

Teachers' Perceptions of the Challenges and Strategies in Supporting Students with Reading Difficulties

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to determine the teacher's perceptions of the challenges and strategies in supporting students with reading difficulties. This study used qualitative method of research and descriptive approach as its research design, in addition to a set of structured interview questions administered through Google Forms to gather data from elementary teachers of Taal Central School, located at Taal Batangas. These structured interview questions were carefully designed to cover various dimensions of the study, including the types of challenges perceived by teachers, strategies employed, and possible solutions for addressing the problems encountered in the process of supporting students with reading difficulties. The results revealed that teachers faced several challenges when teaching students with reading difficulties such as emotional and motivational issues/factors, lack of resources or teaching aids, deficits in knowledge and skills, and problems with student engagement and participation. This study also showed common approaches utilized by the teachers in supporting students with reading difficulties, which were fostering a positive and supportive environment, adopting individualized and multifaceted approaches, and utilizing effective teaching tools and strategies. Lastly, teachers also concluded varied solutions in addressing the challenges perceived in teaching students with reading difficulties towards fostering reading proficiency. These include developing peer support, use of positive reinforcement, and parental involvement. Moreover, specialized resources, professional development for teachers, and specific teaching strategies are also highlighted as crucial components. By integrating these approaches, teachers concluded that it can create a supportive and effective learning environment tailored to the needs of students with reading difficulties.

Keywords: Reading difficulties; Supportive environment; Positive reinforcement; Parental involvement; Professional development

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1. Introduction

Language and reading skills are vital in education as they provide the foundation for all learning and

communication. Reading can be defined as the process of making sense in a regular environment in line with an appropriate method and purpose, based on effective communication between the author and the reader, with the cooperation of cognitive behaviors and psychomotor skills ^[1]. Proficiency in reading enables students to access and comprehend information across subjects, enhancing their overall academic performance. Strong language skills improve communication, allowing students to express their ideas clearly and understand others. In essence, language and reading skills are crucial for developing a well-rounded individual.

Reading skills are fundamental in elementary education as they lay the groundwork for academic success and lifelong learning. During these crucial formative years, children transition from learning to read to reading to learn, children develop foundational literacy skills that are essential for comprehending texts across various subjects. Proficient reading skills enable students to access a wealth of information, from basic instructional materials to complex narratives and scientific texts. Moreover, reading fosters critical thinking skills by encouraging students to analyze and interpret information, make connections between ideas, and evaluate different perspectives. Beyond academic achievement, reading promotes language development and vocabulary expansion and enhances communication skills. It also nurtures a love for learning and cultivates empathy by exposing children to diverse characters, cultures, and experiences through literature. By mastering reading skills early on, elementary students not only excel academically but also build a strong foundation for future educational and personal growth.

Understanding linguistic concepts profoundly influences reading acquisition, as it provides essential insights into how language is structured, processed, and understood. Phonological awareness is essential for reading because written words correspond to spoken words. Readers must have an awareness of the speech sounds that letters and letter combinations represent in order to move from a printed word to a spoken word (reading), or a spoken word to a written word (spelling) ^[2]. Morphology, which examines the structure and formation of words, aids in recognizing prefixes, suffixes, and root words, enhancing vocabulary development and decoding skills. Syntax, the study of sentence structure, guides comprehension by teaching learners how words combine to create meaningful sentences and paragraphs. Together, these linguistic concepts provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and mastering the complexities of reading, facilitating effective reading acquisition, and promoting literacy development in learners of all ages.

In 2018, the Philippines participated in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) of The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for the first time to establish a baseline educational performance through globally accepted standards ^[3]. The Philippines scored 340 in Reading, 353 in Mathematics, and 357 in Science, all below average and 78th among 79 participating nations ^[4]. The Department of Education believes that education should continue despite the imminent difficulties. To address the learning losses, particularly in literacy, the Department, prior to providing interventions, must be able to understand the experiences of teachers in the classroom. According to the data presented, the country is on the far bottom of the list among economies when it comes to reading and one way to grasp the situation is to determine the capacity of teachers as well as their needs in teaching reading. However, even though there are some strategies that are used to enhance the reading skills of the students, there are students who have difficulty or fall behind in reading, which is a big challenge that teachers have to face. This research will focus on investigating and providing detailed insights into the challenges and strategies related to supporting students with reading difficulties from the teachers' perspective.

