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PROMOTING ACTIVE READING STRATEGIES OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS: NARRATIVES OF ENGLISH TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the experiences of junior high school English teachers in promoting active reading strategies among their learners in the South Cotabato Division. The research aimed to understand the challenges these teachers face and the strategies they use to foster reading comprehension. Ten (10) junior high school English teachers participated in the study. A phenomenological approach was employed to delve into the lived experiences of these participants. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed to identify common themes. The findings revealed several challenges encountered by the English teachers. These included difficulties in engaging students with reading, addressing the diverse range of reading levels present in classrooms, and effectively fostering student motivation for reading. To cope with these challenges, the teachers utilized various strategies. These strategies encompassed creating engaging learning environments, incorporating technology into reading lessons, and strengthening student engagement in reading programs. The insights drawn from this research highlight the importance of teacher expertise and training, and the necessity of employing diverse teaching strategies to create a supportive and effective reading environment. These findings can inform the development of targeted interventions and professional development for teachers, ultimately benefiting students' reading development and academic success.

KEYWORDS: *Active Reading Strategies, English Teachers, Junior High School*

INTRODUCTION

Active learning strategies are crucial for promoting deeper understanding and active participation in the classroom, though implementing and assessing their effectiveness can be challenging for educators. These strategies, which involve students directly in the learning process rather than having them passively absorb information, are key to developing essential skills for lifelong learning. They foster critical analysis, enhance solution-oriented skills, and develop the ability to apply real-world learning, real-life context.Despite their significance, many students struggle to fully engage with these strategies, particularly when it comes to reading and comprehension tasks.

This study has the potential to significantly impact educational practices, particularly for students who face challenges in developing key skills critical for academic and life success. In a world where critical thinking and active engagement with information are increasingly essential, addressing reading comprehension difficulties is vital for both academic achievement and success in the workforce. If these challenges are not addressed, students may continue to struggle, limiting their future opportunities. By exploring the role of active learning strategies, the study seeks to identify practical methods that can help students overcome these difficulties, build confidence, and acquire the skills needed for their studies and future careers.

Throughout the world, a variety of learning sectors have implemented numerous innovative programs. As we transition to the new normal, it is imperative that every educational institution investigate the efficacy of remote reading comprehension activities in delivering quality education and outcomes-based education to learners, from every corner of the classroom to the thresholds of our homes (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020).

The Court of Auditors in Portugal reported that 80% of students do not have the opportunity to experience computer devices not only that, they alco encounter challenges with internet connections. The Educational Authority of Portual bought more or less 100,000 pieces of computers in March 2020. These goods were meant for delivery to schools then assigned to underprivileged students. Only in the following year, 2021, was the procurement of computers approved and delivered (Machado et al.).

The students had only got 27% of the 100,000 pieces of equipment by January 2021. The Portuguese government promptly failed to solve the disparities in ICT literacy and availability of digital equipment the epidemic inflicted. The use of children's books in libraries, according to Jaeger and Blaabaek (2020) and Reimer et al. (2021), indicates that the lockdown has significantly exacerbated social inequality.

In England, problems with reading comprehension still exist, which reflect continuous worries about literacy rates and educational fairness. The 2019 National Curriculum Assessments at Key Stage 2 in England published by the Department of Education (DfE) expose a significant achievement difference in reading comprehension between

impoverished kids and their contemporaries. The DfE statistics showed that, compared to 86% of non-disadvantaged students, only 70% of disadvantaged students met the expected level in reading, so highlighting a continuous difference in reading performance (Department for Education, 2019).

Moreover, the pressure of standardized testing, particularly the Key Stage 2 SATs and Phonics Screening Check, continues to influence teaching practices and educational priorities. While assessments are crucial for measuring student progress, critics argue that focusing on test scores can lead to a narrow curriculum and a mechanical approach to reading instruction, which may not adequately develop deep comprehension skills (The Guardian, 2019).

