ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 3| March2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

TEACHERS' MOTIVATION IN CLASSROOM LITERACY INSTRUCTION: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF BELIEFS, PRACTICES, AND CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES

Jenny Marie L. Gloria[1], Lhea Mae G. Aligante[2], Ellen R. Larroder[3]

[1]*Local School Board, Pandan Integrated School, Schools District of Lambunao East, Schools Division of Iloilo.*
Master of Arts in Education (Reading) Student, West Visayas State University - Lambunao Campus, Lambunao, Iloilo
[2]*Local School Board, Schools District of Lambunao West,Schools Division of Iloilo.*
Master of Arts in Education (Reading) Student, West Visayas State University - Lambunao Campus, Lambunao, Iloilo.
[3]*Provincial School Board, Schools District of Lambunao West, Schools Division of Iloilo.*
Master of Arts in Education (Reading) Student, West Visayas State University - Lambunao Campus, Lambunao, Iloilo.

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra26325
DOI No: 10.36713/epra26325

ABSTRACT

Teacher motivation is a critical yet often underexamined factor influencing literacy instruction and students' reading engagement. While literacy reforms emphasize skill development and assessment outcomes, less attention has been given to the motivational forces sustaining teachers' commitment to literacy teaching, particularly in resource-constrained and culturally diverse contexts. This qualitative study explored how teachers experience and sustain motivation in literacy instruction, how motivation shapes classroom practices, and what contextual factors support or constrain sustained engagement. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document review and analyzed using thematic analysis.

Findings indicate that teacher motivation is strengthened by student engagement, perceived instructional effectiveness, intrinsic fulfillment from student success, and professional learning opportunities. Motivated teachers foster engaging literacy environments through enthusiasm, responsive pedagogy, and culturally relevant practices. However, motivation is mediated by contextual realities. Supportive school environments enhance motivation, whereas socioeconomic disparities, resource limitations, large class sizes, and policy pressures constrain its sustainability. The study positions teacher motivation as a relational and socio-culturally mediated construct essential to sustaining effective literacy instruction.

KEYWORDS: *Teacher Motivation, Literacy Instruction, Reading Engagement, Sociocultural Literacy, Teacher Identity*

INTRODUCTION

Literacy instruction remains a foundational priority in education systems worldwide, particularly in contexts where reading proficiency is closely tied to equity, academic success, and lifelong learning. In many educational settings, literacy reforms emphasize structured curricula, assessment targets, and intervention programs to address reading gaps. However, the effectiveness of literacy initiatives depends not only on program design but also on teachers' motivation to implement meaningful literacy practices.

Teacher motivation significantly influences instructional persistence, responsiveness to learner needs, and adoption of effective literacy strategies. Teachers often gauge their motivation through observable student engagement and enthusiasm for reading; when learners display enjoyment and progress, teachers report renewed instructional energy and satisfaction (Brandt et al., 2021). However, discrepancies between teacher perceptions and students' self-reported motivation highlight the need for more nuanced understanding of engagement dynamics (Neugebauer, 2016; Jones, 2020).

Effective literacy instruction that integrates motivational principles enhances both student engagement and teacher confidence. Teachers implementing motivational strategies and adaptive practices report increased professional efficacy and satisfaction (Brandt et al., 2024; Brandt et al., 2025). Professional development further strengthens teacher motivation by equipping educators with frameworks and strategies for responsive literacy instruction, though implementing reforms often requires emotional labor and additional time commitments (Meyer & Emery, 2021; Brandt et al., 2025). Research also shows that teacher enthusiasm and engagement influence student reading enjoyment and achievement (Zhang & Zhu, 2025). Motivated teachers create supportive reading environments by providing choice, fostering self-efficacy, and facilitating collaborative literacy practices (Kennedy, 2018; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2012).

Despite these insights, less is known about how teachers sustain motivation amid structural constraints, sociocultural diversity, and resource limitations. This study examines teachers'

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motivation in literacy instruction by exploring their lived experiences, instructional practices, and contextual influences.

Research Questions

This study sought to understand teachers' motivation in literacy instruction by addressing the following questions:

1. How do teachers experience and describe their motivation in literacy instruction?
2. How does teacher motivation shape classroom literacy practices and reading engagement?
3. What contextual and sociocultural factors support or constrain teachers' motivation to sustain meaningful literacy instruction?

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore teachers' lived experiences of motivation in literacy instruction. Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach that focuses on understanding the meanings of lived experiences from the perspective of those who experience them (Travakol & Sandars, 2025).

Participants

Participants included six (6) elementary teachers responsible for emergent literacy or language instruction of grade levels 1 to 3.

Selection criteria:

a. currently teaching literacy-related subjects
b. minimum of two years teaching experience
c. willingness to share instructional experiences

Purposive sampling ensured variation in teaching contexts.

Data Collection

Data for the study were gathered through qualitative sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of teachers' motivation in literacy instruction. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore teachers' beliefs, lived experiences, and sources of motivation in teaching reading. These conversations allowed participants to describe how they perceive literacy instruction, what sustains their commitment, and the challenges they encounter in their classrooms.

