

BEST PRACTICES IN TEACHING READING AMONG IDENTIFIED GRADE 1 TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Best practices in teaching reading among identified Grade 1 teachers include starting with foundational skills, using varied and engaging strategies tailored to pupils' levels, fostering a supportive environment, and demonstrating patience, compassion, and a deep love for teaching. The goal of this qualitative phenomenological research was to explore and describe the experiences, coping mechanisms, best practices, and hopes and aspirations of teachers. This study was conducted in Bunawan District elementary schools, Bunawan, Agusan del Sur. Data and information were gathered using in-depth interviews. The eight selected teachers were the informants of the study. Using thematic analysis of participant responses, several key themes emerged: start with the basic, ensure students' mastery, make learning simple, use multi-sensory and fine activities, use differentiated instruction and student-centered approach, make reading meaningful, fun, and suited to pupils' level, try alternative approaches, know pupils' reading abilities, conduct regular assessments and give constructive feedback, establish friendly environment, and develop patience, commitment, compassion, and love for teaching. These themes reflect a collective emphasis on foundational skills, emotional connection, instructional flexibility, and contextual responsiveness. Teachers highlighted the importance of tailoring strategies to individual learners, fostering safe and engaging environments, and maintaining a deep sense of care and commitment. The findings offer actionable insights for educators seeking to enhance reading outcomes through holistic, learner-centered, and emotionally grounded practices.

Keyword : *Elementary education, best practices in teaching reading, elementary teachers, qualitative, phenomenological approach, Philippines*

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching reading is a foundational endeavor that underpins academic success and lifelong learning, particularly in early education settings. It plays a critical role in shaping learners' cognitive development, language acquisition, and overall academic performance. By equipping students with strong reading skills, educators lay the groundwork for future learning across all subject areas and foster independent, confident learners. Recent studies underscore the importance of structured literacy approaches such as explicit phonics instruction, vocabulary development, and comprehension strategies, as essential components of effective reading pedagogy [1]. However, teachers often face significant challenges in teaching reading due to learners' limited phonemic awareness, lack of home literacy support, and large class sizes that hinder individualized instruction. In the study of Rivera-Costales (2024), it was revealed that these difficulties are compounded by insufficient instructional materials and the need for sustained teacher training, especially in public elementary schools.

That is why implementing best practices such as differentiated instruction, multisensory strategies, and guided reading, can empower teachers to address these challenges more effectively and foster foundational literacy among early readers [2]. They added that these practices significantly improve literacy outcomes, especially among struggling and underserved learners and it addresses decoding difficulties, comprehension gaps, and engagement barriers by providing structured, evidence-based support tailored to individual needs.

In Thailand on the other hand, teaching reading faces persistent challenges, including limited teacher training, insufficient institutional support, and students' low motivation and reading habits. Supporting this, the study found

that the implementation of extensive reading programs is hindered by teachers' heavy workloads, lack of professional development, and a rigid, exam-oriented curriculum that restricts student autonomy in reading choices [3]. Addressing these issues requires systemic collaboration and a shift toward learner-centered approaches that cultivate a genuine reading culture.

Meanwhile, in Aurora province, Philippines, teachers face persistent challenges in teaching reading due to learners' low reading proficiency, lack of mastery in foundational skills, and the absence of a strong reading culture. These issues were evident in the study which found that many students in Grades 1 to 7 were reading at the frustration level, with contributing factors including non-mastery of reading elements, the presence of at-risk learners, and limited stakeholder support [4].

In Agusan del Sur, teaching reading remains a pressing concern due to learners' limited comprehension skills, lack of parental support, and the scarcity of contextualized reading materials as observed that while phonological awareness and phonics were rated satisfactory among Grade 4 learners in Bayugan South District, comprehension levels remained moderate, with teachers citing the need for remedial reading and more targeted interventions [5]. These findings underscore the need to strengthen foundational literacy in rural communities through different teaching strategies and practices.

In Bunawan District Elementary Schools, persistent challenges in early grade reading such as limited access to instructional resources, overcrowded classrooms, and learners' diverse linguistic backgrounds, continue to hinder foundational literacy acquisition. Despite these difficulties, several teachers have demonstrated remarkable success, even receiving recognition for achieving zero non-readers during specific school years. Their accomplishments highlight the presence of effective, context-responsive teaching practices within the district. This study seeks to identify and document these best practices, offering adaptable strategies that can support fellow educators, enhance instructional delivery, foster learner engagement, and bridge literacy gaps in underserved and remote settings.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore and richly describe the lived experiences of elementary school teachers in Bunawan District, Agusan del Sur. Specifically, it aimed to investigate how educators navigate the multifaceted challenges of teaching in a rural context by examining their coping mechanisms, instructional best practices, and the personal and professional aspirations that sustain their commitment to the profession. Through this inquiry, the study sought to uncover meaningful insights that can inform context-responsive educational policies and support systems, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of rural teaching landscapes in the Philippines.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This research utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore and describe the lived experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, best practices, and hopes and aspirations in the teaching of reading among selected teachers in Bunawan District, Agusan del Sur. A phenomenological study is both a philosophical movement and a qualitative research methodology that examines how individuals consciously experience phenomena, aiming to uncover the essence of their lived realities [6]. This approach was suitable for this study as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of teachers lived experiences.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Likewise, manual coding was employed to identify key themes that emerged from the narratives of the informants. Thus, to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the researchers used member checking and peer debriefing. Ethical principles were also strictly followed throughout the research process. Approval was secured from the graduate school and the division office, along with the permission from the Schools Division Superintendent and respective school heads. Informants were informed of their rights and signed the consent forms before the actual interviews. Moreover, the researchers used pseudonyms to keep the confidentiality of the informant's details. The responses gathered from this study were vital in identifying the best practices in the teaching of reading in the context of elementary education.