Furthermore, especially in elementary schools, questions have been expressed regarding the accessibility and variety of reading resources provided to students. A report by the National Literacy Trust in 2019 found that a quarter of primary schools in England have inadequate library provision, limiting students' access to high-quality literature and diverse perspectives. This lack of access can disproportionately impact students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who often do not have books available at home.

For Nigerian students to effectively integrate into the contemporary workforce, acquiring these skills is paramount. Therefore, merely studying Literature is insufficient; there is a pressing need for a highly efficient teaching-learning process to facilitate the development of these essential skills. However, the prevalent high failure rates suggest that current educational practices may not adequately equip students with the skills intended through literature-in-English education (Stephanie, 2021).

Research indicates that a significant factor contributing to poor teaching and learning outcomes in Nigeria is the lack of adequate learning resources (Nigeria Education in Emergencies Working Group, 2019). Common problems in Nigerian classrooms include shortages of qualified teachers, poor textbook availability, and inadequate school supplies. Government interventions typically prioritize core subjects like English and Mathematics in efforts to address textbook shortages, often neglecting subjects such as Literature-in-English. There is a scarcity of comprehensive studies focusing specifically on the challenges of teaching Literature-in-English in Nigeria, especially regarding teaching resources.

In the Philippines, problems with reading comprehension continue to mirror larger worries about literacy rates and educational quality. Many Filipino pupils still battle with reading comprehension on a major scale. According to the statistics, a significant portion of children scored below competence levels in reading, suggesting a continuous difficulty in this vital ability area (Department of Education, 2019).

One of the contributing factors to low reading comprehension levels is the limited access to quality reading materials, especially in rural and underserved areas. Many schools lack well-stocked libraries and up-to-date reading resources, which hampers students' exposure to diverse texts and opportunities for independent reading practice. Additionally, the scarcity of culturally relevant and age-appropriate reading materials in local languages further impedes students' engagement with reading and comprehension development.

Furthermore, some schools' educational approaches to reading comprehension may be too focused on rote memorization and decoding abilities, rather than promoting deeper knowledge and critical thinking. This restricted approach to reading education may not provide students with the abilities they need to successfully grasp and evaluate complex texts (Habito 2019).

Moreover, socioeconomic factors play a significant role in reading comprehension disparities among Filipino students. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds often face additional barriers to developing strong reading skills, such as limited access to early childhood education, inadequate home literacy environments, and economic pressures that may force them to prioritize work over education. These disparities exacerbate inequalities in educational outcomes and perpetuate cycles of poverty and social exclusion (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2019).

In the Division of South Cotabato, the weekly learning plan includes reading time during which students are provided reading materials, both written and oral, to help them build reading comprehension abilities. Based on the foregoing, the researcher believes it is important to investigate the various methods English instructors use to develop the reading abilities of junior high students in the South Cotabato Division.

Within the preview of this study, the focus is on the beneficiaries, encompassing various stakeholders within the educational ecosystem. Education Program Supervisors in English are poised to gain a foundational understanding for designing policies and schemes aimed at effectively fostering reading comprehension skills. These initiatives are not only advantageous for English teachers but also extend to parents and learners, facilitating improvements in reading comprehension through a contextualized approach (Elleman 2019).

School principals, as instructional leaders, stand to profit from developing appropriate methods for smoothly integrating reading comprehension techniques into teaching practices adapted to the individual requirements of students. The research offers to aid English instructors with exercises aimed at improving pupils' reading

comprehension abilities. Technical assistance from DepEd will enable instructors to effectively include reading comprehension exercises into their lesson plans (Demirtas 2019).

Furthermore, the results will offer instructors a foundation for tailoring instructional techniques to enhance students' reading comprehension skills.For students, the research provides fresh interventions and incentive to succeed in English classrooms. Finally, the study's outcomes hold significance for future researchers, serving as a valuable reference point for similar or comparative studies in the field (Ylmää 2019).

