



Development of an Informal Reading Inventory for Senior High School: A Preliminary Study

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Abstract

This preliminary study addresses the urgent need for an Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) specifically designed for Senior High School (SHS) students in the Philippines. National assessments have highlighted significant deficiencies in reading proficiency, prompting the Department of Education (DepEd) to implement comprehensive reading initiatives. However, the absence of a specialized assessment tool for SHS students presents a critical gap. This study proposes a Test Design Statement for developing an IRI that aligns with Grades 11 and 12 curriculum competencies, international standards (CEFR B2 and C1 levels), and the linguistic profile of Filipino students. The proposed IRI aims to assess essential reading skills, facilitating targeted interventions and supporting the overall goal of producing proficient, independent readers. The study outlines a comprehensive evaluation plan focusing on reliability, validity, authenticity, interactivensness, and practicality, emphasizing the necessity for institutional support and collaboration.

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is a complex cognitive process in which learners decipher text through comprehension, interpretation, and contextualization of its meaning (Butterfuss et al., 2020). As an essential skill for students to develop, reading proficiency is fundamentally linked to robust academic performance. Various factors influence reading comprehension, including prior knowledge, working memory, and executive functions (Butterfuss et al., 2020). For ESL students, reading proficiency is particularly crucial and is influenced by age, cognitive processes, and language knowledge (Ciocoi-Pop, 2020). Recent research has shown that contextualized teaching and learning can enhance learners' engagement and performance in reading comprehension (Baddane & Ennam, 2023). Moreover, L2 learners face reading challenges affected by cognitive, ecological, and psychological factors, necessitating targeted pedagogical strategies to address these issues (Sparks & Alamer, 2023). This multifaceted nature of reading comprehension underscores the importance of a comprehensive approach to reading instruction and support in educational settings.

Empirical evidence substantiates a strong correlation between reading aptitude and academic success. A consistent body of research demonstrates this robust relationship, underscoring the critical role of reading proficiency in educational outcomes (Adhi et al., 2005; Origu et al., 2017; Parker et al., 2015; Cadiz-Gabejan, 2021). Studies have revealed a direct proportional relationship between reading proficiency and academic performance, with higher proficiency leading to better results. Significant positive correlations have been reported between reading literacy levels and academic achievement (Agustina & Anum, 2021). Moreover, research has shown that reading habits contribute substantially to academic success, with a notable correlation between the two (Erlina, 2019). The importance of effective reading strategies and assessments in enhancing academic performance has been emphasized, highlighting the crucial role of educators in fostering these skills (Loopoo & Balfour, 2021, 2021). Collectively, these findings underscore the pivotal role of reading proficiency in academic contexts and the need for targeted interventions to support students' reading development.

Literacy serves as a pivotal conduit for achievement and opportunity, with deficiencies in reading skills potentially obstructing the academic progression of students. The cultivation of proficient reading skills constitutes a primary educational objective, extending from elementary through to secondary education levels. The mastery of effective reading techniques represents a significant educational milestone for young children and is considered one of the most substantial achievements a teacher can attain. The development of proficient reading skills is crucial for academic success and future opportunities (Grigoryan, 2020). Teacher quality, particularly years of experience and teaching practices, significantly impacts student literacy achievement (Maajeeny, 2019). Specific strategies, such as explicit word decoding and comprehension instruction, are essential for the development of reading skills (Loopoo & Balfour, 2021, 2021). These strategies should be applied across subjects to enhance reading literacy (Kilag et al., 2024)

Despite these priorities, challenges persist in achieving reading proficiency among students. The Department of Education (DepEd) of the Philippines has initiated the '*Every Child A Reader Program*' (ECARP), which aims to ensure reading success for every student as a principal focus of the Basic Education Curriculum. However, evaluations indicate that many children have not met the expected levels of reading proficiency. With the implementation of the K-12 program, this deficiency is particularly evident among students in Senior High School, underscoring the need for enhanced strategies in reading instruction and intervention.