2. Research questions

This study aims to determine the teacher's perceptions of the challenges and strategies in supporting students

with reading difficulties.

Specifically, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

- (1) What are the challenges faced by teachers in teaching learners with reading difficulties?
- (2) How can teachers support learners with reading difficulties?
- (3) What are the possible solutions for addressing the problems encountered in supporting students with reading difficulties?

3. Study significance

This study is significant to the following individuals in the field of education:

- (1) School administrators: The result of this study will help them to identify teachers' perceived challenges in teaching students with reading difficulties. The study's findings can serve as the administrator's benchmark in developing a variety of strategies to resolve the perceived challenges teachers encounter in terms of reading.
- (2) Curriculum planners: With the help of the findings of this study, the curriculum planners may have valid and credible information about the teachers' perceived challenges in teaching students with reading difficulties.
- (3) Elementary teachers: The findings of this study will help them recognize the different difficulties of students in terms of reading. It will guide the teachers to research and experiment suited teaching and learning methods that will address the cited difficulties.
- (4) Researchers: Through this study, the researchers will be able to determine the teachers' perceived challenges in teaching students with reading difficulties as to develop effective teaching strategies that cater to the needs of students with different learning abilities.
- (5) Future researchers: This will give them information about teachers' perceived challenges in teaching students with reading difficulties. It can guide them as this paper produces a lot of accurate and vital information regarding the posed problem.

4. Scope and limitations

This study was specifically focused on determining teachers' perceptions of the challenges and strategies in supporting students with reading difficulties in elementary education.

The researchers employed the qualitative method of research and interviews as the major data-gathering instrument. The respondents of the study are composed of seven elementary teachers from Taal Central School at Taal, Batangas.

5. Literature review

This literature review presents key related literature and studies relevant to the study that provide the researcher with sufficient ideas and insights that served as a frame of reference and, the insights that led to the conceptualization and formulation of the research.

5.1. Teachers' challenges in teaching students with reading difficulties

Many educators believed that the failure of the child in formal education could be traced to his reading difficulties. These difficulties hinder him from succeeding in school work requiring the reading process. This

problem prompted researchers to conduct studies on reading.

Darling-Hammond ^[5] gave another three classifications of reading difficulties: (1) Lack of word attack skills: It showed a simple deficiency in word analysis when reading orally from context. Fluency errors are marked by frequent stops and repetitions. As recognition errors accumulate, there is a tendency to lapse into word-by-word reading, accompanied by substitution and refusal; (2) Extreme tension associated with reading: A tendency to stop after making a mistake and continue without correcting it. This results in multiple repetitions of parts of sentences they feel confident about. Nervousness is evident, with a rapid increase in errors when mistakes occur; (3) Lack of motivation for reading: They are reluctant readers, careless readers, and active avoiders. A reluctant reader reads very little, showing minimal engagement. A careless reader performs poorly and shows little concern for improvement. Without motivation, these readers may become self-directed avoiders, resistant to efforts to improve their reading skills. An active avoider explicitly avoids attempting tasks, even those they are capable of handling ^[5].

Typically, students who lack motivation for reading exhibit certain behaviors. They read in monotonous voices and are often careless about word endings. They sometimes make up their own phrases, showing little concern for mistakes. While they may occasionally attempt to correct themselves, these corrections are not always accurate, and they do not make a genuine effort to improve ^[5].

The value of reading permeates the curriculum and is not restricted to formal reading lessons ^[6]. During the study entitled “Foundation Phase Teachers’ Challenges in Teaching Reading in South Africa,” it was found that teachers faced numerous challenges regarding the teaching of reading. These included a lack of resources and support from the school management team (SMT), overcrowded classrooms, and teachers’ poor knowledge of reading instruction ^[6].

