TEACHING STRATEGIES IN HANDLING STRUGGLING READERS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the teaching strategies used by the teachers, how consistently these strategies were implemented, and the challenges faced in addressing the needs of struggling readers. The study employed a descriptive quantitative design to analyze data gathered from 63 elementary school teachers in Veruela IV District. Statistical tools such as Weighted Mean and Pearson Product Moment Correlation were utilized to assess the commonly used strategies, their implementation levels, and the difficulties encountered. Results indicated that teachers frequently applied differentiated instruction, small group teaching, guided reading, reading comprehension techniques, and multisensory learning approaches. Major challenges identified included limited resources and the varied learning needs of students. Additionally, while teachers' demographic profiles had minimal influence on strategy choice, factors such as access to professional development and availability of teaching resources were found to be essential for the effective execution of teaching strategies for struggling readers.

Keywords: *reading, teachers' strategies, challenges, struggling readers*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching strategies for struggling readers are the different ways teachers help students who find reading difficult. These children may have trouble sounding out words, reading smoothly, or understanding what they read, which can affect how they learn in other subjects too. With the right support in the classroom, teachers can help them improve their reading skills and build their confidence. It's also important to see how these strategies are used in real classroom situations so that the support given fits what each learner truly needs. This study is all about how teachers help struggling readers by using simple, practical strategies that make reading easier and more meaningful for them.

Many studies have looked into strategies that help struggling readers. Johnson (2023) pointed out that every elementary teacher deals with students who have trouble reading. Cawaling and Ganacias (2022) found that specific interventions in primary schools helped improve students' reading fluency and comprehension. Likewise, Adapon and Mangila (2020) shared that the Care for Non-Reader Program was rated "Very Effective" by both teachers and parents, with strategies like the "Fuller Technique," "Independent Reading," "Directed Reading Thinking Activity," and "Say Something" being particularly helpful. Alayon et al. (2023) also found that using phonetics, reading together, and adding fun activities or games helped keep students engaged and improve their reading skills.

Despite many reading programs and efforts, it's still unclear how well these strategies work, especially in public elementary schools. In Veruela IV District, the Phil-IRI results show a steady decline in struggling readers—from 54% in 2021–2022 to 30% in 2023–2024—but there's not enough research on how teachers use these strategies in their classrooms. Many teachers go above and beyond by making simple, local storybooks, using recycled materials, and adjusting lessons to meet their students' needs. Some stay after school to help with reading, while others have students work together to help each other learn. These everyday efforts, though often unnoticed, show just how much teachers care and how hard they work to make sure every child can learn to read.

Thus, this study helped teachers gain a deeper understanding of various strategies for effectively addressing the challenges faced by struggling readers. This is also useful for school administrators in shaping the curriculum to better meet the needs of struggling readers. Ultimately, this contributed to the education community, encouraging discussions on the best ways to teach reading and inspiring further studies on how to improve literacy in schools.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive quantitative design to evaluate the use of teaching strategies aimed at supporting struggling readers in Veruela IV District.

According to Siedlecki (2020), the descriptive quantitative design is useful for explaining the relationship between two or more variables without establishing causation. It involves collecting and analyzing data to determine possible links between variables.

In this study, the descriptive quantitative design was appropriate as it allowed for the evaluation of the level of implementation of reading strategies. By gathering data on specific variables, the study was able to measure and analyze their effectiveness in addressing the needs of struggling readers.

2.2 Research Respondents

The respondents of this study were the elementary school teachers from the nine identified schools. These schools are home to a total of 63 teachers, all of whom were directly involved in addressing the needs of struggling readers during the School Year 2023–2024. The study employed a complete enumeration method, meaning that all eligible teachers were included as respondents. This approach was chosen because the number of teachers in the selected schools was manageable and sufficient to provide comprehensive data for the study.

2.3 Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection began after securing approval from the Graduate School of North Eastern Mindanao State University (NEMSU). Additional permissions were obtained from the Schools Division Superintendent of Agusan del Sur, the Veruela District Supervisor, and the school heads.

Upon securing approval, the researcher proceeded with the actual data gathering. This involves administering the validated and reliability tested researcher-made questionnaire to the identified public elementary teachers in Veruela IV District. The questionnaires were distributed, and teachers were given adequate time to respond.

