Investigating Factors Contributing to the Reading Challenges among Intermediate Learners of San Rafael-Agpo Elementary School

Erickson B. Azuela, France Evan B. Coballes, Nadine M. Iraula, Kuh V. Paterno, PhD

College of Education, Partido State University

ABSTRACT

In the pursuit of the objectives, a qualitative case study is used to identify the factors that affect struggling readers of San Rafael-Agpo Elementary School. A total number of 11 struggling readers who met the criteria set in the study were interviewed in semi-structured interview using an open-ended interview guide questions about their experiences, and common problems they encounter that affect reading skills.

The study identified the following factors: reading motivation, lack of parental involvement and support, school-based violence and bullying, lack of reading materials at home, and reading instructions that cause reading difficulties among intermediate grade pupils. Hence, the study propose that teachers should provide and implement more interactive teaching strategies to encourage reading motivation, inform parents of their child's excessive number of missed classes and set up frequent meetings with parents, implement strong policies to address bullying and school-based violence, and to differentiate instruction to cater different learning needs.

Keywords: struggling readers, intermediate grades, reading difficulties

INTRODUCTION

The transition from learning to read to reading to learn usually takes place in the intermediate grades. There are expectations that students understand word meanings and can read texts with comprehension, in addition to the expectation that they have sufficiently mastered the fundamental reading abilities like decoding accurately and fluently as they reach these levels (Larson, 2022). However, data from the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (2019) showed that, compared to Vietnam and Malaysia, the percentage of Filipino pupils in Grade 5 who met the minimal competency standards in reading, writing, and arithmetic was much lower. Filipino fifth-graders performed similarly to or occasionally even lower than their counterparts in Cambodia.

Nine out of ten Filipino pupils have trouble reading simple, age- appropriate texts. In the report of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for 2022, it is estimated that up to 91 percent of children in the Philippines are not proficient in reading. Additionally, the World Bank (2022) reports that nine out of ten children in the Philippines at late primary age are not proficient in reading. Recent studies suggest that there has been a learning crisis in low and middle- income countries even before the COVID-19 pandemic. More than two years of distance learning in the Philippines compounded the problem of the already appalling quality of public education (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2022).

The high rate of learning challenges in the nation has several causes, according to the World Bank (2022). To solve the reading problem among pupils, researchers suggest that it is critical to evaluate the unique needs of struggling readers to provide effective support (William, 2023). The longer it takes to give struggling readers specific and need-based assistance, reading issues will more likely to worsen and be

challenging to treat (Tunmer & Hoover, 2019). Furthermore, this was also supported by William (2023), who stated that early intervention and ongoing support are essential for struggling readers to succeed and that identifying their unique needs and implementing evidence-based reading interventions will significantly influence their academic and personal success.

In San Rafael-Agpo Elementary School alone, out of 237 intermediate- grade pupils, 60 fell on the non-reader level and 120 pupils fell on the frustration level on the August 2022 Phil-IRI pretest result. Thus, it is with this premise that this case study is conducted to identify the factors that contribute to reading difficulties among pupils in the intermediate grades and to provide an in-depth understanding, more specific examples, and empirical findings of factors that are associated with reading problems that can be used in formulating reading intervention programs.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws upon Lev Vygotsky's Socio-cultural Theory of Cognitive Development and Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Systems Theory as its guiding frameworks.

Vygotsky's Socio-cultural theory of cognitive development (1930), suggests that the community plays a significant role in the process of meaning-making. Vygotsky's ideas emphasize the fundamental role of social interaction in the formation of cognition. This places particular emphasis on the notion that the development of higher-order brain functions is primarily influenced by parents, peers, and the broader cultural context. Consequently, this study aims to investigate the environment and society in which struggling readers interact.

Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory (1979), on the other hand, posits that a child's surroundings consist of nested structures. These structures include the microsystem, which represents the immediate environment; the mesosystem, which explores how interactions occur within the learner's micro system; the exosystem, comprising environments indirectly affecting learners, as they influence one of the microsystems; the macrosystem, which pertains to cultural elements influencing a learner's development, such as economic status and ethnicity; and the chronosystem, encompassing major life transitions or events in a learner's life. These five systems serve as Bronfenbrenner's categorization of a child's environment that influences development. Consequently, this study will examine the microsystem, mesosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem structures of struggling readers to provide empirical evidence and enhance our understanding of how these structures impact reading proficiency.

