



**LOCALLY FUNDED TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN TEACHING
READING TO KEY STAGE 1 LEARNERS: BASIS FOR
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the experiences of five locally funded teachers in teaching reading to Key Stage 1 learners in the Municipality of Iloilo during School Year 2025–2026, with the aim of informing policy recommendations. Based on the results of the in-depth interviews with the participants, it was found that locally funded teachers taught reading to Key Stage 1 learners through systematic phonics, read-aloud activities, guided reading, fun learning activities, and the use of basic sight words. The findings also revealed that the challenges experienced by locally funded teachers in teaching reading to Key Stage 1 learners included mixed reading levels, short attention spans, poor phonics awareness, and limited support at home. Moreover, the study found that the coping strategies used by locally funded teachers in addressing these challenges included differentiated instruction, small-group reading, interactive activities, positive reinforcement, regular practice, collaboration with parents, and one-on-one reading sessions.

Keywords: *Locally Funded Teachers, Experiences, Teaching Reading, Key Stage 1 Learners, Policy Recommendation*

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INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the most essential foundational skills that students need to develop because without it, becoming competent in other subject areas becomes difficult. When reading skills are not firmly established, the teaching and learning process becomes challenging for both teachers and learners. Reading ability greatly influences students' academic performance. It also promotes critical thinking and strengthens reading comprehension, which are valuable across many areas of learning. The development of this skill is a shared responsibility of parents, teachers, and learners. Parents play an important role in shaping children's reading habits, and continuous support for reading helps improve children's academic achievement (Abid et al., 2023).

Learners are more likely to develop a strong disposition toward reading when teachers explicitly teach them how to read academic texts in related subjects and provide sufficient opportunities to practice throughout the term. Students' motivation to read is a crucial factor in improving their reading skills; without the desire to learn, it may instead become a barrier to reading development (Songnuan & Nomnian, 2023).

Reading is a key component of literacy that develops when children are actively guided and engaged in the learning process. It is a complex skill because children must first become aware of the sound structure of spoken language and then learn to decode the alphabetic system in order to understand letter-sound relationships. For this reason, reading is considered one of the most important goals during the early years of schooling (Tortorelli et al., 2021).

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Reading proficiency in the early years, particularly within Key Stage 1 (ages 5-7), is a foundational skill that significantly impacts future academic success. The ability to read fluently and comprehend text enables children to access the curriculum, develop critical thinking skills, and engage with the wider world. In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) has prioritized reading interventions, especially in the early grades, to address persistent literacy challenges. However, the effectiveness of these interventions is often contingent on the resources and support available to teachers at the local level. Locally funded teachers (LFTs), who are employed and compensated by local government units (LGUs) rather than the national government, often face unique challenges that can impact their ability to effectively teach reading (Basilan, 2024).

Early reading skills are a critical predictor of academic achievement and lifelong learning. For children in Key Stage 1, mastering foundational reading skills is essential for accessing the broader curriculum and developing a love of learning. However, in many regions, socio-economic disparities significantly impact children's literacy development. Schools in disadvantaged areas often struggle with inadequate resources, larger class sizes, and a higher proportion of students with diverse learning needs. Locally funded teachers (LFTs) are frequently assigned to these schools, where they play a vital role in bridging the literacy gap.

Some of the challenges of the locally funded teachers in teaching reading may include disparities in training, resources, professional development opportunities, and job security compared to their nationally funded counterparts. Understanding the specific obstacles encountered by locally funded teachers in teaching reading to Key Stage 1 learners is crucial

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for developing targeted policy recommendations that can enhance their effectiveness and improve early literacy outcomes.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed in the study, including the research design, participants, data collection procedures, research instrument, and the methods used for data analysis. The study aims to identify the challenges faced by locally funded teachers when teaching reading to Key Stage 1 learners, which will serve as a basis for developing policy recommendations.

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative research approach, specifically utilizing in-depth interviews as the primary method of data collection.