2.2 Research Informants

The informants of this study were the eight (8) identified public elementary school teachers in four (4) schools in Bunawan District, Bunawan, Agusan del Sur. They were chosen using a purposive sampling procedure guided by a pre-inclusion criteria: they must be a licensed professional teacher with at least five (5) years of teaching, particularly with reading in Grade 1; they must be currently connected in the four selected schools in this study; and they must be recommended by the school.

2.2 Research Procedure

The data gathering process was done in a systematic approach to ascertain the validity and reliability of the findings. The first permission was first secured from the Assumption College of Nabunturan Ethics Research Committee. Once approved, the researcher drafted an endorsement letter stamped by the graduate school dean and a personal letter stamped by the researcher that were submitted for final approval at the Office of the School Principal and the Schools Division Superintendent.

After passing the approval, the researchers proceeded to the orientation and signing of informed consent forms with the informants. In-depth interviews were conducted once the informants signed the consent forms, emphasizing that their participation is voluntary. During the interview, the researchers assured the confidentiality of the responses by using pseudonyms. Data were collected using audio recorder and were transcribed in verbatim by the researchers. Moreover, to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the researchers employ member checking and peer debriefing. Ethical principles were also strictly followed throughout the research process.

2.3 Statistical Treatment of the Data

This study employed thematic analysis as the primary method for examining qualitative data, following the six-step framework developed by Clarke and Braun (2018). This approach is well-suited for systematically identifying, analyzing, and interpreting themes that emerge from teachers' lived experiences, coping mechanisms, best practices, hopes, and aspirations in Bunawan District Elementary Schools. Additionally, data triangulation was conducted by comparing findings from IDI to validate key themes and enhance the reliability of the results [7]. This methodological rigor ensured that the study produces credible, insightful, and meaningful contributions to the discourse on teacher challenges and instructional strategies in resource-constrained educational settings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Lived experiences of teachers in teaching reading

The findings reveal three structured themes that emerged namely: Memorable Experiences in Teaching Reading Lessons, Motivation in Teaching Reading Lessons, and Ways in Teaching Reading Lessons. The informants further shared that they have emotional depth involved in teaching literacy skills wherein they must navigate through instances of joy brought about by the progress made by their students alongside feelings of nervousness and defiance exhibited by some students, ultimately showing the relational and transforming aspect of teaching reading skills. Meanwhile, teachers shared that they must motivate their students, using such tactics as setting goals, providing rewards, involving parents, and nurturing intrinsic motivation, all aimed at empowering the latter. In line with this, they shared different ways of instruction, including Marungko, differentiated instruction, remediation, gaming techniques, guided and echo reading lessons, direct instruction, and learner-centered methods.

The findings above support a meta-analysis that found motivational reading interventions have a strong impact on reading achievement and student interest, as they justified the themes namely students to learn, improve, and pass as an indicator of teacher belief in all children [8]. Moreover, intrinsic motivation such as pleasure, interest, and personal interest is a satisfactory predictor of reading ability, as resonated in themes of pupils' intrinsic motivation and students' happiness and eagerness to learn [9].

3.2 Challenges of teachers in teaching reading

The findings reveal two structured themes that emerged namely: Challenges Encountered in Teaching Reading to Students and its Effects on Teachers. The informants further shared their problems that include the pupils' inability to learn, minimal parental involvement, absenteeism, lack of motivation, differences in reading skills, misconceptions, inadequate materials, and poor memory, all of which require prolonged instructional periods and try their patience. The aforementioned challenges not only make learning difficult for the students but also impact the

teachers themselves as they have to be more patient, imaginative, and resourceful, although sometimes it results in frustration and fatigue.

The findings above support a study that revealed that limited parental support at home, absenteeism, and parents' limited knowledge as reading attainment barriers, thus establishing the necessity for converged and community-based support [10]. Likewise, teachers tend to deal with such issues by increasing their patience and creativity, particularly when teaching non-readers [11].