1.1. Reading in the K-12 Program

The K-12 curriculum is carefully crafted to provide sufficient time for mastery of concepts and skills, thereby fostering the development of lifelong learners and preparing graduates for tertiary education, middle-level skills development, employment, and entrepreneurship. This curriculum ensures the acquisition of a comprehensive set of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes through a coherent educational continuum, tailored to meet students' needs across all levels and subjects. Within Senior High School, the Core Curriculum covers seven key learning areas: Languages, Literature, Communication, Mathematics, Philosophy, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences. Specifically in English education for Grades 11 and 12, there are crucial subjects such as 'Reading and Writing Skills' and 'English for Academic and Professional Purposes' that demand high reading proficiency. These subjects not only focus on developing

reading skills in vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension but are also vital across all learning areas. Reading skill enhancement in these areas is known to positively impact writing and speaking abilities as well. Given the importance of reading as a primary mode of language input and its significant role in language acquisition and learning processes (Brunfaut, 2021; Yudha & Mandasari, 2021), it is essential to integrate reading development consistently into English language instruction from elementary through to senior high school. The K-12 curriculum specifically outlines reading competencies in these two subjects within the Department of Education (DepEd) curriculum guides, emphasizing the strategic focus on these essential skills. While other courses may implicitly require reading skills, the two English subjects in the Senior High School uniquely provide direct reading instruction focusing on enhancing critical thinking and reading on academic and professional texts.

1.2. Reading Initiatives of DepEd

The Department of Education (DepEd) of the Philippines issued Department Order No. 70, series of 2011, initiating the 'Every Child a Reader Program' (ECARP), which aligns with the Department's commitment to ensure that every child is capable of reading at their respective grade level. ECARP's objective is to train educators and develop assessment tools that assist in evaluating students' reading capabilities. The program is comprised of several key components: Reading Recovery (RR), an early literacy intervention targeting reading and writing challenges; the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), an assessment tool originally designed for elementary pupils but since expanded to include junior high school; and the Philippine Word List in English (PWLE), a compilation of commonly used English words in textbooks from Grades I to III. Furthermore, the issuance of Memorandum No. 173, s. 2019 introduced the '*Hamon: Bawat Bata Bumabasa*' (3Bs Initiative), a nationwide effort to enhance reading proficiency among students. This initiative seeks to implement comprehensive reading programs across all educational institutions in the country, with the aim of cultivating proficient readers at all academic levels. It states that to achieve this goal, the Every Child a Reader Program (ECARP) "shall be strengthened with the following aims:

- a. Equip learners with reading skills to make them proficient and independent readers in their grade level;
- b. Capacitate teachers to become effective reading teachers; and
- c. Nurture a culture of reading in schools, communities and various levels of governance ..."

The Department of Education (DepEd) of the Philippines is actively encouraging schools nationwide to enhance reading proficiency through the directive to 'make every learner a proficient reader.' In response, educational institutions are significantly increasing the integration of reading into curricula and implementing targeted reading intervention programs. Central to these initiatives is the role of assessment, particularly through the Philippine Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), which serves as the primary assessment tool in DepEd's flagship reading program.

This research focuses on the reading inventory component of the 'Every Child a Reader Program' (ECARP). The Phil-IRI, revised in 2018 by the Bureau of Learning and Delivery of

DepEd, comprises graded passages that assess students' reading levels through oral reading, silent reading, and listening comprehension tests. These tests categorize students into independent, instructional, and frustrated levels. Although it is a comprehensive tool, the Phil-IRI is not intended as the sole method for assessing reading skills but rather as a means to approximate a student's reading level. The data collected from the Phil-IRI administration is crucial for designing interventions at the school, division, and national levels, serving as a diagnostic tool for reading intervention programs. The outcomes of this assessment guide decisions regarding a student's participation in targeted reading interventions.

