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The ESTRELLA Way: An Appreciative Inquiry-Based Reading Intervention for Early Grade Struggling Readers

Estrella T. Omas-as*[1], Mildred F. Accad[2]

Authors Information:

[1-2]Sultan Kudarat State University, EJC Montilla, Tacurong City, Philippines

Correspondence:
estrellaomas-as@sksu.edu.ph

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Abstract. Reading proficiency in the early grades remain a persistent concern in multilingual and socio-culturally diverse contexts, where learners show varying levels of literacy readiness. This study evaluated the effectiveness of the ESTRELLA Way, an Appreciative Inquiry–based reading intervention aimed at improving literacy competency, learner engagement, and reading self-perception among Grades 1 to 3 struggling readers, compared with the DepEd ARAL Program. A mixed-methods quasi-experimental design was used, employing a pretest–posttest control group approach complemented by qualitative data. The participants consisted of 114 learners in the experimental group and 70 in the control group, all identified as low emerging readers through the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA), drawn from lowland, Indigenous Peoples, and Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas. The experimental group underwent an 8-session ESTRELLA Way intervention, while the control group received the ARAL Program.Findings showed that both groups improved in reading competency across key domains, but the experimental group consistently achieved higher posttest scores and greater mean gains. Statistical results confirmed significant improvements within and between groups, with stronger effects observed in decoding and comprehension. Qualitative findings indicated increased learner engagement, improved confidence, reduced reading anxiety, and a more positive reading identity among learners exposed to the intervention.The study concludes that the ESTRELLA Way is a more effective and holistic reading intervention that enhances both cognitive and affective dimensions of early literacy development.

Keywords: Appreciative Inquiry; Early-grade literacy; Learner engagement; Reading intervention; Strengths-based learning

Introduction

Students in the early grades are expected to develop foundational literacy skills that serve as the basis for all subsequent learning. However, many learners continue to experience reading difficulties, particularly in multilingual and socio-culturally diverse contexts where language barriers, limited exposure to print, and varying levels of readiness affect literacy acquisition. These challenges often result in low academic performance, reduced confidence, and limited classroom participation.

Although various reading interventions have been implemented in public schools, including the DepEd ARAL Program, many of these approaches remain largely skill-focused and remediation-driven. They often prioritize decoding and accuracy but give limited attention to learners' motivation, engagement, and socio-emotional development, which are critical components of reading success. As a result, improvements in reading performance may not always translate into sustained engagement or positive reading identity.

A key research gap lies in the limited use of strengths-based and Appreciative Inquiry–driven reading interventions that integrate cognitive literacy skills with learner empowerment, engagement, and cultural responsiveness. Existing programs, including ARAL, provide a necessary foundation for remediation; however, there is limited empirical evidence comparing them with holistic, context-responsive models that emphasize both academic and affective dimensions of reading development. This gap highlights the need to explore alternative intervention frameworks that go beyond traditional remediation approaches.
In response, this study examines the ESTRELLA Way (Empowering Struggling Thinkers through Reading Engagement and Literacy Learning Activities), an Appreciative Inquiry–based and culturally responsive intervention designed to strengthen both reading competency and learner engagement. By integrating structured literacy instruction with strengths-based pedagogy, the study aims to improve reading outcomes among struggling readers in the early grades.

Research Questions

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the ESTRELLA Way as a reading intervention program for struggling learners in Grades 1 to 3. Specifically, it seeks to;