Advanced reading comprehension abilities- it is the capacity to decode each word and formulate a profound concept from the lectures or readings. It is crucial to the overall operation of a community. Also, it is considered one of the fundamental components of reading (Craig & Quimbo, 2022). This inquiry focuses on English teachers' evaluations of junior high school learners reading comprehension skills in the South Cotabato division.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Farid et al. (2019), the online learning approach benefits over 1000 institutions in almost 50 countries by allowing students to study books that are relevant to their interests. e-learning. The pandemic has had a profound impact on education worldwide, requiring institutions to quickly adapt to online platforms in order to maintain the continuity of learning in the face of physical limitations and disruptions caused by the health crisis (Reimer et al., 2021).

The pandemic caused considerable interruptions in students' in-person learning throughout the academic year (Kuhfeld et al., 2021). In late 2019, many educational institutions began adopting various forms of virtual instruction (Lake & Dusseault, 2020). This pattern continued into early 2021.This fosters an environment where learners can share interpretations and clarify uncertainties, ultimately improving their understanding skills.

Reading programs may rely on generic materials that do not engage students or foster critical thinking, making it difficult for them to actively engage with texts and extract meaning. During this period, educators and parents actively sought effective strategies for continuing formal education through remote or virtual learning (Hodges et al., 2020).This change has necessitated the development of innovative teaching and learning strategies that prioritize adaptability and the integration of technology to improve educational outcomes and engagement in virtual environments.

Nonetheless, the efficacy of virtual learning is unclear (Viner et al., 2020). Student reading choices change for a number of reasons. The researchers aimed to identify the factors influencing distance learners' interest in reading, as well as their preferences for different types of reading materials. An additional narrative revolves around the utilization of a variety of reading materials to accommodate varying proficiency levels and interests.

Reading can help children become more actively engaged in various ways, including thinking critically, verbalizing ideas, and participating in related activities.The majority of Nigerian primary school students struggle with reading, according to educational research literature (Iroegbu and Iroegbu, 2019). Children who struggle with reading also have difficulties with spelling, writing, general knowledge, and vocabulary development.

Of all the topics, reading is the most susceptible to parental influences. Additionally, these studies claimed that reading proficiency opens doors to success in other academic subjects. According to Xiaofeng, Wenhui, and Aibaro (2019), interactions such as being read to and exposure to books, newspapers, and environmental print significantly influence children's development in learning to read. Additionally, children from home environments rich in literacy demonstrate higher levels of reading knowledge and skills.
Parents of children from low-income families offered significantly less academic support and were much less likely to supply essential physical resources, such as tablets and computers (Azubuike et al., 2021). Teachers facilitate a more dynamic and inclusive learning experience by integrating a diverse array of texts, such as non-fiction, poetry, fiction, and multimedia resources, which engage students on multiple levels.

A report from the Court of Auditors in Portugal indicates that four out of every five students faced challenges with internet access and did not have the necessary technological equipment. In March 2020, the Portuguese Ministry of Education acquired 100,000 devices for distribution to schools, aiming to support underprivileged students. The authorization for acquiring and distributing technological equipment faced delays (Machado et al., 2021).

Research utilizing children's book loans from libraries has indicated a noticeable rise in social disparity during the lockdown (Reimer et al., 2021). Research suggests that children who participated in daily reading sessions with their parents during the pandemic experienced less learning loss compared to those without such interactions (Bao et al., 2020). However, reading to children cannot substitute for the essential role of formal education in developing their reading skills.

Even so, social resources—such as the strength of the bond between parents and children—are crucial for kids' literacy development. Xiaofeng, Wenhui, and Aibao (2019) observed a connection between inadequate reading comprehension and parental absence. According to these academics, the stability of the parent-child bond affects the quality of interactions between parents and children when they read stories together.