However, a significant limitation arises as the Phil-IRI currently only assesses up to Grade VI, posing challenges for higher educational levels. For instance, in senior high school, there is a marked disparity between the reading levels assessed by the Phil-IRI and the levels required for students, potentially leading to misdiagnoses of reading abilities. Consequently, teachers and researchers in senior high schools often create their own materials and tests to supplement the gaps left by the ECARP and the 3Bs initiative, addressing the advanced reading demands of older students. This situation underscores the need for an expanded and refined assessment tool that aligns with the reading competencies required across all grades, ensuring accurate diagnostics and effective interventions. The researchers recognize that the gaps in the implementation of the reading initiatives must be addressed. There should be an extension of the Phil-IRI up to senior high school that consolidates the efforts made by the teachers to accurately measure students' reading level and effectively intervene to such reading issues.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to conduct a preliminary investigation of the necessary components in developing an informal reading inventory (IRI) for Senior High School (SHS) students.

Specifically, this research aims to **develop and propose an Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) test design framework**. This objective seeks to establish a comprehensive and adaptable framework for assessing reading competencies in Grades 11 and 12. The framework will integrate educational standards, curriculum requirements, and college readiness competencies to guide the creation, implementation, and evaluation of the IRI. This framework aims to ensure that the IRI effectively measures essential reading skills, aligns with national educational goals, and supports teaching practices. The successful proposal of this framework will provide a basis for subsequent pilot testing, refinement, and eventual standardization of the IRI across various educational settings.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

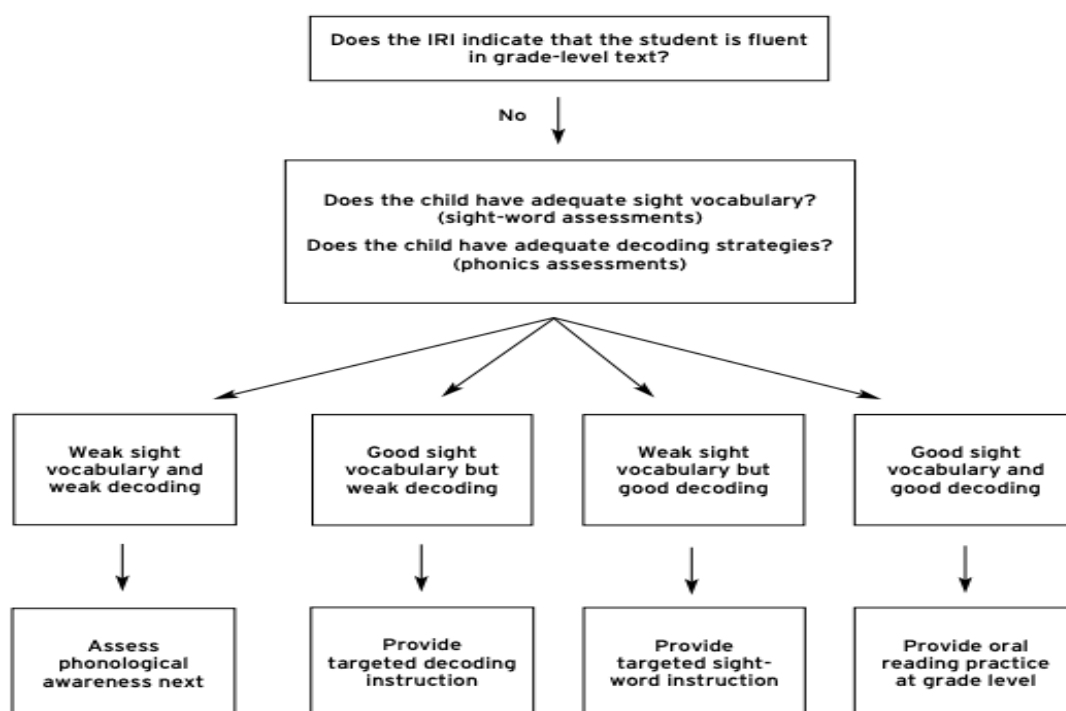
Informal Reading Inventories (IRIs) are diagnostic tools administered individually to assess various dimensions of students' reading capabilities, such as word recognition, oral reading, fluency, and comprehension, through graded word lists and passages (Paris & Carpenter, 2003; Nilsson, 2008; Flippo et al., 2009). These inventories typically include materials ranging from pre-primer levels to middle or high school levels and are designed to provide a detailed profile of a student's reading strengths and weaknesses (Paris & Carpenter, 2003). After a student reads a passage, their comprehension and recall are evaluated through subsequent oral questioning. Educators utilize these assessments to determine reading levels by analyzing comprehension scores, word recognition, and other pertinent factors such as prior knowledge and emotional state (McCarthy & McNamara, 2021).