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1. Determine the pre- and post-intervention reading competency levels of learners in both experimental and control groups across key literacy domains, including letter sounds, rhyming words, sentence reading, fluency, and comprehension.
2. Examine whether significant differences exist between pre-intervention and post-intervention results within and between groups.
3. Compare the mean gain scores of learners exposed to the ESTRELLA Way and those under the ARAL Program.
4. Assess the level of learner engagement during the implementation of the intervention.
5. Evaluate the level of implementation of the ESTRELLA Way across its core components: empowerment, strategies, thinkers, and reading encouragement through love, light and aspiration.
6. Analyze how the intervention supports the development of reading skills and influences learners' engagement, motivation, and self-perception.
7. Explore learners' responses to culturally relevant and strengths-based reading activities.
8. Identify effective teaching practices and classroom experiences that emerge during implementation.
9. Determine the potential of the ESTRELLA model as a sustainable framework for improving literacy outcomes.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study investigated the effectiveness of the ESTRELLA Way reading intervention among selected public elementary schools in Sarangani Province, namely San Juan Integrated School, Kalonbarak Elementary School, and Malungon Central Elementary School SPED Center. The participants included 114 Grade 1 to Grade 3 learners identified as struggling readers based on the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA). The intervention was implemented over a one-month period and consisted of eight structured reading sessions focusing on key literacy domains such as letter-sound recognition, rhyming words, sentence reading, fluency, and comprehension. The experimental group received the ESTRELLA Way intervention, while the control group continued with the existing ARAL Program. Data collection involved pretest and posttest assessments, as well as structured classroom observations conducted by trained school heads and teachers using validated checklists and rubrics. These observations focused on learner engagement, participation, and instructional delivery. The study was limited to early-grade learners (Grades 1–3) and did not include higher grade levels or other subject areas. While the intervention incorporated culturally responsive materials such as Filipino Alamat, external variables such as home literacy environment, parental involvement, and socio-economic status were not controlled and are acknowledged as potential influencing factors in interpreting the findings.

Literature Review

Reading development is widely recognized as a complex, multidimensional process influenced by cognitive, linguistic, motivational, and contextual factors. Foundational frameworks such as the Simple View of Reading and Scarborough's Reading Rope emphasize that skilled reading emerges from the interaction of decoding skills and language comprehension, both of which must be systematically developed in early instruction (Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Oakhill et al., 2019). Similarly, research on effective literacy instruction consistently highlights the importance of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension as interdependent components of reading proficiency (Castles et al., 2018). These models collectively suggest that isolated skill instruction is insufficient without integrated and sustained practice across literacy domains. Empirical studies further show that struggling readers often experience persistent deficits in decoding, fluency, and comprehension, particularly when instruction is fragmented or overly remedial in nature. While structured interventions such as those reviewed by Slavin et al. (2011) demonstrate measurable gains in early literacy, many programs remain narrowly focused on cognitive skill development and provide limited attention to learner motivation and engagement. This creates a recurring gap between improved test performance and sustained reading interest. Recent literature increasingly emphasizes the role of motivation, engagement, and learner identity in reading success. Theories such as Self-Determination Theory and Expectancy-Value Theory highlight that learners engage more deeply in reading when instruction supports autonomy, competence, and meaningful learning experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Wigfield et al., 2016). However, despite this recognition, many intervention models still underutilize affective and socio-emotional dimensions in structured literacy programs. Culturally responsive and strengths-based approaches have been proposed as alternatives that can bridge this gap by connecting instruction to learners' lived experiences and identities (Gay, 2018; SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2020). Appreciative Inquiry, in particular, offers a strengths-focused framework that shifts attention from deficits to learner capabilities, yet its application in structured early-grade reading interventions remains limited. Furthermore, while instructional design models such as ADDIE provide systematic development frameworks, few studies integrate these with strengths-based pedagogy to create holistic literacy interventions. Collectively, the literature reveals a gap in

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interventions that simultaneously address decoding skills, learner engagement, motivation, and cultural responsiveness within a single structured framework. This gap justifies the development and evaluation of the ESTRELLA Way as an integrated, Appreciative Inquiry–based reading intervention designed to address both cognitive and affective dimensions of early literacy development.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods quasi-experimental research design to evaluate the effectiveness of the ESTRELLA Way as a contextualized reading intervention. The design integrated quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of learners' reading performance and engagement (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative component utilized a pretest–posttest control group design involving experimental and control groups of early-grade learners identified as Low Emerging Readers based on the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA). The experimental group received the 8-session ESTRELLA Way intervention, while the control group continued with the DepEd ARAL Program under regular classroom instruction. The qualitative component followed a descriptive case study approach anchored on Appreciative Inquiry to examine learners' engagement, motivation, and classroom experiences. Integration of quantitative and qualitative data occurred during the interpretation phase to ensure triangulation and strengthen validity (Fetters et al., 2013).

