

Community Engagement as Support for Literacy Development in Dinagat Island Schools

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Abstract

This study examined how community engagement supports literacy development and the formation of reading culture among learners in geographically isolated island schools in the Division of Dinagat Islands. Anchored on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory, Epstein's School-Family-Community Partnership Theory, and reading engagement perspectives, the study employed an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design. The qualitative phase explored the views and experiences of teachers, learners, parents, and community stakeholders through focus group discussions, interviews, observation, and document analysis. The qualitative findings informed a quantitative survey administered to 119 teachers and 83 Grade 4 to Grade 6 pupils. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression. Results showed that community engagement in literacy support activities was consistently high, with a grand mean of 4.7370. Reading culture was also highly developed as perceived by teachers ($M = 4.7256$) and pupils ($M = 4.6313$). Correlation analysis showed that family-based literacy support ($r = .186$, $p = .008$) and community-based literacy activities ($r = .262$, $p < .001$) were significantly associated with reading culture, whereas school-community collaboration and resource mobilization were not significantly correlated. Regression analysis indicated that community engagement significantly predicted reading culture, $F(4, 199) = 11.396$, $p < .001$, explaining 18.6% of the variance. Community-based literacy activities emerged as the strongest positive predictor ($\beta = .475$), followed by family-based literacy support ($\beta = .277$). The study concludes that reading culture in island schools is shaped most strongly by relational, participatory, and socially embedded literacy practices rather than by material resources alone.

Keywords: Community Engagement, Reading Culture, Literacy Development, Island Schools, Geographically Isolated Schools, Mixed-Methods Research

1. Introduction

Reading culture is a core condition for literacy development because it reflects not only the ability to decode and comprehend texts but also the sustained habit, motivation, and social value attached to reading. International education reports continue to show that many learners struggle to acquire foundational reading skills, particularly in disadvantaged and remote communities where access to books, trained support, and literacy-rich environments is limited (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2023; World Bank et al., 2022). In island and geographically isolated schools, the development of reading culture becomes more complex because learners' exposure to print materials, adult reading models, and community literacy opportunities may be constrained by distance, livelihood demands, and resource limitations.

In the Philippine basic education context, reading development remains a national priority. Programs such as Bawat Bata Bumabasa and early literacy initiatives emphasize that reading cannot be treated only as a classroom responsibility; it requires sustained support from families, communities, school leaders, and local partners

(Department of Education, 2019). This is especially relevant to the Division of Dinagat Islands, where many schools operate in island communities and depend on school-community partnerships, parent volunteers, barangay support, and locally initiated reading activities to sustain literacy programs. In such contexts, community engagement becomes a practical mechanism for expanding reading exposure beyond the limits of formal instruction.

The rationale for this study lies in the recognition that literacy development in geographically isolated island schools is socially constructed and context-dependent. While schools provide formal reading instruction, learners develop reading habits through repeated interactions with teachers, peers, family members, and community literacy role models. Community-based practices such as reading camps, storytelling sessions, book-sharing drives, parent-assisted reading, and barangay-supported literacy initiatives can strengthen reading motivation and normalize reading as a shared cultural activity. Therefore, examining community engagement provides a more complete understanding of how reading culture develops in island school contexts.