METHODS

Research Design

A qualitative case study design is used in this study to identify the factors that contribute to reading difficulties of the participants. Since the objective of this study is to learn more specifically, contextually, and in-depth knowledge about the factors that affect struggling readers, a case study is the best type of research approach. This will allow researchers to investigate the main traits, significance, and ramifications of the case.

Research Participants

The eleven (11) participants of this study were identified based on teachers recommendation on who meet the criteria; an intermediate pupil who fell in the non-reader or frustration level in the August 2022 Phil-IRI pretest result, and have been documented to read one or more grade levels below current grade level while not having a learning disability , and currently enrolled in the school year 2022-2023.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data gathering procedure was composed of two parts. First, was the pre-implementation procedure, wherein the researchers sent a written consent to the school's principal explaining the objectives of the study, including the consent statement, and the conduct of the interview. The researchers used a semi-structured interview as a data gathering instrument. The medium of communication was in Mother-tongue. A research and language expert was invited to validate the content and appropriateness of the guide questions. The second part was the implementation procedure. The researchers at this state conducted the interview with the participants. A face-to-face in-depth interview was conducted through the use of an audio recorder to collect the information needed for the study. To observe confidentiality in the study's findings, this study uses pseudonyms .

This study draws on Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework using a thematic analysis in identifying themes that are important to the objectives set in the study. The six-phase guide was followed during the data analysis procedure. After the interview was transcribed, data familiarization was done. Then, generating initial codes was observed. In this phase open-coding was done, there were no pre-set codes, but rather developed and modified the initial codes as the researchers worked through the coding process. The third step was searching for themes, codes were then examined if they fitted together in a theme. The next phase was reviewing of themes, each theme was probed if they are coherent and distinct from each other. Then defining the themes was the final refinement. Each theme was examined and identified the essence of what it is all about. The last step was writing up, the themes were then discussed in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reading Motivation

Reading Motivation is what makes someone want to learn, act, comprehend, believe, or acquire specific knowledge, abilities, attitudes, or values is motivation (Barber & Klauda, 2020).The ability to be motivated is crucial for students to succeed academically however one of the major factors that affect a struggling reader is their motivation to read. Most of the pupils find reading as boring and tedious to do. As one of the participants answered when asked if he enjoys reading he revealed *"dai man maray... boblay kaya pag haloy-haloy ka na nagbabasa"* (not really… it's boring when you are reading for a long time already") .

This finding is supported by the idea of Filgona et al. (2020) that pupils' simple attendance in class is, of course, not a guarantee that students want to study, and by the study of Vaknin-Nusbaum and Tuckwiller (2022), which found that pupils with higher levels of reading motivation are more likely to exhibit significantly higher levels of school-based well-being and reading achievement. To further corroborate this finding, this result underpin by the study of Lenski (2008) that avoiding reading creates the conditions for failure in continued reading, which may cause learned helplessness. Consequently, they drop the inspiration to attempt challenging texts.

Lack of Parental Involvement and Support

Lack of Parental Presence

 One of the identified factors that cause reading difficulties is lack of parental presence. Most of the participants in this study are not getting enough guidance and supervision from their parents or immediate family since they are raised by a single parent who works to make ends meet, as echoed by one of the pupils "Ning dae po kaya ako natutukduan ni mama, ta nagtatrabaho kaya po" ("My mother can't teach me, because she is working"). This finding is supported by the study of Bendanillo (2021) that pupils are more likely to succeed and do better in reading when parents are involved in their children's learning at home and

in school. Hence, this proves that the macro system and culture in which the child was raised affect how pupils perform in school, specifically in reading.

Absenteeism caused by household chores

Lack of consistent attendance in school is one major barrier that causes reading difficulties. Researchers found out that the identified struggling readers are those who are frequently absent in class. Major reasons of absenteeism includes family chores and parent's ruling , attested by one of the students "Dae po ako nakakaiswela pirmi", "May pigbabantayan po ako, si lolo ko," (I frequently don't go to school"), (I have someone to attend to, my grandafather") the pupil added. Pupils are left with responsibilities at home instead of focusing on their schooling.

