



LEARNERS' READING DIFFICULTIES: THEIR CAUSES AND TEACHERS' INTERVENTION AS BASES FOR SCHOOL-BASED READING PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative-phenomenological study was conducted to find out the learners' reading difficulties and their causes and teachers' interventions among six (6) Junior High School English teachers and thirty (30) Junior High School learners as bases for School-based Reading Program. Results revealed that the reading difficulties as observed by the English teachers were: poor word recognition and decoding skills, deficiencies in reading comprehension, and challenges with multi-syllabic words; while those as manifested by the learners were: sounding out words and recognizing letter patterns, identifying and manipulating sounds, and comprehending and retaining text. The causes of learners' reading difficulties as observed by the English teachers were: short attention span, poor reading foundation, and overdependence on technology, while those experienced by the learners were: phonological processing deficiency, lack of engagement and focus, and poor vision. The teachers' interventions provided to learners were: providing simple and engaging activities, using interactive methods to make reading enjoyable, and offering scaffolding activities to support learners' progress.

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Keywords: *Learners' Reading Difficulties, Teachers' Interventions, School-based Reading Program*

INTRODUCTION

Reading is the key that unlocks countless doors of opportunity and knowledge for every child. It nurtures imagination, expands horizons, and provides the foundation for lifelong learning and success. When children engage with books, they unlock the ability to think critically, nurture compassion, and gain profound insights into their surroundings. Encouraging a passion for reading from an early age paves the way for scholastic success and holistic development, thereby laying a strong foundation for them to thrive. Teachers should motivate and uplift their young minds to cherish the wonder and power of stories and literature.

However, many learners face reading difficulties that hinder their progress. These difficulties can stem from various factors, including inadequate instructional methods, lack of resources, and individual learning challenges.

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results highlight the urgency of this issue. According to the latest PISA report, the Philippines ranked low in reading performance among 79 countries, with a mean score of 355, significantly below the OECD average of 487 as also reflected in the 2022 Of Iloilo Data on Reading and Numeracy Test. This highlights the importance of implementing tailored strategies to enhance the reading abilities of Filipino learners, guaranteeing that each learner has the chance to build crucial literacy abilities, fostering both their educational success and personal development.

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The researcher has witnessed the significant challenges that learners with reading difficulties encounter daily. These struggles often result in lower academic performance, as these students find it hard to keep up with their peers in subjects that require strong reading comprehension skills especially in English and Filipino. The frustration and anxiety stemming from their difficulties can erode their confidence, thus leading to a lack of motivation and engagement in the classroom. This can create a cycle where their academic struggles and diminished self-esteem further hinder their ability to improve their reading skills.

Thus, the researcher believed that undertaking this study would lead to the implementation of reading interventions to provide these learners with the necessary support to improve their reading skills and comprehension.

These interventions would not only help learners catch up academically but also foster a positive attitude towards learning. By addressing reading difficulties early on, teachers can ensure that learners develop a strong foundation for future academic success. Moreover, effective reading programs can bridge the literacy gap and foster a learning space that embraces diversity and provides encouragement for every student.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methodology

This chapter presents the research method, research design, participants in the study, research instrument, data-gathering procedures, and data analyses. The purpose of this study was to identify the learners' reading difficulties and their causes and teachers' interventions

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as bases for the formulation of school-based reading program in Tubungan National High School, Schools Division of Iloilo, schoolyear 2024-2025.

Research Method

In this study, the descriptive research method using in-depth interviews was employed to determine and interpret the practices of English teachers and peer readers in the Literacy Project, which served as the bases for School-based Reading Program.

Descriptive research seeks to methodically and accurately represent a specific population, occurrence, or situation. It focuses on answering questions about the characteristics of what, where, when, and how (Mcombes, 2019). Furthermore, she explained that the descriptive research approach examines one or more factors in detail.

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach. The interviewer allowed the participants to freely respond to questions to gather the necessary information.

Qualitative research is a method of exploration aimed at gaining insights and understanding by employing established approaches tailored to studying human or social phenomena. This process involves developing innovative questions and methods, gathering information directly from participants' contexts, and performing an inductive analysis that moves from detailed observations to broader patterns. The findings are then interpreted for their deeper meaning, with the final report written in an adaptable and flexible structure, as highlighted by Creswell and Creswell (2022).

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Participants of the Study

The process of choosing the participants was conducted based on the strategy referred to as, "purposeful selection (or purposeful sampling)" according to Smith and Johnson (2022). It is a strategy used in qualitative research to deliberately choose specific settings, persons, or activities that can provide the most relevant and rich information for the study. The participants in this study were the total population of six (6) Junior High School English teachers and the thirty (30) Junior High School learners from Tubungan National High School for Schoolyear 2024-2025.

The research instrument used in the study was an In-depth interview schedule.

The interview guide consisted of a three-item questionnaire for teachers and a two-item questionnaire for learners, designed to allow participants to express their thoughts freely. The study focused on learners' reading difficulties, their causes, and the interventions implemented by teachers.

A researcher-made instrument was used for face-to-face interviews. After participants completed the interviews, their responses were gathered, tabulated, recorded, and analyzed using Thematic Analysis to generate themes.

