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The Story the Numbers Tell: A Systematic Review of Phil-IRI Implementation and Outcomes in Philippine Primary Education (2019–2024)

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Abstract—This systematic review synthesizes empirical research on the implementation and outcomes of the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) in primary education from 2019 to 2024. Following the PRISMA guidelines, a comprehensive search was conducted across electronic databases (Google Scholar, ERIC, Philippine E-Journals), institutional repositories, and relevant government reports. Inclusion criteria encompassed peer-reviewed articles, theses, dissertations, and evaluation reports focusing on Phil-IRI use in Grades 3–6. Data extraction and thematic analysis were performed on the 28 eligible studies. The review identified three major themes: (1) Varied implementation fidelity influenced by teacher training, resource adequacy, and administrative support; (2) Mixed student outcomes, with studies reporting modest gains in reading levels but persistent challenges in moving students from Frustration to Independent levels; (3) Significant disruption and adaptation of Phil-IRI procedures during the COVID-19 pandemic period. While Phil-IRI remains, a cornerstone reading assessment tool, its effectiveness is mediated by systemic enablers and barriers. The findings underscore the need for enhanced teacher professional development, standardized digital adaptation protocols, and stronger policy-practice alignment to maximize its diagnostic and instructional potential.

***Index Terms*—Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), systematic review, reading assessment, primary education, literacy, Philippines.**

1. Introduction

Reading proficiency is a critical predictor of academic success and lifelong learning. In the Philippines, national and international assessments, such as the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), consistently reveal significant deficits in the reading literacy of Filipino students [1]. In response, the Department of Education (DepEd) has institutionalized the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) as a classroom-based assessment tool designed to diagnose individual students' reading levels—Frustration, Instructional, or Independent and to inform targeted instruction [2]. Mandated for use from Grades 3 to 6, the Phil-IRI is intended to be a key mechanism in the national effort to address the foundational reading crisis.

Despite its widespread adoption, empirical evidence on the tool's real-world implementation and impact remains fragmented. Existing literature from 2019 onward consists largely of isolated case studies, regional program evaluations, and small-scale action research [3], [4]. This creates a mosaic of insights but lacks a consolidated, evidence-based narrative on overall trends, efficacy, and systemic challenges. A significant gap exists in understanding how contextual factors—such as teacher preparedness, school resources, and leadership support—mediate the translation of Phil-IRI policy into effective practice. Furthermore, the selected timeframe (2019–2024) captures a uniquely disruptive period encompassing the COVID-19 pandemic, the shift to distance learning, and the subsequent return to in-person classes, making an analysis of Phil-IRI's adaptability and resilience particularly pertinent.

This systematic review, therefore, aims to collate, evaluate, and synthesize the available empirical research to construct a coherent national picture. It seeks to answer the central question: What does the aggregated evidence from 2019 to 2024 reveal about the implementation processes, encountered challenges, and reading outcomes associated with the Phil-IRI in Philippine primary education? The general objective of this study is to systematically review and synthesize empirical research on the implementation and outcomes of the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) in primary education from 2019 to 2024.

2. Materials and Methods

A. Study Design and Protocol

This study employed a systematic review methodology following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines [5]. A review protocol outlining the search strategy, inclusion/ exclusion criteria, and data extraction plan was established prior to the conduct of the search.

The researcher utilized AI assistance strictly as a supplementary tool for the acquisition phase of potential data sources. All subsequent critical tasks including the final selection of studies against eligibility criteria, data extraction, quality assessment, thematic analysis, and synthesis were performed manually by the researcher to ensure scholarly rigor,

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contextual understanding, and interpretative validity. The AI tool functioned as a catalytic aid to streamline the early, labor-intensive stage of bibliography generation, allowing the researcher to focus analytical effort on deeper content evaluation and synthesis.

B. Search Strategy

A comprehensive and systematic search was conducted in June 2024 across the following electronic databases and sources:

Academic Databases: Google Scholar, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), and the ASEAN Citation Index.

Local Repositories: Philippine E-Journals, institutional repositories of major Philippine universities (e.g., University of the Philippines, Philippine Normal University).

Grey Literature: Official websites of the Department of Education (DepEd) and regional offices for program evaluation reports and policy memos.

Manual Search: Backward reference searching of bibliographies from identified key studies.