IRIs also assess sub-skills including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and overall reading fluency. The insights garnered from these inventories are instrumental in tailoring instruction to align with individual student needs, choosing suitable reading materials, and documenting progress over time. Furthermore, Polirstok & Gottlieb (2006) highlights the importance of structured observation in conjunction with teacher-made or commercial assessments, which enable educators to focus on specific literacy development aspects and systematically record student progress.

The utility of informal reading inventories extends beyond the classroom, serving as a resource for school administrators in making informed decisions related to student literacy outcomes. McKenna and Stahl (2003) describe a cognitive model for reading assessment in their work, "Assessment for Reading Instruction." This model is foundational for educational decision-making, beginning with the premise that intact grade-level reading comprehension necessitates no further action. However, if issues are identified, the model advises investigating three primary areas: automatic word recognition, oral language comprehension, and strategic knowledge, to determine the root cause of the reading difficulties. This process provides a structured framework for educators to address and support students' reading needs effectively.

This process is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 Using Informal Assessment to Make Informed Decisions



The ability to read is a gateway to acquiring knowledge and opportunities, particularly when engaging with texts in foreign languages such as English. This skill allows students to access a vast array of information, derive enjoyment, and participate in the global community through reading. Enhanced reading proficiency is paramount for academic achievement, as it significantly aids students in processing and comprehending texts (Iftanti, 2015).

Consequently, enhancing students' reading comprehension is critical not only for mastering the English language but also for augmenting overall knowledge.

High school represents the final stage of a student's basic education before entering college or university. At this stage, students' English proficiency ranges from intermediate to advanced levels, as reflected in the curriculum and expected learning outcomes. High school students are expected to be familiar with various types of English texts, assessed in national and college entrance examinations. Consequently, reading comprehension skills are vital for high school students (Ganie & Rangkuti, 2019).

Oral language, one of the four language domains, correlates with and influences the development of other language skills. Research indicates that children with strong oral language skills learn to read and write more easily and tend to excel academically compared to their peers with less vocabulary and language structure knowledge. Oral language development enhances vocabulary concepts, as children initially learn word meanings and pronunciations through speaking and understanding speech. Those who articulate their words and thoughts clearly have an advantage in learning to read over children with poor oral language skills. Oral language also teaches cultural nuances, providing background knowledge that aids in reading comprehension. According to Nuttall (2000), reading lessons use language to extract messages from text. Therefore, in reading lessons, the focus is on understanding the central meaning, with each learned language item providing incidental benefits. Students must have effective strategies for understanding various types of written texts, each with unique characteristics.

2.1.Vocabulary

When children know the meaning of a word, they are more likely to read it accurately and understand it within a text. Continual vocabulary expansion is necessary for understanding and using words in context. Vocabulary development is both an outcome of comprehension and a precursor to it, with word meanings comprising as much as 70-90% of comprehension (Bromley, 2007). Vocabulary is predominantly learned through repeated exposure to new words in conversations, stories, reading, and different media (Senechal, 1997). Exposure to words in meaningful contexts clarifies meanings, allowing children to easily add them to their vocabulary. This type of indirect vocabulary acquisition is particularly effective for children exposed to a wide and rich vocabulary before starting school. For children with a restricted vocabulary (Biemiller, 2009) and less access to the vocabulary of books, explicit vocabulary teaching is essential (Beck & McKeown, 2007). The academic curriculum in the Philippines mandates that higher education students have a varied and extensive vocabulary and develop good study and research skills. However, many high school students perform poorly in writing simple research papers due to inadequate reading skills and vocabulary application. Al Saif (2011) found that EFL learners majoring in English struggle due to limitations in using the correct academic vocabulary for reports or assignments. Martínez-Gómez & Aizawa (2014) advocates for vocabulary learning, noting that it strengthens academic reading skills and improves comprehension of academic passages. Thus, vocabulary is essential for student success, aiding in higher education by enabling fluid expression in academic situations.

