



Project Boomerang: Evaluating Factors and Challenges in Learner's Reading Performance

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates all the challenges and factors affecting the learners' of East Tapinac in terms of their reading performance, especially those difficulties related to alphabetic knowledge, reading comprehension, emotional responses to reading, as well as the effectiveness of teaching strategies employed by the students' teachers of Gordon College, BSEd English. The mixed-method approach adopted for the present study understands such difficulties with a representative sample of young readers by merging qualitative observations and interviews with the learners. The study suggests that the various challenges confronting the struggling reader demand a multi-modal approach with frequent reading practice and bespoke treatments. These findings add to making more effective literacy programs so that children can become proficient readers.

INTRODUCTION

Lifelong learning starts in early childhood and continues throughout life. It encompasses formal education in schools and training centers, informal and non-formal learning from colleagues and workplace mentors, and unintentional learning from casual social interactions (OECD Skills Outlook 2021). At different stages of learning, children should acquire basic knowledge that matches their age level. According to Morin (2022), children initially focus on spelling, expanding their sight-word vocabulary, and improving their reading fluency. They use context clues and re-reading to understand and clarify texts. As they develop, they transition from learning to reading to reading to learning. Children master multi-syllable words, prefixes, suffixes, and root words; read for various purposes; explore different genres; and analyze story elements like setting, characters, and plot. By high school, students enhance their vocabulary, tackle more complex texts, analyze character development and themes, and grasp advanced literary techniques such as irony and symbolism.

Fauzi (2018), as cited by Rohimah (2021), states that students' reading ability is seen as a determinant of success in their learning activities at school. It is because all subject matter in various fields of study taught in schools requires understanding concepts and theories that must be understood through reading activities. Furthermore, reading comprehension may also be considered an essential skill for personal and professional growth, as Banditvilai (2020) described. The students' reading problems in the Philippines are still critical, which is alarming for the government and other educational institutions. Philstar Global cited the World Bank's 2022 data on learning poverty, which states that at least 90% of Filipino children aged ten struggle to read or comprehend simple texts. While students' various adverse conditions add up to the slow improvement of their reading abilities, it is also discernible that other factors affect the said problem, including the teacher factors. Padilla (2024) noted that some teachers assigned to beginners in reading need to learn how to give the correct sounds of letters and that they have been teaching students the wrong sounds, which leads to the students not learning how to read. She also added that the Philippines has teachers who need to learn how to count syllables in words they hear.

With the matter above, it is proven that students are not the only ones responsible for the poor level of learning in the country. The Department of Education in the Philippines is still acting to arrest the reading problem by implementing different programs to aid the lack of learning. One of the familiar and studied programs implemented for Filipino students is the Brigada Pagbasa Programme (National Reading Brigade), which equips parents and community partners to help children learn and includes interventions to use modalities appropriate for the learners. Additionally, Olongapo City's local government and Gordon College have collaborated on the Mayor's Reading Program (MRP), where Project Boomerang was created. This study aims to determine and evaluate the factors affecting students' reading performance that were discovered during the program sessions. It also seeks to explore the challenges and experiences faced by the learners in the hands of the pre-service teachers who

handled them during the sessions to enlighten people about the possible roots of the reading crisis in the Philippines.

IMPLEMENTATION AND METHODS

Building Outstanding Orators through Mentorship and Engagement with Reading And Nurturing Growth (BOOMERANG) is a community immersion program and the Mayor's Reading Program (MRP) subprogram. Project Boomerang was created in 2024 by the English pre-service teachers of Gordon College in Olongapo City, Philippines, spearheaded by the local government unit of Olongapo City and the director of Gordon College - Community Extension Service Unit, and Barangay East Tapinac officials. The reading and learning materials used during the program sessions include printed texts and modules provided by the Community Extension Services Unit and the College of Education, Arts, and Sciences. The pre-service teachers pooled a small amount of money to cover prizes for the games and other extra expenses, while the barangay staff brought snacks, lunches, and water for the children. The program mainly focuses on improving reading skills, specifically in Filipino texts, of selected elementary students in East Tapinac, Olongapo City, through pre- and post-reading assessments and integrating creative and collaborative activities such as music video-assisted material and interactive fun games.