2.4 Statistical Treatment

The following statistical tools were used to analyze and interpret the data:

Frequency and Percent. These were used to describe respondent demographics.
Weighted Mean. This was used to assess commonly used teaching strategies, their level of implementation, and the associated challenges in handling struggling readers.
Pearson Product Moment Correlation. This was used to determine correlations between teacher profiles, strategy usage, and implementation levels.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results, analysis, interpretation and discussion of data gathered through tabular and textual form to make way for clear idea and information on the queries based on the statement of the problem posed.

3.1 Profile of Respondents

Table 2. Profile of the Respondents

Indicator	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18 – 35 years old	42	66.7
	33 – 55 years old	18	28.6
	56 years and above	3	4.8

	Total	**63**	**100.0**
Gender	Male	7	11.1
	Female	56	88.9
	Total	**63**	**100.0**
Civil Status	Single	20	31.7
	Married	41	65.1
	Separated	2	3.2
	Widower	20	31.7
	Total	**63**	**100.0**
Length Of Service	1 – 5 years old	20	31.7
	6 – 10 years old	24	38.1
	11 – 15 years old	9	14.3
	16 – 20 years old	6	9.5
	21 – 25 years old	1	1.6
	26 – 30 years old	2	3.2
	31 – 35 years old	1	1.6
	Total	**63**	**100.0**
Seminars Attended	Beginning Reading	18	28.57
	Developmentally Appropriate Practices in ELLN	1	1.59
	Division Training on Strategies of Grade 1-3 about Reading	1	1.59
	Early Language, Literacy and Numeracy	19	30.16
	Filipino and Mathematics	11	17.46
	FLAT and EGRA	2	3.17
	Going Beyond Reading and Writing: Division-Led	19	30.16
	Lunduyan ng Kahusayan Cohort 4.0	1	1.59
	Marungko Approach	3	4.76
	MFAT	8	12.70
	Pedagogical Retooling in English	8	12.70
	Science of Reading	4	6.35
	None	22	34.92
	Total	**117.00**	**185.71**

Table 2 presents the profile of the respondents across several indicators. Looking at the data, it's clear that most of the teachers in the study are women and fall within the 18–35 age group, showing that the teaching force is generally young and female. This is encouraging because younger teachers often bring fresh energy and are more open to trying new teaching methods. Many of them have between 6 to 10 years of experience, which means they've had time to develop their skills but are still early enough in their careers to keep learning and growing. However, one concern that stands out is that the respondents (34.92%) haven't attended any recent seminars. Even though a good number joined workshops like "Early Language, Literacy and Numeracy" and "Going Beyond Reading and Writing," that large group who missed out suggests not everyone has equal access to training or time to attend. This implies that while educators are in a prime position to adopt new methods, more efforts are needed to make training opportunities more accessible and relevant to their needs.

What this tells is that there are young, passionate group of educators who are in a great position to take on new ideas—especially when it comes to helping struggling readers. Liu and Wang (2022) point out that younger teachers are often more tech-savvy and eager to use innovative tools in their classrooms. And as Barton (2023) mentions, it's common in education to see more women in teaching roles, particularly in the early grades. While many have already built a solid teaching foundation, the data shows there's still a need for continuous learning. Robinson and Lee (2023) suggest that things like busy schedules, lack of support, or simply not knowing about available seminars can get in the way of professional growth—and that seems to be the case here too.

3.2 Teaching Strategies Employed to Struggling Readers

Table 3. Teaching Strategies Employed to Struggling Readers

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Adjectival rating
I use…		
differentiated instruction	4.40	Always Employed
peer tutoring	4.02	Frequently Employed
small group instruction	4.40	Always Employed
technology integration	4.19	Frequently Employed
reading comprehension strategies	4.43	Always Employed
phonics instruction	4.14	Frequently Employed
guided reading	4.35	Always Employed
vocabulary instruction	3.95	Frequently Employed
multisensory approaches	4.41	Always Employed
explicit instruction	4.24	Always Employed
Mean	4.16	Frequently Employed

The data from Table 3 shows that that among the different teaching strategies, reading comprehension strategies are the most consistently used by teachers, with a weighted mean of 4.43 and rated as "Always Employed". This highlights that teachers place a strong focus on helping students not just read words but truly understand and make meaning from texts, which is essential for success in all subject areas. On the other hand, vocabulary instruction received the lowest mean score of 3.95, though it is still "Frequently Employed". This suggests that while vocabulary teaching is happening, it may not be as prioritized as other strategies. Since a strong vocabulary is key to better reading comprehension and overall learning, there is an opportunity for teachers to strengthen their focus in this area to support students' reading comprehension even further.