3.3 Coping mechanisms of teachers on the challenges encountered in teaching reading

The findings reveal two structure themes that emerged namely: Strategies Employed in Teaching Reading and Ways in Coping with the Problems Met. The informants stressed that building a relationship based on earning pupils' trust and creating a safe environment is a prerequisite in teaching reading skills. Teachers used a wide array of teaching methods such as phonics-based strategies (Marungko and Abakada), drill, echo reading, group work and individual work, remediation, and even games to keep pupils engaged in their activities. In addition, coping includes being patient, creative, committed, and prolonging practice through cooperation with parents and individual tutoring. Despite challenges and weariness, teachers remained optimistic by keeping their faith and giving additional time for pupils who needed help.

The findings above align with the study which revealed that parents' support and cooperation in resolving reading issues, citing that with active involvement through home intervention and communication teachers have fewer instructional burdens and better student outcomes [10]. Thus, the use of alternative methods, give more time, and seek assistance from others as themes and reiterates that collaboration and adaptability are the best ways of overcoming teaching challenges [12].

3.4 Best Practices in teaching reading

The findings reveal two structured themes that emerged namely: Best Practices Employed to Teach Reading to Pupils and Methods Used in Improving Pupils' Reading Ability. The informants shared that they implement creative and structured techniques to enhance their pupils' literacy skills such as the use of multisensory teaching methods, including flashcards, pictures, songs, and stories, as well as group, pair, and individual reading exercises, to facilitate learning. Explicit phonics and vocabulary instructions, the Marungko and Abakada methodologies, increasing levels of difficulty in a spiral manner, mastering vowels, and the CVC method. Teachers also used incentives, praise, games, and engaging exercises to keep students motivated, with parents working collaboratively and exposing learners to print-rich environments to ensure that literacy is integrated into all areas of life outside the classroom. Assessment, guided reading, and peer-assisted learning also contributed to comprehension and engagement.

The findings above support the study that highlighted the importance of multisensory approaches like the use of flashcards, pictures, songs, and stories that utilize full use and memorization by addressing multiple learning styles [10]. Similarly, Marungko approach-based intervention program were found to be effective as a study discovered that systematic phonics instruction, beginning with mastery of vowels and moving through blending, accelerated decoding proficiency and fluency substantially in non-readers [13].

3.5. Hopes and Aspirations of teachers in teaching reading

The findings reveal two structured themes that emerged namely: Things Aspired to Pupils to Improve Reading Ability and Suggestions to other Teachers to Improve Ways of Teaching Reading. The informants hope that their pupils will be able to develop adequate reading skills that would enable them to cope with their studies successfully and help them become confident learners who enjoy reading and can use their reading skills in everyday situations. Teachers emphasize the importance of consistency, retention, fluency, comprehension, and encouragement as a foundation of lifelong learning. In addition to these hopes and expectations, teachers propose several recommendations to their fellow teachers, including being loving, caring, patient, compassionate, and dedicated. These teachers recommend adopting an alternative approach in teaching reading, using differentiated instruction, making lessons interesting by involving multisensory activities, creating a friendly atmosphere in class where pupils will find it easy to read, comprehend, and learn something useful.

The findings above align with the study which proposed alternative methods and differentiated instruction, pointing out that adaptive instructional methods such as multi-sensory activity, stories, and pacing to individuals are key in addressing students with various needs. Their study verifies the subjects make reading meaningful and suitable to students' level, use multi-sensory and fine skills activities, and student-focused teaching, emphasizing that eclectic and participative techniques enhance motivation and retention [14].

4. CONCLUSIONS

This investigation focused on the best practices in teaching reading, revealing that despite the complexity and tension of lived experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and aspirations, teachers were able to employ various effective strategies to meet pupils' learning needs and demands. The prominent best practices are the use of flashcards, pictures, songs, and stories; grouped and paired strategies; reading comprehension strategies and use of fresh and varied materials; one-on-one reading with a teacher; parents' cooperation, patience, creativity, and consistent strategies; explicit instruction in phonics and vocabulary; giving of rewards; starting with letter sounds and blending or the marungko approach; morning and lunchtime reading sessions; and surrounding pupils with reading materials and posters. This shows how teachers exemplified resilience and resourcefulness, utilizing diverse techniques that prove their desire for the students to achieve fluency, understanding, and a passion for reading, as this was based on an advocacy of inclusive, significant, and developmentally responsive teaching.

Moreover, the findings generally underscore that the best reading instruction is not only technical but also deeply human and founded in patience, empathy, and collective labor. Thus, teachers' problem-solving approaches, such as seeking assistance from peers, extending instructional time, and engaging families, reveal an integrated approach to literacy development. Their suggestions to other teachers, founded in emotional connection, responsive instruction, and continuous monitoring, are a template for building empowered, confident readers. Finally, the research confirms that early literacy flourishes in settings where teaching is challenging and compassionate and where each child's path is respected through discerning, responsive, and compassionate teaching.

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