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Best practices in teaching reading: A phenomenological study

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Abstract

This study explored the lived experiences, strategies, best practices, and suggestions of reading teachers in teaching reading in the Montevista District, Davao de Oro. Utilizing a qualitative-phenomenological research method, data were collected through random sampling from eight reading teachers across four participating schools using individual in-depth interviews. The results revealed that reading teachers experienced difficulties in teaching reading, primarily due to the lack of early phonological awareness instruction in the lower grades. Additionally, the study identified several effective teaching strategies, including the use of individualized teaching methods, video materials, and the early introduction of phonological awareness. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that emphasizing phonological awareness at an earlier stage, regularly following up on learners' development, and involving parents in understanding their child's reading skills and progress are crucial. The study recommends that the reading coordinator of Montevista District in Davao de Oro implement more diverse reading strategies, provide additional materials, and offer more training opportunities for teaching reading.

Keywords: Phonological Awareness; Lived Experiences; Strategies; Best Practices; Suggestions; Phenomenological Study

1. Introduction

Gathering the best practices for teaching reading enables all educators to successfully assess and develop their students' literacy abilities. Reading is the process of understanding the meaning or sense of letters and symbols, which includes vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, motivation, phonemic awareness, spelling, alphabetic, phonics, and word recognition. However, one of the most crucial tasks teachers have to accomplish is teaching a pupil how to read. One of the largest societal issues of our time is illiteracy. Numerous kids and teenagers lack reading skills altogether. In Ghana, Mohammed, I., and Amponsah, O. (2018) [1] has shown that even though it's critical to recognize reading challenges in learners early on and even though language teachers are urged to use strategies that would assist students become fluent readers. The absence of pre-reader books in the classroom, teachers' unfamiliarity with the phonemic awareness method of teaching reading, students' lack of confidence to practice reading in class, and teachers' lack of motivation to encourage students' interest in reading are additional factors that do contribute to students' low reading abilities.

In the Philippines, the study of Tomas, Villaros, and Galman (2021) [2] conducted in Cabanatuan City, found that most students had difficulty reading. The perceived causes, origins, and attendant determinants of the students' reading level also included the lack of a reading culture, the existence of learners-at-risk, and the lack of mastery of the reading elements. The reading initiatives, best practices, and programs listed below can be included into contextualized reading curriculum or used as standalone reading literacy initiatives in schools. These programs might be classified as literacy programs, enrichment and enhancement programs, or individual reading recovery programs.

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2. Material and methods

2.1. Qualitative – Phenomenological Method

This study utilized a qualitative-phenomenological approach to gather the best practices of teachers in teaching reading. The goal of qualitative research is to thoroughly examine, comprehend, and explain social phenomena in their natural environments. One benefit of this approach is that it can generate new knowledge by delving deeper into the complexity of human behavior. In addition, this study employed phenomenology as a research design, delving into the participants' lived experiences or the essence of consciousness, where essence refers to the phenomenon. As a result, it allows the researcher to examine the reading teachers in Davao de Oro's Montevista District as they discuss their experiences, strategies, best practices, and suggestions.

2.2. Individual In-Depth Interview

In this study, the eight participants were teachers who were assigned to the participating schools, namely: New Visayas Elementary School, Montevista Central Elementary School, New Dalaguete Elementary School, and Linoan Elementary School in Montevista District, Davao de Oro. These teachers met the qualifications for participation provided by the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) and have been teaching reading for at least five years. Because they have a variety of teaching experiences involving reading, they are also referred to as proficient teachers. On the other hand, considering the experiences of the five participants, new ideas were required.

3. Results and discussion

The structured themes and the emerging therein were made as bases for broadening the discussion of the findings in this study. As each theme was linked to related literature and studies, a substantial discussion was made in order to find their alignment with the theme.

What are the lived experiences of participants in teaching reading?

3.1. Teaching Reading Experiences

The emerging themes are dealing learners with retention problems, quiet challenging, many frustrated readers in higher grades, and difficulties in coping up reading skills, very difficult, very crucial, learners' poor in reading have poor retention and cannot understand each other's language. These are the lived experiences of teachers in teaching reading. This reveals that teachers have different encounters in their daily teaching routines inside the classroom in teaching reading. Further, almost of the themes connote negative experiences and it signifies problems in teaching and learning process. These served as the reasons why teaching reading is a challenging part of being a teacher.

The challenges that teachers may encounter when imparting reading strategies to students may include the lack of a solid foundation in reading (Lucas, 2011; [3] Rany, 2013) [4]. Robertson (2009) [5] has also identified the inability of students to perceive or produce a new sound in a second language as one of the obstacles that teachers may encounter when teaching reading strategies in the classroom.