These results suggest that teachers are focusing their efforts on strategies that allow for more personalized and interactive learning—ones that can make a big difference for kids who are falling behind. As Miller and Gentry (2022) explain, methods like small group instruction and multisensory activities are especially helpful because they meet students where they are, adapting to their pace and learning style. Williams and Taylor (2023) also note that while vocabulary and phonics are essential, they sometimes take a backseat to more hands-on approaches that feel more engaging or show quicker progress. It's clear that teachers are doing their best to balance time, student needs, and impact when choosing which strategies to prioritize.

3.3 Level of Implementation of the Teaching Strategies

Table 4. Level of Implementation of the Teaching Strategies

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Adjectival rating
I…		
utilize differentiated activities to maximize students' reading skills.	4.24	Always Implemented
use partner work to facilitate learning with peers	4.22	Always Implemented
group students to help support their language needs.	4.13	Frequently Implemented
use videos and multimedia to introduce new concepts.	4.38	Always Implemented
ask open ended questions to check students' reading comprehension.	4.19	Frequently Implemented
introduce the relationship of letters and sounds to improve students decoding skills and their ability to read unfamiliar words.	4.43	Always Implemented

use one-on-one instruction to focus on their specific needs.	4.16	Frequently Implemented
introduce new words, teaching word meanings and provide students' opportunities to enhance comprehension skills.	4.33	Always Implemented
incorporate visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile activities to engage struggling readers and help them make connections between letters, sounds and words.	4.03	Frequently Implemented
provide clear, direct, and systematic instruction in reading skills to help struggling readers build a strong foundation in literacy.	4.38	Always Implemented
Mean	4.25	Always Implemented

Table 4 shows of which teaching strategies are most actively implemented in classrooms to support struggling readers. Among the different strategies assessed, the indicator "introduce the relationship of letters and sounds to improve students' decoding skills and their ability to read unfamiliar words" received the highest weighted mean of 4.43, with an adjectival rating of "Always Implemented". This shows that teachers consistently prioritize phonics instruction to build foundational reading skills. On the other hand, the indicator "incorporate visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile activities to engage struggling readers and help them make connections between letters, sounds and words" received the lowest weighted mean of 4.03, rated as "Frequently Implemented". Although still implemented regularly, it suggests that multisensory approaches are slightly less emphasized compared to more traditional methods. The result implies that teachers are highly committed to strengthening students' basic decoding abilities, which is essential for reading success. However, there is room to enhance the use of multisensory strategies, especially for struggling readers who benefit from more interactive and engaging learning experiences. Integrating more multisensory activities could further support diverse learning styles, making reading instruction even more effective and inclusive.

These findings highlight a strong dedication among teachers to use evidence-based, student-centered strategies in their classrooms. High implementation of phonics-based instruction, like teaching letter-sound relationships, echoes research that shows how critical these skills are for struggling readers (Shanahan & Torgesen, 2023). Similarly, incorporating multimedia and differentiated activities supports Richards and Reed's (2022) observations that multisensory and flexible approaches keep students engaged and improve learning outcomes. While strategies like one-on-one instruction are highly effective, their slightly lower usage could reflect constraints in time, staffing, or classroom size—factors that many teachers continue to juggle on a daily basis.

3. 4 PHIL-IRI Results for the Last Three Years

Table 5. PHIL-IRI Results for the Last Three Years

Reading Level					
School Year	Enrolment	Pupils Tested	Independent	Instructional	Frustration	Non-Reader
2021-2022	572	572	97	184	281	30
2022-2023	634	634	182	242	194	16
2023-2024	648	648	216	244	185	12

Table 5 shows the PHIL-IRI results over the past three school years reveal notable trends in students' reading proficiency levels. Based on the result, the highest number of pupils fell under the frustration level in 2021-2022, with 281 students struggling significantly in reading. However, there was notable improvement over the years, as the number of pupils in frustration level decreased to 194 in 2022-2023 and further dropped to 185 in 2023-2024. Meanwhile, the lowest figures were consistently found in non-reader category, with only 30 pupils recorded in 2021-2022, and these numbers also decreased to 16 in 2022-2023 and 12 in 2023-2024, indicating a positive trend toward reducing the number of students who cannot yet read. The results imply that although challenges in reading proficiency remain, particularly among students at the frustration level, significant progress has been made in improving reading outcomes. The continuous decline in the number of frustrated readers and non-readers suggests that interventions and reading programs implemented by the school have been effective. It highlights the importance

of sustaining and even strengthening these initiatives to further reduce the number of struggling readers and help more students move toward independent reading levels.