Validity of the Research Instrument

The accuracy of an interview guide pertains to how effectively the tool evaluates what it is designed to assess. As noted by Kalkbrenner (2021), validity seeks to clarify the authenticity of research results. The interview guide developed by the researcher was forwarded to the adviser for evaluation and modification. After incorporating the necessary

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corrections, the revised guide was forwarded to a panel of experts for content-and-face validation. The guide was deemed valid after it had been reviewed by the panel. Any revisions suggested by the panel were made, and all their feedback were incorporated. The final draft was resubmitted to the panel for approval.

Data Gathering Procedures

After confirming the validity of the study, the researcher reproduced it according to the number of participants involved. Permission was sought from the school head and the participants through formal letters addressed to them. Upon receiving their consent, the researcher conducted the interviews. To ensure clarity and understanding, an orientation session was held to familiarize the participants with the study's objectives. Following this, the participants were asked to respond to the interview questions. After all participants had completed their responses, the data were collected, organized, and analyzed using Thematic Analysis.

Data Analyses

Thematic Analysis is a widely used technique for recognizing, examining, and understanding recurring themes within qualitative information. It involves six key steps to ensure a systematic and thorough approach. The first step is familiarization, where the researcher delves himself/herself in the data, thoroughly examining and revisiting it to develop a comprehensive grasp. Next is coding, which involves generating concise labels or codes for significant features of the data. These codes capture important details that relate to the research questions.

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The third step is searching for themes, where the researcher groups codes into broader themes that represent patterns of meaning. This is followed by reviewing themes, during which the researcher adjusts and fine-tunes the themes to ensure they truly represent the information gathered. During the fifth phase, which involves defining and labeling themes, the researcher explicitly clarifies the meaning and significance of each theme and develops a coherent narrative for each. Finally, in writing the report, the researcher integrates the themes into a compelling and organized report, supported by relevant examples from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study was conducted to identify the learners' reading difficulties and their causes and teachers' interventions as bases for the formulation of school-based reading program in Tubungan National High School, Schools Division of Iloilo, schoolyear 2024-2025.

The research method utilized in the study was descriptive using in-depth interview.

The study used phenomenology under qualitative research design.

The participants of the study were the six (6) Junior High School English teachers and thirty (30) learners with reading difficulties at Tubungan National High School.

The study used a researcher-made in-depth interview guide to gather data. The instrument was subjected to validity tests and was found by validators to be valid and appropriate to use.

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After all participants had completed their responses, the data were collected, organized, and analyzed using Thematic Analysis.

The following are the findings of the study:

The learners' reading difficulties as observed by the teachers were: poor word recognition and decoding skills, poor in reading comprehension, difficulty in reading multi-syllabic words; while for learners, they were: struggles with sounding out words and recognizing letter patterns, trouble in identifying and manipulating individual sounds in words, and difficulty in understanding and retaining what has been read.

The causes of learners' reading difficulties as observed by teachers were: short attention span, poor reading foundation and motivation, and overdependence on social media, gadgets, and video games; while for learners, they were: phonological processing deficiency, lack of engagement and focus, and poor vision or undiagnosed vision problem.

To address these reading difficulties of learners, a school-based reading program was formulated as a result of the study.

Based on the findings, the following insights were drawn:

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The insights drawn from these observations reflect a multifaceted challenge in addressing learners' reading difficulties, as they stem from both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Teachers and learners alike highlight overlapping but distinct issues. For instance, poor word recognition and comprehension, difficulty with multi-syllabic words, and struggles in phonological awareness point to foundational gaps in literacy skills that may have been overlooked during early development stages. Learners' struggles with letter patterns and individual sounds further underscore the need for targeted phonics-based interventions to build confidence and fluency in reading.

The identified causes—ranging from short attention spans and low motivation to external distractions such as gadgets and social media—illustrate how modern lifestyles and developmental challenges intersect to hinder learning.

Additionally, learners' acknowledgment of issues like poor vision and phonological deficiency provides a valuable lens for addressing individual needs. The school-based reading program crafted as an outcome of this study appears to be a promising step. By tailoring strategies to improve engagement and systematically address both skill gaps and motivational barriers, the program has the potential to foster better literacy outcomes and holistic growth among learners.

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Conclusion

In the light of the findings and insights derived from the study, the following recommendations may be considered:

To address the reading difficulties identified in learners at Tubungan National High School, it is essential to strengthen foundational skills which should be a priority by incorporating phonics-based programs that focus on improving letter recognition, decoding abilities, and phonological awareness. Engaging activities, such as word games and sound-pattern exercises, can help build confidence and make the learning process enjoyable.

Additionally, enhancing reading comprehension through guided reading sessions and structured questioning techniques enables learners to develop critical thinking and retention skills, fostering a deeper understanding of the material.

Furthermore, external factors contributing to reading challenges must be addressed. Structured screen time and parental education about the impact of excessive gadget use can help reduce distractions and create a supportive reading environment at home.

Providing individualized support for learners with specific challenges, such as vision problems or attention deficiency, is also crucial. Collaboration with specialists, like optometrists or speech-language therapists, ensures that these issues are effectively resolved.

Finally, the school-based reading program designed in the study serves as a strong foundation to address skill gaps and motivational barriers. By including periodic assessments and adapting strategies as needed, this program has the potential to achieve long-lasting improvements in literacy outcomes.

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