ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 11| November 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

LEARNING FROM THE BEST: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY OF AN OUTSTANDING INDEPENDENT READERS

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ABSTRACT
This multiple-case study explored the experiences of outstanding independent readers, focusing on their challenges, coping strategies, and insights. Two participants, Ace and Rose, were selected using purposive sampling based on their academic achievements and independent reading habits. Ace, who maintains good academic standing while actively participating in sports and reading activities. His love for reading which is supported by his brother explains his development of his fondness for reading. On the other hand, Rose has consistently excelled academically after deciding to fully focus on her studies. Her passion for reading and the encouragement from her sister contribute to her continued motivation and strong academic performance. The study employed a qualitative research design with in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method. The results revealed the challenges of the participants: Struggling with unfamiliar themes; having no time for reading; experiencing difference in terms of reading interest of others; and having reading goals. In response to the challenges the participants encountered, they have chosen the following coping strategies: persistence in reading despite challenges; internalizing story and the character; having a time management; and connecting with others through their reading interest. By facing and knowing such challenges, the participants have learned and absorbed the knowledge, skills, and strategies that enhance their reading and help to their overall learning. The study concluded that fostering a love for reading and providing support for independent readers is crucial for their success.
KEYWORDS: *Outstanding Independent Readers, Multiple-Case, Qualitative, Cross-Case-Analysis.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is the process of understanding written symbols to share ideas. Learning to read is not easy because it involves mental, physical, social, and teaching factors. Reading helps us understand others' views and improves skills like critical thinking and imagination. Students who read more learn new things, especially when studying English. However, reading has decreased due to distractions like social media. For ESL learners, challenges like a lack of books and resources make it harder to build good reading habits. Poverty and strong beliefs also prevent regular reading. Mwangi and Bwire (2020) say that not having enough reading materials is a big reason students do not read much. When students do not read, their school performance suffers. In short, without enough reading materials or habits, students may do poorly in school. Reading is key to success but needs proper resources and support. (Hassan et al.,2021)

In Thailand, students spend a lot of time reading, but many struggle to understand what they read, leading to low reading scores. To improve their comprehension, students need to use different strategies for learning, remembering, and recalling information. These reading strategies are important because they help students read more effectively. This shows that good readers actively engage with the text and are aware of how they understand it. Teachers can help students improve their reading comprehension by teaching them these strategies. Reading strategies are focused methods that help students grasp the author's message. They also help readers adapt their reading habits to deal with text difficulty, task demands, and other factors (Banditvilai, 2020).

In the Philippines, Sagayen National High School (SNHS) in Asuncion, Davao del Norte has a long-standing problem with students who struggle to read, like many other schools. The Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (PIRI) for Grade 7 students shows that many have trouble with reading. To help fix this, the College of Teacher Education and Technology, especially the Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSED) Department, started a project called "Summer Big Brother/Sister: Learning is Fun Project." This is part of the i-READR Program, which is a community project to improve reading skills. The goal of the project is to help struggling students become "grade-level" readers over three years. Using Participatory Action Research (PAR), the project helps students not only understand what they read but also deal with the bigger problems caused by their reading difficulties. It also shows that students who struggle with reading often face social problems because they can't read well. Improving current reading programs is needed to help these students better (Tan et al.,2020).

Studying the reading habits and challenges of outstanding independent readers is socially relevant because these readers play a vital role in academic success and lifelong learning. Students today face an increasingly complex information environment shaped by social media and technology, making strong reading skills essential for critically analyzing what they encounter online and making informed choices. Despite this, many students struggle with reading, which can negatively affect their academic performance and future opportunities. Understanding how outstanding independent readers develop

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and sustain their reading habits offers valuable insights for educators seeking to support all learners. Their experiences highlight the importance of fostering effective reading strategies to help students thrive in both academic and everyday contexts.

The study of independent reading habits and strategies has not been thoroughly conducted. For instance, the research conducted by Cadiz-Gabejan et al. (2021) titled *"Students' Reading Proficiency and Academic Performance"* showed that although many students engage with different types of reading materials, the impact of their preferences on their skill development and motivation is not well understood. Likewise, Pan and Sawyer's (2021) study, *"The Effectiveness of Self-Regulated Learning Strategies on Independent Reading Engagement and Academic Success,"* highlights the significance of self-regulated learning techniques but identifies a lack of knowledge on how students use these methods outside structured environments. Additionally, students face challenges such as distractions from social media and trouble finding reading content that matches their interests and abilities. This research will explore these issues in greater depth and seek to identify effective strategies that encourage more engaged and autonomous reading in today's digital landscape.