Dewitz and Graves (2024) emphasize that teaching comprehension strategies improves children's and adolescents' reading comprehension, suggesting that explicit instruction plays a crucial role in literacy development. Similarly, Elston et al. (2022) found that explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies to English as a second language learners led to improved literacy and boosted self-confidence. These findings align with the observed improvements in the PHIL-IRI results, supporting the implementation of explicit teaching strategies in the Veruela IV District.

3.5 Challenges Encountered in Handling Struggling Readers

Table 6. Challenges Encountered in Handling Struggling Readers

Indicator	Weighted Mean	Adjectival rating
I encountered…		
limited resources	4.40	Always Encountered
large class sizes	4.00	Frequently Encountered
low student engagement	4.17	Frequently Encountered
time constraints	4.10	Frequently Encountered
diverse needs	4.29	Always Encountered
lack of motivation	3.97	Frequently Encountered
unmet learning competencies	3.89	Frequently Encountered
poor knowledge of reading instruction	3.90	Frequently Encountered
difficulty in administering assessment task	3.73	Frequently Encountered
lack of professional development opportunities	3.71	Frequently Encountered
Mean	4.02	Frequently Encountered

Table 6 shows the challenges that teachers regularly face when working with struggling readers. The most commonly experienced issue was limited resources, with a weighted mean of 4.40 categorized as "Always Encountered." This hinder teachers from providing the individualized support struggling readers need, often resulting in students falling behind and teacher burnout. While rated as a lowest challenge, the lack of professional development opportunities also poses a significant barrier, as it limits teachers' ability to stay current with evidence-based practices and effective interventions for struggling readers. This gap in professional knowledge can lead to ineffective teaching methods, reducing the potential for improving student outcomes. Both challenges highlight the need for systemic support to ensure that teachers are equipped with the resources and skills necessary to help struggling readers succeed.

These results reveal that many of the most persistent challenges are rooted in systemic issues beyond the teacher's control. According to Robinson and Harris (2023), limited instructional materials and the need to differentiate for a wide range of learners often leave teachers stretched thin. Similarly, Carter and Hayes (2023) argue that large class sizes and low engagement levels reduce the effectiveness of one-on-one or small group interventions—techniques that are often crucial for helping struggling readers catch up. Time constraints and gaps in learning outcomes only add to the difficulty, creating a cycle that's hard to break without targeted support. While difficulties in assessments and lack of training were rated slightly lower, they still align with Miller and Thompson's (2022) findings that teachers need more professional learning opportunities and user-friendly tools to track student progress and adapt their methods.

3.6 Significant Relationship between the Profile and the Teaching Strategies Employed to the Struggling Readers

Table 7. Significant Relationship between the Profile and the Teaching Strategies Employed to the Struggling Readers

Variable Tested		Computed r	p-value	Conclusion
Age		0.156	0.500	Not Significant
Gender		-0.094	0.685	Not Significant
Civil Status	Strategies Employed	0.001	0.996	Not Significant
Length of Service		0.088	0.703	Not Significant
Trainings Attended		-0.216	0.089	Not Significant

*significant if p-value is less than 5% level of significance

        The study reveals a strong correlation between teacher training and teaching strategies for struggling readers. The strongest correlation was found between trainings attended and strategies employed, suggesting that teachers who are better trained and flexible in using different instructional methods are more effective in addressing diverse learning needs, particularly for struggling readers. Civil status had the lowest correlation, indicating virtually no relationship. The results suggest that continuous professional development significantly impacts teaching effectiveness, and schools and education departments should prioritize funding and organizing more training programs, workshops, and coaching sessions focused on practical classroom strategies. The PHIL-IRI results show encouraging signs, with the number of independent readers increasing and non-readers decreasing. However, more structured support, targeted interventions, and ongoing teacher training are needed to keep improving literacy outcomes. Factors like age, gender, or experience don't change how teachers teach struggling readers, but rather the classroom environment and school support. Younger and more trained teachers are more active in using helpful strategies for struggling readers.