The descriptive research method focuses on systematically describing a phenomenon as it exists in its natural setting, without manipulating variables. According to Elliott (2025), it aims to provide an accurate portrayal of current conditions, practices, or relationships within educational settings, enabling researchers to understand trends, patterns, and implications for practice. This approach is particularly useful in educational studies that seek to document and analyze real-world events, behaviors, or perceptions without altering the environment in which they occur (Elliott, 2025).

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During the interview, the interviewer and interviewee were seated at a distance that allowed for thoughtful reflection on the series of questions regarding a specific issue. The purpose was to gather the key perspectives or essential insights of the participants on the issue within its social context, based on their responses to the questions.

Research Design

The study employed a phenomenological research design. Phenomenology is a philosophical approach used in qualitative research that seeks to understand how individuals perceive the world and how these perceptions may differ from widely accepted views, emphasizing a person’s subjective interpretation of their experiences. This approach typically involves interviewing participants to explore their impressions and is commonly applied in fields such as psychology, sociology, and social work.

According to Smith (2023), phenomenology examines the structures of consciousness from a first-person perspective. A key aspect of any experience is its intentionality — its orientation toward something—meaning that experiences are always about or directed at an object. This orientation occurs through the content or meaning of the experience, along with the conditions that make it possible.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study were five (5) selected locally funded teachers in the municipality. They were assigned to teach reading to Key Stage 1 learners in the public schools within the Municipality during the school year 2025-2026.

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These five (5) selected locally funded teachers could be Municipal Local School Board teachers of the Municipality or Provincial Local School Board teachers of the Province of Iloilo.

They must have at least one month experience as reading teachers, willing to participate in the study by answering the questions during the interview and provide the necessary information according to the purpose of the study.

Sampling Design

The study employed a purposive sampling design. According to Nikolopoulou (2023), purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling in which participants are deliberately selected because they possess specific characteristics required for the study. In other words, participants are chosen intentionally to meet the needs of the research.

Also known as judgmental sampling, this method depends on the researcher's discretion to identify and select individuals, cases, or events that are most likely to provide valuable information for achieving the study's objectives. Purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative and mixed-methods research. It is especially beneficial when seeking information-rich cases or when working with limited resources, although it carries a higher risk of research biases, such as observer bias.

Research Instrument

The research instrument utilized in the study was a researcher-made interview schedule.

An interview schedule in qualitative research is a structured or semi-structured guide comprising a list of questions or topics that the interviewer intends to cover during the

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interview process. Its primary purpose is to ensure that all relevant areas are systematically explored across interviews, enhancing consistency, rigor, and comparability of data, while still allowing flexibility for in-depth probing and adaptation to emerging insights (Morris, 2025). The interview schedule consisted of four questions aligned with the study's objectives.

Additionally, voice and video recorders were used to collect and document data, contingent upon the participants' consent.

Validity of the Research Instrument

Before establishing the validity of the interview schedule prepared by the researcher, the adviser, the Dean of the Graduate School, and a panel of experts in research, testing and assessment, and English were asked to review and validate each question, providing recommendations for revisions if necessary.

Validity is the concept of validity in the context of educational assessment, highlighting the importance of considering multiple sources of evidence to support the validity of test score interpretations (Newton & Shaw, 2020).

The comments, corrections, and suggestions provided by the panel of validators on the interview schedule were taken into account using the evaluation form of Good and Scates as cited by Soqueña, which is presented in Appendix A.

Data Gathering Procedures

Permits were secured from the adviser, the Dean of the Graduate School, the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent, the Office of the District Supervisors, school heads, and the individual participants to allow the researcher to carry out the study. The researcher

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personally visited the schools, communities, or locations convenient for the participants to conduct the interviews.

Before starting the interviews, participants were asked to sign a consent form or waiver granting permission for the study. In-depth interviews were conducted, with voice and video recorders used to accurately capture the participants' responses. After completing the series of interviews, the researcher consolidated all collected data for analysis.

