LITERACY EDUCATION IN THE PHILIPPINES: A SURVEY ON WHAT'S HOT AND WHAT'S NOT

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ABSTRACT

The International Literacy Association (ILA) annually conducts survey to identify key issues in literacy education that are "hot" and "not hot." This survey helps literacy scholars and reading specialists in conducting research studies that are deemed timely in the discipline. Although ILA has been doing this constantly, one limitation of this survey is that the results are limited by geographical constraints and are Western in all aspect. In this milieu, this paper provides an exploration on identifying the issues in literacy that are "hot" and "not hot" in the Philippines. The respondents of this study were made up of teachers, educational administrators, and graduate students of reading education (PhD). Their perspectives were woven together to unravel literacy issues that are receiving positive and negative stances in the Philippines. Finally, this paper aims to become an impetus for local scholars to establish touchstones on suitable and vital topics in literacy education which they can utilize in creating appropriate and apt research for the betterment of Philippine education.

Keywords: *literacy, reading, pedagogy, education*

INTRODUCTION

Literacy can be regarded as empowering because it greatly affects how an individual may function in a society. Traditionally, literacy was viewed as the ability of an individual to read and write. In the present time, it pertains to the possessed knowledge and the competence of a person to particular discipline or area. The ability to read, write, speak, listen, conceptualize, and innovate paves way to a multitude of opportunities to a person. For a very a long time educators had been interested on problems, issues and trends in literacy education because they believe that "literacy encompasses the knowledge and skills students need to access, understand, analyze and evaluate information, make meaning, express thoughts and emotions, present ideas and opinions, interact with others and participate in activities at school and in their lives beyond school…" (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, n.d., in Ewing, 2016, para. 3).

Every year, the International Literacy Association (ILA) gives a report on pressing issues concerning the teaching of literacy through surveys from various experts in the field. The intention of such surveys is "to reveal wide gaps between what educators across the globe consider important topics in literacy education and those garnering the most attention" (Hall, 2017, para. 1). As a fulfillment to ILA's goal, issues in literacy education are categorized as "hot" (those that receive so much attention) and "not hot" (those that are not popular and don't need much attention). It has been a tradition of ILA to provide "hot and "not hot" issues so that it will provide teachers, professors, researchers, administrators, and policy-makers on problems that need immediate discussions and solutions.

The curiosity of educators in the field of literacy education began in the 1990s when they felt the big gaps concerning it vis-à-vis its evolution (Cassidy & Ortlieb, 2011). However, due to insufficient studies and data needed for the propagation of literacy education, many key issues and problems were left unresolved. Thus, literacy experts came up with an idea of making a list of timely and relevant topics or issues concerning the field to help their fellow advocates contextualize their academic endeavors. As stated by Cassidy & Ortlieb (2011), "this body of work would allow us, as literacy professionals, to learn from the past and in turn, refine our practices to suit the ever-changing needs of the educational community" (p. 94).

The survey on "hot" and "not hot" topics in literacy education formally began in 1996 when experts in the field realized that there are various topics and issues in the field that needed to be classified as

"what's hot" and "what's not." As clearly defined by these literacy experts, topics that are considered "hot" would mean that topics were getting more positive attention. Whereas, those that are considered "not hot" because they were getting more negative attention. These topics don't epitomize at all their significance and influence in literacy education.

The topics are determined through a survey, by asking pool of literacy experts from various places in North America (USA and Canada in particular). The opinions of these people cannot be taken for granted because they were educational leaders and were influential in the field of literacy for a very long time. The most fascinating thing about the result of the survey was that each respondent had a spectrum of perspectives as to what they believe are the issues that need to gain positives stances and what not. Cassidy & Weinrich (2007), in Cassidy & Ortlieb (2011) noted "for the first list, What's Hot, What's Not for 1997, we assembled 22 leaders, and 25 in each subsequent year" (p. 94).

To ensure an unbiased result of the survey, it was made sure that respondents will not just simply rate the topics as to what is hot and what is not. Rather, they were told to rate the topics in accordance to their own stances as to what topics should be getting a more positive attention and what should be getting a more negative attention. Such perspectives of the respondents can be derived from their own experiences, observations and exposures derived from their own academic terrains. In 2000, an alteration in the survey took place as two additional questions were asked to the respondents and that required them to decipher if the topics "should be hot" and "should not be hot" (Dewitz, 1999).