Research Questions

This study assessed the experiences of English teachers in teaching reading comprehension skills. Specifically, it aimed to address the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of English teachers in promoting active reading strategies among junior high school learners?
2. How do English teachers cope with the challenges they encounter while promoting active reading strategies for junior high school learners?
3. Based on the study's findings, what insights can be drawn from English teachers' experiences in promoting active reading strategies among junior high school learners?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The phenomenological research design proved advantageous for exploring a topic that required an in-depth examination of the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of the audience. This method effectively gathered audience insights, enhanced understanding of the studied topic, and facilitated the development of new theories regarding the audience's experience in a specific, controlled environment (Dovetail Editorial Team, 2023). The researcher developed a universal interpretation of the event, situation, or experience, leading to a deeper comprehension of the phenomenon.

According to Tenny et al. (2022), phenomenology is defined as the study of the specific or the significance of events. It is originated in the fields of philosophy and psychology, drawing from the contributions of twentieth-century philosopher Edmund Husserl, and was subsequently advanced by Martin Heidegger. Phenomenology broadly refers to an individual's perception of the meaning of an event, contrasting with the event's external existence.

Qualitative research is primarily linked to words, language, and experiences, in contrast to measurements, statistics, and numerical data. The methods employed are inductive, holistic, epic, subjective, and process-oriented, aimed at understanding, interpreting, describing, and developing theories regarding phenomena or settings. A systematic and subjective methodology was employed to articulate life experiences and ascribe meaning to them.

This study employed a phenomenological research design to gather data on English teachers' narratives regarding the promotion of active reading strategies for junior high school students. This research method enhanced comprehension of the nature and significance of daily experiences. The phenomenological research design employed qualitative methods, utilizing interviews as a means to obtain in-depth insights and explanations, thereby facilitating an understanding of the subject's perspective. This study aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of English teachers' narratives about promoting active reading strategies among junior high school students.

Qualitative research focuses on understanding individuals' interpretations of their experiences, the construction of their realities, and the meanings they assign to those experiences. This research method yielded a comprehensive understanding of the subject and improved explanatory capacity. Phenomenology is the study of subjective experiences. The point of view of a person is found in the way they construe events. The study illuminated the meanings of lived experiences of certain individuals about a certain concept or phenomenon. This included methods used by a qualitative researcher. The researcher generated research questions, which addressed the importance of life experiences for people, and asked participants to describe these.

The information was acquired, usually as a result of intensive interviewing, from informants who have been involved in the phenomenon. The data analysis comprised horizontalisation, that is the extraction of substantial statements from the transcribed interviews pattern analysis of the meaningful statements . The meaningful statements which were preferred, were categorized into clusters of meanings and their relation to psychological and phenomenological concepts. Moreover, these changes were linked together to offer a complete picture of the experiences—capturing not just the words used to describe them, but also the way those experiences were structured. The researcher also included the participants' own interpretations to bring their perspectives into the mix. The final report was carefully written to help readers truly understand the core, unchanging nature of the experience.

The study involved ten teachers from the Surallah South District in the South Cotabato Division. To get started, a letter was sent to the school principal and the District Supervisor asking for permission to invite these teachers for interviews. The interviews were scheduled during their free time after classes. To create a comfortable and friendly atmosphere, the researcher began by exchanging names with the participants. The purpose and scope of the study were clearly explained, using different techniques like gestures, engaging activities, and well-timed pauses or moments of silence to encourage open and thoughtful group discussions.

The researcher carefully recorded the participants' opinions, including important comments and conversations that happened during breaks or after the sessions. The recorded interviews were transcribed and then summarized to see where everyone agreed on the key topics. Additional comments and any points that were

missed were also noted to help clarify the subject. To make sure the findings were accurate and trustworthy, the researcher checked back with the participants for their feedback.

Research Participants

The key informants of this study were ten English teachers from the Surallah South District, South Cotabato Division who had been in service for at least three years and had been teaching English subjects as well as serving as reading teachers or reading coordinators. Data were collected through the one-on-one interview process and survey instruments appropriate for qualitative research.

