

PASSION AND RESILIENCE: EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN HANDLING CHILDREN WITH READING DIFFICULTIES IN ONLINE TEACHING

ABSTRACT

Aim. This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of public primary school teachers in handling children with reading difficulties during online teaching.

Study design.

Study design. The use of descriptive phenomenology as research design.

Place and duration of the study. Schools Division of Bacolod City, Philippines from February to July 2022.

Methods. Participants were identified using a purposive sampling technique. Nine public primary school teachers answered the interview using an unstructured in-depth interview. The data collection was done sequentially. In analyzing the participants' transcripts, thematic analysis using the modified van Kaam approach popularized by Moustakas (1994) was utilized.

Results. Analyses of the data revealed that utilizing innovative practices in the teaching-learning process helped teachers handle children with reading difficulties. Also, the aide of Parent Facilitated Learning as an ally for teaching remediated the exhaustion of teachers' workloads. Furthermore, this qualitative research generated data from the participants with three major themes, and 12 sub-themes emerged: (1) dealing with children's problems in fundamental skills; subthemes (8): poor letter identification, poor phonetic foundation, a poor blending of word pattern, poor word recognition, poor reading comprehension, low academic motivation, low academic performance, attention deficit, (2) dealing with online instructions; subthemes (2): poor internet access and problems with the schedule of classes, and (3) utilizing innovative practices to address problems on reading difficulties of children, sub-themes (2): using word and picture cues and parent-facilitated learning.

Conclusion. Public primary school teachers encountered challenges and struggles handling children with reading difficulties in the new learning platform. These experiences create an opportunity to pursue their passion and commitment to teaching during the COVID-19 Pandemic. This paved the way for passionate and resilient teachers in precarious times.

Keywords: Education, reading difficulty, public primary school teachers, online teaching, phenomenological, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Online teaching is an educational process that occurs over the Internet [29]. It is a form of distance education to provide learning experiences for students, both children, and adults, to access education from remote locations or who, for various reasons, cannot attend a school, vocational college, or university [16]. Distance education addresses issues related to geographical distance and many other reasons preventing in-person class attendance [35]. With utmost consideration to providing education as a fundamental human right, educational systems around the globe were once again challenged to produce different measures to sustain education efforts [32].

Reading is a complex cognitive process of decoding symbols to understand the text. It is a means of language acquisition, communication, and exchange of information and ideas [28]. Radically, the use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) in teaching is growing. The teaching changed significantly as it was done virtually [14]. Teachers in the United States focus much more of their instructional time on reading instead of writing [26]. Teaching reading in a virtual way as a trend of education has been embraced by many schools, universities, and other institutions in times of pandemic.

Reading difficulty is a deficit in processes relating to decoding phonetic knowledge, word recognition, and comprehension [28]. As Claessen et al. [8] coined, reading difficulties are present worldwide. The Philippines shared a significant rate of low performers among all Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) [25] Results from PISA 2018-participating countries and economies. That is, 80% of the Filipino students did not reach the minimum level of proficiency in reading. Their poor English, Mathematics, and Science scores are attributed to the student's lack of ability in basic reading and comprehension. This being the case, the Department of Education (DepEd) has launched the *Hamon: Bawat Bata Bumabasa (3Bs Initiatives)* to intensify the advocacy for reading and by pledging commitment to make every learner a reader at his/her grade level.

DepEd Order No. 29, s. 2018 entitled Policy on the Implementation of Multi-Factored Assessment Tool (MFAT) was issued to assess Grade 1 learners enrolled in regular schools who may have exhibited developmental advancement or delays or have manifestations of learning disability. The Schools Division of Bacolod City conducted the MFAT last December 2018 in response to the emergent dilemma of the increasing number of learners with manifestations of learning delays. It showed that in every school, 30% of learners in a certain grade level manifest learning and developmental delays in a specific skill. Reading difficulty is a long overdue issue in the educational system.

Furthermore, Pokhrel and Chhetri [24] highlight the weakness of online teaching infrastructure, the limited exposure of teachers to online teaching, the information gap, the non-conducive environment for learning at home, and equity. This evaluates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on online teaching across other nations. On the other hand, suggested reading programs and activities may form part of creating contextualized reading curricula and be used as reading literacy initiatives in schools [30]. Also, teachers are encouraged to conduct the reading program to create initiatives to improve reading [27] and investigate other related development areas. In another recent study, Kang and Shin [15] concluded that an estimated 6% of struggling readers in elementary grades exhibited early reading difficulties related to decoding. Research suggests that language instructors accentuate collaborative reading practices to provide the students with an effective means to engage in their social environment while developing their comprehension skills [3]. Locally, ushering children with disabilities into the "new normal" [5] has been highlighted in recent studies, especially their coping during the pandemic; hence this study was conducted to fill the gap in the literature dealing with children with reading difficulties in online teaching during the pandemic.

