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READING BETWEEN THE LINES: STRUGGLES IN ADDRESSING LITERACY DIFFICULTIES OF STUDENTS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF PANABO CITY DIVISION

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of English teachers in addressing students' literacy difficulties in public secondary schools. It specifically examined the challenges teachers encounter, the strategies they use to support struggling readers, and the policy implications for strengthening literacy instruction and intervention programs in schools. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, data were gathered through in-depth interviews with English teachers who directly handled learners with literacy difficulties. The collected responses were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common experiences, practices, and insights related to literacy instruction and intervention. The findings revealed that teachers face various challenges, including students' varying literacy levels, limited instructional resources, environmental constraints, heavy workloads, and emotional and professional pressures. Despite these difficulties, teachers remained committed by using differentiated instruction, targeted reading strategies, intervention programs, learner engagement techniques, and continuous assessment practices to support struggling readers. The study also found that persistent difficulties in decoding, comprehension, vocabulary, and reading engagement, as reflected in the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), underscore the need for stronger, more sustainable literacy policies and intervention programs. Based on the findings, the study recommends that school leaders strengthen reading intervention frameworks, provide protected remediation time, support continuous teacher development, supply adequate instructional materials, and encourage stronger school–home–community collaboration to improve learners' literacy outcomes.

KEYWORDS: *Literacy Difficulties; Differentiated Instruction; Reading Intervention; English Teachers; Phil-IRI*

INTRODUCTION

Many students continue to struggle with literacy, posing a significant challenge for teachers responsible for ensuring foundational reading skills. These struggles often include limited vocabulary, poor reading fluency, difficulty comprehending texts, and a lack of motivation to engage with reading materials. Teachers face the challenge of addressing these issues within the constraints of large class sizes, limited instructional time, and standardized curriculum expectations, which can make it difficult to provide individualized support. These literacy challenges hinder student learning across subjects, placing additional pressure on teachers to develop strategies that bridge gaps in reading skills.

In Indonesia, Wigraha (2022) observed that students' limited vocabulary, lack of reading interest, lack of background knowledge, and the complexity of words/sentences in the text were responsible for students' inability to interpret and understand English texts. Meanwhile, in India, the issue of reading attainment, especially at the school level, is crucial, as proficiency in reading is often considered a fundamental skill with an impeccable impact on one's overall academic and practical abilities. A study by Murathoti et al. (2024) examined reading difficulties among government secondary school students in the Jammu region of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, India. The study found that many students had difficulty understanding English texts and often felt nervous when asked to read aloud due to poor pronunciation. These challenges affected their confidence, participation in classroom discussions, and overall academic performance. The researchers also noted that limited reading exposure and insufficient instructional support contributed to the persistence of students' reading difficulties.

Similarly, literacy challenges continue to be a major concern in Thailand, especially in rural communities where access to learning materials remains limited. According to a report by the Equitable Education Fund and the World

Bank (2025), 64.7 of Thai youths and adults perform below the minimum literacy level needed for everyday reading comprehension. The report emphasized the need to strengthen literacy programs, improve access to educational resources, and provide continuous support for struggling readers. It also highlighted the importance of cooperation among schools, teachers, families, and communities in helping learners improve their reading skills and literacy development.

Recent reports reveal that the Philippines continues to face serious literacy challenges, particularly in reading comprehension among students who can read and write but do not fully understand what they read. According to the Functional Literacy, Education, and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS 2024) conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), only 70.8% of Filipinos aged 10 to 64 are functionally literate, which means that nearly 30% still struggle to comprehend written information despite basic reading ability (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2025; GMA News Online, 2025). Moreover, approximately 18.9 million junior and senior high school graduates were found to be functionally illiterate under the revised definition of literacy, highlighting that finishing basic education no longer guarantees functional comprehension (Manila Bulletin, 2025; Senate of the Philippines, 2025). The existing problem with students' literacy is attributed to critical issues, including limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient parental involvement, all of which significantly impact effective learning (Santillan, 2023).

In the Division of Davao City, Jumawid (2024) disclosed that teachers have encountered several challenges in helping struggling readers. These include a lack of student willingness, a lack of parents' cooperation, a lack of time for reading, a lack of reading materials, and a lack of teacher patience. Also, teachers faced challenges in identifying the causes of students' reading difficulties, providing appropriate instructional materials and strategies, and managing classroom behavior.

In Panabo City Division, students continue to face literacy difficulties even at the secondary level. These challenges are evident in students' reading comprehension, writing skills, and ability to analyze and synthesize information from texts. Such difficulties not only affect academic performance across subjects but also hinder critical thinking and overall learning development. However, these observations need to be validated by scholarly research.