The research design employed in this study is a qualitative approach, which allows for an in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences and challenges within the BOOMERANG program. The qualitative data were gathered through interviews, providing rich narrative accounts from the English pre-service teachers and the elementary students. This study aims to determine and evaluate the present factors affecting children's commitment to reading. It also seeks to explore the experiences and challenges of the said learners during the tutoring sessions with the pre-service teachers through document analysis and interview methods. Bowen (2009), as cited by Valenzuela and Sardina (2024), states that document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents. Based on Deakin University, interviews are intended to determine the participants' experiences, understandings, opinions, or motivations (LibGuides, 2024). These are the selected qualitative data analyses and sources used by the researchers to explore and evaluate the data gathered using interview questions and narrative reports of the English pre-service teachers.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants based on their availability and attendance during the program sessions and interviews. This sampling method ensures that the individuals chosen possess relevant experiences that contribute to understanding the impact of the BOOMERANG program on reading commitment and skills. Ethical considerations were crucial in this study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood the research purpose and their right to withdraw at any time. Participants' responses were anonymized to maintain confidentiality, and data were securely stored to protect their identities. The research followed the ethical standards established by the institution, ensuring respectful and responsible procedures.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

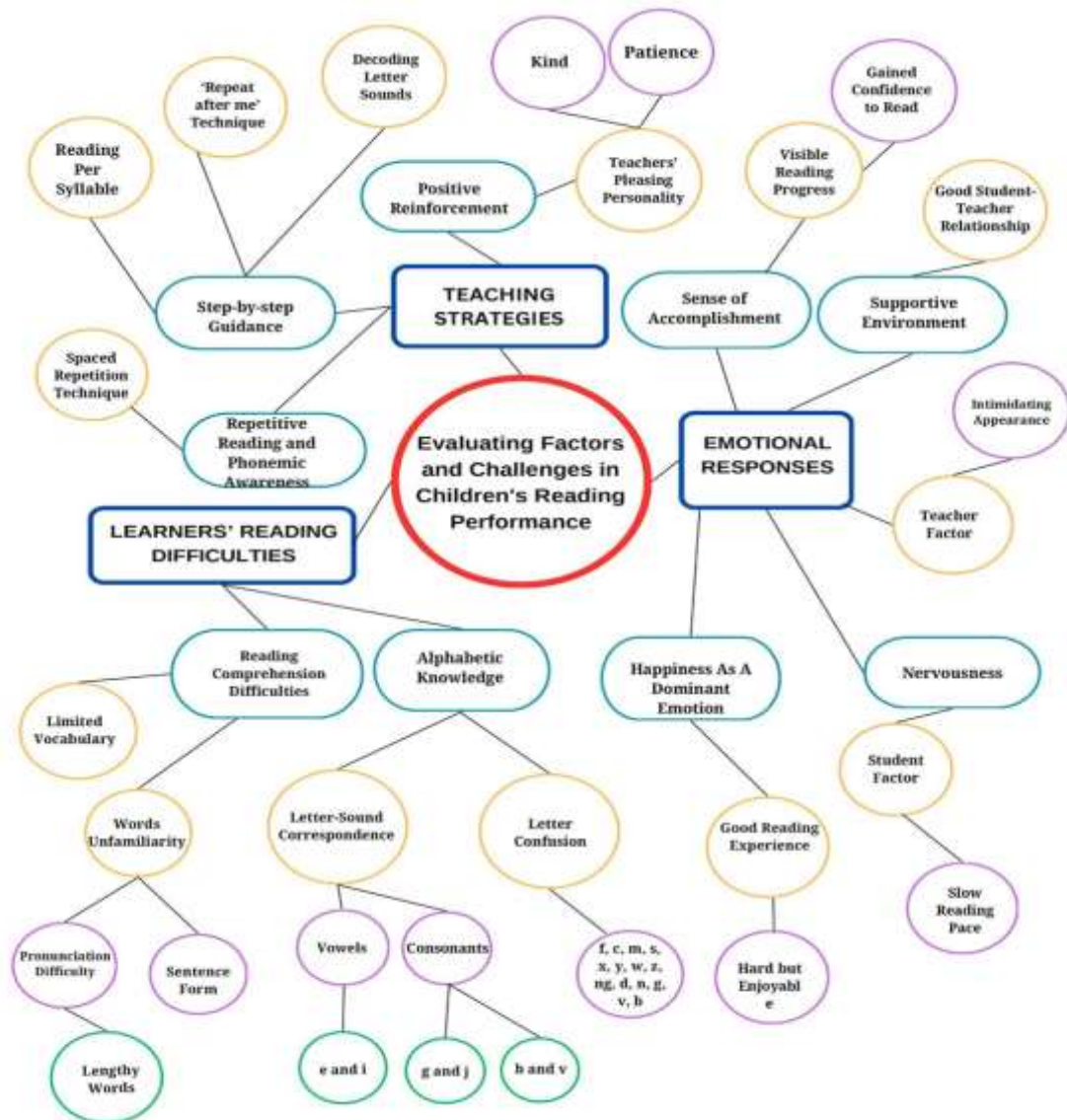


Figure 1. Thematic Analysis Map

The thematic analysis highlights the complexity of understanding struggling readers' challenges, emphasizing the importance of a holistic approach to addressing these issues. The study revealed several themes, suggesting that effective intervention requires careful consideration of learners' needs and instructional strategies. Figure 1 provides an illustrative presentation depicting codes' organization into thematic categories derived from qualitative analysis. These thematic categories are essential for comprehending the multifaceted challenges struggling readers face within the program. Synthesizing various codes into these overarching themes offers a comprehensive perspective, offering more profound insights into the complexities of the readers' difficulties.