Hence, this phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of public primary school teachers handling pupils with reading difficulty during online teaching.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design. This study utilized descriptive phenomenology as the research design. Phenomenology is an encounter, a way of living, and a craft. Guenther [13] defines it as a philosophical practice of reflecting on the transcendental structures that make the lived experience of consciousness possible and meaningful. Thus, this study explored the practical and realistic experiences of public primary school teachers handling pupils with reading difficulty amid this pandemic. In interviewing the participants, I assumed they likely share a wide range of experiences in their new role in the new normal setting. Furthermore, thorough observance of ethical considerations in research was followed to remain neutral and subtle in the conduct of this study.

Philosophical Assumptions. The following philosophical assumptions were laid to bracket personal beliefs and expectations away from the findings of this study.

Ontological assumption. Ontology can be defined as the study of the nature of reality [10]. As a researcher, I believe that teaching pupils with reading difficulties is more challenging than the paradigm shift of teaching from traditional (face-to-face) shifting to online learning brought about by COVID-19. Teachers should have to look into the welfare and safety of their learners without compromising the quality of teaching during online instructions. Teachers are not trained to diagnose children with a specific disability but could make an impression on a child's behavior and manifestations. Learners have their own pace of learning and coping mechanisms during these trying times. Thus, teachers should try to identify and be keen enough on what fits a specific child. Often, teachers innovate and make extra research work to provide quality service, especially during online reading classes and remediation. With the current scenario of the educational system, this interests me to explore the real experiences of teachers during the pandemic.

Epistemological assumption. Epistemology concerns knowledge's nature and scope [10]. Epistemology is the 'study of knowledge. I graduated with a degree in education, majoring in Special Education. Challenged by fate, I was hired as a general education teacher in a public school in the Division of Bacolod City for more than five years. As a neophyte using a distance learning modality, I capacitated my understanding through observation and application. Thus, I used the social constructivist framework, where the goal is to explore how the participants understand the world they live in [10]. I utilized the participants' workplace to fully immerse on what is their experience in the new normal of education. In this way, I could fully document the actual scenario of their lived experiences.

Axiological assumption. Axiology has to do with the role of values in research [10]. As a special education advocate in the general education program, I believed in the No Child Left Behind international policy that all learners should be given equal opportunity for education regardless of race, color, or socioeconomic background. The new trends in education taught us the inclusivity of individuals to participate with the regular learners to fully achieve the child's development. Thus, inclusive education in the virtual classroom should also be provided to make awareness of their existence.

Methodological assumption. An inductive process was utilized in searching for patterns from the observations. I used descriptive phenomenology as the research design and adhered to the modified van Kaam's analysis described by Moustakas in analyzing data. A phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. The fundamental goal of the approach is to arrive at a description of the nature of the phenomenon [9]. As analysis developed, "significant statements" Moustakas (1994) [19] stated, "non-repetitive, non-overlapping" statements, which identified as "invariant horizons," were listed to identify meaning clusters, or "thematic linkages".

The van Kaam method is commonly used in phenomenological studies because the steps let the researcher deeply explore the participants' lived experiences using their narratives. This study focused on the experiences of teachers during online teaching. In interviewing the participants, I assumed that they likely shared experiences despite the interferences brought by COVID-19. New understandings emerged from their responses that influenced the generalizations of this study. Furthermore, fervent observation of research ethics is considered to remain fair and sensitive in the conduct of this study.

Participants. The study participants were nine public primary school teachers handling pupils with reading difficulty during this pandemic. A purposive sampling technique was used to identify the participants. Purposive sampling refers to the random selection of samples within a given population that can best match the purpose of the study [6]. Inclusion criteria were public primary school teachers with at least five years of teaching experience, conducting online reading instruction and reading intervention classes, handling pupils with reading difficulties based on MFAT results, and having undergone training on teaching-beginning reading.

Research Instrument. An unstructured in-depth interview was used as the research instrument. Unstructured interviews use open-ended questions that allow the respondent to talk in-depth and use their own words, confirming their understanding of the phenomenon. To reveal the "what" and the "how" of the lived experiences, an unstructured in-depth interview is appropriate. Phenomenological studies rely primarily on interviews as data sources [10]. The focus of the study revolved around their experiences during the phenomenon; thus, questions concentrated only on this. The unstructured interview allowed participants to fully express themselves through open-ended questions that implied their understanding of the phenomenon. In this manner, the participants may fully express their thoughts on the questions and expand their participation during the interview process.