Despite the critical importance of literacy in student learning, most existing studies have focused primarily on student performance, reading interventions, or curriculum design, leaving a gap in understanding the practical strategies teachers employ to address literacy struggles in real classroom contexts. There was limited research that captured teachers' lived experiences, decision-making processes, and adaptive methods in responding to diverse reading challenges, particularly in settings where resources and support might be constrained. This gap highlighted the urgency of conducting the study specifically in Panabo City Division, as it documented how educators identified and addressed reading difficulties, implemented instructional strategies, and supported students' literacy development.

Exploring these teacher-centered perspectives not only advanced academic knowledge but also yielded actionable insights for improving literacy instruction, professional development, and educational policies that foster stronger reading competencies among learners. This study provided insights into the practical approaches teachers use to support students experiencing reading difficulties, which are essential in promoting literacy development, academic achievement, and lifelong learning. To ensure the findings reach relevant stakeholders, the study would be disseminated through multiple channels, including presentations in educational workshops and seminars for teachers and school leaders, publications in peer-reviewed journals, policy briefs for local education authorities, and online platforms such as academic repositories and educational blogs. This dissemination plan would ensure that both practitioners and policymakers can access and apply the insights, ultimately enhancing literacy instruction.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the challenges public secondary English teachers face in applying their strategies to address students' literacy difficulties in the Panabo City Division. Specifically, the study examined the challenges teachers encountered in addressing learners' literacy needs, as well as the coping mechanisms and adaptive strategies they employed to manage these difficulties. Furthermore, the study aimed to identify policy implications to support teachers in addressing students' literacy challenges, as reflected in the results of the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews to capture teachers' diverse experiences and perspectives. The findings provided valuable insights into the realities of classroom instruction, informed potential policy directions

and support mechanisms for teachers, and contributed to ongoing efforts to improve literacy outcomes in public secondary schools.

Significance of the Study

The teaching of literacy in secondary schools involves both challenges and opportunities, particularly for English teachers who must respond to diverse learner needs while developing essential reading and writing skills. This study examined the struggles teachers faced in implementing strategies to address students' literacy difficulties and the coping mechanisms they used to manage these challenges. By exploring their lived experiences, the study generated practical insights into adaptive instructional practices that support literacy development. Moreover, it provided a basis for identifying policy implications that could strengthen institutional and instructional support for teachers, particularly in relation to literacy interventions informed by the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) results, thereby contributing to improved literacy outcomes among secondary school students. The study was considered significant for the following reasons:

Students. This study would be highly relevant to students as it directly focused on improving their literacy skills, which are fundamental to academic success and lifelong learning. By examining the strategies teachers use to address literacy struggles, the study provided insights into effective practices that could enhance students' reading comprehension, writing proficiency, and overall communication skills. Strengthening these skills would not only help students perform better across different subject areas but also help them learn more effectively. Still, it would also equip them with the critical thinking and language competencies necessary for higher education and future career opportunities. The study contributed to creating more supportive and responsive learning environments that would foster student growth and confidence in their literacy development.

English Teachers. This study would be particularly important to English teachers, as it provides valuable insights into the challenges they face and the strategies they employ to enhance students' literacy skills. By documenting and analyzing their approaches, the study served as a resource for teachers to reflect on their practices, adopt innovative techniques, and refine their instructional methods to address learners' diverse needs better. It also highlighted effective interventions that could be shared and adapted across classrooms, thereby fostering professional growth and collaboration among educators. The study would empower English teachers by equipping them with evidence-based strategies that enhance teaching effectiveness and promote student literacy success.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the study's methodology, including the research design, data sources, research instrument, research participants, data collection procedure, and data analysis process. It also discusses the ethical considerations observed throughout the study and the strategies employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings in terms of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Overall, this section outlines how the study was conducted systematically and ethically to explore public secondary school teachers' experiences in addressing students' literacy struggles.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach, specifically the phenomenological approach. Qualitative research is a methodological approach that focuses on exploring and understanding human experiences in depth within real-life contexts. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), it emphasizes the meanings individuals or groups assign to social or human problems rather than relying on numerical data and statistical analysis. Similarly, Tenny et al. (2022) explained that qualitative research seeks to answer "how" and "why" questions by examining participants' perspectives, behaviors, and lived experiences in natural settings. In this study, a qualitative approach was used to capture the lived experiences of public secondary school teachers in addressing students' literacy struggles, enabling a rich, detailed understanding of their instructional practices and challenges.

Furthermore, this study employed a phenomenological research design, one of the key approaches within qualitative inquiry. According to Neubauer et al. (2019), phenomenology aims to describe the essence of a phenomenon based on the lived experiences of individuals who have directly encountered it. In the same vein, Smith et al. (2018) emphasized that phenomenology focuses on how individuals perceive, interpret, and give meaning to their lived experiences. In this context, the approach was used to explore how teachers experience, interpret, and respond to students' literacy difficulties, focusing on their personal insights, emotions, and reflections on classroom practice.

In addition, the use of both qualitative and phenomenological approaches is justified by the need to gain an in-depth, contextually grounded understanding of teachers' experiences that cannot be captured by quantitative

methods. Since the study aimed to explore "how" and "why" teachers apply certain strategies rather than measure outcomes numerically, this design was most appropriate. It allowed participants to express their experiences freely, enabling the emergence of meaningful patterns and themes related to literacy instruction.