Finally, Lindner (2008) [6] posits that the majority of students have subpar reading abilities due to the following factors: the prevailing attitude among teachers toward reading strategies, the difficulty primary school teachers face in guiding beginning readers toward immediate reading skills, and the lack of exposure to reading strategies among pupils. Klapwijk, et. al. (2011) [7] corroborated this by asserting that certain primary school instructors continue to encounter difficulties with reading instruction and are refractory to its implementation in the classroom.

3.2. Difficulties Encountered in Teaching Reading

The emerging themes are learner absences, parents attitude, difficulties in phonological awareness, slow reading speed, poor comprehension, emission of words, reversal of words, difficulty decoding syllables or reading words, start over from beginning, teaching letter sound, dealing with learners' behavior, learners exposed with technology, dealing learners with hungry stomach, need to be equipped first, encountering learner cannot recognize letter, and how reading can continue at home. These are the difficulties encountered by teacher in teaching reading. This reveals that teachers have encountered different scenarios in teaching reading. Further, almost of the themes shows that there are varied reading difficulty each learners have possess.

According to Gündoğmuş (2018), [8] remedial reading instructors in Turkey frequently encountered severe challenges, including parental indifference, students' unreadiness, a lack of professional experience, student absenteeism, students' lack of interest, and physical inadequacies. In addition, Kasran, et. al. (2012) [9] corroborated the aforementioned findings by identifying teachers' workload, lack of funds, non-conducive learning environment, and lack of support from school administrators as common issues encountered by remedial reading instructors.

It is imperative to retain phonological information by blending sounds within words in order to learn to read (Swanson, et al., 2009) [10]. In addition, Joseph (2018) [11] also stresses that students who develop reading difficulties encounter challenges in accurately identifying and reading words at lower levels. The National Reading Panel (2000) [12] has determined that the primary cause of low reading ability among students is their inability to master phonics, which encompasses the inability to blend sounds, decode words, and break spoken words into their fundamental sounds.

3.3. Ways in Addressing Difficulties Encountered

The emerging themes are inform parents, need to start from phonological awareness, assess learners, back to basic, have an intensive reading remediation, seeking help from Master Teachers, ask help from principal, study and ask reading specialist, watch youtube, spend time for one-on-one teaching, follow up learners form time to time and do home visitation. These are the ways done by the teachers in teaching reading to address the difficulties encountered in teaching reading. This shows the different ways every teachers have done to address the difficulties they have encountered in teaching reading. Further, almost of the themes shows the ways of addressing difficulties encountered.

According to Brown (2004) [13], a teacher should select a method that is contingent upon the specific objectives of the reading. The teacher will concentrate on the three components that comprise the presentation of a passage, the development of the lesson using it, and the follow-up. The teacher will initially provide a meaningful explanation of the passage. Secondly, the teacher must consider the organization of the text phases in the lesson, as this will facilitate the readers' comprehension. Lastly, the teacher should address any additional aspects of reading comprehension.

The teaching of reading should commence at an early age, as scientific research has shown that teaching practices should be designed and implemented to exercise and master basic skills that constitute reading competency as defined by the National Reading Panel (2000) [12] (i.e., phonological awareness, alphabetic knowledge, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension).

Home visitations are an essential intervention for students who experience behavioral issues, literacy difficulties, habitual absenteeism, and other learning challenges. They are one of the final interventions that must be implemented. Other factors were mentioned by Zunguze (2011) [14], who suggests that the educational heritage of the parent also influences the child's enrollment in school. There are several factors that may contribute to low-level reading, including family economic status, early childhood education experience, language acquisition at home, and poor reading practice at home.

3.4. Ways in Assessing Learners' Performance in Reading

The emerging themes are engage students reading assessment, evaluate/assess individual reading ability, using Phil-IRI, give reading materials, make them read individually, using CRLA and EGRA, and update reading log. These are the ways done by the teachers in teaching reading to assess their learners' performance. Teachers use a variety of methods to evaluate their students' performance when teaching reading, and these methods are praised for being accurate and interesting. Providing the activities is a component of lesson planning. Offering exercises is supposed to grab interest and help refine the ability needed to meet the course objectives. Through this evaluation, which can be conducted in a group setting or individually, educators can determine the areas of the curriculum that students have mastered and the skills they still need to develop.