Data Collection Procedure. Upon approval from the panel, I secured an approved letter of intent addressed to the Schools Division Superintendent of Bacolod City to conduct the research instrument for public primary school teachers. Participants were identified using purposive sampling. They were oriented on the ethical considerations and asked to sign an informed consent that signifies their voluntary participation and the purpose of the study. The venue preference of the participants was considered, taking note of the health and safety protocols such as handwashing, sanitizing, observed physical distancing and wearing of face masks, and privacy issues. One-on-one interviews were done for more or less 60 minutes. Follow-up interviews were conducted for a week or two. The interview started by introducing oneself and sharing experiences in the new normal in teaching. We spent a few minutes in a casual conversation to establish rapport in a language where participants were comfortable. I used a

smartphone to record the interview and transcribed it verbatim using pen and paper to gather data comprehensively.

During the interview, I suspended all preconceived ideas about the topic and remained open-minded toward the participants' responses. This process is called "bracketing." Bracketing enables the participants to express themselves and justify their ideas [10] I used probing questions to elicit more information-rich responses, especially when the answers appeared fuzzy and too simplistic. Bracketing one's judgment and using appropriate probing questions led to accurate data saturation in which the richness and depth of their responses created relevant themes. Both verbal and non-verbal languages were considered significant inputs in the data analysis.

After the interview, I debriefed the participants through casual conversation to divert attention from the interview. Afterward, I gathered and asked for additional information if the participants had something to add or clarify. Then, I expressed my gratitude for the interview process with significant participation. Then, I immediately encoded the transcript in a word application on my laptop. Transcriptions were reviewed before proceeding to data analysis. Afterward, each participant reviewed the encoded transcript to confirm and correct the statements. This process is called member checking. Each transcript was read several times to capture the essence of the participant's answers. Data saturation was achieved after interviewing nine (9) participants, wherein further data collection was no longer needed.

Data analysis procedure. In analyzing the participants' transcript in this phenomenological study, thematic analysis using the modified van Kaam approach popularized by Moustakas (1994) [19] was utilized. This study involves seven steps.

Horizontalization. Horizontalization is listing and grouping significant responses from the participants through reading and rereading the verbatim transcription. I listed all relevant information, including words, phrases, sentences, or emotional responses. This step consists of bracketing, wherein I suspend all preconceptions about the topic and select data fairly and correctly.

Reduction and elimination of the data. This step determines the invariant constituents by reducing and eliminating insignificant data. Moreover, I eliminated data that are seen to overlap, repeat, and appear vague. Purposeful data that remained contain the verbatim transcriptions necessary for answering the research objective and are relevant to the phenomenon.

Clustering and thematizing. The invariant constituents related to each other were clustered into thematic categories. Emerging from the analysis, these thematic categories are the data's core themes that reflected the participants' common perceptions and experiences. Initially, there were 373 generated statements from the interview. With this, fifteen (15) themes were generated from the transcripts. Further elimination of repeating, overlapping, and vague data created into three (3) main themes and twelve (12) sub-themes.

Validation. This step determines whether or not the themes and the invariant constituents are valid. I evaluated whether the invariant constituents and themes are expressed explicitly in the transcript and are compatible; otherwise, these data are eliminated. An external validator to validate the transcript with a Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Management performed the audit trail. Furthermore, to enhance the themes of the study, the external auditor provided comments, suggestions, and recommendations.

Construction of textural description. Textural descriptions are constructed to describe the individual experiences of the participants. I constructed using the relevant, validated invariant constituents and themes and included verbatim examples from the transcription. I recorded all relevant data needed for the study.

Construction of structural description. This step requires the use of imaginative variation to contextualize the experience of the phenomenon. I described accordingly the perspectives of each participant regarding their experience of the phenomenon.

Incorporating the textural and structural descriptions into themes. The final step involves the construction of a descriptive transcript with all the themes. These themes represent the conclusion of the analysis that addresses the purpose of the study. The purpose of this step is to present the experience of the participants. I used the constructed relevant statements and described each participant's experiences in developing the themes of the study.

Data Trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is one-way researchers can persuade themselves and readers that their research findings are worthy of attention [12]. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refined the

concept of trustworthiness by introducing the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Trustworthiness is how the researcher can show that the study is valid and reliable [12].

Credibility. Credibility addresses the “fit” between respondents’ views and the researcher’s representation of them [12]. The participants were oriented to give accurate and concrete information while being assured confidentiality. I used probing questions to let participants elaborate on their experiences as teachers handling children with reading difficulties during online teaching. I followed up the interview with my participants twice to ensure the truthfulness of the statements they presented during the initial interview. Afterward, I reviewed each participant the encoded transcript to confirm and correct the statements.