Sampling Design

This study employed random sampling and complete enumeration to ensure comparability of participants across diverse school contexts. Participants were early-grade learners (Grades 1 to 3) identified as Low Emerging Readers based on the 2025 Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA). All identified struggling readers from the selected schools were included in the study. The sampling covered three school contexts in Malungon, Sarangani Province: lowland, highland Indigenous Peoples (IP), and Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDA).Schools were grouped according to geographic classification and comparable CRLA performance. From each category, experimental and control schools were randomly selected to ensure contextual representation and similar baseline conditions. The experimental group received the ESTRELLA Way intervention, while the control group continued with the DepEd ARAL Program and regular classroom instruction. This approach minimized selection bias and strengthened the validity of group comparisons.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in selected public elementary schools in Malungon, Sarangani Province, Region XII (SOCCSKSARGEN), Philippines. The locale includes lowland communities, Indigenous Peoples (IP) areas, and Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDA). These diverse settings were selected to examine the intervention's effectiveness across varied sociocultural and geographic contexts, consistent with inclusive education principles (DepEd, 2022).

Research Participants

The participants of the study were early-grade learners (Grades 1 to 3) identified as Low Emerging Readers based on the 2025 Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA). A total of 114 learners comprised the experimental group, while 70 learners formed the control group. Participants were drawn from lowland, highland/IP, and GIDA schools and were matched according to geographic classification and baseline reading performance to ensure comparability between groups.

In addition, 24 teachers and school heads served as observers during the implementation of the intervention. They monitored instructional delivery, learner engagement, and implementation fidelity using standardized observation tools and reflection instruments.

Research Instrument

The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative instruments to evaluate the effectiveness of the ESTRELLA Way intervention. The primary quantitative instrument was a CRLA-based pretest and posttest reading assessment measuring five literacy domains: letter sounds, rhyming words, sentence reading, reading fluency, and reading comprehension. The instrument was adapted to suit the local language context while maintaining alignment with established CRLA procedures.

Qualitative instruments included an observer checklist, learner engagement rating scale, observation and reflection questionnaire, and Appreciative Inquiry–based feedback forms. These instruments were used to assess implementation fidelity, learner participation, motivation, and classroom experiences, supporting triangulation and comprehensive evaluation of the intervention (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

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Data Gathering Procedure

Data gathering followed a systematic sequence aligned with the implementation of The ESTRELLA Way intervention. Prior to data collection, approval and permissions were secured from the Schools Division Office, school heads, and parents or guardians to ensure ethical compliance. Baseline reading data were obtained from the 2025 Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) results of both the experimental and control groups. Orientation sessions were then conducted for teachers and observers to standardize implementation procedures, monitoring, and use of research instruments. The experimental group underwent the 8-session ESTRELLA Way intervention conducted from March 2–12, 2026, while the control group continued with the DepEd ARAL Program and regular classroom instruction. Throughout the intervention, learner progress and implementation fidelity were monitored using structured observation and progress monitoring tools. After the intervention, post-assessment using the same CRLA-based instrument was administered to measure changes in reading performance across the five literacy domains. Qualitative data were also collected through observer checklists, reflection questionnaires, and feedback forms to capture learner engagement and classroom experiences. All gathered data were consolidated, encoded, and analyzed using quantitative and qualitative procedures to ensure triangulation and methodological rigor.

Results and Discussions

Research Question 1: **Determine the pre- and post-intervention reading competency levels of learners in both experimental and control groups across key literacy domains, including letter sounds, rhyming words, sentence reading, fluency, and comprehension?**

Table 1. Reading Competency Level of Grades 1-3 Learners during Pre-Intervention based on CRLA

Grade Level	Group	Letter Sounds	Rhyming Words	Sentence Reading	Reading Fluency	Comprehension	Overall Mean	Interpretation
Grade 1	Control	2.78	2.75	0.78	1.38	1.42	1.82	Low Emerging Reader
	Experimental	2.80	2.80	0.80	1.40	1.40	1.84	Low Emerging Reader
Grade 2	Control	2.78	1.38	0.60	1.18	1.28	1.44	Low Emerging Reader
	Experimental	2.80	1.40	0.60	1.20	1.30	1.46	Low Emerging Reader
Grade 3	Control	2.88	1.58	0.88	1.20	1.38	1.58	Low Emerging Reader
	Experimental	2.90	1.60	0.90	1.20	1.40	1.60	Low Emerging Reader