5.1.1. Overcrowded classroom

Küçükler and Kodal indicated that overcrowded classrooms can affect the teaching of reading or comprehension at school, as most classrooms accommodate between 40 and 50 learners per Foundation Phase class ^[7]. When classrooms are overcrowded, learners tend to become unruly, and no effective disciplinary measures are taken. Hence, learners are not motivated to read, nor are they interested in listening, largely because of disruptive elements in the class ^[8]. Stakeholders’ negative attitudes toward education in classroom provision can adversely affect the teaching of reading at schools ^[9]. The undesirable impacts of overcrowding in classrooms include ineffectual teaching by teachers who cannot accurately assess learners to determine whether their reading skills are developing and a general lack of engagement and poor performance among learners ^[10].

5.1.2. Reading resources

A lack of resources hinders the teaching of reading and the development of reading proficiency at schools. Limited reading materials and a lack of access to libraries in rural areas might lead to teachers having poor reading competencies, which will impinge on the learners’ reading skills ^[11]. This is because books serve as guides to learners on how to learn to read ^[11]. The provision of libraries in rural schools is pivotal in helping teachers develop learners’ reading proficiencies during reading lessons. It is interesting to note that the Bill and Melinda Gates Project has donated millions of rands to build libraries in some South African provinces, as reported by the Department of Sport, Arts, and Culture, RSA, 2020. However, in the rural Vhembe district, the absence of a library or reading materials impeded the development of reading. Libraries are useful as promotional displays in libraries can entice learners, drawing them into the reading experience. The presence of reading materials for both learners and teachers in the Foundation Phase plays a significant role in enriching

reading lessons and learners' reading proficiency. Scholars believe that a text-rich environment can strengthen the teaching of reading by Foundation Phase teachers in the classroom; a print-rich environment is regarded as the second teacher, and learners' skills can be improved through such an environment ^[12]. It supports the teaching of reading for learners, as it improves learners' reading skills through enriching their vocabulary and understanding of particular texts, as well as explaining what they would have read.

5.1.3. Teachers' poor knowledge of reading instruction

Teachers' lack of knowledge of reading instruction can negatively affect the teaching of reading at schools. Researchers acknowledge that many South African teachers display poor knowledge regarding the teaching of reading ^[13]. Foundation Phase teachers probably use only one teaching method at a time, which may not suit the learning styles of all learners ^[14]. Rule and Land found that teachers used limited reading strategies to teach reading ^[15]. Besides this shortcoming, teachers often do not know how to influence learners to read, whether inside or outside the classroom. In fact, very little should be expected from teachers who are already grappling with the challenges inhibiting the teaching of reading skills. Marais and Wessels reported that foundation phase teachers do not always understand the stipulations of the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) English Home Language document 2011 and as a result, utilize the guidelines partially because they do not know how to interpret them when teaching reading ^[16]. Many South African teachers rely on limited strategies for teaching reading, often focusing on basic approaches such as the alphabet and bottom-up strategies like phonics. While teachers may have been implementing the strategies stipulated in the CAPS document, they were only employing those strategies that they understood or were familiar with. At the same time, teachers were failing to teach reading with understanding, and they did not understand the details of how to develop learners' reading skills ^[17].

5.2. Teacher's strategies for teaching students with reading difficulties

Teaching strategies are a general description of the plan of a lesson such as the needs or objectives for implementing teaching strategies ^[18]. It can be concluded that the teacher is a means of knowledge that can help the student's learning process and inspire their students to learn. Teachers must therefore adapt a number of ways to support teaching and learning ^[19].

A proficient reader can also read for in-depth understanding. This indicates that they read in order to fully comprehend a passage. This type of reading is frequently done in academic settings and other circumstances where thorough comprehension is required. In order to teach reading comprehension, Vacca and Vacca provided the following strategies ^[20]:

- (1) Scaffolding: A key change in the delivery of instruction that would make a difference in the content literacy of all learners, especially students from diverse backgrounds, is to scaffold the strategies for text. Scaffolding is a support strategy provided by teachers to help students develop their learning abilities. This support enables students to achieve a higher level of mastery of the material, as evidenced by their ability to tackle more complex problems.
- (2) Think aloud: Think aloud is a strategy that helps students in learning activities and aims to recall more significant information from the texts given by the teacher. The ability of teachers to foster creativity and manage students through each step of the "think aloud" strategy is crucial for enhancing reading comprehension. This strategy involves teachers verbalizing their thoughts while reading aloud, making their cognitive processes explicit. By doing so, teachers guide students in understanding texts and model effective reading strategies, thereby improving students' own comprehension and analytical

skills.