The first overarching theme, "Learners' Reading Difficulties," amalgamated several codes related to challenges in letter-sound correspondence, letter confusion, and reading comprehension issues. This theme underscored the significant barriers that struggling readers face in developing foundational literacy skills. The second theme, "Emotional Responses," captures the readers' emotional experiences, including nervousness, happiness, and the impact of a supportive environment on their reading progress. This theme highlights the crucial role of emotional well-being in influencing the readers' engagement and success in the program. The last theme, "Strategic Teaching," focuses on teaching strategies that address these challenges, such as step-by-step guidance, positive reinforcement, and fostering a sense of accomplishment to motivate and support the readers. This theme emphasizes the importance of tailored instructional approaches in overcoming the multifaceted difficulties encountered by struggling readers.

To summarize, the difficulties that students faced when learning to read were fully elaborated in the thematic categories of "Learners' Reading Difficulty," "Emotional Responses," and "Teaching Strategies." Taken together, these themes depict the complex issues and coping strategies that non-reader students face when navigating the intricacies of learning to read, reflecting both their setbacks and advancements and the methods they used to overcome these barriers. Three main questions emerged from the interviews and observations the researchers conducted. One is, *what is the reading comprehension level for learners from the reading program?* Some learners can be classified as intermediate readers, but their reading comprehension is still an issue.

Learners' Reading Difficulty

Beginner readers face several primary difficulties in reading, which can be categorized into cognitive, linguistic, and motivational challenges. Cognitive difficulties often stem from limited phonemic awareness, which is crucial for decoding words. Many young readers need help recognizing letter-sound relationships, leading to problems in word recognition and fluency (Webber et al., 2023). Linguistically, a lack of vocabulary and comprehension skills can hinder their understanding of texts, as they may need help to grasp the meaning of words or sentences (Chumairoh & Sukardi, 2023). Additionally, motivational factors play a significant role; children who lack interest in reading or do not see its relevance may disengage, further exacerbating their difficulties (Arifianto & Supriyadi, 2023). Furthermore, environmental factors, such as inadequate exposure to reading materials and supportive reading environments, can limit their development (Sukma et al., 2019). Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes targeted instruction and fostering a positive reading culture.

Alphabetic Knowledge

According to Wang et al. (2020), Alphabetic knowledge and phonological awareness are the two fundamental skills that children must acquire to learn reading; these two will have an impact on students' decoding and reading comprehension abilities. Alphabet letter knowledge is the foundation of students' reading success. Two vital predictors of reading readiness are letter name knowledge and letter sound knowledge (Joanna et al., 2020; Sigmundsson et al., 2017; Snow et al., 1998).