The results show that both groups across all grade levels exhibited almost identical literacy profiles, confirming strong baseline equivalence prior to intervention. Learners consistently performed within the Low Emerging Reader level, with particularly weak performance in sentence reading, fluency, and comprehension. This pattern indicates that learners had not yet developed reading automaticity and higher-level meaning-making skills, despite minimal variation in decoding-related abilities. From a theoretical perspective, these findings align with early literacy development models which emphasize that decoding skills typically emerge earlier than fluency and comprehension (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). However, the persistently low performance across all domains suggests that learners may have experienced limited opportunities for sustained reading practice, thereby restricting progression from word recognition to fluent and meaningful reading.

Table 2. Reading Competency Level of Grades 1-3 Learners during Post-Intervention Based on CRLA

Grade Level	Group	Letter Sounds	Rhyming Words	Sentence Reading	Reading Fluency	Comprehension	Overall Mean	Interpretation
Grade 1	Control	6.40	6.00	5.00	2.10	3.20	4.54	Developing Reader
	Experimental	7.40	6.80	5.80	2.40	3.50	5.18	Developing Reader
Grade 2	Control	6.20	5.70	5.20	2.10	3.10	4.46	Developing Reader
	Experimental	7.20	6.40	6.00	2.30	3.30	5.04	Developing Reader
Grade 3	Control	6.30	5.80	5.20	2.10	3.30	4.54	Developing Reader
	Experimental	7.20	6.60	5.90	2.20	3.50	5.08	Developing Reader

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Post-intervention results indicate that both groups improved from Low Emerging Reader to Developing Reader across all grade levels. However, the experimental group consistently achieved higher mean scores across all CRLA domains, suggesting stronger literacy development outcomes. Improvements were most evident in decoding-related skills such as letter sounds, rhyming words, and sentence reading. This indicates that both interventions effectively strengthened foundational literacy skills. However, reading fluency remained the weakest domain across all grade levels, suggesting that automaticity develops more slowly than decoding skills. This finding supports Rasinski (2014), who emphasized that reading fluency develops through repeated, meaningful, and sustained reading experiences rather than short-term instructional exposure. From a constructivist perspective, the stronger performance of the experimental group suggests that learner-centered and motivationally supportive environments, such as those embedded in the ESTRELLA Way, may enhance engagement and facilitate deeper literacy development. Furthermore, the results reflect the principles of Appreciative Inquiry, which posit that positive, strengths-based learning environments improve learner motivation and participation, thereby enhancing learning outcomes (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

Research Question 2: **Examine whether significant differences exist between pre-intervention and post-intervention results within and between groups?**

Table 3. Paired Samples t-Test Results (ESTRELLA Way vs ARAL Program Combined Summary)

Group	Grade Level	t-values Range	p-value	Interpretation
Experimental (ESTRELLA Way)	Grade 1–3	4.30–14.70	<0.05	Significant Improvement
Control (ARAL Program)	Grade 1–3	4.05–10.40	<0.05	Significant Improvement

Both interventions yielded statistically significant improvements across all CRLA domains, confirming their effectiveness in enhancing literacy skills among struggling readers. However, the experimental group consistently demonstrated higher t-values and stronger gains, indicating a more robust intervention effect. This suggests that while both programs support foundational literacy development, the ESTRELLA Way may be more effective due to its integrated approach combining cognitive instruction with motivational and emotional engagement strategies. This is consistent with Appreciative Inquiry theory, which emphasizes that positive and strengths-based environments enhance learner participation and achievement (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Despite these improvements, fluency and comprehension remained the least improved domains across both groups. This reflects findings in literacy research indicating that higher-order reading skills require sustained exposure, vocabulary development, and long-term reading practice (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

Research Question 3: **Compare the mean gain scores of learners exposed to the ESTRELLA Way and those under the ARAL Program?**