- (3) Reciprocal teaching: Reciprocal teaching is a method that asks both teachers and students to take turns acting as the teacher during a discussion on a particular reading. Four guiding tactics are used in reciprocal teaching: anticipating, posing questions, summarizing, and clarifying. Reciprocal teaching is an excellent technique to teach students how to extract key concepts from a text while chatting about language, formulating thoughts and inquiries, and summarizing data.
- (4) SQ3R: SQ3R is a methodical reading technique that might assist students in segmenting the reading process into digestible chunks. It is only one of 25 different approaches that students can use to increase comprehension. It involves surveying, asking questions, reading, reciting, and reviewing. The SQ3R strategy entails four steps: reading the chapter headings quickly to grasp their key points; turning the heading into a question; reading to discover the answer to the question; and reading to recall the key points (the answer to the question) by retelling them or noting them down in one's memory at the key points.
- (5) Question answer relationship (QARs): QARS is a reading strategy through understanding and analysis of questions. In other words, this strategy helps students understand the questions to extract information from the text itself. In practice, students focus on reading the text briefly and then delve deeper based on the questions posed by the teacher. Both the information in the text and the reader's own knowledge become the primary sources for comprehending the material.

Responsibilities in the acquisition of reading skills are a shared responsibility of parents, teachers, and learners. However, the motivation of the students to read is a crucial factor in enhancing their reading skills, otherwise, it could be a hindering factor if they lack the desire to learn ^[21]. Though teachers tried different strategies on how to address the reading difficulties among students, still there are students who are struggling in learning these skills and one of the common factors is their lack of motivation. The strategy used by the teacher in overcoming reading difficulties in Grade 1 at MI Zainul Anwar is quite good, this can be seen from the continuing efforts to support and motivate students to learn to read, which is something we can also employ in our teaching.

The following is the description of the teacher's strategy in dealing with reading difficulties in students.

5.2.1. Special textbooks

Textbooks are subject matter that is systematically arranged and used by teachers and students in the learning process. Textbooks used in the learning process, if developed according to the needs of teachers and students and used properly, become one of the important factors that can improve the quality of learning ^[22]. Students are seen as learning subjects who need to be actively involved in the learning process, and teachers are the only a facilitator who guides and coordinates student learning activities ^[23]. This special textbook can make it easier for students to read compared to reading LKS books which are usually provided according to the applicable curriculum at school. In the book, there are preliminary reading materials such as letters of the alphabet, reading words, and reading sentences. With this special textbook, it is hoped that students will be attracted to reading and be motivated to be more active in the learning process.

5.2.2. Additional lesson hours

The addition of these lesson hours aims to attract more students' interest in learning to read. The addition of study hours, especially reading, is carried out after school, and this only applies to some students who have reading difficulties. The addition of class hours is filled with dictating activities or spelling, spelling activities

are a beginning reading method that emphasizes letter recognition or through the process of listening to letter sounds, rereading a few sentences in the student's book, and ending with guessing words ^[24].

Additional lesson hours are one of the teacher's strategies in overcoming reading difficulties in low-grade students at MI Zainul Anwar, this has of course been agreed upon by the school and the parents of students whose children have reading difficulties. With the additional hours, it is hoped that students will catch up with the lessons they are learning. These extra hours of study were quite successful in guiding students to catch up so that student grades were up to standard.

5.2.3. Interesting and fun learning strategies

The purpose of fun learning is to create an environment that is relaxed, fun, safe, and interesting, and does not make students hesitate to do something even though they are wrong. Creating a pleasant learning atmosphere is the context of setting the stage for learning, meaning setting the classroom atmosphere by means of the language the teacher chooses, the teacher's attitude tends to bring a happy atmosphere in class and learning that attracts students ^[25]. There are several special concerns in creating fun strategies, including arranging classrooms, affirmative icon posters, learning aids, setting up chairs, using music, teaching styles, forms of interaction, and inserting humor. MI Zainul Anwar has paid special attention to creating this fun strategy. The strategy used by the first-grade teacher at MI Zainul Anwar is to use methods, learning media such as card games to find out the letters of the alphabet and the method of playing word puzzles, compiling words or sentences that have been provided by the teacher. In this way, it is expected that students will recognize and over time, students will get used to and easily mention the letters, words, or sentences.