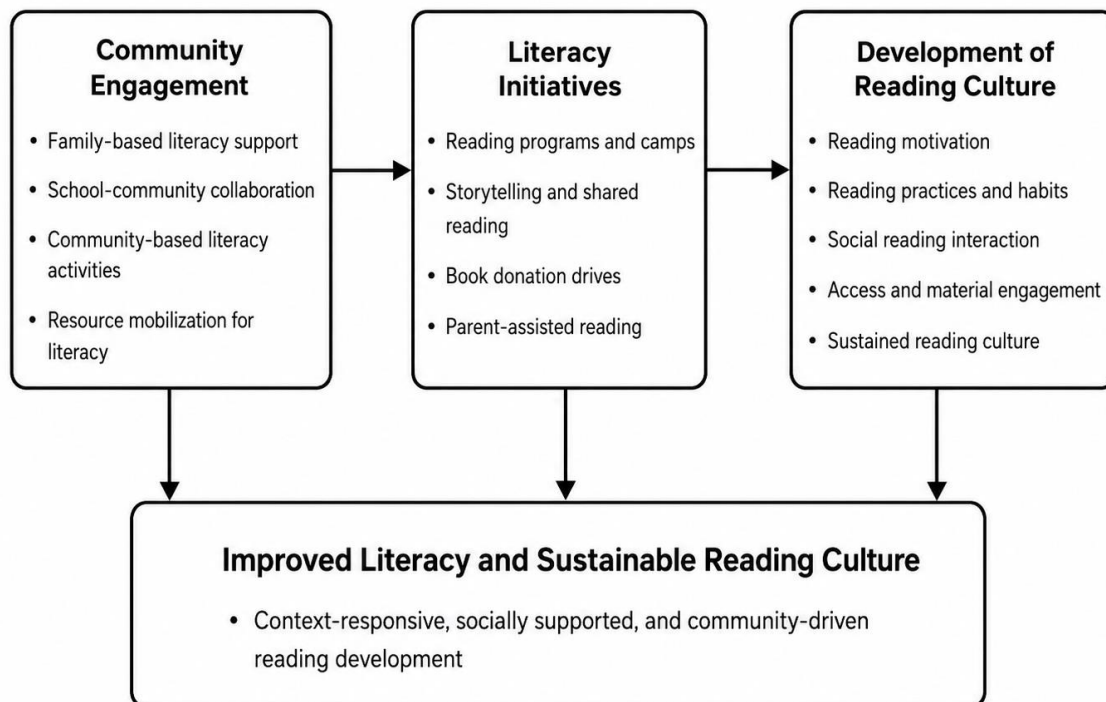
The research gap addressed by this study concerns the limited empirical evidence on how specific dimensions of community engagement influence reading culture in geographically isolated island schools. Existing literacy studies often focus on learner performance, school-based interventions, or reading assessments, while fewer studies explain how family-based literacy support, school-community collaboration, community-based literacy activities, and resource mobilization operate together to shape reading habits and attitudes. This study responds to that gap by using an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design to generate qualitative insights and validate them quantitatively among teachers and learners in Dinagat Island schools.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored primarily on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which explains that child development is shaped by interconnected environments, particularly the family, school, and community (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In the present study, reading culture is interpreted as an ecological outcome produced by the interaction of home literacy support, school literacy routines, and community participation. Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory further supports the study by emphasizing that learning occurs through social interaction, scaffolding, and shared meaning-making (Vygotsky, 1978). Reading is therefore understood as a socially mediated practice rather than an isolated learner behavior. Epstein's theory of school-family-community partnerships also frames the study by explaining how coordinated stakeholder participation strengthens educational outcomes (Epstein, 2018). Together, these theories justify the assumption that community engagement can support literacy development by creating shared spaces, resources, routines, and social models for reading.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework treats community engagement as the independent construct, represented by family-based literacy support, school-community collaboration, community-based literacy activities, and resource mobilization for literacy. These engagement dimensions operate through literacy initiatives such as reading programs, reading camps, storytelling activities, book donation drives, and parent-assisted reading. The dependent construct is the development of reading culture, reflected in reading motivation, reading practices and habits, social literacy interaction, access to reading materials, and sustainability of reading practices. The expected outcome is improved literacy and a sustainable reading culture in geographically isolated island schools.



Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory, and Epstein's School-Family-Community Partnership Theory frame the literacy support process.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework showing community engagement as support for literacy development in Dinagat Island schools.

Figure 1 illustrates how community engagement supports the development of reading culture in island schools. Family involvement, school-community collaboration, community-based literacy activities, and literacy resource mobilization provide learners with opportunities to experience reading as a shared and meaningful practice. These engagement mechanisms are translated into literacy initiatives, including reading programs, storytelling, book-sharing, and parent-assisted reading. The framework assumes that when these initiatives are sustained and socially supported, learners are more likely to develop positive reading motivation, regular reading habits, peer-supported literacy interactions, and long-term reading culture.

Aim of the Study

This study aimed to examine how community engagement supports literacy development and predicts the development of reading culture among learners in geographically isolated island schools in the Division of Dinagat Islands.

Statement of the Problem

1. How do teachers, learners, parents, and community stakeholders conceptualize reading culture in geographically isolated island school contexts?
2. What forms and patterns of community engagement are enacted to support literacy development in island schools?

3. What contextual mechanisms and constraints shape the effectiveness of community engagement in fostering a reading culture in island schools?
4. What are the levels of community engagement in literacy support activities and reading culture among learners in island schools?
5. To what extent does community engagement significantly predict the development of a reading culture among learners in island schools?