“Nahhirapan po ako sa A, E, I...mga ganun po...sa letra F at C...’di ko kayang basahin kapag may Letter M, S, X, Y, W Z” (I only have difficulties with... A, E, I... those kinds of things...with the letter F and letter C...I can't read words with letters M, S, X, Y, W, and Z.) (L8)

“Hindi ko lang po talaga maintindihan Abakada...bina-baybay ko lang po kapag binabasa. Kapag ‘di ko alam, tinatanong ko lang kaya ko nalalaman.” (I just don't really understand Abakada (Alphabet)... I just stumbled over what I read. And if I can't read it, I ask for help, I ask about the letter, and that's how I find out.) (L8)

“Nahhirapan ako sa letra NG” (I have difficulty with the letter NG.) (L3)

“Nahhirapan ako sa mga salita na may letra Y,E,D...nalilito sa N at S.” (I have difficulty with words with the letters Y, E, and D.....and get confused with N and S) (L11)

“Letra N, S, G...’di ko mabasa salita na may letter G” (The letters S, N, and G.....can't read words with the letter G) (L13)

“Nalilito ako sa B at V atsaka G at J” (I got confused with letters B and V, as well as G and J.) (L7)

“B at V, nalilito ako kasi magkatunog sila, katulad ng E at I” (B and V, I get confused because they sound the same, also E and I.) (L13)

Alphabetic knowledge is crucial for an individual's understanding of the alphabet and its associated sounds. Explicit instruction in alphabetic knowledge significantly enhances children's reading skills. Pfeiffer and Pavelko (2023) highlight that systematic phonics instruction, including alphabetic knowledge, improves decoding abilities in young learners. Integrating alphabetic knowledge into early childhood curricula to foster foundational literacy skills is significant.

A strong foundation in alphabetic knowledge offers numerous benefits that significantly impact a child's literacy and personal development. Children build essential reading and writing skills by understanding the relationship between letters and sounds. This leads to improved reading comprehension, expanded vocabulary, and increased academic success. Moreover, strong literacy skills boost children's confidence and cultivate a lifelong love of learning.

“Lagi ko po na pagpapalit ang letra T at I.” (I always mixed up the letter T and I.) (L1)

“Nahhirapan po ako sa letra B at D at na pagpapalit.” (I find difficulty with letters B and Dor reverse B and D.) (L12)

Visual-perceptual processing of letters in the alphabet is a complex phenomenon influenced by various factors, including the specific characteristics of the alphabet and the learner's expertise. Arguin and Fortier-St-Pierre (2023) highlighted distinct processing mechanisms for individual letters versus letter conjunctions. Their research indicates that the visual recognition of letters is influenced by both their position within a word and their form, such as whether they are uppercase or lowercase. This demonstrates that the visual characteristics of letters, including their case, significantly affect recognition efficiency. This suggests that the brain processes letters differently depending on whether they are seen individually or as part of a group, with factors like position and form playing a critical role in recognition.

Most of the time, B and D were always confused with each other, especially when they were in small forms, "b" and "d." They were similar in form, so beginner learners need clarification with them. Similar to the case of letters T, I, and L when in small letters "t," "i," and "l." The small letters "l" and "I" are almost identical, and the capital T is like an I without the lower horizontal line. Children are more likely to identify lowercase letters that resemble their uppercase forms, such as C, J, K, M, N, O, P, R, S, U, V, W, X, Y, and Z. Younger children tend to use uppercase letters more frequently, often favoring letters they recognize well, such as the initials of their name.

Reading Comprehension Difficulties

Reading comprehension involves multiple factors beyond word reading skills (Oakhill et al., 2019). Key components contributing to successful comprehension include vocabulary, inferencing, background knowledge, comprehension monitoring, and knowledge of text structure (Oakhill et al., 2019). Butterfuss and Kim (2020) state that successful reading comprehension encompasses multiple components, including decoding, vocabulary, and language comprehension difficulties. Factors influencing comprehension difficulties include text complexity, vocabulary familiarity, and the ability to identify main ideas and plot structures (Balqis, 2022).

“Kasi ‘di ko pa po alam ibang salita. Kaya nahihirapan ako, kinakaya ko lang po.” (*Because I don't know some of the words yet. That's why I find it difficult. I'm just barely managing.*) (L10)

““Di ko alam ibang salita.” (*Because I don't know some of the words yet.*) (L3)

“May mga salita na di ko alam ibig sabihin.” (*There are some words whose meanings I don't know.*) (L14)

According to Oakhill et al. (2019), vocabulary knowledge is crucial for reading comprehension between 4 and 7 years old, and students with limited vocabulary knowledge, as cited by Gellert et al. (2020), are at risk for reading comprehension difficulties. Various studies have also found that vocabulary knowledge strongly predicts overall reading success, highlighting the importance of targeted vocabulary instruction in educational settings.