The fun learning strategy in question is a way to make learning fun so that students do not get bored with the lesson, as the teacher did for grade 1 students who had difficulty reading at MI Zainul Anwar, the teacher racked his brains to make class lessons fun, all methods such as the card game, method of spelling letters, or with the method of scramble or composing words. The fun learning strategy carried out by the teacher at MI Zainul Anwar can be said to be quite successful because the progress is quite good, it can make most students understand what the teacher conveys, and this is confirmed by the teacher's observations every day on the child. In the textbook, it is stated that applying an appropriate strategy in learning allows for better learning effectiveness, otherwise learning will become a problem for students if students feel learning is a boring activity. Therefore, it is important for teachers to design a strategy that can make learning fun ^[25].

5.3. Reading theories: Effective strategies in addressing students with reading difficulties

This study is anchored on the different theories namely, Bottom-up theory, Top-down theory, Schema theory, Interactive theory, Sub-skills theory, and Psycholinguistics theory.

The reading theories are the vehicles that can be used by the teachers in their reading instruction and activities of the students. This mainly depends upon the needs in terms of teacher-student capabilities, instructional materials, and teaching and learning context.

The bottom-up theory is a text-driven approach. It suggests that reading is basically a process of translating graphic symbols into speech during oral or silent reading. The learner reads text by building from sound-system units to words meaning. Word recognition accuracy is important to comprehension. The most effective instructional materials are phonics-oriented. Learners use word recognition skills to unlock words not in their "ownership" or "sight" vocabularies ^[26]. Written language is subservient to oral language. Lower-level processes are seen as taking place prior to higher-level or cognitive processes ^[27].

The top-down theory is opposite to the bottom-up theory. Its fundamental feature is that it is at the schema

end of the continuum. Meaning is vested in the reader, not in the text per second. Comprehension and meaning precede decoding and word attack. Learning proceeds basically from the whole to its parts and not from parts to a whole. Instruction is focused on meaning rather than on text structure ^[26]. According to this model, the reader plays an active role and supplies more information than the printed page does ^[27].

The interactive theory is more of a compromise between bottom-up and top-down theories. This model believes that different processes are thought to be responsible for providing information that is shared with other processes. Hypothesis is arrived by means of top-down processing. As such, bottom-up processing is guided to a degree by the hypothesis imposed by top-down processing. The information obtained from each type of processing is combined to determine the most appropriate interpretation of the printed page ^[27]. Rumelhart has developed an interactive model, which suggests that at least for skilled readers, top-down and bottom-up appeared simultaneously ^[28].

Schema theory gives importance to prior knowledge. It suggests that knowledge and experiences act to facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge. It emphasizes the importance of teaching students how to comprehend before reading rather than fixing up understanding after reading ^[27]. Rand hypothesized that having many experiences with well-informed stories helps children develop a story schema ^[29]. Reading comprehension involves relating textual information to pre-existing knowledge structures or schema ^[30].

Sub-skills theory believes that reading is a set of sub-skills that children must master and integrate. This theory explains that good readers have learned and integrated these skills and they use them automatically. Teaching these skills until they become automatic and smoothly integrated makes reading meaningful ^[31]. “One of the hallmarks of the reader who learned the sub-skills rapidly is that he was least aware of them at the time, and therefore now he has little memory of them as separate sub-skills.” This model illustrates the process by which students master smaller skills before larger ones and integrate them into units after mastery.

About ten years ago, the “psycholinguistic model” of reading began to assert that contrary to this view of reading as a sequence of skills that one could teach, reading is in actuality a process of predicting meaning based on the reader’s knowledge of oral language syntax, semantics, and phonological cues.

These practices are sometimes used by schools, educators, and parents when a young child developmentally lags behind his or her peers. The young child’s underperformance is interpreted as the child needing more time to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to perform at the level of his or her peers. It is based on the disciplines of psychology and linguistics.