Hypotheses

H01: Community engagement in literacy support activities has no significant relationship with the level of reading culture among learners in geographically isolated schools in Dinagat.

H02: Community engagement in literacy support activities has no significant predictive influence on the level of reading culture among learners in geographically isolated schools in Dinagat.

2. Literature Review

Literacy development is increasingly understood as a social and ecological process. Learners develop reading habits not only through formal instruction but also through the literacy opportunities made available in their homes, schools, peer groups, and communities. Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective supports this view by explaining that children's development is shaped by interacting systems, while sociocultural theory emphasizes that reading competence is strengthened through guided participation, social interaction, and scaffolding (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Vygotsky, 1978). In island schools, these perspectives are particularly relevant because literacy development depends on how families, teachers, local leaders, and community members compensate for limited material resources and geographic constraints.

Family engagement is one of the most consistent forms of literacy support. When parents encourage reading, assist children with reading practice, communicate with teachers, and allocate time for reading at home, learners are exposed to reading as a valued routine. This aligns with school-family-community partnership theory, which emphasizes that learner outcomes improve when families and schools share responsibility for learning (Epstein, 2018). In the present study, family-based literacy support is therefore treated not merely as parental involvement but as a direct mechanism through which reading motivation and reading habits may be sustained in remote island contexts.

Community engagement extends literacy support beyond the household. Barangay-based reading activities, reading camps, storytelling sessions, volunteer-led reading, and locally organized book-sharing initiatives can create social spaces where reading is modeled and reinforced. Research on school attendance and educational participation suggests that community and family systems often buffer the disadvantages associated with poverty, distance, and limited institutional resources (Gubbels et al., 2019). Applied to literacy, this means that community-based activities may help transform reading from a school task into a social practice. This is central to the present study because Dinagat island schools often rely on collective community support to sustain programs.

Access to reading materials remains important, but literature suggests that resources alone are insufficient. International reports on learning poverty and reading outcomes show that learners require both access to materials and meaningful opportunities to use them in guided, engaging, and socially relevant ways (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2023; World Bank et al., 2022). In this study, resource mobilization is therefore examined alongside relational and participatory dimensions of engagement. This distinction is important because the mere provision of books or materials may not automatically produce a strong reading culture unless materials are integrated into sustained literacy practices.

Mixed-methods research is appropriate for studying literacy development in geographically isolated contexts because it captures both lived experiences and measurable patterns. Exploratory sequential designs are especially

useful when the variables and mechanisms of a phenomenon must first be understood qualitatively before they are measured quantitatively (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). In the present study, qualitative findings on reading culture and community engagement informed the development of the quantitative instrument, allowing the survey to reflect local realities rather than externally imposed categories.

The reviewed literature suggests that reading culture is shaped by the combined influence of learner motivation, family support, social interaction, resource access, and community-based literacy participation. However, there remains limited localized evidence explaining which dimensions of community engagement significantly relate to and predict reading culture in island schools. This study addresses the gap by integrating qualitative themes with quantitative correlation and regression analyses to determine how family, school, and community literacy practices contribute to reading culture in the Division of Dinagat Islands.

3. Methodology

The study employed an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design. The qualitative phase was conducted first to explore how teachers, learners, parents, and community stakeholders conceptualized reading culture and enacted community engagement in geographically isolated island schools. Data from focus group discussions, interviews, observations, and document analysis were analyzed thematically. The emergent qualitative themes then informed the construction of a quantitative survey instrument that measured the extent of community engagement and reading culture across a broader sample.

The study was conducted in selected elementary schools in the Dinagat Islands. The quantitative respondents consisted of 119 teachers and 83 pupils from Grades 4 to 6, selected through population sampling. The qualitative phase involved purposively selected teachers, learners, parents, and community participants who had direct involvement in school or community literacy activities. The inclusion of multiple stakeholder groups enabled the study to capture the ecological nature of reading culture and the different layers of literacy support surrounding learners.