 Additionally, this study discovered that there are students who are advised by their parents to refrain from going to school for the reason of not doing well in class in the first place, to quote the pupil's response "Dae po kaya ako tig-papaiskwela ni papa", "tig-anggotan po ako" " ta dae po kaya ko nagtutultol pag-iskwela" (My father won't let me go to school he would scold me because I don't study well")

School-based Bullying

The effect of bullying can have disastrous impacts on pupils' academic performance. Victims of bullying and school violence are prone to develop learning difficulties and reading problems. Another finding of this study worth mentioning is that bullying contributes to reading difficulties of a struggling reader; they suffer emotional and social consequences leading them to struggle to make friends and keep decent friendships. They loathe themselves because they believe the insults they hear over and over again are true causing them to have lower self-esteem, less motivation, and poor social skills. As one of the pupils shared "Pig aano nanggad ako.. tigayong sarabihan na orig" (they would tend to.. call me names like pig") "si mga lalaki po sigeng ayot samo, minsan nalilito na ako mag gibo" (those male classmate would hurt us, sometimes it is confusing me to work), Distracting her focus on studying to read, and deflecting her attention to her welfare instead. The same experience was shared by another pupil as asked about his social life in school "Nang iiriwal po kaya sinda" "Pinabarayaan ko nalang po" ("they are fighting with me") ("I just ignore them") the pupil added. Such experiences cause stress and frustration in school and thus affect their academic performance.

This finding is substantiated by the idea of Jan and Husain (2019) that students that are bullied have trouble focusing and paying attention in class and are more likely to struggle academically.

Lack of Reading Materials at Home

This study found out that lack of literacy resources at home is one of the factors that contribute to reading difficulties. All of the participants in this study revealed that there are no age-appropriate books at home. Thus, they do not have the opportunity to practice and read after school. To support this finding, the same factor was found in the study of Boerma et al. (2017) which used third and fourth graders' current home literacy environments as a starting point and revealed that children's home literacy environments continue to influence children's reading comprehension in the higher grades of primary school.

Reading Instruction

The most widely accepted finding of studies on teacher effectiveness was that teachers have a significant impact on how much children learn (Rupley et al., 2009). While some of the participants enjoy the current reading instruction in their classroom imposed by their teachers, others find it boring and uninteresting. Some of the struggling readers love to read when they are reading stories supported with pictures.

This study also found out that pupils are aware that they are struggling to read in English. All of the participants answered that they are struggling in English more than in Filipino, and that reading long words is becoming more difficult for them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the factors that have been identified in this study, several recommendations are proposed:

1. Teachers should implement more interactive teaching strategies to encourage reading motivation. Direct and explicit instruction could help struggling readers master critical reading techniques and skills.
2. Parents should be more involved in their child's progress in reading to ensure that they receive enough supervision outside of school. Inform parents of their child's excessive number of missed classes. This can be achieved by setting up frequent meetings and collaborating with parents to devise the best strategies for their child.
3. Provide age-appropriate reading materials that pupils can read at home.
4. A school guidance counselor should be present to give proper guidance and counseling to students who have experienced any form of violence that may affect their performance in school.
5. Vary instruction to address different learning needs.
6. A follow-up study may be conducted to further investigate the factors that affect struggling readers.

REFERENCES

1. Akyol, H., & Boyaci-Altinay, Y. (2019). Reading difficulty and its remediation: a case study. European Journal of Educational Research, 8(4), 1269-1286. https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.8.4.12
2. Ampofo, J. A. (2019). Investigating reading difficulties among class six pupils of WA Basic School Complex. Lambert Academic Publishing. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/43668724/INVESTIGATING _READING_DIFFICULTIES_AMONG_CLASS_SIX_PUPILS_OF_WA_BASIC_SCHOOL_COMPLEX
3. Anda, M. C. (2016). Prevenção e remediação das dificuldades de aprendizagem: adaptação do modelo de resposta à intervenção em uma amostra brasileira. Revista Brasileira de Educação, 21, 611–630. https:// doi.org/10.1590/S1413-24782016216632
4. Auletto, K. C., & Sableski, M. K. (2018). Selecting a Reading Intervention Program for Struggling Readers: A Case Study of an Urban District. International Journal of Educational Reform, 27(3), 234–252. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1177/105678791802700301
5. Barber, A. T., & Klauda, S. L. (2020). How Reading Motivation and Engagement Enable Reading Achievement: Policy Implications. Policy Insights From the Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 7(1), 27–34. https:// doi.org/ 10.1177/2372732219893385
6. Bendanillo, M. (2021). Parental involvement in relation to students' reading performance. ResearchGate. https://doi.org/10.46360/globus.edu.220212014
7. Boerma, I., Mol, S. E., & Jolles, J. (2017). The role of Home Literacy Environment, Mentalizing, Expressive Verbal Ability, and Print Exposure in Third and Fourth Graders' Reading Comprehension. Scientific Studies of Reading, 21(3), 179–193. https://doi.org/10.1080/10888438.2016.1277727
8. Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3, 77-101.
9. Calet, N., Pérez-Morenilla, M. C., & De los Santos-Roig, M. (2019). Overcoming reading comprehension difficulties through a prosodic reading intervention: A single-case study. Child Language Teaching and Therapy, 35(1), 75–88. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265659019826252
10. Dalton, B., & Jocius, R. (2013). From Struggling Reader to Digital Reader and Multimodal Composer. Literacy Research, Practice and Evaluation, 3, 79–97. https://doi.org/10.1108/s2048-0458(2013)0000003008