Table 4. Mean Gain Comparison Between Experimental and Control Groups

Grade Level	Experimental Group (ESTRELLA Way)	Control Group (ARAL Program)	Mean Difference
Grade 1	3.34	2.72	0.62
Grade 2	3.58	3.02	0.56
Grade 3	3.48	2.96	0.52

Across all grade levels, the experimental group consistently demonstrated higher mean gains than the control group. Although the differences are modest, the consistency of the pattern suggests that the ESTRELLA Way produced more favorable literacy outcomes. These results imply that integrating motivational, emotional, and learner-centered instructional strategies alongside structured literacy instruction may enhance reading development more effectively than conventional remediation alone. This aligns with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that active engagement and meaningful learning experiences strengthen cognitive development.

Research Question 4: **Assess the level of learner engagement during the implementation of the intervention?**

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Table 5. Overall Level of Implementation of The ESTRELLA Way

Dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Empowerment	4.83	0.37	Very High
Strategies	4.86	0.33	Very High
Thinkers	4.60	0.44	Very High
Love	4.69	0.39	Very High
Light	4.79	0.38	Very High
Aspiration	4.76	0.42	Very High
Overall Mean	**4.76**	**0.39**	**Very High**

The findings indicate a very high level of implementation across all dimensions of the ESTRELLA Way. The highest rating was observed in instructional strategies, followed by empowerment and learning support dimensions. These results suggest that the intervention was implemented with strong fidelity and effectively integrated cognitive, emotional, and motivational components of literacy instruction. From an Appreciative Inquiry perspective, the high ratings reflect a learning environment that emphasizes strengths, positivity, and learner empowerment, which are key drivers of engagement and meaningful learning (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). However, while implementation ratings are highly favorable, they should be interpreted with caution, as perception-based evaluations may be influenced by response bias. Nonetheless, the strong implementation fidelity supports the validity of the observed literacy gains in the experimental group.

Emerging Themes (ET) on How the ESTRELLA Way Supports The Development of Reading Skills

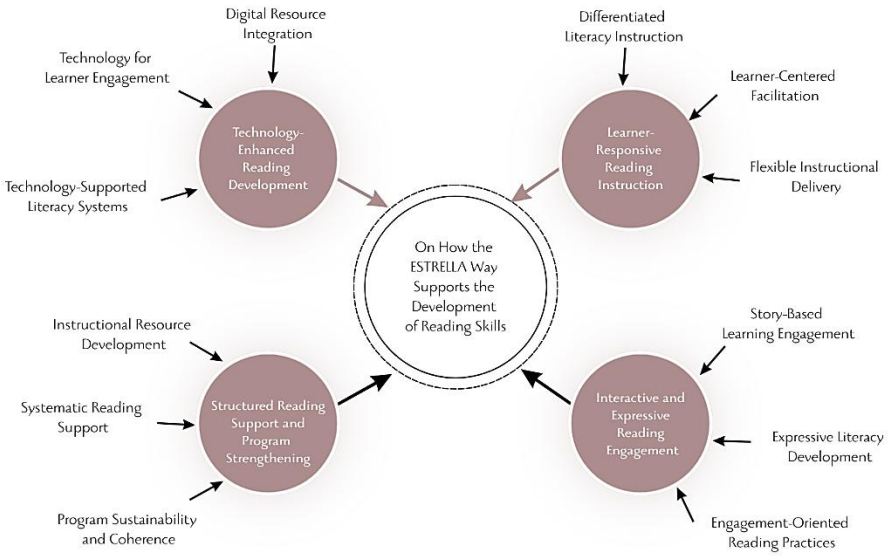

Figure 1*. Schematic Diagram on How the ESTRELLA Way Supports the Development of Reading Skills*

The figure illustrates the emerging themes on how the ESTRELLA Way supports reading development through four interrelated dimensions: technology-enhanced instruction, learner-responsive teaching, interactive engagement, and structured instructional support. The findings indicate that reading development is strengthened through the interaction of cognitive, instructional, and engagement-based factors rather than isolated teaching strategies. Technology-enhanced instruction (ET1) contributes to multimodal learning experiences that reinforce vocabulary development and comprehension. Learner-responsive teaching (ET2) allows instruction to be differentiated based on learners' reading levels, thereby supporting gradual skill acquisition in decoding and fluency. Interactive engagement (ET3), particularly through storytelling and guided oral reading, enhances meaning-making and participation. Structured instructional support (ET4) ensures consistency and systematic progression of literacy skills. Collectively, these dimensions suggest that reading improvement is most effective when instruction is integrated, adaptive, and systematically scaffolded.