Finally, the study was guided by key philosophical assumptions rooted in constructivism and interpretivism, including ontology, epistemology, axiology, methodology, and rhetoric. Ontologically, reality was viewed as subjective and shaped by teachers' varied experiences in different classroom contexts. Epistemologically, knowledge was co-constructed through interactions between the researcher and participants. Axiologically, the study acknowledged the influence of values and maintained reflexivity to minimize bias while valuing participants' narratives. Methodologically, an inductive and phenomenological process guided data collection and analysis, while rhetorically, findings were presented using rich, descriptive language that highlighted participants' voices and lived experiences.

Sources of Data

The data sources in this study primarily came from participants who shared their lived experiences in addressing students' literacy difficulties in the Panabo City Division. The study involved nine public secondary school English teachers who served as reading facilitators in reading remediation programs for at least three years. These participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure they possessed the relevant experiences and qualifications to provide rich, meaningful insights into the phenomenon under investigation. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews using pre-set open-ended questions that encouraged participants to share detailed narratives, opinions, and reflections regarding their strategies, challenges, and experiences in supporting learners with literacy difficulties.

Furthermore, secondary sources such as books, journal articles, and related studies were used to strengthen the theoretical and contextual foundation of the research. Data collection was conducted in the natural settings of the participants, including their respective schools, and in some cases through virtual platforms for convenience and accessibility. In addition, environmental triangulation was applied by gathering data from teachers in small, medium, and large schools within the division to capture varying perspectives and contextual influences. This approach enhanced the credibility and comprehensiveness of the findings by allowing comparisons across different school environments and educational conditions.

Research Instrument

There are several fundamental methods for gathering qualitative data, including interviews, observations, and the documentation of audio and visual materials. Similarly, this study collected data through in-depth interviews to explore the phenomenon and generate new insights (Akinyode & Khan, 2018). Accordingly, participants were asked to respond to pre-set open-ended questions that encouraged reflection and detailed narratives.

In-depth interviews are a key qualitative method through which the researcher obtains information directly from participants. This method is essential for uncovering opinions, experiences, values, and other relevant aspects of the population under study, and it is oriented toward specific research goals (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). During the interviews, participants were regarded as experts of their own experiences, while the researcher assumed the role of a learner. In this study, English teachers who served as reading facilitators in a reading remediation program for at least three years answered pre-set open-ended questions. The sequence or flow of questions was adjusted, and additional probing questions were posed when necessary to clarify responses and gather richer insights. These procedures ensured the collection of detailed and authentic data that support the identification of key themes.

Furthermore, data collection occurred in the participants' natural setting or, if necessary, via virtual platforms to accommodate convenience and current circumstances. The research included nine in-depth interviews. Additionally, secondary sources such as articles, journals, and books were consulted to provide a broader context, support the research findings, and offer varying perspectives.

Likewise, Santos et al. (2020) emphasized that environmental triangulation in qualitative research involves collecting data across diverse contexts to explore participants' subjective experiences under different conditions. By incorporating multiple environments, researchers could assess the consistency of their findings, enhancing the study's credibility and relevance. This approach helped minimize biases that might arise from relying on a single context, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Environmental triangulation is particularly useful in educational research, where the influence of different settings could significantly shape participants' perspectives and behaviors.

In my study on teachers' experiences in addressing students' literacy difficulties in Panabo City Division, I used environmental triangulation to gather data across diverse contexts. By exploring the experiences of teachers in different schools within the division, representing small, medium, and large schools, I was able to compare and assess how the transition process was influenced by factors such as school environment, community dynamics, and available resources. This approach helped ensure a well-rounded understanding of the phenomenon and allowed me to evaluate the consistency and variability of teachers' experiences across different settings. Environmental triangulation strengthened the credibility of the findings by providing a more comprehensive view of how diverse contexts impacted the transition process. It also enabled the researcher to identify common patterns and unique challenges faced by teachers across different school settings, thereby contributing to a richer, more reliable interpretation of the data.

Research Participants

In this phenomenological inquiry, the study involved 9 participants who met the qualifications established for the research, using in-depth interviews (IDI). The number of participants aligned with Creswell's (2018) recommendation that a phenomenological study should include between three and fifteen members. This number was deemed sufficient to achieve data saturation and ensure a comprehensive understanding of teachers' experiences.

For participant selection, purposive sampling was employed, as it provides the most appropriate and practical approach. Also known as judgment sampling, this method involves deliberately selecting individuals based on the specific qualities they possess, without requiring randomization, predefined theories, or a set sample size (Etikan et al., 2016).

