

Literary SOS: The Interventions of Teachers to Struggling Readers

Jason E. Cartoneros¹ and Lilibeth S. Galvez²

¹Baganga National High School, Department of Education, Baganga, Davao Oriental

²Davao Oriental State University, Commission on Higher Education, Mati City

Email: jason.cartoneros25@gmail.com

Abstract— The aim of this study was to determine the challenges, interventions, and needs of the reading specialists with their struggling readers. A transcendental phenomenological study was used to explore 11 reading specialists' collective experiences with their struggling readers during the School Year 2022-2023 at Baganga National High School. The reading specialists identified main challenges such as lack of reading resources, absence of training, deficiency of students in grapheme-phoneme correspondence, polysyllabic, and reading comprehension. They shared interventions in teaching reading, like providing media-aided pronunciation, adopting code-switching or translation, utilizing picture comprehension, using paired reading strategy, and teaching grapheme-phoneme correspondence. They also identified their needs in teaching reading such as the provision of reading resources and literacy training. Addressing the challenges and needs of reading specialists is vital for the reading development of struggling readers and applying interventions to reading helped improve the reading readiness of struggling readers.

Keywords— challenges in teaching reading, reading specialists.

INTRODUCTION

One of the foundational skills of learning is reading comprehension. However, in many nations, some secondary school students performed below grade level in this competency (OECD, 2019). According to recent studies, education systems with lower reading achievement rates account for 53% of all participating students in participating economies and countries (n=78) in the Programme for International Student Assessment in 2018 (OECD, 2019). Evidence also suggests that lower achievers appear to have struggled with reading comprehension throughout their secondary school years (Edmonds, Vaughn, Wexler, Reutebuch, Cable, & Tackett, 2009; Potocki, Magnan, & Ecalle, 2015).

Despite initiatives to improve students' reading abilities, such as the Every Child A Reader Program (ECARP), a nationwide initiative that aims to make every child a reader of the Department of Education (DepEd) (Enclosure to DepEd No. 70, s. 2011); and the annual celebration of National Reading Month every November, the Reading Intensification for Sustainable Education (RISE) project of Schools Division of Davao Oriental as a reading intervention that can address the reading problem of the struggling readers, many students still struggle in reading.

The most recent reading assessment results patterned from the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) at Baganga National High School in September

2022 revealed that junior high school students had inadequate reading proficiency. Only 15% of the 2,873 students tested for reading proficiency in English were categorized as independent readers. On the other hand, the frustration level is represented by 1,216 students. These results showed that these students were struggling with reading. They demonstrated poor comprehension and decoding skills and read below grade level. To increase readers' understanding, an intervention must be created to fill this gap (Biancarosa & Snow, as cited in Cantrell, Almasi, Carter, Rintamaa & Madden, 2010).

The Baganga National High School was chosen as the study's locale because it is the most populated high school in District 1, with 42% struggling readers, and categorized as a mega school in the province of Davao Oriental. With this, determining the lived experiences of reading specialists in conducting reading is necessary to address the pressing issue of reading to fill this gap (Baye, Inns, Lake, & Slavin, 2019).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed a transcendental phenomenological approach to qualitative research because the phenomenon being investigated focuses on the shared significance of the challenges in teaching reading, intervention, and needs of 11 Grade 9 reading specialists with struggling readers at Baganga National High School (Creswell, 2013). A phenomenological approach allowed for a more thorough description of "what" was experienced and "how" the participants experienced it,

whereas using a qualitative design allowed the researcher to use inductive and emerging procedures shaped by the collection and analysis of data (Creswell, 2013).

The design was meant to encourage the analysis of the common and specific phenomena of reading and to comprehend how their lived experiences have impacted their reactions to reading. In order to meet this requirement, the researcher chose participants from the school where he is now teaching.

The study's transcendental phenomenological design necessitated the incorporation of the participants' personal reading experiences. These experiences were recorded through semi-structured individual interviews in which participants expound on their comments in a comfortable and non-threatening atmosphere.

This transcendental phenomenological design was also appropriate because of the epoché process of isolating the researcher from the participants (Cresswell & Poth, 2018).

Although his assumptions were obvious, careful treatment of the data collected mitigated bias and subjectivity by bracketing recurring themes, and this study was designed to provide an opportunity for 11 Grade 9 reading specialists to share their lived experiences and feelings about reading.

Research Instrument

A heterogeneous group of three or four participants to ten or fifteen participants is typically used in phenomenological research (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). According to literature cited by Moustakas (1994), interviews with five to 25 participants are encouraged. Data collection methods for this study on transcendental phenomenology included teacher interviews.