Students with limited vocabulary often struggle with reading comprehension due to several interconnected factors. They may need help understanding the meaning of words within the context of a text, which hinders their ability to grasp the overall message. Furthermore, a restricted vocabulary can impede their ability to decode key terms, leading to clarity and interpretation. Additionally, students with limited vocabulary may find connecting ideas within a text challenging, preventing them from synthesizing information effectively. These challenges can lead to frustration and disengagement, further impacting their comprehension skills. A strong vocabulary is foundational for successful reading comprehension, and its absence can significantly hinder academic performance. Learners have asserted that sometimes, they have difficulty pronouncing a word or a set of words because they get tongue-tied.

"Opo, mahirap kasi nabubulol ako sa salita." (*Yes, it is hard because I get tongue-tied with words sometimes.*) (L1)

"Minsan nabubulol ako sa U." (*I get tongue-tied with the letter U sometimes.*) (L2)

"Nahihirapan po ako sa G...Minsan nabubulol ako lalo na kapag nagbabasa nang mabilis. (*I find it hard to pronounce G.....Sometimes I get tongue-tied, especially when reading fast.*) (L4)

The reason behind there is a difficulty with what they read, as Learner 15 claimed,

"Dahil sa dila ko." (*Because of my tongue.*) (L15)

Rohima (2021) listed various factors in mispronunciation. There are internal and external factors. Internally, a lack of phonological awareness can make it difficult for individuals to recognize and manipulate spoken language sounds, leading to pronunciation errors. Physical factors, including hearing impairments or speech disorders, further impact one's ability to produce sounds accurately. Externally, consistent or adequate exposure to correct pronunciation can reinforce incorrect habits. Individuals may struggle with phonological awareness, which is crucial for recognizing and manipulating the sounds in spoken language. This can lead to difficulties in producing words correctly. Physical factors such as hearing impairments or speech disorders can also affect one's pronunciation abilities.

Learners were also asked how they were when reading short and longer words. Research has shown that longer sentences can complicate pronunciation for language learners. This is often due to the increased cognitive load required to process and articulate more extended structures, leading to pronunciation and fluency errors.

"sa salitang may apat na letra. 'Di ko alam yung ibang letters....'Di ako mabilis magbasa, binabaybay ko lang." (*words that have four letters. I don't know some of the letters yet ... I'm not that fast at reading, I just spell out the words.*) (L8)

"Minsan mapapatigil ako...kapag pangungusap." (*sometimes I paused....when it is in sentence form*) (L12)

"Minsan hirap magbasa ng mahabang salita...sa maikli kaya ko."
(Sometimes I find it hard to read lengthy words...I can manage short words.) (L3)

As noted by Kaakinen and Fronden (2023), longer words and sentences can impede reading comprehension and pronunciation for beginner readers. Morphological awareness – an understanding of longer words – bolsters reading comprehension in these early learners. While longer words may pose pronunciation challenges, they can also enhance comprehension by fostering the development of morphological awareness (James et al., 2020).

On the other hand, these words can pose challenges in terms of pronunciation, which may hinder immediate reading comprehension. On the other hand, they also play a crucial role in developing morphological awareness. This awareness helps readers understand the structure and meaning of longer words, ultimately supporting their reading comprehension.

Emotional Responses

The transcribed interviews showed that learning to read often triggered various emotional reactions in students while learning and afterward. Many respondents mentioned these emotional feelings. Pekrun (2021) claims that reading texts can stir up strong emotions, and these emotions significantly affect what students learn from texts. Whether good or bad, students' feelings affect how well they read. This highlights why addressing these feelings is essential to help students improve their reading. Libre and Decano's (2021) research backs this up, showing that students often feel frustrated, anxious, and alone, which can slow down their reading progress while learning from a distance. When teachers recognize these emotional hurdles, they can create a better learning environment that boosts students' grades and makes them feel better. The link between the thinking and feeling parts of reading shows why we need to teach literacy in a way that looks at the whole picture, keeping in mind what students need as part of the entire learning process.

Happiness as a Dominant Emotion

Many students expressed feeling "happy" while reading. They highlighted that the program created an environment of inclusivity where students can feel supported and encouraged during challenging moments. The feeling of acceptance and contentment generated meant they felt included, had a sense of belonging, and were more optimistic about sharing the joy surrounded by strong social reinforcement, which facilitated seeing signs of partial recovery during reading sessions. Linking reading to experiences and pleasurable feelings like joy creates a conducive environment where students can individually engage with their reading materials. This idea is consistent with the research of Cunningham (2024) in the study "Start with Joy; Designing Literacy Learning for Student Happiness." Cunningham highlights the importance of joy in strengthening the learning circuit. She says that positive emotion should be in the reading process, which could either bring some sense to the learners or, in addition to slowness, can add happiness that forever living identity comes into motion. Student

happiness matters, even though it is an emotion that students communicate about what makes them happy or unhappy.

