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INTENTIONALITY OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS ON READING COMPREHENSION DIFFICULTIES AMONG GRADE NINE LEARNERS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The ability to read was an important skill in today's modern world where so much information is transmitted in written form. It is important that people have reading skills whether they are in school or not. This is a challenge to teachers in the junior high school level on how they nurture grade 9 learners to learn proper reading in their respective grade level. The purpose of this research topic emanated from an observation from past research that, levels of reading difficulties among junior high school are still very high in the Philippines and is not an exception (Kelly, 2019). Philippines could possibly be having thousands of learners who have severe reading problems which have not been detected. Therefore, there is a need to identify and understand these reading comprehension difficulties early in life and the challenges they bring about so that the situation could possibly be changed for the better. This study involved teachers in grade 9 in selected public schools in Davao City. This group was chosen because, the following year, they are supposed to be in grade 10 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 students will proceed to college education or not. Therefore, it is expected that by the time a student reaches grade 10, they must be competent in reading as preparation for their college life.

KEYWORDS: *intentionality, junior high school, teachers, reading comprehension, difficulties, grade nine, learners*

INTRODUCTION

This study aimed at exploring factors that contribute to reading comprehension difficulties in grade nine learners and challenges faced by teachers in teaching these learners how to read and understand properly. The ability to read is important if one is to succeed in school. This is due to the fact that the comprehension of everything that is learnt in school depends on the learner's good reading skills. According to Lyon (2019), if grade nine students 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 students, revealed that, "of the grade nine and ten students 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 and understand at all" (Gross, 2021).

Furthermore, a study which was carried out by the Southern Africa Consortium for Measuring Educational Quality in about fifteen African countries which included Zambia, Mauritius, Uganda, South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana and others revealed that most of the students 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.

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Such reports do not give a good picture about what is happening in the education sector. Where is the problem? Is it the student who are dull, 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 students 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 (2019) found that 49.1% of the students could not read words at all and 57.5% 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 nine conducted in 2015 by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the International Institute for Education Planning in Paris revealed that, levels of reading ability were very low in secondary schools. Unfortunately, according to Reading Support for Zambian Children report (2019–2020), reading achievement levels for grade nine learners in Zambia are among the lowest in Africa. There is poor reading performance at grade nine level in the Zambian basic schools. The Southern Africa Consortium for Measuring Education Quality report (2020), 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).

To make 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, 2018).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 and the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) in 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand, 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, in April 2021 set an agenda that targeted to create 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 164 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 create a balance in the literacy rate among them.

However, in region 11 despite the government effort for equality in education in the Philippines, numbering between 15 to 20 million in around 110 communities, still share the same discrimination and marginalization experiences. Most of these learners 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, 2019).

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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 of similar studies have been done in the Philippines.

On the other hand, the numerous researches on reading were mostly on junior high school learners only a few dealt in the country. Consequently, few attempts were made to develop and produce a research-based reading material for junior high school 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 Learners and their teachers (Martin, et. al., 2020).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In order to enable future researchers to extrapolate the findings of this study to different contexts, the specifics of the research methodologies will be detailed. Transferability, the qualitative equivalent of external validity in postpositivist research, will be developed by detailed and meticulous discussions of the study's time, place, environment, and culture (Mertens, 2005). This section will address the following topics: (a) the interview technique; (b) the researcher's function; and (c) the sample strategy and ethical issues.

Patton (2005) proposes researchers to conduct interviews in order to learn the things they cannot directly observe. Qualitative interviewing is not used to get answers to questions, but to understand the experiences of the participants and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 2016). Generally, qualitative studies use unstructured, open-ended interviews, because they allow for the most flexibility and responsiveness to emerging issues for both the participants and interviewer; however, the use of semi-structured interviews is not uncommon and used when the researcher seeks to obtain specific more focused information (Schwandt, 2001).

Semi-structured interviews combine the flexibility of unstructured, open-ended interviews with directionality and an agenda to produce focused, qualitative, textual data (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 2019). This study collected data using semi-structured interviews in order to explore how the junior high school teachers improve the quality of teaching reading to grade nine learners and to describe their experiences, strategies, and outcomes when attending classes in promoting reading comprehension skills.
In order 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 across a number of 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 (Patton, 1990).

Since qualitative research studies subjects in their natural setting, all interviews must be done through 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

Every participant was a teacher in one of Davao City's chosen public schools and was at least eighteen years old. With almost two years of experience, these participants are now teaching in the 2022–2023 academic year. Ten people in all are included in this study and will participate in the focused group discussion and in-depth interview. Three will participate in a focus group discussion (FGD), and seven will participate in an in-depth interview (IDI). To organize the participant responses, the information acquired during IDI and FGD will be transcribed and converted. The participant's inclusion criteria are listed below.

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Participant 1 is a public-school teacher and got her licensed 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 responsibilities includes laboratory and remedial reading program. Participant 3 is a licensed professional teacher in public school for almost 9 years teaching junior high school with grade nine learners. Participant 4 is a licensed professional teacher. She experienced 4 years in private school teaching English and 5 years in public school teaching junior high school. Participant 5 is a licensed teacher teaching in public school and taught General education for 4 years as Grade 9 teacher. Participant 6 a licensed teacher. She taught grade 9 students with reading comprehension problems. Participant 7 is also a licensed teacher. He experienced 4 years in teaching Secondary level with grade 9 and 10 learners. He is currently continuing his Master's Degree with a major in English Literature. Participant 8 is an English teacher in one of the public schools in Davao City. She is in-charge with the remedial program in their school since she already finished her master of arts in teaching English. Participant 9 is a licensed professional teacher and currently teaching in one of the junior high schools in Davao City. Her field of specialty includes reading comprehension and oral communication skills. Participant 10 is a public-school teacher for almost 12 years. Her area of responsibility includes teaching grammar, reading and writing among junior high school students.