Interview. The researcher moved through the interviews in a logical manner, asked the same questions to all participants in the same order, and applied preset probes by using the validated semi-structured interview that was validated by the esteemed doctors in the English language of Davao Oriental State University. Participants answered the questions and probes in a semi-free manner while using semi-structured interview questions (Morse, 2015).

The individual interviews were allotted 60 minutes or so. The researcher followed the proper process for conducting interviews and recording sessions (Creswell,

2013), which included getting everyone's consent before the recording. To keep the conversation with the participants on topic, the researcher employed the questions from the semi-structured interview protocol. During every interview, he also took notes (Creswell, 2013).

Research Procedure

In the conduct of the study, the researcher sent a copy of the endorsement letter from the Head of the Graduate School of Davao Oriental State University. Then, another communication letter was given to the Schools Division Superintendent, the Public Schools Division Supervisors, and the School Heads of the school, asking permission to conduct the study.

When it was approved, the researcher began selecting participants by handing a letter of permission to 11 reading specialists who were suspected of meeting the requirements.

The researcher's identity, a declaration of the study's objective, a description of the research and its processes, confidentiality, and risks and benefits were all included in the letter. The questionnaire was validated by the experts.

Next, he used grand-tour queries without any specific direction and floating cues. Participants talked more when given prompts, and grand-tour questions that focused on the study's research topics – the challenges of reading specialists in giving intervention to struggling readers, the interventions used in the teaching of reading, and the needs of these reading specialists brought the discussion to a head (Leech, 2002).

All interviews were audio recorded in order to catch verbatim language and voice inflections, and all recordings were transcribed afterward to ensure the highest quality digital recordings.

After transcribing the audio-recorded data, the researcher organized them using tables. He then started reading the transcribed data to get acquainted with them. Then, he started coding by clustering the generated text. After that, he combined several codes through their brackets to create a theme.

Moreover, he constantly reviewed the terminology used to come up with a more accurate phrase about the challenges, interventions, needs, and joys of reading specialists in teaching reading to struggling readers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Fig. 1 shows the four major themes of the study.