The inclusion criteria for participants required that teachers had served as reading facilitators in the reading remediation program for at least 3 years. Additionally, participants must be currently teaching English in the selected public secondary schools of Panabo City Division. Teachers who did not meet these criteria or were from outside the selected schools were excluded from the study. To protect participants' identities and maintain confidentiality, code names were assigned, and participants might withdraw from the study at any point, particularly if they felt uncomfortable during interviews or discussions.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection for this study was conducted through a series of systematic steps. According to Lau and Bratby (2023), qualitative data can be collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, direct observations of participants in their professional environments, and the examination of pertinent audiovisual materials.

At the outset of the data collection process, I obtained approval from the Ethics Committee to ensure that the study complied with established ethical standards. This involved submitting a detailed research proposal outlining the study's objectives, design, and any potential risks to participants. The committee reviewed the proposal to ensure that participants' safety, rights, and confidentiality were adequately protected. Upon receiving ethical clearance, I proceeded with the subsequent stages of data collection, maintaining ethical conduct and research integrity throughout the entire process.

Upon obtaining ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee on December 17, 2025, I sought formal endorsement from the Dean of the Graduate School at Rizal Memorial Colleges (RMC) on January 8, 2026. I secured an authorization letter from the Schools Division Superintendent (SDS) of Panabo City last February 9, 2026. These official approvals were necessary to conduct the study within the designated educational setting. I submitted written requests on February 11, 13, and 19, 2026, detailing the research objectives, intended participants, and planned procedures. Obtaining consent from these authorities provided institutional support and legitimacy for the study's implementation.

To prepare for data collection, I created an interview guide that functioned as the main tool for gathering insights. The guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore how teachers manage and respond to the literacy challenges faced by struggling students. I ensured that each question was clear, pertinent, and accurately reflected the teachers' experiences. After drafting the guide, I sought evaluation and feedback from field experts to confirm its content validity and ensure it effectively elicited the required information.

Prior to conducting the interviews, I obtained informed consent from each participant. This involved providing comprehensive information about the study's purpose, objectives, and the participant's role. I made it clear that participation was entirely voluntary and that participants could withdraw at any time without negative repercussions. To ensure full understanding, I explained the procedures thoroughly and secured their written

consent before beginning the interviews. This process upheld ethical standards and protected the participants' rights and autonomy.

Once participants provided informed consent, I began the interviews in accordance with the approved procedures. I conducted one-on-one, in-depth interviews to enable teachers to discuss their experiences, strategies, and perspectives on supporting students with literacy challenges. The interviews were held in a safe, comfortable environment to encourage candid, open dialogue. To ensure accurate and thorough records, all conversations were audio-recorded.

After the interviews were completed, I transcribed the audio recordings word-for-word to capture the participants' responses accurately. Any statements made in the local language were translated into English as needed to ensure clarity and consistency in the analysis. Once transcription and translation were complete, I analyzed the data using a phenomenological approach, concentrating on recurring themes and key patterns that reflected the core of the participants' experiences. The goal of this analysis was to interpret the teachers' lived experiences authentically.

Once the data transcription and analysis were completed, I sought the expertise of a qualified data analyst to review the findings. The analyst assessed whether the analysis was thorough and truly represented the collected data. This process was essential to confirm the reliability and trustworthiness of the research outcomes. After receiving the analyst's feedback, I incorporated the necessary revisions and finalized the analysis for the study's final presentation.

Throughout the data collection and analysis phases, I took measures to protect the privacy of all participants. All audio recordings and transcriptions were securely stored in a password-protected location. Any identifying information was kept strictly confidential, and participants were assigned pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity. Additionally, the data were used solely for this research and were securely disposed of once the study was completed to maintain confidentiality and privacy.

Data Analysis

Humble and Mozelius (2022) outlined five key steps in qualitative data analysis: data logging, anecdotes, vignettes, coding, and thematic analysis. For this study, particular attention was given to coding and thematic analysis to organize and interpret the detailed narratives provided by participants systematically.

Data coding is a crucial method for structuring qualitative information, as it breaks down extensive raw data into smaller, meaningful segments that directly address the research questions. This process allows the researcher to manage large volumes of information and identify significant patterns and concepts. According to Kiger and Varpio (2022), codes that consistently appear throughout the dataset are likely to evolve into major thematic categories. In this study, the researcher used highlighters and colored pens to visually mark recurring and important ideas within transcripts from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Segments highlighted with the same color were grouped and labeled with brief, descriptive phrases that captured the essence of emerging themes.

Once coding is complete, thematic analysis was applied to identify, interpret, and synthesize patterns in the data, while organizing unique content into meaningful categories (McLeod, 2024). This approach allowed for a structured assessment of which data segments form coherent themes before proceeding to deeper interpretation, thereby providing a thorough understanding of the participants' experiences. In this study, thematic analysis progressed from initial coding to more detailed examination, moving from general observations to specific insights. Related ideas were grouped to establish clear themes, with each theme supported by at least 3 key data points to enhance credibility. Furthermore, unique identifiers were assigned to participants to maintain systematic organization and protect confidentiality, strengthening the trustworthiness and rigor of the study's findings.