Transferability. Transferability to the generalizability of inquiry. In qualitative research, this concerns only case-to-case transfer. Thick description is described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) [12] as a way of achieving a type of external validity. By describing a phenomenon in sufficient detail, one can begin to evaluate the extent to which conclusions are transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people. This was achieved by producing thick descriptions for each theme that meaningfully contextualized the participants’ experiences. I provided a rich account of descriptive data, methods, procedures, and interview transcriptions.

Dependability. In this study, researchers can ensure the research process is logical, traceable, and clearly documented [12]. This was demonstrated by keeping all recorded data such as transcripts, field notes, and the researcher’s journal until the research was finished and did not need further editing. Moreover, I strictly followed and observed the van Kaam method in analyzing the data to ensure the stability of the findings.

Confirmability. Confirmability is concerned with establishing that the researcher’s interpretations and findings are clearly derived from the data, requiring the researcher to demonstrate how conclusions and interpretations have been [12]. I ensured that the interpretations were not based on subjectivity but the data. The data were further validated through the audit trail performed by the external auditor. Observations from the audit trail presented that when the supporting statements for each theme and sub-theme were reviewed, there were four sub-themes supported by less than 50% of the interviewees. In finalizing the themes and sub-themes, comments and suggestions to review, reconsider and decide whether to include or not were considered.

Ethical considerations. Going through an ethical approval process helped researchers to think more deeply about their research [34]. I addressed the general ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice to ensure the ethical soundness of the study.

Social value. This study is significant for exploring the lived experiences of public primary school teachers handling children with reading difficulty during online teaching. Furthermore, recommendations from the other research suggest that teaching reading to children with reading difficulties may differ in the context of the delivery of instruction in a particular platform of learning and the era of teaching. Data that emerged showed that every participant shared a different experience of the phenomenon. The contribution of this study is substantial in addressing the experiences of teachers handling children with reading difficulty during online teaching.

Informed consent. Informed consent is often cited as the ‘cornerstone of research ethics’ [18]. Participants signed the informed consent. The informed consent includes the name and affiliation of the researcher, the invitation to participate and reasons, and the research’s purpose and procedure. Participants are assured that their participation is voluntary and have the right to withdraw if they feel uncomfortable during the data gathering process. The informed consent and the whole interview were explained in the native dialect (Hiligaynon) so that the participants could fully understand the study.

Vulnerability of the research participants. In the conduct of the study, teachers were not labeled as vulnerable. They were adults and considered literate and independent to pursue or ignore their study.

Risk and benefits. Since the emphasis of the study concerns the teachers’ personal experiences, the risk of physical, emotional, and psychological issues may be revealed. Addressing the risk in physical, I assured no conflict of pain and injury in the conduct of the study. I assured my participant’s safety by adhering to standard safety procedures through proper handwashing, sanitizing, and wearing of face mask. Sensitive questions that may trigger negative emotions from the participants were considered. I gave the participants enough time to regain before continuing the interview. I also reminded them that they could share and open their own experience whenever they were comfortable. This study is beneficial

in raising awareness of teachers coping and dealing with children with reading difficulties during online teaching in times of the pandemic.

Privacy and confidentiality. During the data collection, the confidentiality of the participants was preserved by not revealing their names and identity. Privacy and confidentiality of the interview environment were managed carefully during the interview and study. Confidentiality was an essential step in protecting the participants from potential harm. The participant was kept anonymous using pseudonyms to protect their identity in adherence to the Data Privacy Act of 2012. No information disclosed their identity, and their verbatim transcriptions were only analyzed after peer review. The transcripts containing their information were disposed of by manual shredding after the data analysis. Collected data were deleted in the storage of the android phone of the interview for protection and proper disposal of the statements of the participants.

Transparency. To live with the utmost respect in this study, transparency and boldness of the process were disclosed. I divulged any monetary benefits and affirmed no conflict of interest in the conduct of this effort. Furthermore, participants were given access to the data issue of the study. Moreover, they were provided a copy of the study as needed. To better facilitate access to the study's findings, participants were informed of the availability of the study from reputable publication sites and journals.

Justice. A fair selection of participants based on the inclusion criteria set by the researcher was utilized. In return for their voluntary participation, I prepared a snack and a simple token of thankfulness for their responsive involvement. Participants are treated equally regardless of their personal experiences with the utmost respect. Any load used during the communication process was reimbursed to the participants.

Qualifications of the researcher. I am currently taking my Master of Arts in Education major in Special Education, working as an elementary public-school teacher in the Division of Bacolod City. A special education graduate but employed and hired as a regular education teacher handling intermediate grade level using a blended approach in learning delivery (online-modular, RBI-modular, modular-parent facilitated). Recently, I presented my innovation in handling children with learning disabilities under my project Resource Room for children with learning difficulties during the District Innovation Showdown in the said division. I underwent training using the qualitative research method, and I am capable of doing this method.