2.2.Fluency

Fluency is not merely the ability to read quickly. Fluent reading resembles spoken language, with appropriate phrasing, expression, and pace. Fluent readers understand and derive meaning

from the text as they read (Rasinski, 2004). Core components of fluency include accuracy, pace, expression, and volume. There is a strong correlation between fluency and comprehension. Even competent readers struggle with fluency when encountering unfamiliar or technical words. Fluency requires texts at the readers' independent reading level. Beginning and struggling readers need simple texts at their independent level to build speed and confidence. Practicing with books they can already read helps children develop appropriate expression, chunking, pausing, and confidence. Conversely, reading quickly without attending to punctuation, expression, and comprehension does not constitute fluency. Reading rates should not compromise comprehension (Hasbrouck, 2006).

2.3.Comprehension

Effective readers understand the purpose of their reading and adjust their reading behaviors (skimming, scanning, or reading closely for detail) accordingly. They recognize that texts vary according to their purpose, context, and audience. Understanding the features of different text types helps readers make meaning. Proficient readers monitor their understanding as they read, integrating new information with existing knowledge and experience. They focus on relevant text parts to distinguish important content from minor details, make and monitor predictions, and evaluate content. To achieve this, readers adjust their strategies, pace, vocabulary knowledge, and strategies for decoding and chunking unfamiliar text (Ganie & Rangkuti, 2019). Comprehension involves a toolkit of strategies that should be explicitly taught, including questioning, visualizing, predicting and activating prior knowledge, monitoring and clarifying, determining importance, making connections, inferring, summarizing, and synthesizing. These strategies often intertwine, but some are more suited to specific reading tasks than others (Spencer, 2018).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1.Developmental Research Design

This study adopts a developmental research design, shifting the output from being merely an object of study to a process integral to a working environment. This paradigm fosters reflexivity between researchers and their research. The research evolves as researchers theorize and implement findings, an approach termed the “developmental approach” by Attia and Edge (2017). This method enriches the research experience by promoting bottom-up, capacity-building work that shapes researchers' own learning and progress.

Richey & Klein (2005) defines developmental research as a systematic study of designing, developing, and evaluating instructional programs, processes, and products that meet criteria of internal consistency and effectiveness. This approach is suitable for a product-development process that can be analyzed, described, and evaluated. It also allows for impact analysis on learners and organizations.

The researchers employed this method due to the study's nature. As language teachers, they are continuously exposed to evolving pedagogical issues. Numerous factors affect teaching outcomes, necessitating varied solutions. This approach enables exploration of influences impacting the study's goal—developing a procedure and material to assess students' reading levels and create instructional solutions for reading proficiency in line with international standards.

3.2. Bachman and Palmer (1996) Framework of Test Development

The development of the IRI adapts the Bachman and Palmer (1996) framework, which emphasizes two fundamental principles:

1. Correspondence Between Language Test Performance and Language Use

The language test tasks should mirror specific language use scenarios, allowing students to demonstrate their skills. Aligning the characteristics of language use with the test tasks strengthens the validity of the IRI.

2. Clear and Explicit Definition of Test Usefulness

Test usefulness, according to Bachman and Palmer (1996), encompasses reliability, construct validity, authenticity, interactiveness, impact, and practicality. These qualities are addressed in the operationalization phase of test development. The Bachman-Palmer framework includes three stages of test development: Design, Operationalization, and Test Administration. This study focuses on the Design Stage, detailing the test components to ensure alignment with target language use. The subsequent stages involve developing test task specifications and assessing the test's usefulness through pilot testing and operational testing.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The development of the Test Design Statement in this study, based on Bachman-Palmer (1996) framework, revealed key components such as reading levels, text complexity, and assessment modes that are essential for a comprehensive IRI. The proposed framework was formulated to include these elements, ensuring that it captures a range of reading abilities from basic to advanced levels. The following are the components relevant to the proposed test design framework.