The detailed findings of this study will be shared widely to make sure that important groups like teachers, decision-makers, and schools can learn from them. Students who are independent readers will be able to access the results to help them learn from each other and stay motivated. In addition, universities and faculty research teams will receive the findings to help improve teaching plans and support better reading development for students. To reach more people and have the greatest influence, the study will also be published on trusted online academic platforms so that the knowledge is easy to access, well known, and useful in different educational settings.

1.1 Research Objectives

This study aimed to investigate real-life experiences of a student who excels as an independent reader.
Additionally, the following questions are addressed in this study:

1. What are unique cases of outstanding independent readers?
2. What are the challenges of the outstanding independent readers in reading?
3. What are your ways of coping and overcoming obstacles during your reading pursuits?
4. What are the insights of outstanding independent readers?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Literature Review

Independent Readers

Developing strong reading skills is a crucial foundation for students' academic success, as these abilities enable them to comprehend, analyze, and apply information across all subjects. Regardless of their backgrounds, students benefit significantly from becoming independent readers individuals who can read with confidence, understanding, and self-motivation. This research explores the relationship between effective reading capabilities and academic outcomes, with a particular focus on English proficiency. By examining students' profiles, the study assessed their reading abilities alongside their academic performance. Findings revealed that factors such as gender and parents' educational attainment influence reading proficiency. Notably, students who demonstrate higher levels of reading independence tend to achieve stronger academic results. These outcomes emphasize the importance of fostering independent reading habits, especially among students who struggle with reading. The study recommends providing targeted support to such learners and encouraging teaching strategies that motivate boys to develop autonomous reading skills comparable to those of girls. Such efforts can guide educational institutions and teachers in nurturing independent readers who are well-equipped to excel academically (Cadiz-Gabejan et al., 2021).

Reading Habits

Reading habits play a vital role in the development of children's reading abilities which serve as cornerstone for achieving a well-rounded education. These habits are especially significant for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, as they enhance language skills both inside and outside the classroom. According to Rhee (2001), reading habits encompass how often individuals read, how effectively they engage with texts, and the types of materials they choose. Research shows that children who consistently read across a variety of genres tend to perform better academically, underscoring the importance of cultivating positive reading routines early on. Encouraging these practices can help students develop the autonomy, motivation, and comprehension skills necessary to become independent readers. However, localized studies have reported mixed findings regarding students' reading preferences, purposes, and material choices, likely reflecting the diverse backgrounds and circumstances that shape their reading behaviors (Hassan et al., 2021).

Reading comprehension

Mangila described that reading comprehension has three main skills: understanding basic words, interpreting deeper meaning, and analyzing what is read. Understanding basic words is about recognizing and grasping their simple meaning. The higher-level skills involve figuring out hidden messages, evaluating arguments, and understanding the author's purpose, which can be hard for younger readers. This shows how important it is to intentionally teach and develop reading comprehension skills. When students improve in these areas, they become more confident and independent in reading, able to analyze and think about texts on their own. As their understanding gets better, they are also more likely to enjoy reading and stay motivated, helping them grow into self-sufficient readers (Mangila et al., 2020).

Vocabulary

Having a wide and well-developed vocabulary helps readers better decode, understand, and interpret texts. Children usually learn new words quickly, picking up around 2 to 8 root words each day. As they begin reading on their own, their vocabulary starts to grow more from the books they read than just from

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speaking or formal teaching. However, since many texts contain only a few unfamiliar words, chances for learning new vocabulary by chance are limited. Studies also show that direct vocabulary instruction covers only a small fraction of the roughly 40,000 words skilled readers are expected to know by high school. This highlights the important role of independent reading, which offers students repeated, meaningful encounters with a wide range of words in real contexts, helping to improve both their vocabulary and reading comprehension.