In the identification of these research informants, purposive sampling was used, specifically exemplified through the key informant technique wherein one or a few individuals acted as guides to a culture. A referral system was used to access teachers who helped meet the study's criteria. This system was called snowball sampling.

Snowball sampling, a non-random method often used to reach specific groups, was used in this study to help gather the most relevant data for the research questions. While the first participants were purposefully chosen to meet the study's needs, they also helped refer others who could contribute valuable insights. Throughout the process, participants' identities were carefully protected and treated with the utmost respect, in line with ethical research standards. The interactions with participants were warm, respectful, and grounded in professional integrity.

Data Analysis

This study involved a careful and detailed examination of all the data collected. I began by reflecting on my own personal experiences related to the phenomenon to be mindful of how they might influence the research. By doing this, I aimed to keep the focus on the participants' perspectives. I then created a list of key statements from the data, identifying those that truly captured the individual experiences. These important statements were treated as equally valuable and organized into a list that avoided repetition or overlap. From there, I grouped these statements into broader themes, also called "meaning units," to help make sense of the information. Finally, I provided a clear description of how the participants experienced the phenomenon being studied.

Next, I wrote a description of how the experience unfolded, which is called the "structural description." In this, I took into account the setting and context where the phenomenon took place. Finally, I combined both the detailed descriptions of what was experienced (the textural elements) and how it happened (the structural elements) into a single, comprehensive account. This combined description captures the essence of the experience and represents the final, key part of a phenomenological study.

Thematic Content Analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and themes within the interview responses. Thematic analysis offers the advantage of flexibility, making it suitable for both exploratory studies, where researchers may lack a clear understanding of the patterns being investigated, and deductive studies, where researchers have specific interests in mind.

Document Analysis. Document analysis is a qualitative research method that involves systematically reviewing and interpreting documents to help answer specific research questions. Like other qualitative approaches, it requires repeated cycles of reading, analyzing, and making sense of the material to build a deeper understanding of the topic being studied. This method can be used on its own or alongside other approaches in a broader qualitative or mixed-methods study. Often, it's used to support or compare with findings from interviews, focus groups, observations, or surveys. In this process, documents can confirm or challenge other findings, add depth or context, and help reduce potential bias through triangulation (Frey, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implications

There were several challenges that Junior High School English teachers described in promoting active reading strategies: Mediocre reading program implementation, stalled parents' involvement in the reading development of children, and the reading gap is evident. In a classroom setting, the inconsistent application of reading strategies can significantly hinder the effectiveness of reading instruction. Teachers often face difficulties in applying strategies that work across the entire class, as some methods resonate with certain students while others struggle to engage. This inconsistency can impede students' overall reading development and create disparities in their comprehension levels.

Similarly, limited parental involvement presents a major barrier to enhancing students' reading development. While many parents express interest in supporting their children's education, their involvement often falls short, particularly in terms of encouraging reading outside of school. This lack of consistent support from home makes it more challenging for students to develop strong reading habits and further hinders their academic progress.

Another challenge that teachers face is the noticeable gap in students' reading comprehension. Despite the use of various strategies, some students show advanced reading skills, while others struggle with basic comprehension. This gap continues to grow as students progress through the grades, and it becomes increasingly difficult for teachers to ensure that all students are engaged with the material in a meaningful way. To address these challenges, educators must adapt their approaches, implement more effective strategies, and work closely with both students and parents to improve reading comprehension and engagement.

The analysis revealed that the emerging themes of the Junior High School English teachers in coping with the challenges of promoting active reading strategies were as follows: creating an engaging learning environment, strengthening students' engagement in the reading program, and utilizing technology-related reading lessons. These strategies were essential in overcoming obstacles and ensuring that students actively participated in their reading development.

Creating an engaging learning environment is vital in promoting active reading. Teachers make sure that the classroom is a place where students feel motivated to read and participate. They incorporate various activities and reading materials that cater to students' interests, making the learning experience more enjoyable. By ensuring that the environment is supportive and interactive, students are more likely to engage with the material and develop stronger reading skills.