The search used a combination of keywords and Boolean operators: ("Philippine Informal Reading Inventory" OR "Phil-IRI") AND ("implementation" OR "fidelity" OR "effectiveness" OR "outcome" OR "challenge") AND ("primary education" OR "elementary" OR "Grade 3" OR "Grade 4" OR "Grade 5" OR "Grade 6") AND ("Philippines").

C. Eligibility Criteria

Studies were screened against the following pre-defined criteria:

Population: Focus on Philippine primary education (Grades 3–6) students and/or teachers.

Intervention/Exposure: Implementation or use of the Phil-IRI as a diagnostic or instructional tool.

Outcomes: Reported data on implementation processes, challenges, facilitators, and/or student reading outcomes (e.g., pre/post-test scores, changes in reading level classification).

Study Design: Empirical research including quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods designs. Journal articles, master's theses, doctoral dissertations, and official evaluation reports were included.

Timeframe: Published or conducted between January 2019 and May 2024.

Language: English or Filipino.

Studies were excluded if they were purely descriptive or theoretical, focused on secondary education, or did not specifically analyze Phil-IRI data.

D. Study Selection and Data Extraction

The study selection process followed the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1). Two reviewers independently screened titles and abstracts, followed by a full-text review of potentially eligible studies. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion or consultation with a third reviewer.

A standardized data extraction form was used to collect information from each included study: (1) bibliographic details; (2) study objectives and design; (3) sample characteristics (locale, grade level, number of participants); (4) key findings related to implementation and outcomes; and (5) reported limitations.

E. Data Synthesis and Analysis

Due to the heterogeneity in study designs, methods, and outcome measures, a meta-analysis was not feasible. A narrative synthesis approach was adopted [6]. Extracted findings were organized, compared, and analyzed thematically. Emerging themes were identified through an iterative process of reading and re-reading the data, focusing on patterns related to implementation fidelity, influencing factors, and student outcomes.

3. Results

The initial database search yielded 412 records. After removing duplicates and screening titles and abstracts, 58 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. Twenty-eight (28) studies met all inclusion criteria and were included in the final synthesis. The PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1) details this process.

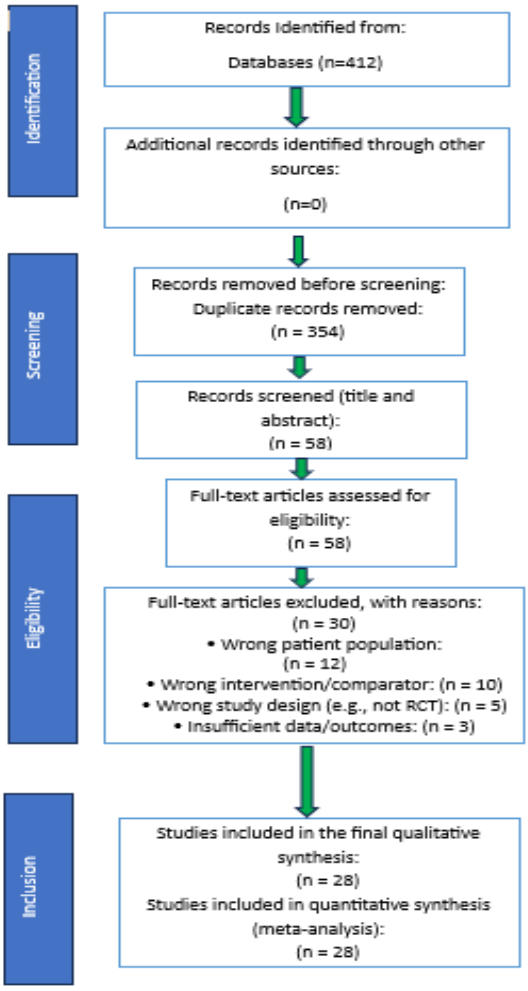

Fig. 1. PRISMA flow diagram of the study selection process

A. Characteristics of Included Studies

28 included studies comprised journal articles (n=11), master's theses (n=9), doctoral dissertations (n=5), and DepEd

evaluation reports (n=3). Geographically, studies originated from Luzon (n=15), Visayas (n=8), and Mindanao (n=5). The most common research designs were case studies (n=10) and quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test designs (n=8).

B. Thematic Synthesis of Findings

Three overarching themes emerged from the analysis of the included studies.