Likewise, Santos et al. (2020) emphasized that environmental triangulation in qualitative research involves collecting data across diverse contexts to explore participants' subjective experiences under different conditions. By incorporating multiple environments, researchers could assess the consistency of their findings, enhancing the study's credibility and relevance. This approach helped minimize biases that might arise from relying on a single context, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Environmental triangulation is particularly useful in educational research, where the influence of different settings could significantly shape participants' perspectives and behaviors.

In my study on teachers' struggles in addressing students' literacy difficulties, I used environmental triangulation to gather data across various contexts. Each school category, small school, medium school, and large school, was represented by three participants. This approach helped ensure a well-rounded understanding of the phenomenon and allowed me to evaluate the consistency and variability of teachers' experiences across different settings.

Environmental triangulation strengthened the credibility of the findings by providing a more comprehensive view of how diverse contexts impacted the transition process.

The analytical method proposed by Colaizzi (1978), as cited in Praveena and Sasikumar (2021), offers a structured approach to examining qualitative data, focusing on uncovering the essential meanings within participants' lived experiences. This approach involves several steps, including a careful review of interview transcripts, identification of significant statements, interpretation of their underlying significance, and organization of related themes. Colaizzi's framework prioritizes preserving participants' perspectives while capturing the depth and complexity of their experiences. It is widely recognized in phenomenological research as a systematic tool for deriving meaningful insights and for achieving a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.

In this study, Colaizzi's framework was applied to analyze interviews with teachers. This method enabled the extraction of rich and nuanced insights from the qualitative data. By adhering to Colaizzi's step-by-step process, the analysis remained faithful to the teachers' own accounts, accurately reflecting the essence of their experiences while ensuring the study's reliability, consistency, and credibility.

Analyzing the Interviews. The initial stage of Colaizzi's analytical method entailed a thorough examination of the collected interview data. In this study, I began by carefully reviewing the transcribed interviews, paying close attention to the participants' narratives to gain a comprehensive understanding of their lived experiences. Each transcript was read multiple times to become fully familiar with the content and to appreciate the broader context of the responses. This close engagement enabled the recognition of nuanced meanings and subtle details in each teacher's account, providing a solid foundation for subsequent stages of analysis. By focusing on the depth and complexity of the data, all significant insights were captured and integrated into the interpretation process.

Identifying Key Phrases. After analyzing the interviews, I identified and extracted significant phrases and meaningful statements from the data. These selections captured the essential experiences and perspectives of teachers. Special focus was placed on remarks that illustrated the challenges they face and the strategies they employ to navigate these teaching demands. Highlighting these key statements enabled the identification of the most relevant and insightful elements within the dataset.

Identifying Meanings and Coding. Once the significant phrases were identified, I interpreted their meanings and assigned appropriate codes to each relevant data segment. These codes served as labels that capture the central ideas and emerging themes within the participants' responses. This stage was essential for organizing and structuring the collected information, enabling a more thorough and systematic analysis. Coding allowed for the detection of recurring concepts and patterns across the interviews, providing a foundation for deeper interpretation.

Organizing Codes into Groups. Following the coding process, I organized the codes into clusters based on their similarities and relationships. This step helped uncover overarching themes that captured the various aspects of the participants' experiences. Grouping the codes enhanced the analysis's structure and highlighted the main factors influencing the transition process. This method ensured that all pertinent data elements were included, offering a comprehensive and coherent portrayal of the participants' viewpoints.

Describing the Phenomenon. At this stage, the goal was to construct a detailed portrayal of the phenomenon grounded in the teachers' lived experiences. The themes and insights identified in the previous steps were synthesized into a coherent, comprehensive narrative. This account highlighted the challenges teachers face and the strategies they use to support students with literacy difficulties. Developing this thorough description allows for a deeper understanding of their overall experiences.

Identifying the Fundamental Structure. During this stage, I determined the essential structure of the phenomenon by examining the key aspects that define how teachers address the literacy difficulties of struggling students. The themes derived from the analysis were carefully reviewed, with special focus on the most significant factors of their experiences. This process enabled the drawing of conclusions about the core elements of the teachers' lived experiences.

Validating the Findings. In the final stage, the findings were validated through feedback from both the participants and subject-matter experts. The identified themes and detailed narratives were shared with the participants to confirm that the interpretations accurately represented their lived experiences. Additionally, experts or peer reviewers assessed the analysis to ensure its accuracy, validity, and methodological rigor. This validation process strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the results, ensuring they were firmly grounded in the participants' actual accounts. Following Colaizzi's method, the interview data were carefully examined to uncover meaningful insights and provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of English teachers in the Panabo City Division.

Figure 1 shows the processes of Colaizzi's thematic analysis applied to the study's data. Each step, which included reviewing interview transcripts, identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, and constructing a comprehensive description, provided a systematic and rigorous approach to analysis. Using Colaizzi's method ensured that the participants' own words were central to the interpretation, preserving the authenticity of their lived experiences while revealing underlying patterns and themes.