Strategies of an Outstanding Readers

Students rarely engage in active questioning during reading tasks, often relying on teacher-provided comprehension questions after completing a text. This practice positions them as passive recipients of information rather than active constructors of meaning. Thohir observed that students seldom initiate questions during the teaching and learning process, which limits their depth of engagement. To counter this, the Question Generation (QG) strategy encourages students to create their own questions about the text, fostering both critical and creative thinking. This strategy aligns with the behaviors of outstanding readers, who actively monitor their understanding by questioning, predicting, and clarifying as they read. Generating questions requires students to analyze content, identify key ideas, and connect them to prior knowledge skills characteristic of proficient readers. Furthermore, students cannot produce meaningful questions without first comprehending the material, making QG a powerful metacognitive strategy that promotes deeper engagement. By incorporating QG, educators can help students adopt the self-directed and reflective habits that define outstanding readers (Thohir et al., 2020).

Digital Tools

This study emphasized that the rise of eBooks, online reading platforms, and social media has redefined how students access and engage with texts. They argue that digital tools offer significant opportunities to enrich reading experiences by providing multimodal content, interactive features, and immediate access to a broad range of culturally diverse and level-appropriate materials. Such tools can strengthen reading comprehension through built-in dictionaries, text-to-speech functions, annotation features, and adaptive reading supports, which are particularly beneficial for struggling readers and English language learners. However, campia also caution that digital reading environments pose challenges, including information overload, distractions, and diminished attention spans. To counter these risks, they advocate for intentional instruction in digital literacy and self-regulation strategies to help students navigate online texts effectively. By thoughtfully integrating digital tools into reading instruction, educators can enhance students' engagement, foster deeper comprehension, and support the development of essential 21st-century literacy skills. (Ciampia, 2019).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Sociocultural Theory by Lev Vygotsky, which emphasizes that learning happens through social interactions and cultural contexts. Individuals develop knowledge by engaging with more knowledgeable others, such as teachers and peers, who provide guidance and support. In reading, this means learners improve through discussions and collaborative learning, which enhance motivation and understanding.

The study also draws on Self-Determination Theory by Deci and Ryan, which states that motivation depends on fulfilling three needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Students read more independently when they choose their materials, feel confident in understanding texts, and connect with others about their reading. Additionally, Bandura's concept of self-regulation highlights that learners manage their learning by setting goals, monitoring progress, and adjusting strategies to overcome challenges, leading to effective independent reading.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design, which involves various methods to systematically collect and describe social phenomena. Qualitative research is useful for exploring and understanding key topics. In this study, we gathered and documented the experiences and insights of outstanding independent readers. This helped us learn about their learning processes, the strategies they used, and how they faced and overcame challenges to excel in independent reading. To support our choice of a qualitative approach, this section includes relevant literature from real-world sources (Denzin, 2010).

3.2. Participants of the Study

For this study, two (2) outstanding independent readers and one (1) key informant, either from their family or close friends, were chosen. The first participant was selected using the following criteria: (a) the student must have been an academic achiever since elementary school; (b) they must currently be enrolled at Santo Tomas National High School; and (c) they must be recognized as an outstanding independent reader, whether male or female. This participant shared their personal journey and the challenges they faced with reading over the years.

The second participant was chosen based on the criteria: (a) the student must be in senior high school; (b) they must regularly read novels, no matter what genre; and (c) they must be a top student leader, regardless of gender.

Each participant's story provided insight into their experiences and difficulties in becoming strong, independent readers. They highlighted the specific struggles they encountered and how these impacted their reading journey.

3.3. Instrumentation and Data Gathering Process

The researcher followed distinct procedures to gather data and pertinent information for the study. Various tools, including a camera and a voice recorder, were employed to support her educational investigation. These devices play a crucial role in establishing robust evidence, ensuring that all written information and expressions solely reflected the perspectives of significance.

The camera and audio recorder prove highly valuable during interviews. Initially, the camera plays a crucial role in establishing a factual foundation for the informants'

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expressions, capturing vivid illustrations of the emotions conveyed by these individuals. This technology proves instrumental in reinforcing the key points emphasized by the informants involve in this study.

Additionally, the voice recorder provides significant assistance in carrying out the study. While it cannot capture stationary or moving images like the previous device, it nonetheless offers a clear audio recording, which was crucial for the research.

