



# TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF ELEMENTARY LEARNERS IN READING ACCORDING TO THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: A PURVIEW OF INQUIRY

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## ABSTRACT

*The ability to read is an important skill in today's modern world where so much information is transmitted in written form. People must have reading skills whether they are in school or not. This is a challenge to teachers at the elementary level on how they nurture indigenous learners to learn proper reading in their respective grade levels. The purpose of this research topic emanated from an observation from past research that, levels of reading difficulties among primary school pupils are very high in the Philippines and are not an exception (Kelly, 1999). The Philippines could be having thousands of children who have severe reading problems which have not been detected. Therefore, there is a need to identify and understand these reading difficulties early in life and the challenges they bring about so that the situation could be changed for the better. This study involved teachers in grade 3 in selected private schools in Davao City. This group was chosen because, the following year, they are supposed to be in grade seven to write their examinations which are to be read and answered in English without anybody's help. These examinations are very critical as they determine whether the pupil will proceed to secondary education or not. Therefore, it is expected that by the time a pupil reaches grade six, they must be competent in reading as preparation for their Junior High School life.*

**KEYWORDS:** *trials and tribulations, elementary learners, reading, department of education, purview of inquiry.*

## INTRODUCTION

Across the globe, students have been away from schools and their teachers, but literacy learning has continued. In many countries, students' literacy proficiency is often measured via high-stakes assessment tests. However, such tests do not make visible students' literacy lives away from formal learning settings, so students are positioned as task responders, rather than as agentic readers and writers. The authors explore the fluidity and diversity of literacy events and practices for students and their teachers.

This study featured a very unique way in exploring factors that contribute to reading difficulties in elementary learners and challenges faced by teachers in teaching them how to read. The ability to read is important if one is to succeed in school. This is because the comprehension of everything that is learned in school depends on the learner's good reading skills. According to Lyon (2013), if children do not learn to read, understand, write and use language to communicate their ideas and perspectives, their favorable conditions for a fulfilling and rewarding life are seriously compromised.

From the global perspective, reading difficulties have been estimated to be at two to five percent among school-going children (Wong, 2018). Findings from the study that was carried out in the United Kingdom among the English-speaking children, revealed that "of grade two and three children whose reading was assessed, approximately a quarter were functioning at a fairly low level for their grade and approximately one in twenty, were hardly able to read.

Furthermore, a study which was carried out by the Southern Africa Consortium for Measuring Educational Quality in about fifteen African countries including Zambia, Mauritius, Uganda, South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, and others



revealed that most of the pupils read below what was expected of their grade level while some of them were not able to read at all. To be specific, low-performing countries included Mauritius, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe where it is reported that, 97.6% of the grade six learners were virtually unable to read. Such reports do not give a good picture of what is happening in the education sector. Where is the problem? Is it the pupils who are dull, or is there something wrong with the curriculum? Could it be the teachers who are not well trained, or there is something wrong with the teaching methods? All these questions deserve to be answered, if the problem is to be solved (Kalindi, 2019).

Research on reading difficulties among pupils in Zambia has a short history although for a long time now, Zambia has been concerned with the unsatisfactory levels of reading ability among school children (Kachenga, 2018). Research has shown that most pupils reach as far as grade six without the ability to read (Kelly, 2019). A study conducted by Matafwali (2017) found that 49.1% of the pupils could not read words at all and 57.5% of children could not read any single sentence. The ability to read is by far the most important ingredient for one to excel in other subjects as far as academic work is concerned.

Another study on reading ability in grade five conducted by the Ministry of Education (2019) in collaboration with the International Institute for Education Planning in Paris revealed that levels of reading ability were very low in primary schools. Unfortunately, reading achievement levels for grade six learners in Zambia are among the lowest in Africa. There is a poor reading performance at grade six level in the Zambian basic schools. The Southern Africa Consortium for Measuring Education Quality report, found that overall, the achievement levels in reading for both boys and girls remained very low.