Ethical Consideration

This study placed a strong emphasis on ethical considerations, ensuring the research was conducted responsibly while protecting participants' confidentiality and anonymity. To uphold these ethical standards, all relevant aspects and the study's scope were clearly defined within this qualitative research. These ethical concerns primarily arose from the selected methodology. The study strictly followed the ethical guidelines established by the Rizal Memorial Colleges Ethics Review Committee, particularly regarding the study's population and data, which included but were not limited to:

Social Value. This study carried considerable social significance as it illuminated the real-world challenges and successes of public secondary school teachers of Panabo City Division in addressing literacy struggles. Understanding teachers' experiences offered valuable insights to guide educational policies, professional development programs, and curriculum enhancements, ensuring educators are equipped with the knowledge and strategies to improve student literacy outcomes. In addition, the research fostered a deeper appreciation of the critical role teachers play in fostering students' reading and writing skills, encouraging stakeholders, including school administrators, policymakers, and parents, to collaborate in supporting a more effective and inclusive learning environment. Through examining the obstacles encountered in literacy instruction and the strategies employed to overcome them, the study contributed to broader initiatives aimed at enhancing educational quality, equity, and student success.

Informed Consent Form. In this study, the researcher ensured that the process of obtaining informed consent adhered to ethical principles and transparency, respecting participants' rights and autonomy. Prior to data collection, each participant received a detailed informed consent form outlining the study's objectives, scope, methodology, potential risks and benefits, and the voluntary nature of participation. The form also highlighted confidentiality and anonymity, assuring participants that their identities and responses remained protected. Participants were given sufficient time to review the document, seek clarification, and make a well-informed decision regarding their involvement. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any repercussions.

Vulnerability of Research Participants. In this study, the researcher implemented careful measures to safeguard the vulnerability of teacher participants, ensuring a safe, respectful, and non-coercive research environment. Recognizing that teachers might encounter challenges related to professional responsibilities, institutional expectations, or personal experiences, the study maintained strict confidentiality and anonymity to protect participants' identities and responses. Participation was entirely voluntary, and teachers were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences. Moreover, the researcher cultivated a supportive and non-judgmental atmosphere during data collection, enabling participants to share their experiences openly and without fear of repercussions.

Benefits, Risks, and Safety. In this study, the researcher carefully considered and addressed the potential risks, benefits, and safety of teacher participants. Possible risks, such as emotional discomfort when reflecting on literacy challenges, were minimized through a supportive and respectful environment in which participants felt safe to share their experiences without fear of judgment or professional consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously maintained to protect participants' identities and responses. The study also emphasized potential benefits, including the contribution to a deeper understanding of teachers' experiences, which might inform improvements in educational policies, professional development programs, and classroom support practices.

Privacy and Confidentiality of Information. The researcher ensured the privacy and confidentiality of teacher participants through strict data protection measures. Personal identifiers were removed or anonymized in all research documents, and responses were securely stored with access limited to the researcher. Recorded interviews and transcripts remained confidential and were utilized exclusively for research purposes. Participants were thoroughly informed about the handling of their data, and their consent was obtained prior to participation.

Justice. The researcher ensured justice for teacher participants by consistently applying fairness, equal treatment, and respect throughout the research process. Participants were selected based on clearly defined criteria relevant to the study, ensuring inclusivity and providing equal opportunities for all to share their experiences. The

researcher also guaranteed that teachers' perspectives were accurately represented, avoiding any misinterpretation or distortion of their insights. In addition, the study ensured that the burdens and benefits of participation were distributed equitably, protecting teachers from unnecessary risks while recognizing that their contributions might inform educational policies and enhance teaching practices.

Transparency. In this study, the researcher ensured transparency through clear, open, and ethical communication throughout the research process. Participants received comprehensive information regarding the study's objectives, methodology, and potential risks and benefits before providing informed consent. The researcher also clarified how data were collected, analyzed, and reported, ensuring that participants understood how their contributions were used. Any conflicts of interest or potential sources of bias were disclosed, and participants were encouraged to ask questions or seek clarification at any point during the study.

Conflict of Interest. The researcher upheld objectivity, integrity, and ethical responsibility throughout the research process to prevent conflicts of interest. Any personal, financial, or professional relationships that could influence the study's design, data collection, analysis, or interpretation were disclosed and managed appropriately. Participant selection was conducted fairly and without bias, ensuring that no favoritism or undue influence affected the process. Furthermore, data were analyzed and reported transparently, maintaining accuracy and fidelity to participants' contributions.