The quantitative instrument consisted of teacher and pupil questionnaires. The teacher questionnaire contained items measuring family-based literacy support, school-community collaboration, community-based literacy activities, resource mobilization for literacy, and teacher-perceived reading culture. The pupil questionnaire measured learners' reading attributes and motivation, reading practices and habits, social nature of reading, access to and use of reading materials, and sustainability of reading culture. Responses were rated using a five-point Likert scale. Reliability testing produced high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha of .837 for the teacher instrument and .982 for the pupil instrument.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation, and multiple linear regression. Means and standard deviations were computed to determine the level of community engagement and reading culture. Pearson correlation was used to examine significant relationships between community engagement dimensions and reading culture, while multiple regression identified the predictors of reading culture. All quantitative analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 30. Ethical safeguards included informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymized reporting, and the use of data solely for academic and research purposes.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1. Qualitative themes on reading culture and community engagement

Qualitative focus	Emergent theme	Interpretation
Conceptualization of reading culture	Reading culture as habit formation and everyday practice	Participants described reading culture as learners' regular and self-directed engagement with reading inside and outside school.
Forms of community engagement	Family support, school-community collaboration, community literacy activities, and resource mobilization	Community engagement was enacted through parent-assisted reading, reading camps, storytelling, book drives, and local partnerships.
Contextual mechanisms	Social modeling, shared literacy practices, and motivation	Reading was strengthened when adults, peers, teachers, and community members modeled and supported literacy practices.
Contextual constraints	Geographic isolation, limited resources, parental time constraints, and unequal access to materials	Isolation and resource scarcity affected literacy opportunities, making community participation necessary for sustaining reading activities.

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Table 1 shows that reading culture in island schools is not viewed only as a learner attribute but as a socially supported practice. The themes indicate that community engagement operates through family reinforcement, local reading activities, resource sharing, and social modeling. These findings support the theoretical assumption that literacy development is shaped by interacting home, school, and community environments.

Table 2. Population and sample distribution of respondents

Group	Population	Sample	Sampling technique
Teachers	119	119	Population sampling
Grade 4 to Grade 6 pupils	83	83	Population sampling
Qualitative participants	Selected stakeholders	10 community participants / stakeholder informants	Purposive sampling until data saturation

Table 2 presents the respondent distribution. The quantitative phase included the full available population of 119 teachers and 83 pupils, while the qualitative phase used purposive sampling to obtain deeper context from participants directly involved in literacy-related practices. This design allowed the study to combine breadth of measurement with contextual depth.

Table 3. Level of community engagement in literacy support activities

Dimension	Teachers mean	Students mean	Combined mean	SD	Interpretation
Family-based literacy support	4.7471	4.8169	4.7755	.24148	Always
School-community collaboration	4.8364	4.6867	4.7755	.18082	Always
Community-based literacy activities	4.7868	4.3422	4.6059	.30101	Always
Resource mobilization for literacy	4.8132	4.7590	4.7912	.20274	Always
Grand mean	4.7959	4.6512	4.7370	.16132	Always

Table 3 indicates that community engagement in literacy support activities was consistently rated as Always, with a grand mean of 4.7370. Resource mobilization obtained the highest combined mean ($M = 4.7912$), while community-based literacy activities obtained the lowest but still high combined mean ($M = 4.6059$). The results

suggest that literacy support in island schools is sustained through a strong multi-stakeholder system involving families, schools, and communities.

Table 4. Reading culture among learners as perceived by teachers

Dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Observable reading attributes and motivation	4.8496	.13972	Always
Voluntary reading practices and habits	4.7091	.30551	Always
Peer-to-peer social literacy	4.9438	.11895	Always
Quality of access and material engagement	4.7256	.23542	Always
Grand mean	4.7256	.23542	Always

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Table 4 shows that teachers perceived learners' reading culture as consistently strong. Peer-to-peer social literacy obtained the highest mean ($M = 4.9438$), indicating that reading in island schools is highly collaborative and socially reinforced. Voluntary reading practices and habits received the lowest mean ($M = 4.7091$), though still interpreted as Always, suggesting that independent reading may be strengthened further.

Table 5. Reading culture among learners according to students

Dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Reading attributes and motivation	4.6627	.10787	Always
Reading practices and habits	4.4024	.24692	Always
Social nature of reading	4.6795	.28446	Always
Access to and use of reading materials	4.7566	.23174	Always
Sustainability of reading culture	4.6554	.31127	Always
Grand mean	4.6313	.14039	Always

Table 5 confirms that pupils also perceived reading culture as strong, with a grand mean of 4.6313. Access to and use of reading materials obtained the highest mean ($M = 4.7566$), while reading practices and habits obtained the lowest mean ($M = 4.4024$). This pattern suggests that learners value and access reading materials, but self-initiated reading habits may still require reinforcement through sustained family and community support.