Literacy is an indispensable foundation of education. It provides opportunities for survival, growth, security, and stability. It instills human formation by the needs and demands of society's culture and core values the learner thrives. The level of literacy that the learners may achieve is illimitable. Thus, the best education program and policy should be equally accessible to all regardless of race, culture, religious affiliation, and beliefs (Arimah, 2021).

Making teaching and learning available to all is considered the primary goal of the international community. This is widely asserted by various government human rights agencies and acknowledged as a fundamental aspect of achieving development, progress, and communal growth. This acknowledgment of education attainment is exemplified in the international aims, goals, and schemes that have been targeted in the past two decades (UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2015).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (2019) stressed and reiterated schooling as a social right and persistently paved the way for an intense international relation. Further, the assembly of the international community in Dakar, Senegal, set an agenda that targeted creating development in education. At the World Education Forum, the Dakar Framework was adopted to formulate and bring to fruition the EFA commitments. This was composed of governments from different countries, including the Philippines, and representatives of regional groups, international organizations, donor agencies, on-government organizations (NGOs), and civil society.

Likewise, DepEd Order 94 s.2019 was issued, which ordered that EFA regional and division committees be created to perform specific functions toward achieving global goals in increasing literacy. With EFA by UNESCO and EFA Philippines in collaboration with the Department of Education (DepEd), there is an urging call for closing the achievement gap among diverse groups of learners and creating a balance in the literacy rate among them.

However, in region 11, despite the government effort for equality in education, the ethnic groups, or the indigenous peoples (IP) in the Philippines, numbering between 15 to 20 million in around 110 communities, still share the same discrimination and marginalization experiences. Most of these indigenous tribes settle in mountainous parts of their provinces, far from the inaccessible public schools. Thus, various non-governmental and governmental groups provide education interventions in these communities (Episcopal Commission on Indigenous Peoples (ECIP, 2019). Some of these ethnic groups, called the Agta or Abihu, are found in Region V. For instance, a total of 34 communities are located in the towns of Camarines Norte (National Commission on Indigenous Peoples). Finally, the books are limited to meet the number of students in a class. There are no reading materials available for classroom use in some grade levels. There is no contextualized and culture-based instructional material for the Indigenous students to be used as a supplemental reading resource. Few similar studies have been done in the Philippines. On the other hand,



the numerous researches on reading were mostly on non-indigenous groups, and only a few dealt with the Indigenous Peoples in the country. Consequently, few attempts were made to develop and produce research-based reading material for Indigenous learners in the study's locale. Having these considerations, the researcher's output-the Contextualized and Culture-Based Reading material is deemed to benefit the Indigenous Learners and their teachers (Martin, et. al., 2012).

To achieve the main aim of this study, the following research questions are set to generate reliable and authentic data from the elementary teachers who served as the participants of this study, to wit:

1. What are the lived experiences of the elementary teachers on the reading difficulties by the grade 3 learners?
2. How do they cope with those reading difficulties encountered by the grade 3 learners?
3. What is the teaching and learning insights can be drawn to enhance the reading abilities of the grade 3 learners?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Desi**

Extensive and careful descriptions of the time, place, context, and culture of the study will be thoroughly discussed to develop transferability, which is the qualitative parallel to external validity in postpositivist research (Mertens, 2005). This section will: (a) discuss the interview approach; (b) explain the role of the researcher; and lastly, (c) describe the sampling method and ethical considerations.

To ensure that the same information was collected from all the participants, an interview guide was used. The interview guide included open-ended questions and topics to help structure the interview, but when needed, the interviewer also explored, probed, and asked additional questions to clarify and expand on a particular topic. The interview guide helped make interviewing several different participants more systematic and comprehensive by defining in advance the issues to be explored (Patton, 2005). The open-ended questions were framed in a way, so the participants could represent their views and perspectives in their own words and terms, in addition to taking the questions in any direction that they chose.

Since qualitative research studies subjects in their natural setting, all interviews must be done through face to face or virtual interviews using google meet at a time convenient for the participants. All interview sessions were tape-recorded for purposes of transcription. When needed, the researcher used follow-up interviews after transcription to clarify meaning or explore areas in more depth.