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Emerging Themes (ET) on Changes in Reading Engagement and Self-Perception

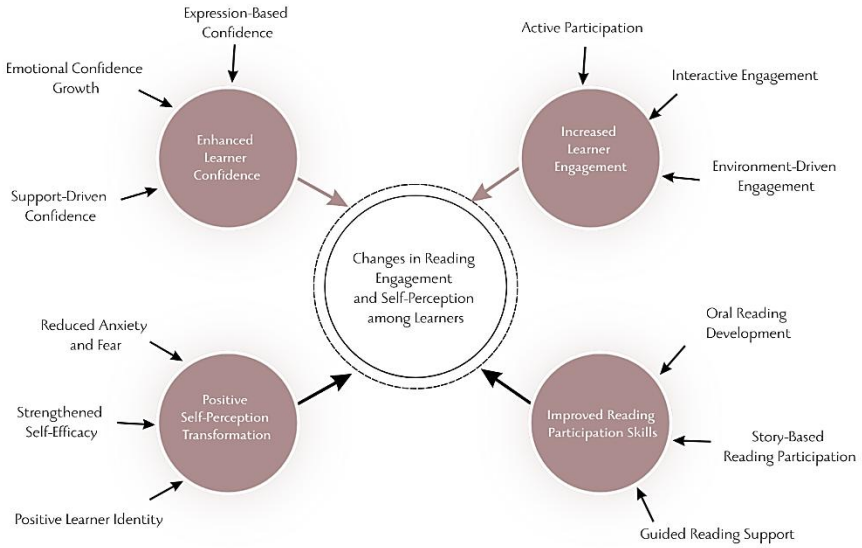

Figure 2. *Schematic Diagram on Changes in Reading Engagement and Self-Perception among Learners after the Implementation of the ESTRELLA Way*

The figure presents the emerging themes on changes in learners' reading engagement and self-perception following exposure to the ESTRELLA Way. The results show that reading development extends beyond cognitive gains and includes significant effective and motivational changes. Confidence (ET1) increased as learners experienced reduced reading anxiety and received consistent positive reinforcement. Engagement (ET2) was strengthened through active participation in reading tasks, group reading activities, and storytelling sessions. Participation skills (ET3) improved as learners demonstrated better oral reading, fluency, and comprehension performance during classroom activities. Self-perception (ET4) shifted as learners began to view themselves as capable and improving readers. These findings indicate that literacy development is strongly influenced by affective transformation, where improved self-efficacy supports sustained reading engagement.

Emerging Themes (ET) on How Learners Respond to the Integration of The ESTRELLA Method in Reading Sessions in Terms of Cultural Relevance and Motivation to Read

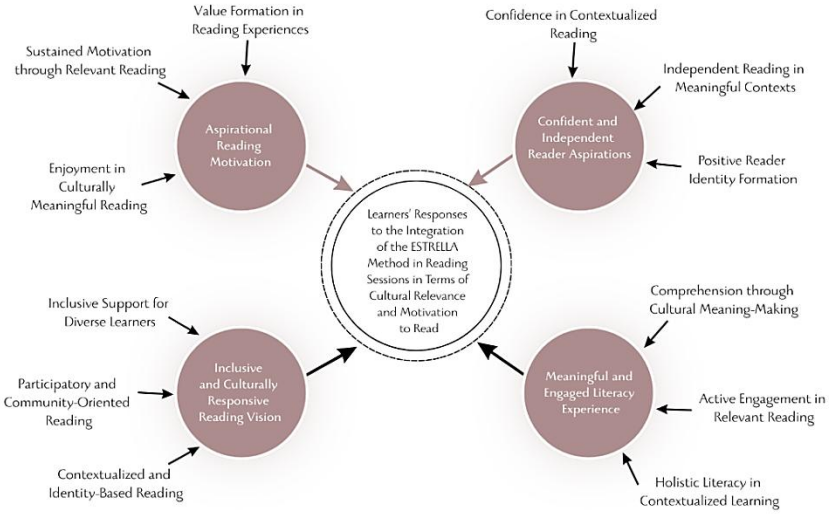

Figure 3. *Schematic Diagram on Learners' Responses to the Integration of the ESTRELLA Method in Reading Sessions in Terms of Cultural Relevance and Motivation to Read*