4.1. Bases for Developing the Informal Reading Inventory

In this study, developing the Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) requires identifying elements affecting its development. Three interrelated elements, based on current teaching environments, must be considered:

Constructs of Reading as Defined by DepEd Memo

The DepEd Memo outlines goals for the reading development program within the 3Bs Initiative, focusing on developing reading proficiency across grade levels nationwide. The DepEd's position paper, "Conceptual Considerations in Implementing the 3Bs Initiative," identifies six elements of reading: Oral Language, Phonological Awareness, Phonics, Vocabulary, Fluency, and Comprehension. This study focuses on the last three elements, as the proposed IRI targets Grades 11 and 12 students, who are assumed to have mastered the first three elements. These elements are crucial in assessing the higher-level reading proficiency required at this stage.

Reading Competencies Defined by the National Curriculum for Grades 11 and 12

The curriculum for Grades 11 and 12, which includes courses like "Reading and Writing Skills" and "English for Academic and Professional Purposes," reflects complex literacy and instructional practices. These courses focus on developing reading and writing skills applicable to a wide range of materials and communication skills for academic and professional purposes. The competencies outlined in these courses are mapped into the structure of the proposed IRI, ensuring alignment with curricular goals.

Higher Education Requirements for College Readiness

The proposed IRI also considers the reading skills necessary for college readiness, aiming to bridge the gap between high school and higher education. By incorporating college-level reading skills, the IRI prepares students for the higher standards required in college, both locally and internationally. This approach challenges students to achieve a higher standard of reading, facilitating a smoother transition to higher education.

This multi-faceted approach ensures that the IRI is comprehensive and aligned with both current educational standards and future academic expectations. However, future research might explore how these elements interact and potentially conflict in practice.

4.2.Purpose of the Test

The next portion of the design statement is an explicit description of the test's purpose. In formulating the purpose, the researchers consider the inferences regarding the students' language abilities and the decisions based on those inferences.

Regarding language ability, the proposed Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) should cover reading competencies expected in Grades 11 and 12, based on their curriculum and the competencies required for entry-level college reading. As stated earlier, IRIs are informal assessment tools or formative assessments of students' reading levels. However, given the research context, the researchers argue that it should be a primary tool to identify readers needing intervention. The proposed IRI will be used as a low-stakes diagnostic test, functioning as an entry and exit exam in a school's reading program, given the national government's initiative to implement reading programs nationwide. Therefore, the researchers propose the following test purpose:

“The purpose of the test is to determine the reading levels of Grades 11 and 12 students. Primarily, the test will be used as a diagnostic tool to decide if a student needs to be enrolled in the school's reading intervention program. Additionally, the test can be utilized by English teachers as an informal assessment tool for reading instruction.”

The purpose statement of the Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) effectively outlines its dual role as both a diagnostic tool to assess the reading levels of Grades 11 and 12 students and as an informal assessment tool for English teachers, aligning well with national initiatives to enhance educational outcomes. This multifunctional approach facilitates not only the identification of students requiring intervention but also supports ongoing adjustments in teaching strategies to meet diverse student needs. However, operational challenges such as ensuring consistent test administration and providing comprehensive teacher training need to be addressed to maximize the IRI's effectiveness. Additionally, a more detailed definition of reading levels and competencies could enhance the precision and utility of the IRI in tracking and interpreting student progress over time within the educational framework.

4.3.Description of the Target Language Use (TLU) Domain and Task Types

In describing the Target Language Use (TLU) domain and task types of the proposed IRI, the researchers considered three sources:

1. The reading competencies stated in the Grades 11 and 12 curriculum from the Department of Education (DepEd) course guides.

2. The reading skills specified in the DepEd's 3Bs initiative.
3. International standards for reading at the collegiate level as a basis for the college-readiness aspect of the IRI.

The TLU tasks considered for the test are identified and selected from the following sources: **Reading Competencies of Grades 11 and 12 and skills in 3Bs initiative:** Senior high school, comprising Grades 11 and 12, is part of the K-12 basic education program. Courses for both grade levels are grouped based on different tracks. However, all tracks include core courses, with specialized applied courses taken later. The researchers identified two courses as the basis for the IRI: Reading and Writing Skills (a core course) and English for Academic and Professional Purposes (an applied course). The proposed IRI focuses on reading skills within these courses.