The success of "What' Hot and What's Not" survey is undeniably evident because the lists of issues and topics in literacy education created a big impact in the discipline (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2004). Not only that, it has become a symbolic facet of Reading Today, the official newspaper of the International Reading Association (ILA). The success of the "What's Hot and What's Not" survey leveled up in the succeeding years since it first came out because of the various recognitions it went through. "It has been translated into Spanish, modified for use in other countries, summarized in newspapers, and utilized in collegiate courses and professional development experiences for classroom teachers" (Cassidy & Ortlieb, 2011, p. 95). The survey has paved way to several contradictions as well. Dewitz (1999) questioned the credibility of the survey due to these reasons: (1) the topics on the list, (2) the determination of the participants, and (3) the result of the survey. Likewise, a review conducted by Anderson (2000) led Cassidy & Cassidy (2004) to admit that there are interconnected factors that could have affected the outcome of the survey. These factors are: (1) the reception of the popular media, (2) the

local and national policy decisions, (3) the teaching and learning materials for various kinds of students, and (4) the cultural orientations of a certain geographical area.

In the Philippines, The Department of Education [DepEd] (2000) reports that literacy rate among Filipinos is 96.6 percent. Furthermore, the United Nations Development Report (2009) claims that the Philippines has a high literacy rate of 93.4 percent (as cited in Imam, 2016), and as of 2015, the literacy rate of the youngsters is 98.2 percent (as cited in Balinas, Rodriguez, Santillan & Villena, 2017). These figures can be considered questionable since several studies confirm the alarming deterioration of the reading abilities of Filipino students for the past years (Bacal, 2005; Imam, 2016; Luz, 2007; Orencia, 2006; Selangan, 2015).

Contrary, Cristobal (2015) reports that 1.2 million of Filipinos in the age bracket of five to fifteen years old are out of school youths and have limited literacy skills. Also, Balinas, Rodriguez, Santillan & Villena (2017) reveal the continuous poor reading performances of kindergarten students in the far-flung areas of Mindanao. If these figures continue to increase in the coming years, Luz's (2007) claim that this country is "a nation of non-readers" might be one of the serious problems that the Philippines will confront.

It cannot be denied that the country has been facing numerous problems particularly on the propagation and enrichment of its literacy education. Such problems cannot be ignored since Joelippo (2012) noted that "without literacy, all other learning is impossible" (para. 1). On the other hand, Keh (n.d.) rules out the biggest reason why many Filipinos are tormented on literacy struggles in their lives and that is, poverty. "Many students are unable to finish education because they do not have enough resources that will enable them to go to school and receive a decent education" (Keh, n.d., para. 4). Furthermore, Grimwald (n.d.) emphasize that there is a deterioration of literacy in the Philippines and that, the three main culprits for this are: (1) corruption, (2) unqualified teachers and personnel, and (3) the anti-intellectual media.

Even though several studies identified certain causes of the problems attributed to literacy education in the Philippines, it is clear that these identified problems are limited and may not fully clarify literacy issues that need urgent or important attention as contrast to the America's survey of what's hot and what's not. Furthermore, the annual report of literacy issues that are labeled as "hot" and "not hot" by ILA may only be true on the Western context and thereby limited by cultural orientations and geographical factors (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2004). In this milieu, the researchers seek to provide a "Philippinized" version of "what's hot" and "what's not" survey in literacy education specifically for the year 2019.

Specifically, this paper has the following objectives:

1. Identify the issues in literacy education in the Philippines as to "what's hot" and "what's not.

2. Discuss the rationales why those issues are "hot."

Methodology

Design

The vantage point of this paper is to conduct a survey that will determine "what's hot" and "what's not" in the field of literacy education in the Philippines. Since this study captures the literacy issues in the Philippines via survey, it typifies an exploratory endeavor of how educators, leaders, and even graduate students in reading education of the country perceive which literacy issues should get positive stances and which of these should get negative stances. It is expected that after the identification of "Philippinized" literacy topics that are "hot" and "not hot," this will generate more studies in these areas thereby, adding pool of knowledge in the improvement and betterment of literacy education in the Philippines.