Data Analysis

The data collected through the interview schedule were analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative method designed to identify, interpret, and report recurring patterns or themes within narrative data. This approach enables the researcher to uncover meaningful insights into the challenges of locally funded teachers in teaching reading to Key Stage 1 learners.

Each written response was carefully examined to extract emerging themes related to the purpose of the study.

According to Braun and Clarke (2021), thematic analysis provides a flexible yet rigorous framework for analyzing qualitative data, allowing researchers to identify both explicit and implicit meanings across participants' narratives. Thematic analysis is especially well-suited for educational research aimed at understanding complex social and organizational dynamics. According to Nowell (2021), this approach also strengthens the transparency and credibility of qualitative studies by promoting systematic coding and careful interpretation of data.

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In this study, the transcribed interview data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2023), a method effective for identifying, examining, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data.

The analysis followed the standard six-phase process:

(1) Familiarization with the data: reading and re-reading the transcripts in both the local language and English translation;(2) Generating Initial Codes: Assigning short phrases or labels to meaningful segments of data (e.g., "shared phone," "fear of judgment," "poor signal"); (3) Searching for Themes: Grouping the initial codes into potential overarching themes and sub-themes that captured significant patterns (e.g., Codes like "no insult," "private correction" will be grouped under a theme); (4) Reviewing Themes: Refining and checking the themes against the entire dataset to ensure they accurately reflected the participants' meanings and the study's focus; (5) Defining and Naming Themes: Developing clear, concise, and academically sound names for the final emergent themes (will be presented in Chapter 4); (6) Producing the Report: Weaving the themes, supported by direct quotes, into the narrative structure of the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of data (Chapter 4), and linking them to the theoretical framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the experiences of five (5) locally funded teachers in teaching reading to Key Stage 1 learners in a municipality in Iloilo during SY 2025–2026, aiming to inform policy recommendations.

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Data were collected through in-depth interviews using a researcher-made, content-validated interview schedule, with recordings and videos used upon participants' consent.

Necessary permits were secured from relevant authorities, and data were consolidated and analyzed using a thematic approach to identify key patterns and insights.

The following are the findings of the study:

Based on the results of the in-depth interviews with the participants, it was found that locally funded teachers taught reading to Key Stage 1 learners through systematic phonics, read-aloud activities, guided reading, fun learning activities, and the use of basic sight words.

It was also found that the challenges experienced by locally funded teachers in teaching reading to Key Stage 1 learners included mixed reading levels, short attention spans, poor phonics awareness, and limited support at home.

Furthermore, it was found that the coping strategies used by locally funded teachers in addressing the challenges they encountered in teaching reading to Key Stage 1 learners included differentiated instruction, small-group reading, interactive activities, positive reinforcement, regular practice, collaboration with parents, and one-on-one reading sessions.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the following insights were drawn:

The findings suggest that teachers employed a combination of structured strategies and engaging methods to support early reading development. Instruction balanced skill-focused approaches with activities that captured learners' interest, ensuring that foundational

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literacy skills were developed while maintaining motivation and active participation. This approach reflected an effort to create a learning environment that was both effective and enjoyable, thereby promoting steady progress in reading among young learners.

The findings also indicate that teachers faced a range of obstacles that made early reading instruction complex, including differences in learners' readiness and abilities, difficulties in sustaining attention, foundational skill gaps, and external factors affecting practice at home. These challenges highlighted the need for adaptable teaching strategies, targeted support, and collaborative efforts with families to ensure that all learners could progress effectively in developing their reading skills.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that teachers responded to instructional challenges by employing flexible and targeted approaches that addressed individual learner needs. By combining personalized support, engaging classroom techniques, and active collaboration with families, teachers were able to sustain learner motivation, reinforce key reading skills, and create a supportive environment that promoted steady progress and confidence in early literacy.

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ISSN: 2704-3010

Volume VII, Issue III

February 2026

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