### **Participants and Sampling**

A total of 10 participants are considered in this study who will join the in-depth interview and focused group discussion. Six of them will join the in-depth interview (IDI) while the remaining four will be subjected to the focus group discussion (FGD). All data gathered during IDI and FGD will be recorded and transmuted to summarize the responses of the participants in an orderly manner. Below are the inclusion criteria of the participants.

Participant 1 is a public-school teacher and got her license in 2017. Currently, she is an English teacher teaching reading to elementary pupils. Participant 2 is a licensed professional teacher working in one of the public schools in Davao City. Her area of responsibility includes laboratory and remedial reading programs. Participant 3 is a licensed professional teacher in public school for almost 9 years teaching Elementary grades with IP learners. Participant 4 is a licensed professional teacher. She experienced 4 years in a private school teaching English and 5 years in public school teaching Elementary grade with all the subject areas. Participant 5 is a licensed teacher teaching in a public school and taught General education subjects for 4 years in Grade 3. Participant 6 is a licensed teacher. She taught grade 6 pupils with 100 percent IP learners. Participant 7 is also a licensed teacher. He is teaching in a public school for almost 6 years. As an English teacher, he is assigned in teaching reading to grade 3 students. Participant 8 is a licensed teacher in one of the public schools in Davao City. Currently, he is the language teacher of the grade 3 students. Participant 9 is teaching English in the Elementary unit for almost 3 years. She is a licensed teacher and currently enrolled her Master of Arts in Educational Management in one of the private schools in Davao City. Participant 10 is a public-school teacher in Davao City. He is in the teaching profession for almost 7 years and currently teaching reading to grade 3.



### Research Instruments

The sampling method used was purposeful and also what Patton (2005) calls extreme or deviant case sampling. Deviant case sampling focuses on cases that are rich in information because they are unusual or special in some way. The researcher selected a total of ten participants from selected public schools in Davao City. The researcher was interested in this sample to explore and compare the themes that developed between the participants with differing populations.

The researcher utilized the in-depth interview (IDI) and focused group discussion (FGD) respectively. During interviews, teachers were invited through a virtual conference (google meet) and face to face to participate in the study. If interested, teachers were asked to complete a short demographic survey and to join a scheduled meeting. Due to expense and time, qualitative researchers often use fewer participants than quantitative researchers (Patton, 2005).

### Data Analysis

The data analysis was done in the qualitative method. To answer the first and second research questions, the researcher analyzed the interviews. Therefore, she did the content analysis of each interview, and the themes were identified. To answer the third research question, the researcher created a rubric and a checklist to determine the progress of students and the increase in the amount of their willingness to promote reading comprehension skills during the pandemic. Finally, the questionnaire was used to explore the advantages and disadvantages of these interactive slides in reply to the last research question.

Qualitative data analysis begins with the process of organizing, reducing, and describing the collected data (Schwandt, 2001). Unlike quantitative analysis, there are no prescribed formulas for qualitative analysis. Collaizi (2006) remind researchers that qualitative analysis does not proceed linearly and is not neat. However, good practice and procedures enhance the credibility of qualitative research. In this last section, the data analysis procedures will be explained and the steps taken to ensure the results from this study are credible, transferable, dependable, and authentic will be thoroughly described.

To guide the data analysis, the researcher used the seven phases of data analysis described by as a means to reduce data, create manageable pieces, allow for interpretation, and find meaning in the words of the participants. The seven phases included: (a) organizing the data; (b) immersion in the data; (c) generating categories and themes; (d) coding the data; (e) offering interpretations through analytic memos; and (f) searching for alternative understandings (Collaizi, 2006).

Data analysis first begins with organizing the data. The organization of the data involved keeping information provided by each participant separate and in sequence with the order of the interviews. The process of organizing the data allowed it to remain manageable, easily accessible, and readily available. The digital audio files from the interviews were carefully transcribed into written form. Electronic folders were established to create an organization for the data collected from each participant.