The figure presents the thematic responses of learners regarding cultural relevance and motivation under the ESTRELLA Method. The findings highlight that culturally responsive instruction plays a critical role in strengthening reading motivation and comprehension. Aspirational motivation (ET1) increased when reading materials reflected learners lived experiences and cultural contexts. Confidence and independence

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(ET2) developed as learners experienced repeated success in contextualized reading tasks, strengthening self-efficacy. Meaningful engagement (ET3) was observed through active participation in culturally grounded reading activities that enhanced comprehension and interest. Inclusive and culturally responsive practices (ET4) fostered a sense of belonging, equity, and relevance in reading instruction. Overall, the results indicate that culturally contextualized literacy instruction significantly enhances learners' motivation and engagement in reading activities.

Emerging Themes (ET) on Positive Teaching Strategies and Classroom Moments in the Implementation of The ESTRELLA Way

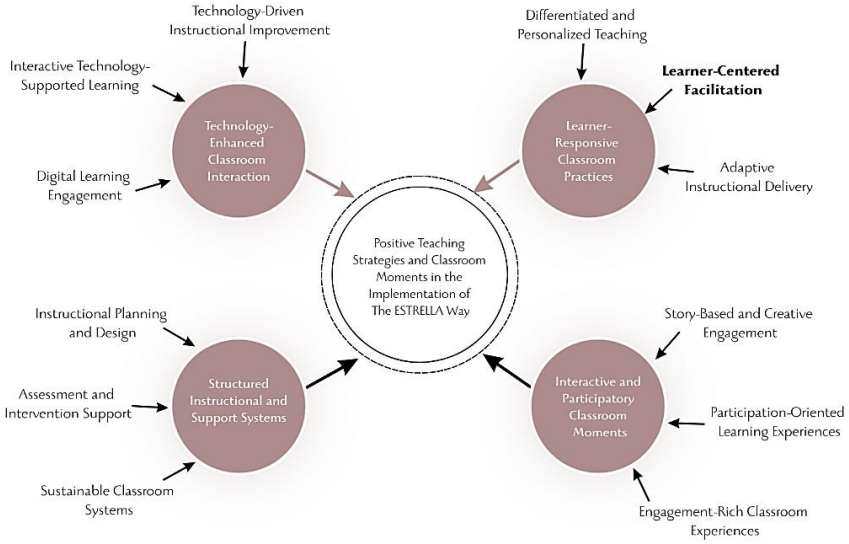

Figure 4. *Schematic Diagram on Positive Teaching Strategies and Classroom Moments in the Implementation of The ESTRELLA Way*

The figure illustrates the key instructional strategies and classroom practices that emerged during the implementation of the ESTRELLA Way. The findings show that effective literacy instruction is shaped by a combination of technology integration, responsive teaching, interactive learning, and structured instructional systems. Technology-enhanced instruction (ET1) improves learner engagement through multimedia and ICT-based resources. Learner-responsive practices (ET2) allow teachers to adjust instruction based on learner needs and reading levels, improving comprehension and participation. Interactive classroom moments (ET3), such as storytelling, guided reading, and collaborative tasks, strengthen active engagement and meaning construction. Structured instructional systems (ET4) ensure consistency in lesson delivery, assessment, and literacy progression. These findings suggest that effective reading instruction requires a balance of innovation, responsiveness, and instructional structure.