Data Analysis

A qualitative approach was used to analyze the data. The researcher examined the interviews to provide answers to the first and second research questions. As a result, she conducted a content analysis on each interview, identifying the themes. In order to assess student growth and the rise in their willingness to support learners' reading comprehension skills, the researcher developed a checklist and a rubric in order to respond to the third study question. In order to address the final study question, the questionnaire was utilized to examine the benefits and drawbacks of these interactive slides.

The process of arranging, condensing, and characterizing the gathered data is the first step in the analysis of qualitative data (Schwandt, 2001). There are no set formulas for qualitative analysis, in contrast to quantitative analysis. Researchers are reminded by Marshall and Rossman (2006) that qualitative analysis is messy and does not follow a linear process. Nonetheless, sound methods and practices raise the legitimacy of qualitative research. This final section will provide an explanation of the data analysis methods used as well as a detailed account of the measures taken to guarantee the validity, reliability, transferability, and authenticity of the study's findings.

The seven stages of data analysis outlined by Marshall and Rossman (2006) served as a guide for the researcher as a way to distill the data, break it down into digestible chunks, permit interpretation, and extract meaning from the participant's comments. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), there were seven stages in all: (a) organizing the data; (b) immersing oneself in the data; (c) coming up with categories and topics; (d) coding the data; (e) providing interpretations using analytical memoranda; and (f) looking for alternate interpretations.

The initial step in data analysis is data organization. Data organization required maintaining participant information distinct from one another and in accordance with the interview order. The organization of the data made it possible for it to stay immediately available, easily controllable, and quickly accessible. Written transcriptions of the digital audio files from the interviews were done with great care. To organize the information gathered from every participant, electronic folders were created.

After that, the researcher read through the interviews in great detail to become familiar with the material and comprehend its substance. At least three readings of the interviews were required for this. As per Hatch's (2002) suggestions, the researcher made a note sheet specifically for every participant in the qualitative analysis. As the data analysis progressed, the summary sheets provided a convenient means of quickly consulting the source data (Hatch, 2002).

Hatch (2002) advises researchers to study the data through in its entirety with a single typology in mind following the initial readings. Typologies are classification systems composed of categories that split the universe into different portions, according to Patton (1990). Hatch (2002) asserts that research objectives, common sense, or theory are the

sources of typologies. The investigator employed the typologies or themes identified in the literature review as the conceptual frameworks to analyze the data in this investigation.

The researcher categorized the data into five categories from the literature by extracting text extracts from the data and classifying it inside a specific category after going over the data with each construct or typology in mind. Following the coding procedure, the researcher went over the information once again and started to provide interpretations while also penning analytical notes outlining her ideas and discoveries. In order to give the teachers' educational experiences context and relevance, the researcher started to analyze the data at this point. To do this, she identified key themes, recurring concepts, and belief patterns that appeared often 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 meanings 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 purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of the junior high school teachers on reading difficulties encountered by grade nine learners. Analysis of the data revealed three themes; namely, importance of reading comprehension, modification of reading strategies and imposition of strong motivation.

The data from the interviews were 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. Main themes were identified through the iterative process of coding and categorizing, resulting in the most salient topics in participants' responses to the interview questions. These themes were discovered inductively in a bottom-up manner as emerging from transcript data when analyzed about the research questions. This resulted in the final distribution of themes deemed as most accurately reflecting the reported experiences of the research participants.

The first theme "importance of reading comprehension" have four (4) sub-themes namely: understanding English language, proper intonation and pronunciation, provide appropriate reading materials and significance of interest in reading. The second theme immersed is "modification of reading strategies" with four (4) sub-themes namely, provide more reading activities, conduct question and answer portion, cooperation between teachers and learners and practice reading without teachers. Finally, theme number three which is "imposition of strong motivation" have four (4) immersed themes, to wit: conduct of remedial classes, availability of teachers, reading is a self-fulfilling prophecy and significance of self-confidence in reading.

Recommendations

This research study shares the lived experiences of junior high school teachers in teaching reading among junior high school learner's value reading comprehension, modification of reading strategies and imposition of powerful motivation. Just as it informs of the many challenges teachers faced, it exposes numerous areas for further study. The overarching topic of educational disruption could be explored in relation to student achievement, teacher mental health, or teachers leaving the profession.

Within in the context of the difficulty in reading among JHS learners and its impact on education, possible directions for research include student attendance, engagement, mental health, and coping strategies. To hone in on student academic progress, the study of the inequities which seemed to be exacerbated during teaching reading and learning, and the impact of those on the achievement gap in education across the nation could be explored.

Also, worthy of study is how the reading format was beneficial to JHS students as they did not have to manage the complexities of attending school with their peers every day, were allowed to work at their own pace, and possibly

received one-to-one interaction and assistance from their teachers. Additionally, I would recommend studies to examine the impact of reading on parents' perceptions of teachers' roles and responsibilities. Other possibilities might involve the notion of reading student cues while video conferencing, and how adaptations teachers made during reading sessions and learning directly impacted their future practice in either a face-to-face or a distance environment. The extreme disruption of poverty among Indigenous learners opened the floodgates with regards to educational topics worthy of pursuit. My study situates itself in the literature with regards to teachers' experiences in teaching Indigenous learners. Its findings led to several recommendations and possibilities for additional research.

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