

**The Social Stigma of Being a Non-Reader in English:
The Case of Struggling Grade 3 Learners in the Philippine Local School**

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In an English reading remediation program conducted by the Department of English of MSU-IIT to one school in Iligan City, 70 Grade 3 pupils were diagnosed to be seriously decoding disabled. They had very low self-esteem and motivation for learning. These were mostly children of parents of poor educational background. Even before the remediation began, most of them felt being differently treated, in and out of school, because of their inability to read in English. The constant pounding by their school teachers of the importance of English has observably resulted in either their resignation to their poor learning conditions, especially as their names long appeared in classroom lists labelled as non-readers, or in a strong desire to improve which is evident in the 48 pupils who successfully completed the 4-week remediation. They, however, will need more than just the ability to decode in order to academically succeed.

Despite the introduction of MTB MLE (Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education) in the Philippines, English still occupies a privileged status and its maintenance continues to create a divide between children who have access to an English rich environment and those who do not have. For the economically challenged children, this difference could mean not being able to read in English. This inability has not only left these young learners behind their peers in terms of learning comprehension and analytical skills, among other age-appropriate academic learning outcomes, but have also pushed them away from school as many lose their motivation to learn or as their socio-economic realities bring them to the streets for mendicancy. Obviously, English has not equally permeated all levels of the Philippine society. Until school administrators and teachers are able to bridge the gap, English language learning will not be a safe and fostering experience for these kinds of children.

Keywords: *reading remediation in English, English as Second Language, the social value of English*