“Masaya naman po. (*I'm happy.*)” (L1)

“Gusto ko stories...okay lang.” (*I like stories...I feel good.*) (L2)

“Mahirap po pero masaya. (*It is quite hard but enjoyable.*)” (L3)

“Masaya po. (*I'm happy.*)” (L6)

“Maganda po siya, masarap po magbasa... Hindi naman po ako natatakot (*It's good, it's enjoyable to read... I'm not really scared.*)” (L8)

“Okay lang po... masaya po ako. (*It's okay, I'm happy.*)” (L10)

The responses from the students reveal a positive emotional connection to reading, even when faced with challenges. Phrases like “*Masaya naman po*” (I am happy) and “*Mahirap po pero masaya*” (It is pretty challenging but enjoyable) illustrate that students find joy and satisfaction in reading activities despite difficulties. This intrinsic motivation is crucial for continued engagement and improvement in reading skills. In connection with McBride and Sweeney (2019), their study emphasizes how emotional responses such as hope and frustration impact students' reading experiences. While the McBride and Sweeney study highlights the dual nature of emotions—frustration, and hope—affecting reading, the learners' responses reflect the positive aspect of this dynamic. Learners' enjoyment and happiness align with the study's findings that positive emotional states can enhance motivation and perseverance in reading tasks.

Nervousness

While happiness was dominant, some learners expressed nervousness, particularly when they encountered difficult words or were aware of being observed. This nervousness often stems from the fear of making mistakes or the pressure of being judged, which can create anxiety and hinder the reading process. The learners' nervousness reveals the delicate balance between challenge and support that must be maintained in educational settings. When learners face tasks that are too challenging without adequate support, their confidence can wane, leading to increased anxiety and reduced engagement.

“Masaya naman po... kinakabahan po... medyo nahihirapan po intindihin yung iba. (*Well, I'm happy... but I'm nervous... it is hard to understand some of it.*)” (L12)

“Di ko po natatapos ang pagbasa ko, kinakabahan lang po ako unti. (*I don't finish my reading, I just get a bit nervous.*)” (L13)

“Kinakabahan po. (*I'm nervous.*)” (L14)

“Kinakabahan po. Tumitingin ako sa kanya parang ano na po siya... parang nawawalan ng gana na po siya. (*I'm nervous. Whenever I look at her, it's like... it's like she doesn't have the energy.*)” (L15)

As shown in their responses, the expressed nervousness among learners underscores the critical need for a nurturing and empathetic reading environment. This nervousness often stems from a fear of making mistakes or facing judgment, inhibiting a learner's willingness to engage fully with reading activities. It was revealed by Rahmat et al. (2020) that perceived reading difficulties and reading anxiety, such as fear, nervousness, and sadness, are closely related. Negative emotion highlights the need for an empathetic approach

to teaching. Suggested that teachers' attitudes and their handling of mistakes can significantly influence learners' reading experiences; thus, it is crucial to cultivate an environment where learners feel supported, valued, and encouraged.

Supportive Environments

The learners' experiences underscore the critical role of supportive environments in shaping their emotional responses to reading. Learners who felt supported by their teachers or peers reported more positive emotions and greater confidence in overcoming reading challenges. This finding aligns with the research by Derotas and Barcelona (2023), who emphasize that Filipino children who receive adequate motivation and support are more likely to succeed in their learning endeavors. The importance of a supportive environment cannot be overstated; it fosters positive emotional responses and empowers learners to take risks and persevere through challenges. Teachers and adults play a key role in guiding and fostering a desire to learn, which enhances overall learning outcomes.