Respondents

The respondents were made up of teachers, educational administrators, and graduate students of reading education (PhD), whom the researcher believe have first-hand experiences and awareness on updated issues and topics in literacy education. The respondents were conveniently selected and were limited to 60. In order to make the selection of the respondents easier they should have been teaching reading for 5 years and above because the researcher believe that their years of teaching are sufficient enough for them to have the knowledge on the pressing issues of literacy education in the Philippines. When the survey was handed down to the respondents, they were told to provide quick responses on how they perceive the given topics concerning literacy education in the Philippines. The researchers clarified to them what Cassidy & Cassidy (2004) noted that "rating a topic hot meant that it was currently receiving more and positive attention while a rating of not hot meant that the topic was receiving less or negative attention" (p.13).

Instruments

The researchers had utilized the survey form of the International Literacy Association (ILA) to capture the perceptions of the respondents on the literacy topics that are hot, not hot, should be hot, and should not be hot. Since it has been assumed that these topics may be limited on certain cultural and geographical terrains, the researchers modified the survey form by adding "others" as part of the literacy topics. This particular option gave the respondents a chance to include topics which they believe should be part of the list but weren't included. There were four columns attributing to the responses of the respondents toward the topics: (1) what's hot, (2) what's not, (3) should be hot, and (4) should not be hot. To expound the exploration of these key issues in literacy, the researchers categorized them into five (Cassidy, Brozo, & Cassidy, 2000; Cassidy, 2002). These categories were: (1) philosophy/approach, (2) level, (3) content, (4) materials, and (5) assessment. The respondents in this study include

Results and Discussion

This section presents the topics or issues in literacy education that are regarded by the teachers and education leaders as "hot" and "not hot." Expounded rationales are given to better understand the positive attitudes of the respondents on these topics or issues.

Table 1. What's Hot and What's Not Survey

	What's hot	What's not	Should be hot	Should not be hot
Adolescent literacy	√√√			
Adult Literacy	√√			
Comprehension	√√√			
Core learning/literacy standards	√√			
Critical reading and writing	√√			
Curriculum-based assessment			√	
Disciplinary/Content-area literacy			√	
Differentiated instruction	√√√			
Early intervention	√			
English as a second language/English language learners	√√			
Fluency				√√√
High Stakes Assessment	√√√			
Informational/nonfiction texts			√	
Literacy coaches/reading coaches			√√√	
Motivation/engagement			√√	
New literacies/digital literacies	√			
Phonemic awareness		√ √		
Phonics		√√√		
Political/policy influences on literacy		√√√		
Preschool literacy instruction/experiences			√	
Professional development (inservice)			√	
Response to intervention				√
Scientific evidence-based reading research & instruction				√
Struggling/striving readers (grade 4 & above)	√√			
Teacher education for reading (preservice)	√			
Vocabulary/word meaning			√√	
Writing			√√	
Others (please specify): Localization of Texts	√√√			

The table above presents the issues indicated in the survey. The participants were asked to choose which of the topics they think are hot, not hot, should be hot, and should not be hot in the Philippines. Items that have √ Indicates that more than 50 percent of the respondents were in agreement that the indicated topics are hot or not hot. On the other hand, items with √√ Indicates that at least 75 percent of the respondents were in agreement that the indicated topics are hot or not hot which can also be interpreted as very hot or very cold. Finally, items with √√√ Indicates that 90 percent the respondents were in agreement that the indicated topics are hot or not hot which can also be interpreted as extremely hot or extremely cold.

Table 2. Percentage of agreement on What's Hot and What's Not

	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
>50% in agreement (hot or not hot)	35.7	35.7	35.7
>75% in agreement (hot or not hot)	32.1	32.1	67.9
>90% in agreement (hot or not hot)	32.1	32.1	100.0
Total	100%	100%	

To further justify the information indicated in table 1, table 2 presents that out of 60 participants, 35.7% are 50% in agreement that the topics chosen are hot or not hot. Furthermore, 32.1% are 75% in agreement that the topics chosen are hot or not hot. Finally, 32.1% of the participants are 90% in agreements that the topics chosen are hot or not hot.