Qualification of the Researcher. The researcher's qualification as a Master of Arts in Teaching English ensured a strong academic foundation and expertise in the subject matter. With advanced knowledge of language-teaching methodologies, curriculum development, and pedagogical strategies, the researcher is well-equipped to explore and analyze English teachers' experiences in addressing literacy struggles. This qualification also reflected the researcher's familiarity with educational theories, qualitative research methods, and ethical standards, enabling a rigorous and credible investigation of the challenges and successes teachers face. Furthermore, the researcher's background enhanced their ability to interpret findings accurately, provided meaningful recommendations, and contributed valuable insights to the field of English language teaching.

Adequacy of Facilities. The researcher ensured that the study was supported by adequate facilities to conduct a rigorous, ethically sound investigation. Access to academic resources, including research databases, libraries, and technological tools, provided a foundation for a well-informed study. Secure and reliable data collection methods, such as designated interview spaces, recording equipment, and transcription software, were employed to ensure high-quality, confidential data collection. Institutional support, including guidance from faculty mentors and adherence to the Rizal Memorial Colleges Ethics Review Committee's standards, further enhanced the study's reliability.

Results

This chapter presents the findings on the challenges English teachers face in addressing students' literacy difficulties, the coping strategies they employ, and the resulting policy implications. Data reveal persistent barriers related to student literacy levels, instructional constraints, and teacher well-being.

3.1 Challenges in Addressing Literacy Difficulties

Teachers identified three major challenges:

1. **Student Literacy Levels:** Weak foundational skills, limited vocabulary, and reading comprehension gaps hinder effective instruction. Low motivation and minimal reading practice further compromise engagement and skill development.
2. **Instructional and Environmental Constraints:** Diverse learner abilities, insufficient teaching materials, large class sizes, and limited institutional support complicate implementation of consistent literacy strategies.
3. **Emotional and Professional Struggles:** Teachers experience frustration, stress, and increased workload, requiring patience and flexibility to sustain effective teaching.

These findings align with prior studies emphasizing the impact of foundational literacy deficits on learning outcomes (Daniel et al., 2021; Brooks et al., 2021; Yan et al., 2021) and highlight the cumulative effects of motivation and exposure on literacy development (Liebfreund, 2021; Nevo et al., 2020).

3.2 Coping Strategies

Teachers employ multiple, integrated approaches to address these challenges:

- **Adaptive and Differentiated Instruction:** Tailoring lessons, modifying materials, and adjusting pacing to meet diverse learner needs.

- **Targeted Literacy Strategies:** Guided reading, scaffolding, vocabulary building, code-switching, and translation to enhance comprehension and fluency.
- **Intervention Programs and Support Systems:** School-based and national reading programs, collaborative teacher networks, and structured assistance for struggling learners.
- **Learner Engagement and Motivation:** Interactive, gamified activities, active participation, confidence-building, and positive reinforcement.
- **Continuous Assessment and Monitoring:** Formative and summative assessments, observation, feedback, and data-driven adjustments to guide instruction.

These strategies demonstrate a proactive, student-centered approach, promoting inclusivity, engagement, and literacy development (Rukadah et al., 2025; Van de Pol et al., 2021; García & Lin, 2020).

3.3 Policy Implications

Findings suggest the need for systemic interventions:

- **Structured Literacy Programs:** Early and continuous reading remediation, phonics-based instruction, and vertical alignment of competencies across grade levels.
- **Differentiated Instruction:** Institutionalized frameworks with professional development in scaffolding and adaptive teaching based on learner profiles.
- **Resource Provision:** Standardized, leveled, and localized instructional materials and digital tools.
- **Workload and Time Management:** Protected remediation time, reduced administrative tasks, and support staff to assist teachers.
- **Home–School–Community Engagement:** Programs promoting parental involvement, home reading, and community literacy initiatives.
- **Teacher Support:** Mentoring, peer collaboration, psychosocial support, and measures to reduce stress and burnout.
- **Data-Driven Instruction:** Utilization of assessment tools such as the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) for systematic monitoring and targeted interventions (Corog-Jonson, 2025; Misanes & Pascual, 2023).

Overall, results underscore that effective literacy development requires responsive teaching strategies complemented by institutional policies, resources, and professional support.

Summary

This study used a qualitative phenomenological design to explore English teachers' lived experiences in addressing students' literacy difficulties. Based on the responses of the informants, the key findings were as follows:

1) The findings revealed that English teachers face multiple and complex challenges in addressing students' literacy difficulties. These include challenges due to students' literacy levels, instructional and environmental constraints, emotional and professional struggles
2) To address the challenges of teaching literacy, English teachers employed a variety of coping strategies that enhanced both instructional effectiveness and student engagement. These strategies included the use of adaptive and differentiated instruction, implementation of targeted literacy strategies, utilization of intervention programs and support systems, promotion of learner engagement and motivation, and continuous assessment and monitoring of progress
3) The findings indicate that students' persistent literacy difficulties, particularly in decoding, comprehension, vocabulary, and reading engagement as reflected in the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) results, require strengthened system-wide policies on foundational literacy, differentiated instruction, and sustained intervention programs supported by adequate resources and teacher development. Moreover, improving literacy outcomes depends on integrated policy actions that address learner motivation, teacher workload, instructional support, and school–home–community collaboration, all anchored on data-driven monitoring and evidence-based instructional decision-making.