Adequacy of facilities. To avoid virus transmission during this time, as the researcher, I gave much attention to the health of my participants by strictly imposing the standard health protocol set by the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF). I facilitated the convenience in the conduct of the study. The school where the participant's work was used as the facility for the entire research process. I kept in mind the process of the conduct of the study and emphasized the protocol through proper sanitation of the materials to be utilized before using, avoid touching MEN (mouth, eyes, nose), wearing of facemask is a must, and face shield when needed. I used library resources from the current research of the Recoletos de Bacolod graduate studies to better facilitate the proper way of conducting this study.

Community involvement. I sought the participation of the Schools Division of Bacolod City, schools under its division that adapted the blended approach in the teaching-learning process to initiate the study. I engaged DepEd teachers, administrators, and guidance personnel in the study presenting the lived experience of public primary elementary school teachers during this time of the pandemic. Through this, they can create programs, activities, innovations, and accommodations in living the mantra that every child is a champion. Local Government Unit may opt to lend a shared effort in aiding the current dilemma the teachers face through mobile literacy and alike. This could help teachers to lessen the number of pupils who may manifest reading difficulties in the community. Feedbacking on the result was provided to Special Education teachers to utilize as the basis for crafting their lessons and making intervention programs to better perspectives of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic Insights

After interviewing the nine participants and transcribing their verbatim, I followed the Van Kaam method popularized by Moustakas in identifying relevant information from individuals' data. Composite descriptions that derived the essence of the phenomenon were developed. The descriptions contextualized "what" they experienced and "how" they experienced the phenomenon. Similar insights were organized into three (3) themes and twelve (12) sub-themes as follows:

Theme 1: Dealing with difficulties of children with problems with fundamental skills

- a. Poor letter identification
- b. Poor phonetic foundation
- c. Poor blending of word pattern
- d. Poor word recognition
- e. Poor reading comprehension
- f. Low academic motivation
- g. Low academic performance
- h. Attention deficit

Theme 2: Dealing with problems with online instruction

- a. Poor internet access
- b. Problems with a schedule of classes

Theme 3: Utilizing innovative practices in online teaching to address problems with reading difficulties

- a. Using word and picture cues
- b. Parent Facilitated Learning

Theme 1: Dealing with difficulties of children with reading difficulty

Teachers shared their experiences in the online platform and learning delivery in the new normal education. Similar statements were organized into eight (8) subthemes: Poor letter identification, poor phonetic foundation, poor blending of word patterns, poor word recognition, poor reading comprehension, low academic motivation, low academic performance, and attention deficit.

Poor letter identification. The sudden shift in the learning platform affected not only the learners but also the teachers. Teacher participants expressed their challenges dealing with the situation and how to manage it. Antoinette shared her experience with her pupils with reading difficulty. She said:

Knowing that they reached Grade 3 level, and they could not even identify the letters, it's very annoying! Even I keep on teaching him but still he cannot get it. I wondered how they were able to reach this grade level without knowing the fundamental skills. (Antoinette, personal communication, March 8, 2022, lines 333, 337-338, 355)

Since the start of my class, it has been my problem with the letter identification of my pupils because they cannot identify some of the letters of the alphabet. And it saddened me to know that they reached this level without learning anything from the basic. (Mark, personal communication, March 9, 2022, lines 283-284)

Poor phonetic foundations. The ability to manipulate sounds and employ them to sound out words correctly is phonetic awareness. Thus, individuals must possess skills in identifying and saying the sounds of the letters in forming a word. Participants shared their experiences dealing with phonetic problems of pupils during reading sessions. They shared:

I have a pupil that in sounding the letters and words, it takes a long time to get the response and I'm almost bursting in teaching, yet he cannot get it. He is exhausting to deal with. (Lanz, personal communication, March 16, 2022, lines 238-239)

I have also a pupil who has difficulty in sounding the letters and it is a struggle that I am almost feeding him the letter sounds yet he cannot absorb it. It's difficult to start reading without knowledge on the soundings and blending. It's a depressing experience. (Tepay, personal communication, March 22, 2022, lines 241-244)

Poor blending in the word pattern. Reading is complex, and it needs gradual steps to master the skills. To acquire the reading skill, correct training must be conducted appropriately. With the sudden shift in the learning process, teachers situate themselves in recognizing their experiences on the difficulty of their pupils in reading. Here are the participants' shared experiences:

Another problem I have with my pupils is that they have difficulty in blending the letter sound to form a word. They tend to syllabicate each letter which I have hard time too. (Dora, personal communication, June 23, 2022, lines 225, 227, 230)

In terms of blending the word pattern, I have hard time with my pupil who has no prior knowledge of the sound blending. it is also difficult where to start his reading. (Ricka, personal communication, June 24, 2022, line 225)

Poor word recognition. To achieve reading, the reader must first identify and recognize the word. Word recognition is important in reading [1]. When word recognition is realized wrongly, the text symbol being read will be comprehended incorrectly. When pupils with reading difficulties are negatively influenced by reading, they will think reading is a waste of time. Thus, teachers' apprehensions are at stake in dealing with the problems. Participants shared their experiences and expressed:

They have poor word recognition. Some of my pupils can't read even sight words and tend to misread the word. It's difficult to know that they read without knowing what word they are reading. (Mark, personal communication, June 22, 2022, lines 296-298)

It is also difficult to teach them reading knowing that they can't even recognize the sight words. (Ricka, personal communication, April 4, 2022, lines 239-240)

Poor reading comprehension. Several other studies show a positive relationship between fluent reading and reading comprehension skills [23]. It might be that during the reading process, students' ability to comprehend depends on their fluent reading level. Thus, participants of this study shared their experiences dealing with the comprehension level of their pupils. They shared:

There are pupils also who can identify and sound out letters but has lacking understanding and comprehension of what they are reading and its somehow stressful to know. (Mark, personal communication, June 22, 2022, line 300)

Another problem is their reading comprehension. They know how to read the words, but they don't know what they are reading. (Lanz, personal communication, June 21, 2022, lines 225-226)

Low academic motivation. Supporting verbal praise on the reading behavior of the child stimulated the desire to read. Aykol [1] stressed that motivating a child to read was one of the key factors in his learning to read and developing his reading. Pupils who are less motivated to read and have less time practicing their reading skills often experience frustrating academic difficulties. Thus, low academic motivated children think reading is a waste of time. Participants also shared their experiences on the missing drive of children to read, and they shared:

Also, I have noticed the reason why my pupils are not reader because of their low motivation... It is difficult to teach such skill if the child is lacking with motivation and drive for learning.) (Lanz, Personal communication, June 21, 2022, lines 260, 263)

Another problem is the lacking drive and low motivation of pupils in reading. Some of them are too dependent with their parents.) (Dora, personal communication, June 23, 2022, lines 211-212)

Low academic performance. Nowadays, poor academic performance is among the main concerns of teachers, syllabus designers, curriculum developers, and the whole educational body [2]. Surfing the Internet and googling, we would come across an ample number of articles and studies conducted to find out the factors that impact students' academic performance in different contexts and countries [7]. Understanding the goal of the educational system toward the academic performance of every learner is necessary to achieve its purpose. Statements from the participants were collated. They shared:

It saddens to know that these children are not a performer in the class. Not even a single learning subject that they have. (Antoinette, personal communication, June 22, 2022, line 312)

These children are not academically performers. That is why their reading and learning are affected. (Tepay, personal communication, June 21, 2022, line 269)

Attention deficit. Attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), also called a hyperkinetic disorder, is a neurobehavioral disorder or mental disorder typified by a significant inability to pay attention or control hyperactivity or impulsiveness, or a combination of those according to Woweasy. Attention is one factor in learning. A child who can pay attention and focus more on the task can achieve their ultimate goal of learning. Teachers' dilemma on the attention deficit of their pupils during reading could take more time reprimanding their behavior than acquiring necessary skills. Participants shared their experiences, saying:

I have this child who has no focus and tends to fidget on other things during our reading session. It's difficult to sustain our session due to his inattention and focus. (Dora, personal communication, March 31, 2022, lines 157-159)

It's annoying every time we had our reading session my pupil cannot stay focus. Oftentimes, he tends to fidget things around and can't stay seated. (Antoinette, personal communication, June 22, 2022, lines 352-354)

Theme 2: Dealing with problems with online instruction

The new normal education offers a variety of modalities accessible to all using internet data to access such applications. In this theme, teachers shared common experiences on the accessibility of the data and the schedule of classes.