In the Reading and Writing Skills course, three major competencies are stated, with the first two directed at reading. The first competency is Reading and Thinking Strategies across Text Types, which aligns with the reading demands of college-bound senior high school students. This competency includes recognizing the structure and organization of information in a reading text and understanding the purpose based on its development pattern. The second competency, Text and Context Connections (Critical Reading), involves critically engaging with the text to produce various outputs, such as essays and reaction papers. It aims to develop students' critical reading skills, enabling them to identify claims and evaluate assertions and counterclaims in texts.

The English for Academic and Professional Purposes course includes ten competencies, with the first nine considered for the proposed IRI. This course focuses on students' awareness and knowledge of specific text types or genres, the language of academic texts, the structure of academic or professional writing, and strategies for organizing ideas in academic texts.

International Standards for College-Level Reading: The researchers used the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for language learning, teaching, and assessment. The CEFR provides a detailed framework for aligning curriculum, teaching, and assessment with real-world language use. For English in higher education, Cambridge English identifies three CEFR levels: B2 (preprofessional or foundational level), C1 (undergraduate and postgraduate), and C2 (postgraduate). The proposed IRI focuses on the B2 and C1 levels, as C2 is too advanced for Grade 11 and 12 curricula. B2 reading levels include understanding main ideas in various text types, scanning texts for relevant information, and demonstrating grammar and vocabulary control. C1 levels involve reading quickly enough for academic courses, taking accurate notes, scanning texts for relevant information, and confidently dealing with various texts.

4.4. Description of Test Takers' Characteristics

The researchers also consider the characteristics of the students taking the IRI. The profile of the target users includes:

1. **Personal Characteristics:** Students are adolescents aged 16-18, taught in English in basic education. They may speak English as their second or third language. They are in the last two years of their education, with future paths including work, technical vocational education, or higher education.

2. **Topical Knowledge of Test Takers:** Students have varied topical knowledge, as they are in the later stage of basic education. Their knowledge of highly specialized or technical subjects is limited, though technical courses are covered at an introductory level.
3. **Levels and Profiles of Language Knowledge:** The general level of language ability and knowledge for these students is expected to be intermediate to upper-intermediate. The CEFR refers to their level as independent users, with specific reading abilities up to Grade 10 competencies.
4. **Possible Affective Responses to Taking the Test:** Classroom administration of the IRI may have a lower affective impact, as all students take the same test for formative assessment. However, as the IRI is also a diagnostic tool, students may feel threatened. Low scores may lead to embarrassment and resistance, as they may indicate the need for remedial reading programs.

The description of the test takers' characteristics for the Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) underscores the necessity for a test that is sensitive to the diverse backgrounds and educational needs of students aged 16-18, many of whom may use English as a second or third language. These students, approaching pivotal career and educational milestones, require an assessment that respects their varied topical and language proficiencies, ranging from intermediate to upper-intermediate levels as outlined by the CEFR. The potential for affective responses such as anxiety or resistance, particularly due to the diagnostic nature of the IRI, highlights the importance of implementing the test in a way that minimizes stress and avoids negative impacts on student performance. Therefore, the IRI must be carefully designed and administered to ensure it is both an effective measure of reading skills and a supportive tool in the educational progression of these students.

4.5. Definition of Constructs

The primary purpose of a language test is to provide a measure that can be interpreted as an indicator of an individual's language ability (Bachman and Palmer, 1996:23). To be able to do this, the researchers consider various bases for defining the constructs to be measured. First, is the construct definition stated in the policy memo of DepEd related to students' **reading skills** (vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension). Second, are the definitions of language **learning competencies** as stated in the instructional syllabus that are used universally across the country. Lastly, are the constructs that are considered gaps that are unspecified in the two previous documents? These are the constructs that relate to the required **language use in higher education**.