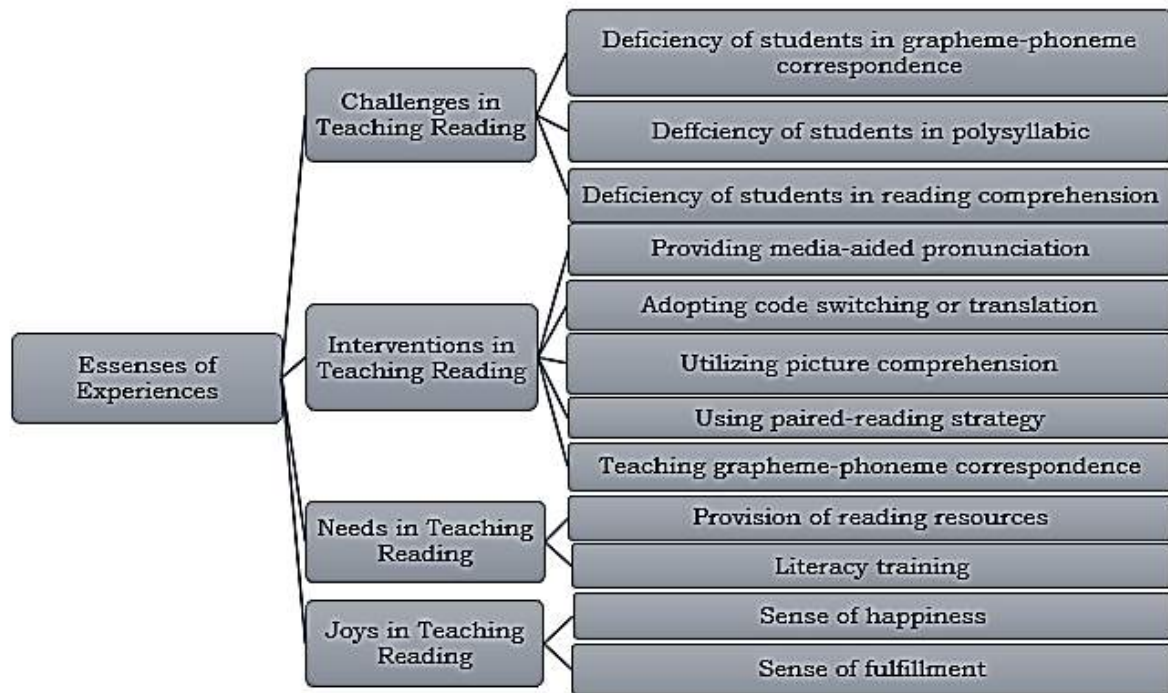


Fig 1. Four Major Themes – Essences of the Experiences

Based on the figure, what emerged as essential to the ongoing intervention program for struggling readers was that the participants determined the challenges in teaching reading such as lack of reading resources, absence of training, deficiency of students in grapheme-phoneme correspondence, polysyllabic, and reading comprehension. Despite that, participants found interventions to address the challenges such as the provision of media-aided pronunciation, adoption of code-switching, utilization of picture comprehension, use of paired reading strategy, and teaching of grapheme-phoneme correspondence to help aid their struggling readers. The participants aired out their plea to provide them with reading resources and literacy training to effectively and efficiently deliver the reading instruction.

Despite all the challenges, participants found joy in what they had done for the betterment of the struggling readers, these accounts were according to the participants' experiences with struggling readers (Moustakas, 1994). The teachers shared the same literacy viewpoint in that they understood the value of reading interventions for these high school students, which led to noticeable improvements in their literacy levels. Additionally, each teacher mentioned how these students' lives had been impacted in some way, leading to literacy growth.

Four themes that emerged as the meaning of the essences of the experiences shared by teachers in their experiences with struggling readers were: (a) challenges in teaching reading, (b) interventions in teaching reading, (c) needs in teaching reading, and (d) joys in teaching reading.

CONCLUSIONS

Reading specialists in this study were under-resourced with regard to the supply and provision of support materials. This would have a greater impact on the teaching of reading, as teachers would lack resources to assist them in reading and preparing their work thoroughly. The study also revealed that, despite being reading specialists at Baganga National High School, these teachers were not trained to teach reading. In addition, the school did not provide any form of in-service training or literacy instruction.

The deficiency of grapheme-phoneme correspondence is also a challenge in teaching reading among struggling readers. Therefore, the issue arises that students lack adequate knowledge and grapheme-phoneme awareness before reading instruction is taught to them. Students with persisting reading difficulties are often particularly challenged by multisyllabic words. This difficulty is exacerbated by the fact that the overwhelming majority of English words are multisyllabic and account for an

increasing proportion of the language's vocabulary because of their length.

Some students were able to read but lacked comprehension. From letter and word recognition to comprehending meaning at the phrase, sentence, and paragraph levels, reading is a complex process. It was also revealed in the study that the participants used media-aided pronunciation such as YouTube videos and the use of speech app Speechify to help struggling readers with their grapheme-phoneme correspondence difficulties. The study found out also that specialists used code-switching or mother-tongue translation approaches to reading comprehension. The more exposed a student is to the language he uses, the easier it is for him to express himself and reply to teachers' inquiries during class discussions, according to the reading specialists. The study showed that participants used picture comprehension to elicit comprehension from students. Pictures are regarded as the best teaching tools for teaching reading since they can clearly illustrate the connected issues in texts for students, explain what is happening, and clarify what the characters in the book are discussing.

Reading comprehension and word recognition are significantly improved when less proficient readers are paired with more proficient readers, according to the literature. Therefore, the learner reader gains decoding and fluency strategies as they read together with a more proficient reader in paired reading.

The study highlighted that specialists felt a sense of happiness in conducting a reading intervention program. When teachers see their students' decoding and comprehension skills improve, it makes them extremely happy and satisfied.

These teachers revealed their amazing tale of converting non-readers into readers. The testimonies of the teachers indicate that it is a gradual procedure that necessitates a lot of modeling.

Over the course of the academic year, they watch slowly as struggling readers go from being non-readers to readers.

Lastly, based on the teachers' narratives, specialists felt a sense of fulfillment in conducting a reading intervention program. The reading interventionists put a high focus on feeling satisfied with their work since they were so driven to see these struggling readers succeed in becoming independent readers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study on the challenges of teaching reading to students with struggling readers has highlighted potential suggestions that could inspire future research.

Since the study discovered that non-English reading specialists were not trained to teach reading, I recommend focusing future research on the teaching of reading on teacher training. The findings of such a study could be crucial for enhancing the literacy instruction of non-English reading specialists.

Since the study was primarily concerned with the teaching of reading to ninth graders at Baganga National High School, it would be ideal if it were extended to other institutions in Davao Oriental Province. Such a study could be fruitful if it examines how reading instruction could be implemented effectively in other institutions.

It is necessary to evaluate the efficacy of capacity-building programs. A comparison could be made between the perspectives of rural and urban reading specialists regarding the challenges encountered in teaching reading and the interventions used for struggling readers.

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