In addition to fostering a positive classroom atmosphere, strengthening students' engagement in the reading program is crucial. Teachers focus on motivating students to participate actively in reading activities and discussions. This includes using diverse strategies to keep students engaged, such as encouraging them to make connections with the text and asking critical questions. Moreover, the use of technology-related reading lessons has become an effective way to capture students' interest and provide them with interactive and dynamic reading experiences.

Lastly, the insights drawn from Junior High School English teachers' experiences in promoting active reading strategies and comprehension monitoring are as follows: fostering an engaging learning environment and enhancing comprehension monitoring. These themes can be described as the mechanisms that provided teachers with better opportunities to deliver effective teaching while promoting active engagement and improving students' understanding of the reading material.

The impact of not addressing students' reading comprehension challenges is significant. When students struggle with understanding what they read, it affects their overall learning experience. A student who cannot fully comprehend a text may not only hinder their own learning but could also contribute to a lack of engagement in the classroom. When comprehension struggles are widespread, it creates an environment where students feel disconnected from the material, leading to decreased motivation and participation. Consequently, teachers face increased challenges in maintaining classroom focus and ensuring that all students meet the learning objectives.

Improving students' ability to monitor their understanding and use active reading strategies directly boosts their academic success and overall learning outcomes. When teachers encourage students to reflect on and evaluate their understanding of what they read, they're helping them develop critical thinking skills that go beyond just reading. These strategies not only boost academic growth and keep students engaged but also improve the overall atmosphere in the classroom. By identifying and addressing comprehension challenges early and consistently, teachers create a more supportive and effective learning environment that promotes both academic success and student well-being.

Future Directions

Based on the findings and the importance of this study, several key recommendations are offered to improve how active reading strategies are implemented in schools, benefiting teachers, students, and the wider education community.

Teachers play a central role in the successful implementation of active reading strategies. The researcher recommends that teachers receive continuous professional development opportunities focused on effective reading strategies, comprehension monitoring, and the use of diverse reading materials.

These professional development programs should offer workshops, seminars, and training sessions that focus on interactive teaching methods, helping create a more engaging and dynamic learning environment.

Students, as the primary beneficiaries of active reading strategies, should be encouraged to take an active role in their reading development. The researcher recommends that students be empowered to monitor and reflect on their reading comprehension regularly. Teachers should facilitate this by creating classroom environments that motivate students to engage with the reading material, using techniques such as graphic organizers, group reading activities, and the integration of technology to support deeper levels of understanding.

Parents play a vital role in supporting their children's reading development outside the classroom. The researcher suggests that schools actively engage parents by offering guidance and resources on how to encourage active reading at home. Activities like workshops, reading logs, and family reading nights can help connect school and home, fostering a culture of literacy that becomes part of students' everyday lives.

School Heads are pivotal in fostering an atmosphere that supports the implementation of active reading strategies. It is recommended that school heads take an active role in supporting teachers by providing them with the resources, time, and administrative support needed to implement these strategies effectively. School heads should encourage cross-curricular collaboration among teachers to integrate active reading techniques across subjects, ensuring that students consistently experience these strategies throughout their learning journey.

The Department of Education (DepEd) has a crucial role in supporting the successful use of active reading strategies throughout the education system. The researcher recommends that DepEd create and implement policies that encourage the use of active reading techniques across all subjects—not just in English classes. Additionally, DepEd should provide funding for teacher training, promote access to a variety of reading materials, and set up systems to track how these strategies affect student learning outcomes.

Future Researchers are encouraged to explore the effectiveness of various active reading strategies across different student populations and learning environments. This could include investigating how strategies work in diverse socioeconomic settings or how they can be adapted for students with special learning needs. Future research should look into the long-term effects of active reading strategies on students' reading comprehension and overall academic achievement. It would also be valuable to explore how schools can better involve families in supporting reading development, offering deeper insights into the wider support networks that help improve student success.

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