Kenneth Goodman, a noted psycholinguist, pointed out the importance of the reader’s ability to anticipate the material she has read ^[32]. Its salient features are the following: Learning to read does not require memorization of letter names, phonic rules, or a large list of words. Learning to read is not a matter of a child relying upon instruction because the essential skills of reading cannot be taught ^[33]. Smith, like other psycholinguistics, believes that children learn to read as they learn to speak, by generating and testing hypotheses about the reading materials and getting appropriate feedback.

Building on the notion of cognitive comprehension strategies, the Whole Language Theory presents a different perspective on literacy development. This theory perceives reading as an integrative process that connects the reader, the text, and the context. Unlike the traditional theory of Phonics, which focuses primarily on decoding, the Whole Language Theory emphasizes the importance of comprehension and meaning-making in reading.

The Whole Language Theory posits that the development of a fluent reader is not merely about mastering phonetic cues or decoding skills. Instead, it underlines the importance of the reader’s interaction with the text and the subsequent process of constructing meaning. This theory promotes the idea of a strategic reader—

one who actively engages with the text, drawing on their existing knowledge to comprehend and interpret the information presented ^[34].

The Transactional Reading Theory, pioneered by Louise Rosenblatt, further expands on the idea of reading as an interactive process. Rosenblatt's theory builds upon the philosophical foundations laid by John Dewey and posits that meaning is constructed in a continuous transaction between the reader and the text.

This theory underscores that reading is not a passive activity but an active engagement where the reader plays a vital role in selecting and synthesizing information from the text. This process involves abstracting and analyzing information, connecting it to prior knowledge, and drawing inferences to derive meaning.

Rosenblatt's Transactional Reading Theory is a testament to the richness and depth of the reading process. It suggests that every reading experience is unique, influenced by the reader's background, the text's content, and the context in which reading occurs.

Drawing from the idea of active engagement in the Transactional Reading Theory, the Constructivist Reading Theory takes a step further, placing the reader at the center of the science of reading. Rooted in social constructivism and the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, the Constructivist Theory posits that individuals create their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. In the realm of reading, this theory emphasizes the reader's active role in creating meaning from texts. It suggests that reading is not just about acquiring or receiving instruction of knowledge; it is about constructing knowledge.

The reader uses their background knowledge and cognitive development to comprehend, interpret, and make sense of the text. This process is not limited to reading; it also extends to writing composition, as the reader uses their knowledge about sounds, words, and syntax to express their thoughts and ideas ^[34].

6. Research design

The study employed a descriptive research design as chosen by the researchers. The descriptive method involves observing, documenting, and analyzing behaviors, events, or phenomena without manipulating them.

According to McCombes, a descriptive research design can use a wide variety of research methods to investigate one or more variables ^[35]. Therefore, the flexibility of descriptive research design is vital for producing valuable insights in a wide range of disciplines and research situations. It proves to be a valuable tool for collecting teachers' perceived challenges and strategies in the process of teaching reading to students with reading difficulties and thoroughly analyzing their opinions about how those difficulties can be solved.

6.1. Data collection

In this study, data were collected to explore teachers' perceptions of the challenges and strategies in supporting students with reading difficulties.

The researchers utilized a set of structured interview questions administered through Google Forms to gather insights from the respondents. These questions were carefully designed to cover various dimensions of the topic, including the types of challenges faced, strategies employed, and possible solutions for addressing the problems encountered in the process of supporting students with reading difficulties. Generally, the use of Google Forms facilitated efficient and flexible data collection, allowing teachers to respond at their convenience. This method also ensured a streamlined process for compiling and analyzing the responses, enhancing the accuracy and reliability of the data collected.

6.2. Data analysis

After the researchers gathered all the answers of the respondents through Google Forms, all the contents of the interviewees' statements were translated into words, sentence by sentence, classified, and inferred. Colaizzi's^[36] 7-step analysis method was adopted to summarize the common concepts as the theme of this study. The details were as follows: (1) thoroughly understanding the interview data of this research; (2) extracting meaningful viewpoints from the data; (3) encoding ideas that repeatedly occur and conform to the phenomenon of this study; (4) clustering the views after coding; (5) providing a detailed description of the clustered views without omission; (6) identifying similar viewpoints and forming theme concepts; and (7) returning the data to the interviewees for verification. During the analysis, new data were divided or generated as a new topic. The entire data analysis process was completed by two researchers and verified throughout the process of this study.