Table 6. Significant relationship between community engagement and reading culture

Community engagement dimension	Pearson r	p-value	Interpretation	Decision
Family-based literacy support	.186	.008	Highly significant	Reject H01
School-community collaboration	.008	.910	Not significant	Fail to reject H01
Community-based literacy activities	.262	< .001	Highly significant	Reject H01
Resource mobilization for literacy	.037	.600	Not significant	Fail to reject H01

Table 6 shows that family-based literacy support and community-based literacy activities were significantly related to reading culture. However, school-community collaboration and resource mobilization were not significantly correlated with reading culture. These findings imply that direct literacy engagement at home and in the community has stronger links to reading culture than formal collaboration or material provision alone.

Table 7. Regression analysis predicting reading culture from community engagement dimensions

Model / Predictor	B	SE	Beta	t / F	p-value	Interpretation
Overall model	R = .432; R ² = .186; Adjusted R ² = .170	—	—	F(4,199)=11.396	< .001	Significant
Constant	5.002	.474	—	10.556	< .001	Significant
Family-based literacy support	.238	.062	.277	3.850	< .001	Significant positive predictor
School-community collaboration	-.277	.087	-.242	-3.165	.002	Significant negative predictor
Community-based literacy activities	.327	.057	.475	5.717	< .001	Strongest positive predictor
Resource mobilization for literacy	-.340	.080	-.333	-4.248	< .001	Significant negative predictor

Table 7 indicates that the regression model significantly predicted reading culture, explaining 18.6% of the variance. Community-based literacy activities were the strongest positive predictor ($\beta = .475$), followed by family-based literacy support ($\beta = .277$). The negative coefficients for school-community collaboration and resource mobilization suggest that formal collaboration and material provision may not automatically enhance reading culture when considered alongside direct family and community literacy activities. The result emphasizes that reading culture is most strongly shaped by direct, participatory, and socially embedded reading experiences

The integrated findings show that community engagement is most effective when it is translated into concrete literacy practices that learners experience directly. Qualitative findings emphasized shared reading, storytelling, parent-assisted reading, and community-based activities, while quantitative findings confirmed that family-based literacy support and community-based literacy activities were the most meaningful contributors to reading culture. The results therefore support the view that in island schools, literacy development is sustained through relational and participatory practices rather than through resources alone.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that community engagement plays a significant role in supporting literacy development and sustaining reading culture in geographically isolated island schools in the Division of Dinagat Islands. Qualitative findings revealed that reading culture is conceptualized as habit formation, social participation, access to reading opportunities, and sustained community-supported practice. Quantitative findings confirmed that both community engagement and reading culture were consistently high. However, not all engagement dimensions contributed equally. Family-based literacy support and community-based literacy activities were significantly associated with reading culture, while regression results showed that community-based literacy activities were the strongest positive predictor. These findings suggest that reading culture in island schools is shaped less by material inputs alone and more by direct, social, and context-responsive literacy practices involving families, peers, teachers, and community members.

It is recommended that schools institutionalize community-based literacy activities such as reading camps, storytelling sessions, barangay reading corners, parent-assisted reading, peer reading circles, and culturally contextualized book-sharing programs. Parents and guardians should be supported through simple literacy orientation sessions that enable them to assist children even with limited resources. School heads and teachers should strengthen home-school communication and coordinate with barangay leaders, local government units, youth groups, and civic organizations to sustain reading programs. Resource mobilization should be linked to guided reading activities so that donated books and materials are actively used rather than merely distributed. Future researchers may extend the study by testing intervention models, including more schools, comparing island

and mainland contexts, and examining mediating variables such as reading motivation, parental literacy, school leadership, and community ownership.

Declarations

Funding.

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CRedit Authorship Contribution Statement.

Diana Rose B. Pagente: conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data collection, formal analysis, writing - original draft, and project administration.

Ethical Statement.

The study obtained the necessary permissions from school authorities and participating communities. Informed consent was secured from participants and, where applicable, from parents or guardians of pupil participants. Participation was voluntary, and data were treated confidentially and reported in aggregate form.

Declaration of Competing Interest.

The author declares no competing financial, personal, institutional, or professional interests that may have influenced the conduct or findings of the study.

Data Availability Statement.

Data supporting the findings of this study are available from the author upon reasonable request, subject to school approval, participant confidentiality, and applicable data privacy requirements.

AI Usage Disclosure.

AI-assisted tools were used for language refinement, organization, and formatting support. The author reviewed, verified, and approved the final manuscript and remains responsible for the accuracy and integrity of the content.

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