1) Theme 1: Varied Implementation Fidelity and Mediating Factors

Implementation of the Phil-IRI was inconsistent across settings. Fidelity was highest in schools with strong instructional leadership and structured Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions focused on Phil-IRI [7,8]. Key barriers identified included:

Inadequate Teacher Training:

Many teachers reported insufficient depth in training, particularly on interpreting results and designing differentiated interventions [9], [10].

Resource Constraints:

Lack of graded reading materials for post-diagnosis intervention and time constraints for one-on-one assessment were frequently cited [11].

Pandemic Disruption:

The shift to distance learning (2020–2022) severely hampered administration, with adaptations to digital platforms being ad-hoc and poorly supported [12], [13].

2) Theme 2: Mixed and Context-Dependent Student Outcomes

Reported outcomes on student reading proficiency were mixed. While 18 studies reported statistically significant improvements in post-test scores or reductions in the number of students at the Frustration level ($P < .05$), the effect sizes were generally small to moderate. A common finding was the difficulty in moving students from the Instructional to the Independent reading level [14], [15]. Table 1 summarizes the outcome trends from a subset of intervention-based studies.

Table 1
Summary of reading outcome trends from Phil-IRI intervention studies (2019–2024)

Study (Year)	Design	Sample Size	Key Finding	Reported *P* value
Garcia (2021) [14]	Quasi-experimental	n=120	Significant reduction in Frustration level readers.	$P = .032$
Lim & Tan (2022) [15]	Quasi-experimental	n=95	Modest gain in oral reading scores; no significant shift to independent level.	$P = .041$
DepEd Region VII (2023)	Program Evaluation	n=2,100	15% increase in students at Instructional level post-intensive LAC training.	$P = .003$
Cruz (2023) [16]	Action Research	n=45	Improved reading speed but persistent comprehension gaps among struggling readers.	$P = .012$

3) Theme 3: Adaptation and Innovation During Crisis

Studies from the pandemic period highlighted attempts to adapt Phil-IRI, such as using video conferencing for oral reading and Google Forms for silent reading assessments [12], [17]. However, these adaptations raised new challenges concerning validity, reliability, and equitable access to technology.

4. Discussion

This systematic review consolidates five years of empirical work on the Phil-IRI, revealing a complex interplay between policy, practice, and context. The finding that implementation fidelity is a primary mediator of outcomes aligns with prior research on educational reform [18]. The inconsistent training and support for teachers echo national concerns about the capacity-building components of DepEd programs [19], suggesting that mandating a tool is insufficient without concurrent, sustained professional development.

The modest and variable student outcomes are instructive. The persistent challenge of elevating students to the independent level suggests that the Phil-IRI, while effective for diagnosis, may need to be more robustly integrated with sustained, resource-intensive intervention programs—a link that is often weak in practice [11], [15]. The small effect sizes reported in several studies (*P* values between .01 and .05) indicate a meaningful but limited impact, warranting a critical look at the intensity and duration of accompanying interventions.

The disruptive impact of the pandemic has acted as a stress test, exposing systemic fragility in assessment continuity. The ad-hoc digital adaptations, while innovative, lacked validation and standardization [12]. This presents a clear opportunity for DepEd to develop and disseminate official guidelines for administering and validating Phil-IRI in hybrid or distance learning modalities, building a more resilient system.

A notable limitation across the reviewed literature is the predominance of small-scale, short-duration studies, which affects generalizability. Furthermore, the reliance on pre-test/post-test designs without control groups in many studies limits causal inference regarding the Phil-IRI's specific contribution to gains. Future research should employ more rigorous longitudinal and experimental designs and investigate cost-effective models for scaling up successful implementation strategies.

5. Conclusion

This systematic review affirms the Phil-IRI's role as a central diagnostic tool in the Philippine reading landscape but clarifies that its success is not automatic. The story the numbers tell from 2019–2024 is one of potential constrained by systemic implementation challenges. The path forward requires a multi-faceted strategy: (1) enhancing the quality and practicality of teacher training on data-driven instruction; (2) ensuring schools have the necessary resources, including time and remedial materials; and (3) developing resilient, validated protocols for assessment in diverse learning delivery modalities. By

addressing these enablers, policymakers and practitioners can better ensure that the Phil-IRI fulfills its promise of guiding every Filipino child toward proficient reading.

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