To further specify, since the three are interrelated constructs, the abilities that are measured in the proposed IRI focus more on the performance and knowledge of language use in reading. For example, the ability to understand formally accurate texts and complex sentences, and the ability to recognize cohesion in texts to be able to understand relationships of ideas or organization of information. Another is the ability to interpret the purpose, intention, and setting of the reading texts to be able to make meaningful and accurate responses

4.6. Plan for Evaluating the Qualities of Usefulness

The plan for assessing the usefulness of the test includes:

1. **Reliability:** The reliability of the test can be ensured through the administration of test try-outs. Additionally, the school will use the proposed IRI as a pre-test for all students and a post-test for those enrolled in the school's reading program. Comparing students' scores on both tests will serve as one method of measuring test reliability. Furthermore, the scripted nature of informal reading tests allows for greater control in test administration.
2. **Validity:** Construct validity can be assessed in several ways. As previously mentioned, the proposed IRI will be administered to all students at the beginning of the term. A comparative analysis of students' IRI scores and their performance or grades in English classes will be conducted to evaluate validity. Additionally, students in the reading program will be given reading tasks, and the scores from these tasks, along with their progress, will provide data for evaluating validity.
3. **Authenticity and interactiveness:** The authenticity and interactiveness will be evaluated at a higher level. Ensuring the quality of authenticity and interactiveness of texts in the proposed IRI will involve consultation and collaboration with instructors in higher education. This collaboration will help provide relevant and current reading texts, as well as the knowledge required to comprehend and respond to the texts.
4. **Practicality:** The practicality of the test will be assessed based on its similarity to the administration of Phil-IRI. Since the primary difference between the proposed IRI and Phil-IRI is the target level, the school can utilize existing resources such as test administrators. Consequently, the manpower, time allotment, and other resources required for the test will be approximately the same.

4.7. Inventory of Resources and Plan for Management

The proposed IRI is intended for institutional use, necessitating the involvement of the school and its personnel in resource provision. The majority of resources will be allocated to the development of test items. Allocating time for writing test items is a crucial resource. English teachers and reading practitioners within the school should be allotted time to collaborate in the development of these test items. The second most labor-intensive task in the development process is the administration of test try-outs. These try-outs must be administered to various classes multiple times. The researchers propose collaboration among several senior high schools during this phase of test development.

5. CONCLUSION

This preliminary study underscores the urgent need for an Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) specifically designed for Senior High School (SHS) students in the Philippine educational system. National assessments have revealed significant deficiencies in literacy, particularly in reading, prompting the Department of Education (DepEd) to implement comprehensive reading initiatives. However, the successful implementation of these initiatives necessitates substantial resources and strategic utilization of those resources. A critical gap identified is the absence of a reading assessment tool, akin to the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) but tailored for the advanced competencies required at the SHS level.

The proposed IRI aims to bridge this gap by assessing reading skills encompassing vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, aligned with the competencies outlined in key SHS subjects such as 'Reading and Writing Skills' and 'English for Academic and Professional Purposes.' By integrating international standards, specifically the Common European Framework of

Reference (CEFR) levels B2 and C1, the IRI ensures that it not only meets local educational goals but also prepares students for global academic challenges.

Senior high school students stand at a critical juncture where they may choose to enter the workforce, pursue technical training, or enroll in higher education. Each of these paths demands robust reading skills, which the K-12 program is designed to develop. The development of an IRI for Grades 11 and 12 is a significant contribution to the government's initiative, through DepEd, to cultivate competent and productive citizens. Reading proficiency and, more broadly, language proficiency in English, are essential steps toward achieving this goal.

The study also delineates a comprehensive plan for evaluating the IRI's usefulness, focusing on reliability, validity, authenticity, interactiveness, and practicality. The proposed test development process incorporates rigorous pilot testing, collaboration with higher education instructors, and continuous alignment with educational policies and curricular goals. Institutional support, particularly the allocation of time and expertise of English teachers and reading practitioners, is crucial. Collaborative efforts across multiple senior high schools are recommended to enhance the robustness and applicability of the test items through extensive try-outs.

In conclusion, the development of a specialized IRI for Senior High School students addresses a critical gap in current educational resources, providing a reliable and valid tool for diagnosing reading levels. This tool will facilitate targeted interventions, thereby supporting the overall goal of producing proficient, independent readers. The findings of this study highlight the necessity for educational stakeholders to prioritize the creation and implementation of such assessment tools to enhance literacy outcomes and ensure academic success for all students.

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