7. Discussion

This study presents the discussion and interpretation of data gathered from the respondents through structured interview questions.

7.1. Teacher's challenges in teaching students with reading difficulties

Two participants believed that some students faced emotional and motivational factors which resulted in how students struggled emotionally and created significant obstacles for teachers in reducing the effectiveness of teaching efforts that later on hampers the students' learning process in terms of reading.

"Emotional impact because students with reading difficulties may experience frustration, anxiety or self-esteem which can affect their motivation and eagerness to participate during classroom teaching and learning process."—Participant 1

"Teaching learners with reading difficulties presents challenges among teachers. The lack of students' motivation to enhance their reading skills hinders the teachers from supporting and helping them learn. Irregular attendance of the learners is also a problem in teaching them. Likewise, lack of resources that can aid in teaching learners with reading difficulties is seen also as a challenge since the availability of resources has a great help in improving learners especially those who struggle in reading."—Participant 2

Four participants agreed that a shortage of teaching aids and materials also directly impacts the quality of instruction and the ability to address reading difficulties.

"Many teachers face frustration due to the lack of access to specialized instructional materials and resources that are essential for supporting students with reading difficulties."—Participant 4

"Some challenges that teachers encounter in teaching reading are inadequate knowledge of teaching reading skills, insufficient reading materials and deficiency of pre-reading skills among pupils."—Participant 5

Additionally, two participants also mentioned that student engagement and poor comprehension are critical issues with which low participation levels result in more difficulties in the process of teaching effectively.

"Poor comprehension."—Participant 3

"Low participation in class/low interest of the learner in reading, health condition and lack of physical availability of resources."—Participant 6

Plus, one participant discussed the distractions and specific engagement challenges during the class as one of the common challenges perceived in teaching students with reading difficulties.

"The challenges I encounter in teaching learners with reading difficulties are their unfamiliarity with the letter sound, reading comprehension, and distraction during the class."—Participant 7

7.2. Teacher's strategies for teaching students with reading difficulties

Four participants emphasized the importance of a positive and supportive environment, but they highlighted different aspects such as safety, motivation, inclusivity, and fun activities. The common theme was the need for a nurturing environment that encouraged participation and reduced anxiety.

"Foster a positive and supportive environment where students feel safe to take risks and ask for help."—Participant 1

"Teachers can support learners with reading difficulties through a multifaceted approach tailored to individual needs. They should create a motivational and supportive environment for learners which will help them build their self-confidence in attaining a satisfactory level of performance in reading. Helping them set achievable reading goals to give them a sense of accomplishment and motivation can also make them feel supported inside the classroom."—Participant 2

"These kinds of learners need special attention; allot some of your free time to these learners to have a reading intervention. Integrate fun activities where they will enjoy reading classes; most of all, give credit to their hard work, even though their progress takes time."—Participant 7

On the other hand, four participants also mentioned various tailored and multifaceted approaches. Participant 4 offered a comprehensive strategy including assessments and collaboration with specialists, while Participant 3 focused on specific strategies like summarizing and visual aids. The shared understanding is that a one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective and individualized strategies are crucial.

"Use visual aids - it really helps to capture easily and maintain the learner's attention with poor difficulties."—Participant 3

"Teachers can support learners with reading difficulties by implementing a multifaceted approach that includes differentiated instruction, using a variety of teaching methods to cater to different learning styles. They should integrate multi-sensory techniques, such as visual aids, hands-on activities, and auditory tools, to enhance understanding and retention. Regular assessments are crucial for tracking progress and adjusting strategies as needed. Collaboration with specialists, such as speech therapists and reading interventionists, can provide additional targeted support. Creating a positive and inclusive classroom environment that fosters self-confidence and reduces anxiety is also essential. Engaging parents and caregivers in the learning process, offering them strategies to support reading development at home, further reinforces the student's progress."—Participant 4

In addition, three participants emphasized the utilization of specific teaching tools and methods. Participant 4's multi-sensory approach is broad, whereas Participants 3 and 5 focused on specific techniques like visual aids and sound-symbol association. However, all agreed on the importance of using diverse methods to cater to different learning styles.