In DepEd Order No. 14, s. 2018, a revised assessment tool was prepared prior to the introduction of K-12 Curriculum in 2013. The Phil-IRI is an informal reading inventory composed of graded passages designed to determine the individual student's performance in oral reading, silent reading, and listening comprehension. These three types of assessments aim to find the student's independent, instructional, and frustration levels (The Phil-IRI Reading Package, 2018)

For an extended period, the Philippine basic education system has implemented a remedial literacy program. In fact, Genero's research (as cited in Hoover, et. al., 2019) [15] revealed the manner in which elementary and secondary institutions in the country established remedial reading programs to assist struggling readers. Principals should motivate their educators to assess the reading proficiency of their students in order to implement suitable interventions.

The Department of Education (DepEd) Order 45, series of 2002 – Reading Literacy Program in the Elementary Schools and DO 27, s. 2005 – Remedial Instruction Programs in High Schools have been the most effective means of remediating struggling readers, despite the fact that remediation has been practiced for several decades.

What are the Strategies that Participants Employed in Teaching Reading

3.5. Strategies Employed in Teaching Reading

These are the emerging themes that have developed by the participants: using 5 major elements reading strategies, introduce letter sound, modeling, asking questions, reading aloud, peer teaching, using Marungko and Fuller approach, word blending, CVC, giving activities/stories with follow up questions, unlocking of difficulties and read by words, phrases then sentences. Teachers should have strategies employed when teaching reading to attain its goal.

The purpose of the reading strategies is to reveal and clarify the underlying meaning, which is invisible (Köse, 2006) [16]. Teele (2004) [17] posits that the objective of all consumers should be to comprehend the content they are reading. Research indicates that proficient readers are cognizant of the processes they employ to comprehend the text and are actively engaged with it. By instructing students on reading strategies, educators can enhance their comprehension. Research has demonstrated that the following strategies can be employed to enhance reading comprehension: predicting, visualizing, inferring, inquiring, and summarizing (Block, et. al., 2005) [18].

Some of the coping strategies for teaching reading include teacher modeling, predicting throughout the text, using post-it notes throughout the text, working with companions, or using a graphic organizer. One prediction strategy involves employing the title, table of contents, images, and key terms. Another essential prediction strategy is to have students make predictions at specific points in the text, evaluate the predictions, and revise them as needed (Teale, 2004) [17]. Visualization is an additional approach that proficient readers implement when comprehending a text (Adler, 2001) [19]. Visualization necessitates that the reader generate an image of the text. This image is retained in the reader's memory as a representation of the reader's interpretation of the text (National Reading Panel, 2000) [12]. Teachers can encourage students to envision the settings, characters, and actions of a narrative and prompt them to create drawings or write about the image that arises in their minds after visualizing the text.

It is imperative to retain phonological information by blending sounds within words in order to learn to read (Swanson, et al., 2009) [20]. In addition, Joseph (2018) [21] also stresses that students who develop reading difficulties encounter challenges in accurately identifying and reading words at lower levels. The National Reading Panel (2000) [12] has determined that the primary cause of low reading ability among students is their inability to master phonics, which encompasses the inability to blend sounds, decode words, and break spoken words into their fundamental sounds.

3.6. Ways in Making Sure Learner will Know How to Read

The emerging theme that are gathered from the responses are: employed the basic and the best strategies, start with phonemic awareness, learning the alphabet, building word skills, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency and comprehension skills, do individual reading assessment, follow up every now and then, track improvement through record, give incentive reward, give time individually, give time and dedication, peer tutoring and provide reading materials.

The following recommendations were made to ensure that the students' reading abilities improve: teachers should increase the students' reading confidence by having them read aloud together; the school authority should provide an adequate supply of pre-reader books to support reading instruction in the classroom; parents should secure an adequate supply of pre-reader books at home; and parents should reward and commend their children for improving their reading abilities. Additionally, the most effective methods of teaching literacy must be refined and improved (Mohammed, et. al., 2018) [1].

According to Brown (2004) [13], a teacher should select a method that is contingent upon the specific objectives of the reading. The teacher will concentrate on the three components that comprise the presentation of a passage, the development of the lesson using it, and the follow-up. The teacher will initially provide a meaningful explanation of the passage. Secondly, the teacher must consider the organization of the text phases in the lesson, as this will facilitate the readers' comprehension. Lastly, the teacher should address any additional aspects of reading comprehension.

Nurdianingsih (2021) [22] conducted a study that examined the use of three teaching strategies by teachers to teach reading comprehension: understanding text, individual and group strategies, and question-and-answer relationships (QARs). The strategy was implemented to ensure that the students comprehend the material and its contents. The

strategies were effective in teaching reading comprehension, as they were able to assist students in understanding the text, according to this research. It would be simpler for students who struggle with reading to acquire reading comprehension. Additionally, those strategies could encourage students to become more dynamic. It is recommended that educators implement strategies for teaching reading comprehension that are consistent with the students' proficiency levels and individual characteristics.