Next, the researcher became familiar with the data through extensive reading of the interviews to gain an understanding of the content. This involved reading through the interviews at least three times. Following Hatch's (2002) recommendations for qualitative analysis, the researcher created a sheet of notes for each participant. The summary sheets were a quick way to refer back to the original data as the data analysis continued.

After the initial readings, Hatch (2002) recommends researchers read data through completely with one typology in mind. Accordingly, typologies as classification systems made up of categories that divide some aspects of the world into parts. Typologies are generated from the theory, common sense, or research objectives. For this study, the researcher used the typologies or themes from the literature review as the constructs through which to view the data.

After reading through the data with each constructor typology in mind, the researcher coded the data into five categories from the literature by taking excerpts of text from the data and identifying them within a particular category. After everything was coded, the researcher read through the data again while writing analytic memos on her thoughts and insights and began the process of offering interpretations. During this stage, the researcher began to interpret the



data to find significance and meaning in the teachers' instructional experiences through pulling salient themes, reoccurring ideas, and patterns of belief that resonated collectively throughout the interviews.

The offering of interpretations began following the emergence of themes in the data. Marshall and Rossman (2006) believe this part of the data analysis brings meaning to the themes and categories and allows the researcher to develop links between the interviews. The researcher began to interpret the data to find significance and meaning in the teachers' instructional experiences.

Rossman and Marshall (2006) remind researchers there will always be alternate explanations existing within the data. Before moving forward, the researcher stopped and evaluated the findings for other plausible explanations.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data from the interviews was analyzed using a process of thematic analysis facilitated by initial coding of the interview transcripts, identifying preliminary categories, second round coding, refining categories, and recognizing emerging themes.

As a result of the analysis, the main themes; namely, *rules in reading, use context clues, and importance of remedial reading* aligned with the formulated research questions. Learning to read is about listening and understanding as well as working out what is printed on the page. Through hearing stories, children are exposed to a wide range of words. This helps them build their vocabulary and improve their understanding when they listen, which is vital as they start to read. They need to understand how stories work too. Even if your child does not understand every word, they will hear new sounds, words, and phrases which they can then try out, copying what they have heard.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Teaching a student to read is arguably one of the most important functions of the teaching profession. The ability to read, and read for comprehension, opens up an entire world of possibilities and opportunities for children to discover new worlds and learn new concepts. And while teaching reading is such a high priority, some teachers who aren't specially trained in the practice find themselves seeking additional help.

### For the Teachers

Begin the school year by getting a baseline reading of each student's current reading level. This will help you to A: Understand the abilities(s) that you are working with and how to group students (which is another effective instructional strategy) and B: Determine what reading strategies and tools will work best for each student's individual needs.

Think of this like a mentorship program, where older students with demonstrable reading abilities are paired up with younger, new readers to help them improve. Younger readers get to see high-level reading modeled by the older student, and the older students learn the valuable skills of mentorship, patience and how to give direction. What's more, if there are older students who are struggling with reading at their grade level, a reading buddy program would allow them to be exposed to more approachable reading materials with the younger student, only helping to build their confidence and ability.

### For the School Heads

Using audiobooks while reading also known as ear reading is a great way to assist struggling readers. While this shouldn't be your primary practice, using audiobooks in conjunction with focused phonics instruction has been proven to help students improve their reading accuracy. And that benefit applies to students across all abilities and skill levels.

Send teacher to trainings as part of their faculty development. To teach academic English means teaching general and domain-specific vocabulary in accordance with a subject or unit. While vocabulary is sometimes thought of as separate from reading instruction, it is actually an integral part in improving reading abilities. This has been a proven tactic especially for English language learners, but these practices help readers of all levels and backgrounds.



### For the Students

A good reader is someone who not only reads more quantity- or time-wise than the average person, it is also someone who can better understand the written text. What I'm referring to here is not only the simple understanding or decoding of the written language but also a more in-depth comprehension of the text. Understanding and enjoying metaphors or other subtle subtexts while reading a book makes a huge difference in enjoying the experience of reading. A good read will catch on to these things and will have a better understanding of the mental process the author has gone through while writing the book.

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