“Masaya naman po, nawala unti yung kaba... magaling po siya, mabait po. Mahaba rin po pasensya niya kada nagbabasa po kami. (the nervousness has decreased a bit... She is a great teacher because she is so patient and kind to me every session.)” (L4)

“Masaya po, masaya po kasi si Teacher. (I'm happy because Teacher is happy.)” (L7)

These reflections highlight how the presence of a supportive teacher can mitigate negative emotions like nervousness and foster a more positive learning experience. The learners' increased confidence and reduced anxiety when supported by their teacher suggest that the emotional climate of the classroom plays a significant role in their reading development. By fostering a positive and supportive environment, teachers can help students navigate reading challenges with greater resilience and optimism, ultimately leading to better academic and emotional outcomes.

Sense of Accomplishment

It highlighted that when the learners perceive their teachers as patient, kind, and positive, they are more likely to overcome nervousness—enhancing their happiness and ease, feel a sense of accomplishment, and derive joy from their learning experiences. Furthermore, those learners who experience appropriate support are encouraged and able to build skills and a growth mindset. This positive emotional state is crucial for sustaining motivation and engagement in learning activities. Pekrun (2021) emphasizes that emotions like joy improve cognitive functioning and strengthen self-regulation, making students more resilient and persistent in their academic efforts..

“Masaya naman po...dahil natututo po ako. (I'm happy... because I'm learning.)” (L5)

“Masaya na po... hindi na po ako kinakabahan.” (I'm happy... I'm not nervous anymore.) (L11)

“Masaya. Dahil may nababasa na po ako sa mga nahihirapan akong basahin. (*I’m happy. Because I can now read things that were difficult for me before*)” (L14)

When learners feel supported, they are more likely to experience joy and satisfaction in their learning, which is a key factor in achieving a sense of accomplishment. Based on the study of Taboada and Barber (2020), supportive environments that foster motivation and positive emotions significantly contribute to learners' reading engagement and overall academic success. As illustrated in their statements, the learners' positive emotional responses highlight the crucial role that a supportive and nurturing learning environment plays in their ability to develop reading skills and a growth mindset.

Teaching Strategies

Based on the learners' responses from the transcribed interviews, several dominant teaching methods and strategies employed by student teachers help learners familiarize themselves with letters and reading. A recurring theme in the students' responses is the emphasis on repetition, breaking down tasks into manageable steps, and positive reinforcement. For instance, research by Jimenez (2023) highlights the effectiveness of multisensory approaches, such as repetition, in improving reading skills among Filipino learners in mainstream classrooms. Similarly, Canuto et al. (2024) found that repetition enhances reading fluency among Grade 4 students at Tinoc Central School. Furthermore, these studies support the teaching strategies observed in the learners' interviews and their relevance in mainstream educational settings in the Philippines.

Repetitive Reading and Phonemic Awareness

Most learners' responses indicated that when they made mistakes, their teachers corrected them by pronouncing the word or letter correctly, prompting the students to follow along. For instance, Learners 4, 11, 12, 14, and 15 frequently noted that their teachers had them repeat reading tasks until mastery was achieved, reflecting a strategy to enhance reading fluency through iterative practice. This approach is also highlighted by Canuto et al. (2024), who demonstrated that repetition improves reading fluency, leading to positive outcomes for participants across various interventions. Romig and Jetton (2023) also reported that repeated readings positively impacted all students reading fluency..

“Pinapabasa po. Pinapa-ulit ulit.” (*She makes me read it. Repeat it.*)” (L4)

“Kapag nagkamali ako, ipapabasa ulit sa akin hanggang sa mabasa ko nang tama.” (*When I make mistakes, he will make me repeat it again until I read it correctly.*)” (L11)

“Pinapabasa po. Pinapa-ulit ulit.” (*He makes me read it again and again.*)” (L12)

“Yung 'di ko po masyadong mabasa at yung binabasa ko po tapos nakalimutan ko po, inuulit nya.” (*When I can't read something well and when I forget what I read, she repeats it.*)” (L14)

“Mga letter po. Pinapabasa at iniisa-isa niya po yung letter, iniiba,

pinapantig-pantig." *(The letters, reading and pronouncing the letters one-by-one, then differentiating their positions and reading per syllable.)*" (L15)

Step-by-Step Guidance

Additionally, many learners expressed appreciation for teaching methods that involve breaking tasks into manageable steps, such as learning letters individually before constructing words, as reflected in the responses from Learners 8, 12, and 15. According to Abejuela et al. (2023), this approach is beneficial for enhancing reading comprehension within the educational process. By employing this strategy, teachers can facilitate learners' understanding and retention of material, improving their performance. Furthermore, this strategy aligns with the "Pause, Ask Questions, Pause, Review" method described by Jufri (2019), in which students read a segment of challenging text, pause, and then engage in questioning.