3.7. Materials Used to Address Learners Reading Ability

These are the emerging themes: using technology, textbooks, magazines and other recorded reading, IDDO read, video clip, visual aid, youtube, games, Marungko and Fuller approach, Phil-IRI, Materials from LR and passage, short stories and books.

There is an increasing body of research that suggests that digital textbooks provide students with a literacy advantage. Research indicates that younger and lower-performing students are motivated and engaged by reading in a digital learning environment, and feedback in e-books and applications is a significant factor in maintaining motivation (Grinshaw, et. al., 2007 [23]; Zucker, et. al., 2009) [24].

Animation, hotspots, and audio are digital features that facilitate comprehension and aid in the recall of content information and narrative plots (Shamir, et. al., 2009 [25]; Verhallen, et. al., 2006) [26]. Built-in tutors or virtual assistants that concentrate attention and offer on-the-spot instruction of reading skills, including decoding and word meanings, are the most promising (Smeets, et. al, 2013) [27].

Visualization is an additional approach that proficient readers implement when comprehending a text (Adler, 2001) [19]. Visualization necessitates that the reader generate an image of the text. This image is retained in the reader's memory as a representation of the reader's interpretation of the text (National Reading Panel, 2000) [28]. Teachers can encourage students to envision the settings, characters, and actions of a narrative and prompt them to create drawings or write about the image that arises in their minds after visualizing the text.

What are the Best Practices of the Participants in Teaching Reading

3.8. Best Practices in Teaching Reading

The following are the best practices of teachers, discussed emerging themes, in reading: teaching phonics, teach the letter sound, give opportunities to practice sound symbol each day, review daily, drop everything and read, intensive reading remediation, repetition of letters, need someone to focus on teaching reading, make learners read first in class, do reading assessment with parent, require dictionary, having pair reading, reading aloud and choral reading and using of visual aids. Every teachers have different practices in reading which helps them make a child able to read.

The teaching of reading should commence at an early age, as scientific research has shown that teaching practices should be designed and implemented to exercise and master basic skills that constitute reading competency as defined by the National Reading Panel (2000) [28] (i.e., phonological awareness, alphabetic knowledge, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension).

The implementation of the Drop-Everything-And-Read (DEAR) program, which was created in response to the directives provided in DepEd Memorandum No. 22, s. 2011, clearly demonstrates the Department of Education's proactive attitude, as mentioned by Lemana et al. (2023), citing Acita et al. (2022) [29]. The DEAR project is a well-crafted tactic that aims to deeply integrate reading into the educational process. It began as a notable practice that was seen in educational systems overseas. This tactical effort is intended to improve reading's standing as a regular and essential activity in the academic domain (Sanden, 2014) [30].

Teachers should implement activities that emphasize the following: repeated reading of the same text (Rasinski, 2003) [31], independent reading of carefully selected text (Allington, 2000) [32], or the practice of expression (Schwanenflugel, et. al., 2012) [33], and repeated oral reading with feedback (Armbruster et al., 2001) [34].

3.9. Methods Used in Improving Learners' Reading Ability

The emerging themes were teacher's diligence and having a big heart, start with teaching phonics, sound blending, reading through games, reading aloud, remedial, involve parents, through sounding method, using video and pair reading and words games.

Research findings have yielded a plethora of instructional practices that have been recommended to enhance these fundamental skills. Specific activities for the instruction of phonemic awareness were devised by the National Reading Panel in 2000. These consist of the following: the isolation, identification, categorization, substitution, addition, and deletion of phonemes. In the same vein, it has been discovered that the effect size is significantly increased when two or more tasks of segmenting (e.g., dividing a word into sounds) and deletion (e.g., removing a sound from a given word) are combined. Research has demonstrated that it is more effective to integrate the instruction of sounds with that of the printed letter in the context of alphabetic knowledge (Ehri et al., 2001) [35].

In addition, it is crucial to recognize that the implementation of a systematic instructional sequence (i.e., the most common letters and letter patterns and the progression from easier to more complex) and the provision of ample opportunities for practice, in conjunction with the implementation of evidence-based phonics instruction methods, leads to improved student outcomes (Armbruster et al., 2001) [34].