Table 3. Comparison of What's Hot and What's Not

Category	What's Hot	What's Not	What Should be Hot	What Should not be Hot
Philosophy/Approach	Differentiated Instruction	Political/policy influences in literacy	Literacy Coaches/reading coaches	
Level	Adolescent Literacy			
Content	Comprehension	Phonics		Fluency
Materials	Localized Texts			
Assessment	High-stakes Assessment			

The table above shows the topics which were deemed as hot, not hot, should be hot, and should not be hot by the participants. Under the category philosophy or approach, the respondents believe that differentiated instruction is a hot topic in the Philippines and that political or policy influence in literacy is not a hot topic. Also, they perceive that literacy or reading coaches should be a hot topic. In the category level, the participants think that adolescent literacy is a hot topic. Surprisingly, no topics were perceived as not hot, should be hot and should not be hot. Under the category content, the respondents perceive that comprehension is a hot topic and that phonics is not a hot topic. Furthermore, they see fluency as a topic that should not be hot. On the other hand, under the category materials, the respondents believe that localized text is a hot topic. Fascinatingly, no topics were seen as not hot, should be hot and should not be hot. Finally, in the category assessment, the participants consider high stakes assessment as a hot topic. Similar to level and materials, no topics were taken as not hot, should be hot and should not be hot.

Table 4. Percentage Table for Responses

	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
What's Hot	46.4	46.4	46.4
What's Not	10.7	10.7	57.2
What Should be Hot	32.1	32.1	89.3
What Should Not be Hot	10.7	10.7	100.0
Total	100%	100%	

Table 4 shows the percentage of respondents who gave their views of the given topics in literacy education. Out of 60 participants, 46.4% regards of the topics as hot. 10.7% believes that there are topics that are not hot. On the other hand, 32.1% perceives that there are topics that should be hot. Finally, 10.7% thinks that there are topics that should not be hot.

Discussion

The result of the survey reveals that majority of the respondents have a positive stance towards differentiated instruction thus considering it a "hot" topic in literacy education in the Philippines. Such positive attitude of the respondents to this topic can be attributed on the fact that the -Department of Education is putting much emphasis on its implementation in the local classrooms in order to boost the active involvement of students. Furthermore, it can be noted that educators might feel it deem necessary to focus on differentiated instruction since it can be difficult in most cases to put it into practice in the class. That is because students possess individualities and this makes it difficult for teachers to device differentiated instructions and activities since they need to attend on the various needs of their learners all at the same time (Villamero, 2014). Furthermore, Aranda and Zamora (n.d.) pointed out that the tremendous number of students in a class and a limited number of teacher trainings or development made differentiated instruction very challenging among teachers. Their findings may justify why teachers find differentiated instruction a "hot" topic.

Teaching reading in the adolescent and adult years has been considered as a perennial problem in the Philippines. Hence, it is not a surprise that majority of the respondents agreed that adolescent literacy is a "hot" topic. It can be assumed that Filipinos place a high regard on adolescent literacy because "adolescents prepare to become productive citizens, they must be able to comprehend and construct information using print and nonprint materials in fixed and virtual platforms across disciplines" (Reading Association of the Philippines, 201l, para. 1). Furthermore, the association believes that adolescents are deserved to receive the following from their teachers: (1) promotion of literacy across all content-area disciplines, (2) creation of reading programs that will further enhance their literacy skills, (3) exposure and access to multimodal and multiple texts, (4) incorporation of differentiated instruction tailored to the individual needs of the learners, (5) opportunities to practice their oral skills vis-à-vis reading skills simultaneously, (6) possibilities of using literacy to succeed in the future profession, (7) unbiased assessment that will address all the strengths and challenges of the students, and (8) access a wide spectrum of reading materials from print to nonprint across different disciplines. From the aforementioned report of the association, it is indeed obvious that Filipinos pay attention to adolescent literacy because it prepares the youngsters on the actualities of the professional world.