In addition, a document review was undertaken to examine lesson plans, reading program materials, and related instructional resources. These documents offered contextual evidence of how literacy instruction is planned and implemented, and how institutional programs support or influence teachers' practices. Together, these data sources enabled triangulation and enriched the analysis of teacher motivation in literacy teaching.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework. Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis (TA) is a widely recognized and influential method for analyzing qualitative data. It is particularly valued for its flexibility, accessibility, and systematic approach, making it suitable for a wide range of research contexts, including health, social sciences, and education (Campbell et al, 2021).

The method involves a six-phase process:

1. **Familiarizing with the data:** Immersing oneself in the data to understand its depth and breadth.
2. **Generating initial codes:** Systematically coding interesting features across the entire data set.
3. **Constructing themes:** Collating codes into potential themes.
4. **Reviewing themes:** Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set.
5. **Defining and naming themes:** Refining each theme and generating clear definitions and names.
6. **Producing the report:** The final opportunity for analysis, selecting vivid, compelling extract examples, and relating the analysis back to the research question and literature.

Trustworthiness was enhanced through triangulation and member validation.

RESULTS

Teachers' experience and their motivation in literacy instruction

Theme 1: Student Engagement as a Primary Motivator

Teachers consistently described student enthusiasm and reading progress as central to their motivation. Observing learners' enjoyment and participation reinforced teachers' sense of purpose and instructional fulfillment.

Research shows that teachers often derive motivation from visible student engagement and progress, which reinforces instructional purpose and satisfaction (Brandt et al., 2021; Brandt et al., 2024). Teachers frequently use student participation and enjoyment as indicators of instructional success and professional fulfillment.

Theme 2: Instructional Effectiveness Strengthens Professional Confidence

Teachers reported increased motivation when literacy strategies resulted in improved comprehension and participation. Successful instructional practices enhanced professional efficacy and confidence.

Teachers' sense of efficacy increases when instructional strategies lead to observable learning gains (Bandura, 1997; Brandt et al., 2025). Effective literacy practices enhance professional confidence and reinforce motivation to sustain instructional efforts.

Theme 3: Intrinsic Fulfillment Through Student Success

Participants expressed deep personal satisfaction when students developed reading skills and confidence. This intrinsic fulfillment sustained commitment to literacy teaching despite challenges.

Intrinsic motivation in teaching is strongly linked to witnessing student growth and success (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Teachers often experience emotional rewards and professional fulfillment when learners achieve literacy milestones (Brandt et al., 2024).

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Theme 4: Professional Learning as Motivational Reinforcement

Professional development equipped teachers with literacy frameworks and motivational strategies, increasing confidence and sustaining instructional commitment.

Professional learning enhances instructional competence and motivation, especially when training integrates pedagogical and motivational strategies (Meyer & Emery, 2021; Yusoff et al., 2026). However, reform implementation may require emotional labor and additional time commitments (Brandt et al., 2025).

How Teachers' Motivation shape classroom literacy practices and reading engagement

Theme 5: Teacher Enthusiasm Cultivates Engaging Literacy Environments

Teachers emphasized that enthusiasm and positive energy encouraged student participation and reading enjoyment. Motivated teachers created supportive and emotionally safe reading environments.

Teacher enthusiasm predicts student academic enjoyment and achievement, with engagement acting as a mediating factor (Zhang & Zhu, 2025). Enthusiastic instruction fosters positive learning climates.

Theme 6: Responsive and Motivational Pedagogy Enhances Engagement

Motivated teachers implemented a range of learner-centered strategies that strengthened literacy engagement. They provided students with reading choices to enhance autonomy and interest, fostered collaboration through peer discussions and group activities, supported learners' self-efficacy by offering encouragement and scaffolded feedback, and adapted instruction to meet diverse learning needs. These practices created a supportive and responsive classroom environment that promoted active engagement and deeper participation in reading.

Motivational literacy practices such as choice, collaborative reading, and self-efficacy support enhance engagement (Kennedy, 2018). Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction integrates strategy instruction with motivation practices, improving comprehension and engagement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2012).

Theme 7: Teacher Reading Identity Influences Instructional Practices

Teachers who valued reading personally integrated authentic literacy practices and shared reading experiences, modeling positive reading behaviors.

Teachers' personal reading habits influence their instructional strategies and classroom literacy culture (Leal-Soto et al., 2018). Educators who value reading foster motivational classroom climates and promote literacy engagement.

Contextual and Sociocultural factors support or constrain teachers' motivation

Theme 8: Sociocultural Relevance Enhances Instructional Meaning

Teachers reported greater motivation when literacy instruction connected to students' language, culture, and lived experiences. Contextual relevance strengthened learner participation and instructional satisfaction.

Culturally responsive literacy practices enhance comprehension and engagement (Thompson, 2019; Alwi et al., 2024). Sociocultural relevance strengthens instructional meaning and teacher commitment.