Poor internet Access. Coping with the norm of education in some parts of ASEAN counties where lessons and classes are just on the tip of the finger, many teachers and pupils in the Philippines, geographically on Negros Island, depends on minimal data usage if not only free data to the internet. Most teachers cannot afford to subscribe to high data access if they say so; too expensive for weekly and monthly consumption. Participants shared their struggling experiences with internet access during their online teaching, saying:

To be honest, online teaching is very exhausting... There are many things to consider. First is internet access. It is very difficult to start my online class with an unstable connection... Also, another burden to start my online class when everybody is connecting on the internet. Everyone is sharing, making the connection run slow. Because we are too many connecting and sharing the internet and too distant from the generation, I wanted to stay anywhere where I could constantly connect without interruptions so that I could continuously deliver my online class. So, what I did is that I subscribed to a week-long internet data access so that I could spend it wisely on my online class activities. (Antoinette, personal communication, March 8, 2022, lines 53, 55-64)

The same with my pupils I had struggles with internet connection too. Oftentimes, when I'm conducting my online reading, they got disappeared and left the meeting and it made me bothered if what happened to them. I am thinking that probably they got bored, or they did not like the lesson. A lot of things in my mind. There are times that their classmate will tell me that he left the meeting because he lost his connection. Others are also sending me message because he/ she left the meeting due to poor connection or run out of load data to access. Whenever they lost connection, I directly sent the link of my referenced class through youtube for them to cope with. (Trev, personal communication, March 25, 2022, lines 45-50)

Problems with the schedule of classes. O'Brien [21] discussed what research stated about reorganizing school schedules. She elaborated that increasing instructional time has lots of common-sense appeal as a mechanism for raising student achievement. She reiterated that extra time only makes a difference if used appropriately. The term she used to enhance this topic was "student's time on task" [11]. Schedules, when properly met and planned, will always come up with better results. Teachers' problems with the schedules of their pupils' classes gave them a burden in attaining their goal of reading. Participants shared their experiences on this theme. They shared:

Dealing with time schedule on reading session is also difficult. Other pupil cannot attend the schedule because of time conflicts. (Antoinette, personal communication, June 22, 2022, lines 350-351)

I created time schedule both in online and face-to-face to cater their reading difficulty, but the problem is that they cannot attend on time due to some conflicts with other subject areas of learning. (Ricka, personal communication, June 24, 2022, lines 227-228)

Theme 3: Utilizing innovative practices in online teaching to address problems with reading difficulties

While pandemic schooling has always been hard, it has seemed to get harder as time has gone on, say Ford and other educators, who are desperately looking for ways to help students stay motivated. According to many research studies, hopeful people are not simply optimists but can think proactively about the future and plan to get there.

Using word and picture cues. Visual memory has been found to be an area of strength for every child. The use of visual aids for learning in enhancing one's memory has been an effective way of teaching learners to build their vocabulary and reading. Participants shared their coping with the reading difficulty of children in the class. They shared:

I innovated ways on reading activities such as assigning specific words in each letter. Also, I used picture cues and use of DOLCH words in reading. (Antoinette, personal communication, June 22, 2022, lines 363, 365-367)

In my reading activities I assigned each letter with specific word to let the child know the sound of the letters of the alphabet. As to the word recognition I used picture cues. (Lanz, personal communication, June 21, 2022, lines 271-272)

Parent-facilitated learning. Parental involvement in school has been demonstrated to be a key factor in children's academic outcomes. From an ecological framework, reciprocal positive interactions between these two key socializing spheres – families and schools – contribute positively to a child's socioemotional and cognitive development [4]. In this divergent theme, a participant shared how parental involvement helped the educative process. He shared:

I am positive because of the help and aid of my classroom parents who do the reading activities of their child and I supplement them with the reading materials they need. it eases the burden because they are assisting their child in reading. (Lanz, personal communication, March 23, 2022, March 23, 2022, lines 212-213)

Synthesis. Overall, these teachers' experiences attested to their capabilities to bridge the learning gap in reading during the pandemic. Teachers situated dealing with struggles with children's problems with fundamental skills and problems with online instruction led teachers to be more innovative in their teaching to facilitate efficient reading. It also allowed other parents to facilitate learning and be an ally of reading instruction in their child in facilitating the learning for reading.

The new learning platform allowed teachers to build confidence to try new understandings in teaching pupils with reading difficulties through innovations. It builds up characters to help one another to pursue education amidst the pandemic. In general, teachers' experiences in the online teaching of reading difficulties of their pupils refined them to become passionate and resilient teachers in times of the pandemic.