3.4. Data Analysis

All collected data were analyzed through thematic analysis, which offered a structured approach to examining the results. This method allowed the researcher to look at both the frequency of themes and the overall content of the data. The interpretations of the participants were especially important, as they provided meaningful insights into their behaviors, actions, routines, and thoughts. As outlined, thematic analysis involves the connected steps of reducing the data, presenting it, and drawing conclusions, all of which supported the process of reviewing and organizing the information collected (Miles, 2004).

In addition. Data reduction involves the process of selecting, narrowing down,simplifying, and organizing the information collected. It requires making decisions about which parts of the data should be highlighted, minimized, or left out, depending on their importance to the study. The aim is to present the information in a clear and understandable way, focusing on the points that best shed light on the topic being examined (Huberman, 1984).

3.5. trustworthiness of the study

Ensuring trustworthiness is crucial in research endeavors. It highlights the extent to which the results genuinely mirror the individual experiences being examined. To uphold this trustworthiness, Shenton's guidelines become pivotal. Consequently, my study emphasizes four key criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2004)

To establish the **credibility** of my study, I employed various techniques to instill confidence in the accuracy of the findings. These methods included verifying the qualifications and experience of the investigator, providing a detailed description of the case under investigation, reviewing existing research, implementing measures to ensure informant honesty, using triangulation, engaging in peer debriefing, conducting member checking, maintaining continuous observation, and ensuring referential adequacy. In this context, credibility refers to how well the findings correspond with reality (Shenton, 2004).

To ensure the **transferability** of the study, comprehensive background data is provided to establish the context. Detailed and careful contextual information about the participants' experiences is presented through thorough case descriptions, allowing for meaningful comparisons. Transferability demonstrates the applicability of the findings in different contexts. Additionally, it is crucial to clear the study's boundaries by providing essential additional information before any application to other contexts is made (Shenton, 2004).

To establish **dependability**, a detailed account of the research design and methodologies implemented, along with an inquiry audit, is essential. The study processes are reported comprehensively, ensuring the consistency and reliability of the findings. This detailed description includes operational data gathering methods and a reflective evaluation of the project's effectiveness. Each participant is thoroughly interviewed using a structured guide and spontaneous open-ended questions relevant to the research issue. Every aspect, including participants' statements and emotions, is recorded without manipulation (Shenton, 2004).

Confirmability is established through the proper use of an audit trail, triangulation, and member checking. Confirmability refers to the degree of neutrality, ensuring that the study's findings are not influenced by researcher bias, motivation, or interest. An audit trail transparently describes the research steps from the project's initiation to the development and reporting of findings. Emphasizing triangulation in methods, sources, analysis, and perspectives is crucial. Steps are taken to minimize investigator bias, ensuring that the study's findings truly reflect the experiences and ideas of the participants (Shenton, 2004).

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 challenges faced by outstanding independent readers.

The major themes and core ideas for research question number 1 are presented in Table 1. From the answers of the participants, three major themes had emerged: *struggling with unfamiliar themes, experiencing differences in terms of reading interest of others and having reading goals.*

Table 1
Challenges Faced by the Outstanding Independent Readers

Emerging Themes	Supporting Statements
Struggling with Unfamiliar Themes	• *"Number 1 is about the story or the storytelling style. Every genre has its own way of portraying the story, and when encountering a new genre with a different storytelling style, I find it challenging and it's not easy to cope with".* -IDI-01 • *"When it's a genre he is not familiar with, If the wording or style is different, he finds it difficult".* -IDI-02 • *"If I read stories or genres outside my interest, the biggest challenge is unfamiliarity with the theme, which feels tricky since I'm not used to that genre".* -IDI-03