"Make reading meaningful to them by teaching sound/symbol association in an exciting manner, avoiding the use of nonsense words or programs that incorporate a purely phonetic approach; this method will lead to confusion, teaching word families, using a lot of repetition, and reviewing material learned."—Participant 5

While one participant believed that it is also important to focus on student's weaknesses as the teacher's strategy in addressing the difficulties in reading.

"The teacher focuses on their weaknesses and addresses their needs."—Participant 6

7.3. Effective strategies in addressing students with reading difficulties

In addressing the challenges perceived by the teachers in supporting students with reading difficulties, two participants mentioned the importance of the peer support method.

“Encourage peer support and collaboration by pairing students with reading buddies and implementing cooperative learning activities.”—Participant 1

On the other hand, only one participant had specifically mentioned positive reinforcement and motivation as solutions. This highlights a unique focus on the psychological aspect of learning and maintaining student engagement.

“Using positive reinforcement to learners and providing consistent encouragement and support to help them stay motivated are helpful in addressing the problems experienced in teaching learners with reading difficulties. In addition, conducting regular communication with parents is a good way to determine the cause of irregular attendance of the learners. Seeking for resources specifically designed to help learners with reading difficulties can help in teaching them and improve their academic performance.”—Participant 2

Four participants stressed the importance of involving parents but from slightly different angles. Participant 2 saw parental communication as a way to address attendance issues, while Participants 5, 6, and 7 emphasized the broader benefits of parental involvement in supporting reading development and providing continuity at home.

“For me, the possible solution to this problem is to coordinate and collaborate with the parents concerned. Involving them in their children’s reading journey would possibly make their children develop interest in reading.”—Participant 5

“Know the needs of the learner on their reading disabilities. Ask also the help of their parents because learning is not only happening in school, there must be a continuation at their home.”—Participant 6

“The best way I can advise is to coordinate with the parents of these learners, notify the parents about the situation and seek their help, and provide some reading materials they can take home. This can improve not only their reading skills but also their bond with their parents. Because sometimes this kind of difficulty needs parental support.”—Participant 7

One participant also believed that advocating for early identification, ongoing teacher training, and the use of specialized resources highlights a comprehensive and systematic approach to addressing teachers’ challenges in dealing with students with reading difficulties.

“To address the problems encountered in supporting students with reading difficulties, a comprehensive approach is necessary. First, ensuring early identification through regular screening and assessments can help tailor interventions promptly. Teachers should receive ongoing professional development to stay updated on the latest research and effective instructional strategies. Schools must invest in specialized resources and technologies, such as assistive reading software and multi-sensory materials, to support diverse learning needs. Collaboration between educators, specialists, and parents is crucial for creating a consistent support system both at school and at home. Additionally, fostering an inclusive classroom environment that encourages peer support and reduces stigma can help build students’ confidence and engagement in learning.”—Participant 4

Moreover, one participant focused on specific, actionable teaching strategies, unlike others who discussed broader approaches or support systems. This participant provided concrete techniques that can be directly applied in the classroom.

“First, asking questions while reading. Then, going back to the text to look for the keywords. Lastly, visualizing what they are reading.”—Participant 3

8. Conclusion

The following conclusions were drawn based on the highlights of the findings.

- (1) This study revealed that teachers face multifaceted challenges when teaching students with reading difficulties, including emotional and motivational issues, lack of resources, deficits in knowledge and skills, and problems with student engagement and participation. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that considers emotional support, resource allocation, teacher training, and strategies to enhance student engagement.
- (2) The common approaches utilized by the teachers in supporting students with reading difficulties were fostering a combination of positive and supportive environment, adopting individualized and multifaceted approaches, and utilizing effective teaching tools and strategies. Addressing these areas comprehensively helps in meeting the diverse needs of students, ultimately enhancing their reading abilities and overall learning experience.
- (3) The teachers concluded varied solutions for addressing the problems encountered in supporting students with reading difficulties. These include the importance of peer support, positive reinforcement, and parental involvement. In addition, specialized resources, professional development for teachers, and specific teaching strategies are also highlighted as crucial components. By integrating these approaches, teachers can create a supportive and effective learning environment tailored to the needs of students with reading difficulties.

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Disclosure statement

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