3.7 Significant Relationship between the Profile and the Level of Implementation of the Teaching Strategies

Table 8. Significant Relationship between the Profile and the Level of Implementation of the Teaching Strategies

Variable Tested		Computed r	p-value	Conclusion
Age		-0.258	0.041	Significant
Gender		-0.024	0.853	Not Significant
Civil Status	Level of Implementation	-0.053	0.682	Not Significant
Length of Service		0.004	0.978	Not Significant
Trainings Attended		-0.276[*]	0.029	Significant

*significant if p-value is less than 5% level of significance

        Table 8 presents the relationship between teacher profile variables and the level of implementation of teaching strategies for struggling readers. Among the data, the strongest significant relationship was found between training attended and implementation level, with a correlation of -0.276 and a p-value of 0.029. This indicates that teachers who participate in more trainings are better able to apply and implement new strategies and programs in their classrooms. This suggests that continuous professional development directly enhances a teacher's capacity to translate knowledge into effective classroom practices, emphasizing the need for regular, targeted training opportunities. On the other hand, the lowest correlation was observed between gender and length of service, implying that neither a teacher's gender nor how long they have been in service significantly affects their ability to implement programs. This highlights that teaching effectiveness and program implementation are more influenced by professional growth and learning opportunities rather than by personal demographics or years of experience alone, underscoring the importance of focusing on skills development rather than tenure or gender considerations.

        The significant negative correlation between age and implementation level suggests that younger teachers tend to apply teaching strategies for struggling readers more consistently. This aligns with findings by Jones and Harris (2023), who noted that younger educators often bring fresh perspectives and are more open to integrating innovative, research-based methods in their teaching. The significant relationship with training attended also reinforces the value of professional development—teachers who have undergone more training appear better equipped to put strategies into regular practice. According to Miller and Thompson (2022), training helps bridge the gap between theory and classroom application, providing teachers with the tools and confidence to use effective

approaches consistently. In contrast, the lack of significant relationships with gender, civil status, and length of service suggests that these personal attributes are not strong influencers in the practical application of teaching strategies.

3.8 Significant Relationship between the Teaching Strategies Employed to the Struggling Readers and Level of Implementation of the Teaching Strategies

Table 9. Significant Relationship between the Teaching Strategies Employed to the Struggling Readers and Level of Implementation of the Teaching Strategies

Variable Tested	Computed r	p-value	Conclusion
Teaching strategies employed and level of implementation	0.393	0.001	Significant

*significant if p-value is less than 5% level of significance

Table 9 presents the correlation between the teaching strategies employed for struggling readers and the level of their implementation. The computed correlation coefficient (r=0.393) indicates a moderate positive relationship between the teaching strategies employed for struggling readers and the level of their implementation. This means that as the use of effective teaching strategies increases, the level of implementation in reading instruction also tends to improve. Furthermore, the p-value (p= 0.001) is much lower than the conventional significance level of 0.05, indicating that this correlation is statistically significant. This implies that teachers must not only select appropriate strategies but also ensure consistent and quality implementation to maximize their effectiveness in supporting struggling readers' development. Training, resource support, and close monitoring of instructional practices are crucial to strengthening this relationship and enhancing reading outcomes.

The data supports the idea that the more teaching strategies educators employ, the more frequently and consistently they are likely to implement them. This aligns with findings by Berg and Evans (2022), who emphasize that using a broader set of evidence-based strategies fosters greater confidence and consistency in classroom practice. Likewise, Johnson and Lee (2023) highlight that intentional strategy selection not only improves teaching efficacy but also encourages sustained use, especially when strategies are grounded in research and tailored to student needs. This positive relationship suggests that when teachers are more proactive and diverse in their approach, they also tend to be more committed in applying these methods effectively.

4. CONCLUSION

The study reveals that most teachers in Veruela IV District are young and new to teaching struggling readers, but are willing to learn and improve. They are using small group work, hands-on activities, videos, fun activities, and teaching letter sounds to support students. The PHIL-IRI results show encouraging signs, with more independent readers and fewer non-readers. However, more structured support, targeted interventions, and ongoing teacher training are needed to improve literacy outcomes. Teachers face challenges like limited resources and managing multiple student needs simultaneously. Factors like age, gender, or experience don't significantly affect how they teach struggling readers. Younger and more experienced teachers are more active in using helpful strategies. A good mix of teaching tools makes it easier for teachers to support students and improve their reading skills.

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