"Binabagalan niya po yung bawat letra." *(She slow down each letter.)*" (L8)

"Siya ang magbabasa muna tapos ako naman ang magbabasa." *(She will read it first then afterwards I will be the one who reads.)*" (L12)

"Mga letter po. Pinapabasa at iniisa-isa niya po yung letter, iniiba, pinapantig-pantig." *(The letters, reading and pronouncing the letters one-by-one, then differentiating their positions and reading per syllable.)*" (L15)

Positive Reinforcement

According to Ismail (2023), positive reinforcement significantly enhances student engagement in the classroom, thereby underscoring its importance in improving reading proficiency. This observation is corroborated by interviews with Learners 4, 5, 7, and 13, highlighting the critical role of affective strategies – where the teacher's demeanor and emotional support are pivotal – alongside cognitive strategies in promoting literacy. The study's results demonstrate that positive reinforcement not only fosters increased student engagement but also reveals, through statistical analysis, a high and positive significant relationship between teachers' positive reinforcement practices and students' self-resiliency, as reported by Lapaz and Bello (2020).

"Magaling po siya, mabait po. Mahaba rin po pasensya niya kada nagbabasa po kami." *(She is a great teacher because she is so patient and kind to me every session.)*" (L4)

"Gusto ko kapag masaya si Teacher habang nagtuturo sa akin." *(I like it when Teacher is happy while teaching me.)*" (L5)

"Masaya po siya magturo nakangiti po." *(She teaches in a happy manner and smiles.)*" (L7)

"Masaya po magturo, mabait at lagi pong nakangiti." *(The teaching is enjoyable, kind, and always smiling.)*" (L13)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study highlight how important it is to provide supervised and encouraging environments to improve young readers' emotional and practical engagement. Based on the learners' responses, a positive emotional climate—defined by helpful teachers and a learning environment—promotes greater confidence, reduces anxiety, and creates a sense of accomplishment. This demonstrates how vital affective support is in affecting learning results. In addition to reducing anxiety, the presence of kind, understanding teachers fosters happiness and motivation, encouraging persistence in the face of reading difficulties.

Teaching methods emphasizing phonemic awareness, repetitive reading, step-by-step instructions, and positive reinforcement improved reading proficiency. Techniques like dividing activities into small parts and correcting mistakes with gentle repetition promoted a growth mindset, encouraging learners to embrace challenges as part of their learning experience. These strategies have been demonstrated to improve reading fluency and comprehension, particularly in the Filipino educational setting, where proper motivational support substantially impacts engagement and performance.

Finally, the study shows that creating a caring environment and purposeful, empathetic teaching approaches is critical in helping young learners develop core reading abilities and good emotional responses. By fostering a supportive school environment, educators may empower youngsters to manage the complexity of reading with resilience, increasing their academic and emotional development.

1. Encourage frequent reading practice in and out of the classroom to build fluency, expand vocabulary, and enhance overall reading comprehension.
2. To strengthen alphabetic knowledge, engage students in explicit alphabet teaching, where each letter is introduced with focused attention on its shape, sound, and usage.
3. Implement a systematic approach to phonics instruction, focusing on teaching the relationship between sounds and letters in a structured and sequential manner to improve reading accuracy.
4. Introduce a structured vocabulary-building program, including word walls, explicit instruction on word meanings, and engaging activities to reinforce new vocabulary.
5. The predominant positive emotions expressed by learners indicate that a supportive and empathetic learning environment significantly enhances their reading experiences and motivation while addressing nervousness and difficulties, which is essential for comprehensive development.
6. Regular training for teachers on emotional support strategies could also benefit them. Teachers could provide consistent encouragement, offer constructive feedback, and foster a non-threatening atmosphere to help learners overcome nervousness and build confidence.

7. Educators should incorporate repetitive reading and phonemic awareness strategies into their teaching practices to enhance reading fluency. Emphasizing iterative practice and targeted phonemic instruction can significantly improve students' reading accuracy and fluency.
8. It is advised to implement step-by-step guidance methods, such as individually teaching letters before constructing words and incorporating applicable strategies and techniques to support students' reading fluency.
9. Maximize reading proficiency and student engagement with positive reinforcement techniques. Emphasizing teacher patience, kindness, and a positive demeanor can significantly enhance student motivation and resilience.

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