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	• *"She's into romantic comedies now, often laughing and getting thrilled by them, but I've noticed she also enjoys thrilling mysteries".* -IDI-04
Experiencing Differences in terms of Reading Interest of Others	• *"We don't understand each other because we like different things. I'm not interested in what they read, and they don't enjoy what I like, so we can't share our interests".* -IDI-01 • *"It is really difficult for him to start a conversation".* – IDI-02 • *"It is really challenging for me because our interest is different. But I just listen to their stories, and they do the same to me".* -IDI-03 • *"Of course, that is quite a challenge for her because her friend likes a different genre. Her friend enjoys mysteries, but they do share a common genre that they both like, so they talk and discuss each other's preferences".* -IDI-04
Having Reading Goals	• *"My main challenge to myself is to read more. I set specific goals for the number of chapters I will read, and because of that, I have become faster at reading, making it easier to finish and solve mysteries, and I have more time to explore other genres".* -IDI-01 • *"When he sets goals, that is what I have noticed about him. Like today, he set a goal to finish reading a certain number of chapters".* -IDI-02 • *"I challenge myself by reading books that I am not familiar with. Also, to keep my self-interested in reading. I adjust the number of pages that I read. Like today I would not finish this story so that I will be surprised and thrill about what will happened next in the story".* -IDI-03 • *"I noticed that she reads intermittently because she wants to ask herself questions and stimulate her mind, thinking about what might come next. She also tries new genres or books".* -IDI-04

4.2 Coping mechanisms of the teachers on the challenges encountered in the No Homework Policy.

The major themes and core ideas for Research Question Number 2 are presented in Table 2. Based on the participants' responses, four key themes emerged: *persistence in reading despite challenges, having time management and* connecting with others through reading interest.

Table 2
Coping Mechanisms for the Challenges Faced by the Teachers in Implementing the No Homework Policy

Emerging Themes	Supporting Statements
Persistence in Reading Despite Challenges	• *"The hardest part is dealing with sadness. It is really hard to get over a sad feeling, like when a character dies or is cheated on - I feel sad too. So, what I do is take a break from what I am reading and try to read something happy".* - IDI-01 • *"It is really hard for him to take a break; once he starts reading, he wants to keep going".* – IDI-02 • *"I take a break, especially when the story is too painful. Sometimes, I also talk to other people about how painful the book that I am reading to make me feal at ease and release some emotions I feel".* - IDI-03 • *"She will take a rest, she will not continue reading the story, and she tells us that she is mad because of the story she is reading right now".* -IDI-04
Having a Time Management	• *"At school and with my family, reading comes first. If I do not have any other tasks or assignments, and my mom does not tell me to do anything else, I will read because it is also my hobby".* - IDI-01 • *"Once he is done with all his obligations".* – IDI-02 • *"It is really difficult to balance, especially since I have a lot of obligations aside from school that need to be done at home.*

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	However, it is just a matter of time management. Once I finish everything, that is when I start reading". - IDI-03 • *"Use of time management, thinking about what she needs to do".* – IDI-04
Connecting with Others through their Reading Interest	• *"It is okay because I am shy, and I am okay with reading alone, but it is hard when I enjoy reading, but I have no one to discuss it with. What I do is look for genres they might like, try reading them, then share with them".* - IDI-01 • *"He feels left out, but if his friends suggest something, he will try reading it".* – IDI-02 • *"It feels sad, but I cannot force them to do what I want them to do. Instead, what I do is still talk to them about what I am reading and so on so that I do not become disconnected from them".* - IDI-03 • *"She talks to us even if we do not understand, so even if we do not understand, we just listen".* – IDI-04

4.3 Insights of outstanding independent readers.

The major themes and core ideas for research question 3 are presented in Table 3. From the answers of the participants, four major themes emerged: *patience, the value of making reading as a habit, the sharing of the same interest with a friend and a benefits of reading.*

