guide instructional decisions and ensure targeted support for struggling readers.

5. Learners should actively engage in the structured and interactive activities provided under Project SMILE, as consistent participation in literacy-enhancing tasks strengthens decoding skills, reading fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension abilities. Cultivation of positive reading habits and intrinsic

motivation toward reading must be put into practice as these could significantly contribute to long-term academic success across subject areas.

6. Parents &/or guardians must collaborate closely with schools by reinforcing reading habits at home. Establishing structured reading routines, providing access to age-appropriate reading materials, and participating in school literacy initiatives can significantly enhance the effectiveness of classroom-based interventions. Home–school partnerships play a critical role in sustaining learners' literacy growth.

7. The researcher should continue refining Project SMILE by incorporating emerging educational technologies, adaptive learning systems, and evidence-based instructional practices. Further development of contextualized and culturally responsive reading materials to strengthen learner engagement and relevance must be incorporated.

8. Future Researches must replicate this research across diverse educational contexts, grade levels, and learner populations to enhance generalizability. Researchers may also consider employing experimental or quasi-experimental designs, larger sample sizes, and longitudinal tracking to measure the long-term impact of interactive reading interventions. Additionally, incorporating advanced digital analytics tools and mixed-method approaches may provide deeper insights into learner motivation, engagement, and sustained literacy development.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This study adhered to established ethical standards in educational research. Prior to data collection, the researcher secured permission from the appropriate education authorities and the school head. The purpose, procedures, and intended use of the study were clearly communicated to the participants and their parents or guardians, and participation was voluntary. Informed consent from parents or guardians and assent from the learners were obtained before their inclusion in the study. The privacy, dignity, safety, and welfare of the participants were protected throughout the research process. All personal information and assessment results were treated with strict confidentiality, anonymized, and used solely for academic purposes. Participation involved no discrimination, coercion, or undue pressure, and participants were permitted to withdraw without penalty. Project SMILE activities were implemented in a supportive and age-appropriate manner and posed no foreseeable harm to the learners. Furthermore, the researcher upheld honesty, objectivity, transparency, and integrity in collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting the data, ensuring that the findings were presented accurately and without fabrication, falsification, or misrepresentation.

Acknowledgements

With profound appreciation, the researcher extends her deepest gratitude to the individuals and institutions that generously shared their time, expertise, guidance, and support throughout the conduct and completion of this research endeavor.

First and foremost, the researcher offers heartfelt gratitude to Almighty God for His guidance, wisdom, strength, and countless blessings throughout the research process.

Special recognition is accorded to the researcher's statistician, Dr. Mario Q. Sevilla, and panel members, Dr. Salome D. Cariño, Dr. Rodelio V. Macapuy, and Dr. Marites P. Talosig, for their expert guidance, insightful comments, constructive suggestions, and unwavering support, which greatly enhanced the quality of this research. Their invaluable insights and recommendations were instrumental in refining the study and bringing it to its best possible form. Their guidance has been an indispensable contribution to this endeavor.

The researcher is likewise deeply indebted to her adviser, Madam Krystel Joy F. Nacino, whose profound expertise in the field of management illuminated the researcher's path and enabled her to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter of the study.

Special thanks are also extended to the researcher's husband, family, friends, and colleagues for their unwavering support, faith, prayers, and understanding throughout this research journey. They served as the researcher's pillars of strength. Their encouragement, patience, and confidence in her abilities sustained her through the challenges and long nights of research and writing.

This research stands not only as the fulfillment of an academic requirement but also as a testament to the collective efforts of the mentors, colleagues, participants, family members, and friends who contributed in countless ways. May this work serve as a reflection of their invaluable influence, generosity, and support.

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APA Citation:

Montereal, J. B., & Nacino, K. J. F. (2026). OPTIMIZING THE READING SKILLS OF LEARNERS IN SAN IGNACIO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL THROUGH PROJECT SMILE (Striving for Modernized and Interactive Learners Reading Proficiency Enhancer). Ignatian International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research, 4(10), 598–616. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23663068

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