Comprehension has been regarded as a perennial problem in the area of literacy (Villamero, 2014). In the Philippines, the teachers have always considered the poor performance of their students in reading comprehension as a problem that needs an immediate solution (Estacio, 2012). Most of those interviewed felt that too much attention and research had been focused on these topics and most authorities would agree that the single most important aspect to literacy is meaning construction. However in years past, "comprehension was primarily associated with upper elementary grades and as a result, not given as much attention as topics related to early reading instruction like phonemic awareness and phonics, which are both currently not hot topics" (Cassidy & Ortlieb, 2011, p. 99). Fluency, as an area in literacy in the Philippine education system has not been emphasized primarily because teachers have not seen that this skill is compensatory to reading comprehension (Protacio, 2013) and most educators agreed that too much attention had not been focused on that area. Although this is the first time that such survey has been explored in the Philippine setting, it can be assumed that there might be a shift in content focus in the field since the country has just recently

incorporated K-12 in the educational system. As noted by Cruz (2014), K-12 puts so much emphasis on literacy that the overall goal of the such paradigmatic shift is to produce Filipino students that are multiliterate. Perhaps struggling sixth graders will no longer be subjected to phonemic awareness exercises and maybe more attention will be paid to comprehension for kindergarteners and first graders in the near future.

The localization of the reading materials has not been part of the topics stipulated in the survey implemented by ILA. However, the topic has been perceived by majority of the respondents as "hot" and was then written many times in the "others" option of the survey. As Hall and Ould (1996) defined, localization refers "involves a comprehensive study of the target culture in order to correctly adapt the product to local needs" (para. 4). In the Philippine context, localizing the reading materials has been considered as one of the areas in literacy education that needs an immediate attention (Miguel, 1996; Protacio, 2013; Reading Horizons, 2011). Perhaps, the reason why the respondents consider this area as a "hot" topic is because of the lack of reading materials that "Philippinized" for the local students to easily comprehend and relate themselves to (Miguel, 1996). There has been a movement in the Philippine education to design learning materials that will incorporate localized texts (Cruz, 2014). However, the problem has still cling on its toll and has been an issue that seems to remain unresolved (Protacio, 2013).

High-stakes assessment has been perceived as "hot" and has become a cornerstone in almost every school nationwide with increasing emphasis over the last 20 years even in America (Cassidy & Ortlieb, 2011). Students of every grade level are expected to meet or exceed grade-level-appropriate benchmarks even in the Philippines (Reading Association of the Philippines, n.d.). The Department of Education has championed for national standards to measure knowledge, skills, and performance in hopes of increasing student learning (Cruz, 2015). Finding the balance between data collection/analysis and the utilization of those findings within instruction is a difficult but necessary task for all educators. As soon as policy makers determine how to establish that balance, an assessment topic will probably become "hot" in the succeeding years

Conclusion and Recommendation

Literacy trends have clearly fluctuated over time. Since the new millennium, however, significant change has resulted in the field redirecting attention to address many topics that were perhaps overlooked in the past. It is clear that not only three of the five pillars of reading education (fluency, phonemic awareness, and phonics) receive less attention in the Philippines and thus, only comprehension was

regarded as the forefront issue. Indeed, there are other aspects of literacy that are currently receiving a greater amount of attention like differentiated instruction, adolescent literacy, localized texts, and diagnostic tests.

Those in the field of literacy have long known the value of comprehension and believe it should be the primary focus of every literacy program. This study also stresses the vitality of including people (such as reading experts, teachers, and administrators) in determining issues in literacy that are important and need immediate attention. In addition, educators can utilize the findings in this survey to adjust their instruction and direct attention to needed areas within their own schools.

Although this study aims to provide answers on literacy issues that are hot and not hot, the study also possesses certain limitations. This study limits only on specific stakeholders and did not consider the inclusion of students and parents which can also be considered as people who can give their voices regarding literacy issues. Furthermore, since the respondents of the study came from Metro Manila, the responses given by them may be affected by certain cultural and geographical constraints, and thus, may not guarantee that such responses may really capture the issues in literacy education in the Philippines. In this light, the researchers recommend that further study to extend the survey should be conducted by adding more respondents that may well represent the entire Philippines. It is also recommended that the survey should be modified to further fit it in the Philippine context. Topics that were revealed as "hot" in this study can be explored by researchers in the field of literacy education to further clarify why they were perceived as such by the respondents.

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