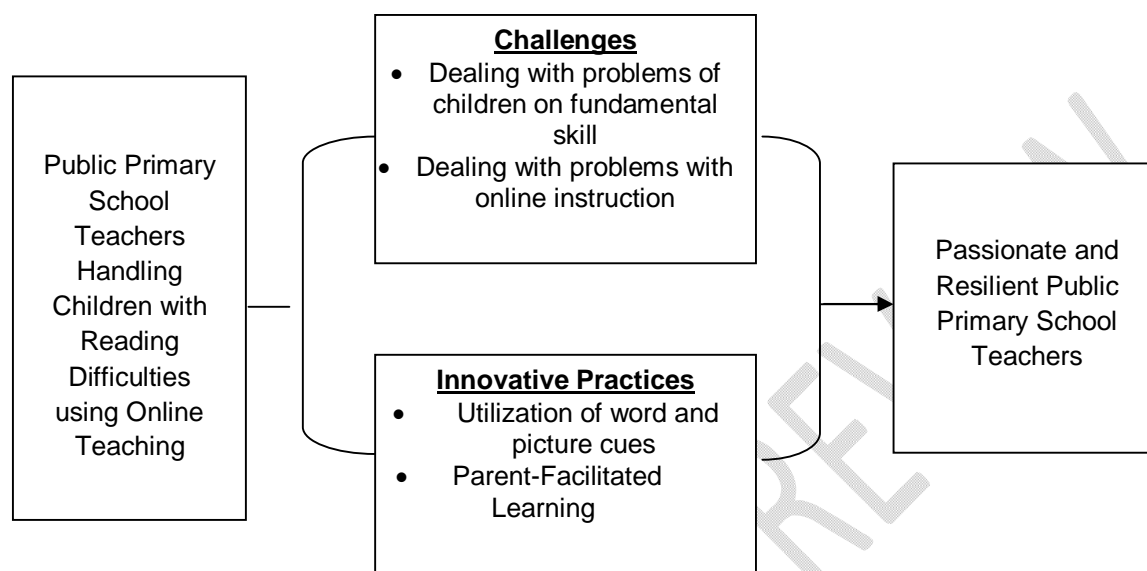


Figure 1. A Conceptual Model on Passion and Resilience: Experiences of Public Primary School Teachers in Handling Children with Reading Difficulties in Online Teaching

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings. The lived experiences of public primary school teachers during the pandemic are thematically described into three (3) themes: dealing with children's problems with fundamental skills, dealing with problems in online instructions, and utilizing innovative practices in online teaching to address problems with reading difficulties. Essentially, teachers' experiences revealed that through the utilization of innovative practices on the use of word and picture cues in reading and parent-facilitated learning where they grasp strength to aid the reading difficulties of their pupils in perilous times. These experiences of teachers handling children with reading difficulties in online teaching developed teachers' character as passionate and resilient teachers during the pandemic.

Conclusion. Public primary school teachers encountered challenges and struggled in the new learning platform in handling children with reading difficulties. Their struggles influenced their teaching delivery dealing with problems of children with reading difficulties on poor letter identification, poor phonetic foundation, poor blending of word patterns, poor word recognition, poor reading comprehension, low academic motivation, low academic performance, and attention deficit and on problems on online instruction on poor internet access and problems with the schedule of classes. Amidst this dilemma brought by COVID-19, which makes the educational system shift into virtual classrooms, teachers find ways addressing remedy the problems of reading difficulties of their children. Teachers addressed their struggles by creating interventions and innovations on the reading difficulties of their children by using word and picture cues for reading and utilizing parent-facilitated learning as an ally for teaching reading. The new normal situation in the teaching-learning process allowed teachers to discover, develop, and adopt new skills. These experiences create an opportunity to pursue their passion and commitment to

teaching during the COVID-19 Pandemic. This paved the way for passionate and resilient teachers in precarious times.

Limitations of Findings. The present study recognizes several limitations, first, in terms of the generalizability of the result. The study is only applicable to public primary school teachers. The result may differ in different situations and may have different intricacies. Researchers may conduct a study on the experiences of private primary school teachers as the teaching environment may have different results. Second, the current situation of the pandemic on the use of a new platform of learning for the conduct of the study may also be considered. A hybrid type of learning may also be considered by the researcher. Lastly, the time constraints of the conduct of the study collecting data from the participants.

Practical Application. The findings of the study can be utilized by the school as a springboard for innovating programs and activities relevant to the needs of the children. The study on the problems of children with reading difficulties paved the way for integrating individualized instruction among learners in an inclusive setting, specifically in classroom management. The findings of the study may also be integrated into lesson planning as the content of teaching children with reading difficulties. This provides teachers the awareness that they, too, have the same experiences dealing with children with reading difficulties in online teaching. Thus, it developed their character as passionate and resilient teachers.

Direction for Future Research. The findings of the study focused on public primary school teachers. Thus, researchers may conduct the same research problem utilizing private institutions as participants of the study. Provided the current situation of the pandemic and the local of the study was made in a specific division, future researchers may opt to broaden the scope of studies in provincial or regional opportunities. Also, the findings were not anticipated on the limited innovative practices generated by the participants. Thus, the future researcher may also study the other best practices of teachers in facilitating reading to children with reading difficulties.

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