What are the Advices and Suggestions of the Participants to others who Teach Reading

3.10. Best Thing Other Teachers Will Do to Address the Reading Ability

The emerging themes gathered from the participants are: be committed and dedicated, teach phonics, emphasize writing task, introduce phonetic awareness, give time and attention to struggling readers, cope up reading at early stage, find the best own way, be resourceful and initiative, love your profession, make children read, assess children first, and vary strategies will suit to learner's need.

Some researchers have proposed solutions to address the low reading abilities of students. For instance, Cekiso (2012) [36] recommends that English language instructors impart reading strategy instruction to students in order to develop strategic reading skills. Adebayo (2008) [37] asserts that instructors can improve the reading abilities of their students by employing effective teaching methods.

Reading, which is defined as the process of creating meaning from texts and symbols, must be approached as a strategic, enduring, fluent, sense-making, and motivation-based process in order to be effective. Five fundamental principles of reading are embodied in the skills that are employed in this process (Akyol, 2015) [38]. Fluent reading is a fundamental component of reading skill that is necessary for individuals to read effectively and at the anticipated level (Ulusal Okuma Paneli [NPR], 2000) [39].

In order to progress successfully, reading necessitates a multitude of supporting skills. Many supporting skills, including vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge, knowledge of grammar, metacognitive awareness, syntactic knowledge, and reading strategies, are required for reading comprehension, as extensively discussed by Bernhardt et.al. (García-Madruga et al., 2013) [40].

3.11. Suggestions to Improve Learners Reading

These are the emerging themes: inform and seek help from parents, track reading performance record regularly, teach letter-sound relationships, give multiple opportunities each day, review daily, introduce sounds earlier, provide reading materials, motivation for children, give time, impose peer tutoring, and know learner's need.

Ariandika, et. al. (2018) [41] found that teaching literacy is not as straightforward as individuals may believe. They should acquire additional experience and broaden their knowledge in order to effectively deliver reading materials, particularly at the senior high school level. The researcher discovered that the instructors employed an engaging approach that enabled students to acquire a solid understanding of the process of reading text.

As stated by Asih Nurcahyani (2016) [42], there are four distinct categories of reading. Intensive reading, extensive reading, passive reading, and reading aloud are the four categories. Each variety serves a distinct purpose, and all are beneficial for enhancing student comprehension.

In order to progress successfully, reading necessitates a multitude of supporting skills. Many supporting skills, including vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge, knowledge of grammar, metacognitive awareness, syntactic knowledge, and reading strategies, are required for reading comprehension, as extensively discussed by Bernhardt et.al. (García-Madruga et al., 2013) [40].

4. Conclusion

The sole purpose of this study, after analyzing the collected data, is to suggest that the District Reading Coordinator to design and implement an action plan for annual professional development focusing on reading for all teachers in all schools in Montevista District.

The researcher has collected different lived experiences of the teachers in teaching reading. Experiences encountered were addressed through different teaching strategies, methods, and best practices implied. Furthermore, important observation and understanding collected by the researcher about the reading ability of the learners experienced by the teachers: dealing learners with retention problems, quiet challenging, many frustrated readers in higher grades, difficulties in coping up reading skills, very difficult, very crucial, learners' poor in reading have poor retention and cannot understand each other's language. It can be concluded that there are learners who have reached higher grades who do not know how to read, which shows that their reading ability has not been addressed at the earlier stage. Teachers also have a little time to address the struggling readers.

Moreover, this study also found that learners had poor performance in reading. This leads the researcher to the conclusion that introducing phonological awareness early in teaching reading is vital because it creates the foundation for recognizing how sounds make words, making reading easier and more simple. Teaching phonological awareness at an early stage, focusing on the sounds of letters before the letter name, helps children acquire the basics of reading more efficiently. Involving parents in their children's reading is equally vital since it fosters a supportive environment, offers constant practice, and promotes learning. Teachers confront tremendous difficulties and may find it nearly impossible to guarantee that the child learns efficiently in the absence of parental engagement. When combined, these strategies guarantee a child's reading journey gets off to a stronger, more fruitful start and inspire a lifelong love of reading and learning. By giving phonological awareness the highest priority and promoting parental involvement, we enable learners to develop into skilled, confident readers who are prepared to learn about the world through reading. Together, these efforts foster a loving environment for growth and development while also improving academic attainment and the parent-child bond. Urge to execute or conduct more trainings and seminars in teaching reading, exploring the effective methods, approaches, and strategies that would help teachers teach reading effectively. Further, parents will also contribute to the learning of their children, especially in reading, thus providing and creating open communication between and among parents, teachers, and the designated school principal.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of ethical approval

The present research work does not contain any studies performed on animals/humans subjects by any of the authors

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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