The findings of this study affirm the principles of Constructivist Learning Theory (Piaget, 1972 as cited in McLeod, 2025), demonstrating that learners actively construct knowledge through meaningful experiences and interactions rather than passively receiving information. The study revealed that teachers intentionally implemented strategies that engage students in interactive reading activities, such as guided reading, collaborative discussions, and exploration-based tasks, which align with the constructivist emphasis on problem-solving and critical thinking. Teachers were observed adapting instruction to students' developmental levels, scaffolding lessons to connect prior knowledge with new content, and providing opportunities for reflection, practices that directly support students in building comprehension skills and constructing understanding in a learner-centered environment. These findings confirm that, consistent with constructivist theory, the active involvement of students in making sense of texts and in navigating literacy challenges promotes not only deeper understanding but also

increased confidence and competence in reading, highlighting the theory's relevance as a foundation for instructional decision-making in literacy education.

Implications

In light of the analysis and discussion of the results of the study, the following implications are drawn:

1) The findings imply that addressing the complex challenges faced by English teachers in handling students' literacy difficulties requires institutional and system-level support rather than relying solely on individual teacher initiatives. The presence of instructional, learner-related, and emotional struggles suggests the need for DepEd to strengthen school-based literacy support systems by assigning dedicated reading coordinators, reducing non-teaching workloads for teachers handling remediation, and providing structured psychosocial support to address teacher stress and burnout. These measures are essential to ensure that teachers are not only equipped but also sufficiently supported in implementing effective literacy instruction.
2) Furthermore, the coping strategies employed by teachers, such as adaptive and differentiated instruction, targeted literacy interventions, learner engagement strategies, and continuous assessment, should be institutionalized as part of a standardized literacy intervention framework. Schools should provide protected time for remediation activities and ensure that these practices are embedded in the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and supported through sustained capacity-building programs. Strengthening collaborative mechanisms such as Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions is also necessary to formalize the sharing of effective literacy strategies and promote consistency in instructional practices across classrooms.
3) The persistent literacy difficulties reflected in the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) results highlight the urgent need for a comprehensive, data-driven literacy reform. This includes implementing mandatory reading recovery programs for learners identified as instructional and frustration-level readers, ensuring vertical alignment of literacy competencies across grade levels, and providing adequate, leveled, and localized reading materials. Schools should also strengthen home–school literacy partnerships through structured parental involvement programs and home reading initiatives to improve learner engagement. Literacy improvement requires a coordinated policy response that integrates assessment, instruction, intervention, resource provision, and stakeholder collaboration, all anchored on continuous monitoring and evidence-based decision-making.

Future Directions

Based on the findings, future research could take several directions to deepen understanding and support for both teachers and students in literacy development.

1) For school heads, future directions emphasize strengthening school-based literacy leadership and support systems. They are encouraged to institutionalize structured reading intervention programs anchored on the results of the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), ensuring that literacy data are systematically used for planning, monitoring, and decision-making. School heads may also consider reducing the administrative burdens on English teachers who handle remediation classes, providing dedicated reading coordinators, and strengthening Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions as venues for collaborative planning and instructional improvement. In addition, establishing stronger partnerships with parents and the community is essential to reinforce reading development beyond the classroom.
2) For teachers, future directions focus on sustaining and enhancing instructional effectiveness through continuous professional growth. Teachers are encouraged further to strengthen their use of adaptive and differentiated instruction, targeted literacy strategies, and data-driven assessment practices to address diverse learner needs. Continuous engagement in professional development programs focused on literacy intervention, scaffolding techniques, and assessment interpretation is recommended. Teachers may also explore innovative, learner-centered strategies that promote reading motivation while consistently using Phil-IRI results to guide instructional adjustments and intervention planning.
3) For students, future directions highlight the importance of strengthening reading engagement and responsibility for learning. Students are encouraged to actively participate in reading intervention programs, develop consistent reading habits, and utilize available learning resources both in school and at home. Increasing exposure to reading materials and reducing dependence on non-educational screen time may also help improve their literacy development. Strengthening motivation and participation in classroom reading activities is essential in building their confidence and comprehension skills.
4) For future researchers, it is recommended to explore further the long-term effectiveness of literacy intervention programs implemented in public secondary schools, particularly those informed by Phil-IRI results. Future studies may examine the impact of specific instructional strategies such as differentiated instruction, scaffolding, and gamified learning on reading proficiency. Researchers may also investigate

the role of parental involvement, digital literacy tools, and teacher workload in influencing literacy outcomes. Researchers are also encouraged to conduct scoping reviews to map existing literacy intervention practices and identify gaps in current Philippine-based reading programs, as well as meta-analyses to synthesize quantitative evidence on the effectiveness of literacy interventions across different contexts.

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