Emerging Themes (ET) on the Future of the ESTRELLA Model in Enhancing Pupils' Literacy Level

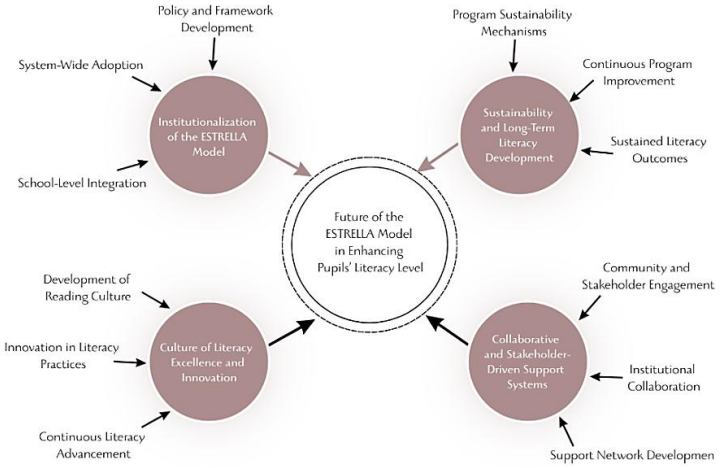

Figure 5*. Schematic Diagram on the Future of the ESTRELLA Model in Enhancing Pupils' Literacy Level*

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This figure presents the emerging themes on the future scalability and sustainability of the ESTRELLA Model. The findings suggest that the ESTRELLA Model has strong potential for long-term institutionalization and literacy improvement. Institutionalization (ET1) reflects its potential integration into school-based and division-level literacy programs. Sustainability (ET2) emphasizes the need for continuous teacher training, monitoring, and resource support to maintain implementation fidelity. Collaboration (ET3) highlights the importance of shared responsibility among teachers, parents, and stakeholders in sustaining literacy development. A culture of literacy excellence (ET4) reflects the long-term goal of establishing a literacy-rich learning environment that promotes continuous improvement. Overall, the model demonstrates strong potential as a scalable and sustainable literacy intervention.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical standards in educational research. Prior to data collection, formal approval was secured from relevant school authorities and institutional research bodies. Informed consent was obtained from school heads, teachers, parents, and other participants involved in the study. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained through the use of coded identifiers, and all collected data were used solely for academic and research purposes. The study also ensured that all instructional interventions posed no physical, psychological, or academic harm to learners, and that classroom implementation remained aligned with existing school policies and child protection standards.

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that both The ESTRELLA Way and the ARAL Program significantly improved the reading competencies of early-grade learners. However, learners exposed to The ESTRELLA Way consistently achieved higher gains across the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) components, particularly in letter sounds, rhyming words, sentence reading, reading fluency, and comprehension. Statistical analysis confirmed that the experimental group outperformed the control group, indicating the greater effectiveness of The ESTRELLA Way as a literacy intervention. Qualitative findings further supported these results, showing that The ESTRELLA Way strengthened learner engagement, reading confidence, motivation, cultural connection, and positive reading identity through interactive, learner-centered, and contextually responsive instruction. Anchored in the Appreciative Inquiry 4D framework, the intervention promoted not only cognitive literacy development but also socio-emotional growth and sustained learner participation. Overall, The ESTRELLA Way emerged as a more holistic, effective, and sustainable literacy model with strong potential for wider implementation in early-grade education settings.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, schools are encouraged to institutionalize early literacy screening using the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) to identify learners who are classified as Low Emerging Readers. This allows for timely, targeted, and data-driven intervention focusing on foundational literacy skills such as letter sounds, rhyming words, sentence reading, reading fluency, and comprehension. In addition, since both interventions showed weaker gains in reading fluency and comprehension, teachers are encouraged to strengthen sustained instructional practices such as guided reading, repeated oral reading, vocabulary enrichment, and meaning-making activities, as these competencies require longer and more consistent exposure to develop. Given the significant improvements observed in both groups and the consistently higher gains of learners exposed to the ESTRELLA Way, schools may consider adopting it as a complementary literacy enhancement approach within existing reading programs. Its learner-centered and Appreciative Inquiry–based structure, which emphasizes empowerment, positive engagement, and motivation, may further strengthen reading development. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to conduct longitudinal and comparative studies to examine the long-term effects of the ESTRELLA Way, particularly on reading fluency and comprehension, and to explore its applicability in diverse educational contexts.

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