Theme 9: Supportive Professional Environments Sustain Motivation

Teacher motivation was strengthened by a supportive professional environment that enabled effective literacy instruction. Encouraging school leadership fostered a sense of value and purpose, while collaborative school cultures promoted shared responsibility and professional support among colleagues. Access to adequate literacy resources enhanced teachers' capacity to implement meaningful reading activities, and active community and parental involvement reinforced the importance of literacy beyond the classroom. These factors created a supportive ecosystem that sustained teachers' commitment and enthusiasm for teaching reading.

Trusting school cultures, administrative support, and collaborative environments enhance teacher engagement and instructional effectiveness (Behizadeh et al., 2019). Professional support systems sustain motivation.

Theme 10: Structural and Socioeconomic Constraints Challenge Sustainability

Teachers also identified several barriers that challenged their ability to sustain motivation and deliver responsive literacy instruction. Large class sizes made individualized support difficult, while limited instructional resources restricted the range of reading activities they could implement. Pressure to meet assessment targets often narrowed instructional focus, reducing opportunities for creative and student-centered literacy practices. Additionally, socioeconomic disparities affected learners' access to reading materials at home, creating unequal learning conditions that teachers had to navigate. Together, these factors constrained instructional flexibility and made it more difficult to maintain long-term motivational sustainability.

Large class sizes, assessment pressures, and resource shortages limit instructional flexibility and professional engagement (Behizadeh et al., 2019). Socioeconomic disparities restrict access to literacy materials and affect instructional effectiveness (Nag, 2023; Yetkin, 2025).

DISCUSSION

This study conceptualizes teacher motivation in literacy instruction as a dynamic interplay between relational, instructional, and contextual factors. Findings indicate that motivation is strongly linked to teachers' perceptions of student

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engagement and progress. Observing learners' enthusiasm reinforces teachers' instructional purpose and professional satisfaction, supporting research that intrinsic rewards derived from student success strengthen teacher commitment (Brandt et al., 2024). Teacher enthusiasm emerged as a critical mediator of student reading engagement. Motivated teachers cultivate supportive literacy environments, aligning with evidence that teacher enthusiasm predicts academic enjoyment and achievement (Zhang & Zhu, 2025). This reciprocal relationship suggests that teacher and student motivation function as mutually reinforcing processes within literacy classrooms.

Instructional efficacy and professional competence also shaped motivational experiences. Teachers who implemented adaptive and motivational strategies reported increased confidence and engagement, highlighting the importance of professional development in sustaining motivation (Brandt et al., 2025; Yusoff et al., 2026). Training that integrates motivational principles with literacy pedagogy supports both instructional effectiveness and teacher well-being. The findings further highlight the sociocultural nature of teacher motivation. Literacy instruction aligned with cultural contexts and linguistic realities enhances instructional meaning and learner participation (Thompson, 2019; Alwi et al., 2024). Teachers' literacy identities and sociocultural backgrounds influence their instructional approaches and motivation (Tavsanli, 2025). This underscores the importance of culturally responsive literacy practices in sustaining teacher engagement.

However, motivation operates within structural constraints. Institutional pressures, resource limitations, and socioeconomic disparities can diminish teachers' instructional flexibility and professional engagement (Behizadeh et al., 2019; Nag, 2023; Yetkin, 2025). These constraints highlight the need for systemic support to sustain teacher motivation in literacy reform contexts.

Importantly, the findings suggest that teacher motivation is not static but adaptive. Teachers sustain motivation through responsive pedagogy, collaboration, and commitment to learners despite challenges. This resilience underscores motivation as both an individual and collective professional resource essential for sustaining literacy initiatives.

CONCLUSION

Teacher motivation is a central and sustaining force in effective literacy instruction. Teachers derive motivation from student engagement, instructional success, professional learning, and culturally meaningful practices. However, motivation is shaped by broader sociocultural contexts and constrained by systemic and socioeconomic challenges. Recognizing teacher motivation as a relational, sociocultural, and contextual phenomenon is essential for strengthening literacy initiatives and sustaining meaningful reading instruction.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were carefully observed in the collection and processing of documents used in this study. Prior to reviewing lesson plans, reading program materials, and other instructional documents, permission was formally requested from the school administration and the concerned teachers. Access was granted only for materials relevant to the research objectives. In compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act 10173), all documents were treated as confidential. Identifiable information such as names of teachers, students, schools, and specific locations was removed or anonymized to protect privacy. Documents were used solely for research purposes, stored securely, and accessed only by the researcher.

The study also maintained transparency in the use of digital tools. Artificial intelligence (AI) applications were utilized strictly to assist in improving grammar, clarity, and coherence of the manuscript. AI tools were not used to generate data, fabricate findings, or replace the researcher's analysis and interpretation. The researcher retained full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the work, ensuring that all interpretations remained grounded in the collected data and aligned with ethical research standards.

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Volume: 12| Issue: 3| March2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

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