Table 3

Insights of the teachers about the Implementation of the No Homework Policy

Emerging Themes	Supporting Statements
The Value of Making Reading as a Habit	• *"Just keep reading what you like, and when you finish one story, look for another one to start reading right away".* -IDI-01 • *"He continues to read even when he feels bored because he knows it's necessary. It is great that he started reading at a young age because it really helps develop his thinking skills".* -IDI-02 • *"My message is just to keep finding and trying new books, and not be ashamed or hesitant to ask for help. Because reading regularly can be very helpful".* -IDI-03 • *"Reading is really important, so do not ever stop looking for new ways to keep your interest in reading alive. Find new books or strategies that will catch your interest".* -IDI-04
The Sharing of the Same Passion with a Friend	• *"You should really look for what you like, and it is also important to have a friend to read with so you can discuss it together".* -IDI-01 • *"It is also nice to have a friend to talk to about it because when you both like the same things, it becomes more exciting".* -IDI-02 • *"The only advice I can give is to talk to other people about what you are reading. That way, you can get motivated and find something that catches your interest. Or you can also try reading different books".* -IDI-03 • *"Keep trying different books and change your reading habits to make them more engaging and to truly capture your interest".* -IDI-04
The Benefits from Reading	• *"To be honest, it makes me mature. What I read feels like I have experienced it myself. I can see different perspectives, even if it is just from one person's creation, I learn a lot".* -IDI-01 • *"It is a huge help to him because he learns a lot of new words and it really shapes him as a person".* – IDI-02 • *"What I have realized and learned from all my experiences as an outstanding independent reader is that reading on my own helps me understand different people and cultures".* -IDI-03 • *Reading is very important and it greatly helps with your education and personal development.* -IDI-04

This study employed a phenomenological qualitative approach to explore the lived experiences of outstanding independent readers. The methodology allowed for an in-depth understanding of how these individuals perceive and interpret their reading habits, challenges, and coping strategies. Through flexible data collection methods such as interviews, the research aimed to describe the core essence of their reading experiences, emphasizing their personal meanings and perceptions, while setting aside preconceptions to ensure authentic insights.

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By focusing on lived experiences, this approach provided a detailed and nuanced understanding of what motivates and sustains independent reading among students. The phenomenological method enabled the researcher to capture the depth and complexity of these experiences, highlighting key themes related to challenges faced, strategies employed, and personal insights gained. This approach ultimately helped reveal the essential qualities of effective independent reading practices, contributing valuable knowledge for educators and policymakers seeking to foster autonomous learning.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, outstanding independent readers have discussed the challenges and stress involved in their journey in reading pursuits. These results imply that it is important to understand outstanding independent reader's challenges. The people must be aware that challenges can happen at any point throughout their journey.

Various challenges encountered by participants include struggling with unfamiliar words and themes, experiencing differences in reading interest, and having reading goals. These difficulties underscore the need for institutions to play a proactive role in addressing these challenges. By providing adequate support, resources, and guidance, institutions can empower students to navigate these obstacles effectively and enhance their readiness for their reading journey. Collaboration between educators, administrators, and policymakers is crucial in developing strategies and interventions to alleviate the burdens faced by students and foster an environment conducive to academic success. Through concerted efforts, institutions can ensure that students receive the necessary assistance and support to overcome challenges and thrive in their educational journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As the researcher I want to sincerely thank everyone who contributed to making this study successful. I am deeply grateful for their help and dedication.

Above all, gratitude and appreciation are extended to our **Almighty God** for guiding my mind, heart, and spirit and for granting me good health and direction that enabled me to succeed in this study. From start to finish, blessings in various forms have been bestowed, enriching my inner being.

I am thankful to my thesis adviser, **Rhea Joy B. Semblante, PhD**, for her expertise upon checking the manuscript and for giving suggestions as well as the remarkable guidance she gave as I embarked on this path of research, not to mention the immerse faith, confidence, and utmost patience she put upon the researcher as the study began.

To the head of the panelist, **Jobell B. Jajalla, PhD,** I am equally grateful for giving inspiration and reminders, faith, idea and incalculable intelligence that brought caliber motivation and instruction to me of the school. Special thanks are also rendered to the members of the research panel**, Mary Ann Ronith P. Libago PhD,** and **Jandy D. Daga-as PhD**, who imparted their intellectual insights and comments, and suggestions which paved the way for the enrichment of this study, and for the researcher analyst **Deveyvon L. Espinosa PhD**, for checking the data of this study.

I am indebted to my **Alma mater**, **Kapalong College of Agriculture, Sciences, and Technology (KCAST)**, headed by **Rodrigo C. Licayan, Jr.,DBA,** for gracing the opportunity to embark on this profound educational endeavor, expressing support and encouragement as I experiences the journey of embodying this inquiry.

To my **parents** for the unending motivation, love and support both in financial and moral aspects that made it easier for me to accomplish this study, specially in times when I was down or lost, to my **friends** for their unending support, which help me complete this research.
Lastly, I am very thankful to those who willingly helped with my academic journey.

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EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 11| November 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

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ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 11| November 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

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