11. DEMİROZ, E. (2020). A Case Study: Literacy Experiences of Struggling Readers with Interactive Digital Books. Trakya Eğitim Dergisi, 298–306. https://doi.org/10.24315/tred.56899797

12. Dougherty, S. M. (2016). Career and Technical Education in High School: Does It Improve Student Outcomes? | Advance CTE. Careertech.org. https://careertech.org/resource/cte-does-improve-student-outcomes #:~ :text = Students%20with%20greater%20CTE%20exposure

13. Filgona, J., Sakiyo, J., Gwany, D. M., & Okoronka, A. U. (2020). Motivation in Learning. Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies, 16–37. https://doi.org/10.9734/ajess/2020/v10i430273

14. Goodman, K. S., Fries, P., & Strauss, S. (2016). Reading- The Grand Illusion: How and Why People Make Sense of Print. Routledge & CRC Press. https://www.routledge.com/Reading–The-Grand-Illusion-How-and-Why-People-Make-Sense-of-Print/Goodman-Fries-Strauss/p/book/9781138999299

15. Hulme, C., & Snowling, M. J. (2016). Reading disorders and dyslexia. Current Opinion in Pediatrics, 28(6), 731–735. https://doi.org/10.1097/mop.0000000000000411

16. Iannacchino, C., & Samalot-Rivera, A. (2022, January 2). Physical Educators Teachers Perceptions when Teaching English Language Learners (ELL). Lecturas: Educación Física Y Deportes, 26(284), 2–12. https:// doi.org/10.46642/efd.v26i284.2919

17. Ivey, G., & Friddle, K.-A. (2023). Expanding meaningfulness for struggling readers. International Encyclopedia of Education(Fourth Edition), 398–407. https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-12-818630-5.07056-

18. Karkashadze, N., Benidze, N., Bitsadze, J., & Mikabadze, S. (2022). Modern problems of construction business and ways of development https:// journals .4 science .ge/ index. php/ GS/ article/ view/ 1077.GEORGIAN SCIENTISTS. https://doi.org/10.52340/gs.2022.04.03.19

19. Kishore, K. (2020, August 10). Importance And Benefits Of Reading Skills In Communication. Harappa. https://harappa.education/harappa-diaries/importance-of-reading/%20.

20. Luciano, R., Pedro, V., & North, S. (n.d.). Grade II pupils performance in Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (PHIL-IRI): Does intervention matter. Retrieved March 15, 2023, from http:// ijrtm.com/ iotg/ sites/default/files/IJRTM552019-17.pdf

21. Ma, L., Jiao, Y., Xiao, L., & Liu, J. (2022). Moderation of teacher–student relationships in the link between motivation and English performance of struggling learners in China. Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2022.2151603

22. Miñoza, M., & Montero, M. (2019). Reading comprehension level among intermediate learners. Sci. Int.(Lahore), 31(3), 561–568. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED596833.pdf

23. Mohammed, I. (2018). Predominant factors contributing to low reading abilities of pupils at Elsie Lund Basic School in the Tamale Metropolis, Ghana. African Educational Research Journal, 6(4), 273–278. https:// doi. org/10.30918/aerj.64.18.071

24. Neitzel, A. J., Lake, C., Pellegrini, M., & Slavin, R. E. (2021). A synthesis of quantitative research on programs for struggling readers in elementary schools. Reading Research Quarterly, 57(1). https:// doi.org/ 10.1 002 / rr q.379

25. Nurmalasari, N., & Haryudin, A. (2021). The students' difficulties in learning reading. Project (Professional Journal of English Education), 4(1), 29. https://doi.org/10.22460/project.v4i1.p29-34

26. Powell, M. B., & Gadke, D. L. (2018). Improving oral reading fluency in middle-school students: A comparison of repeated reading and listening passage preview. Psychology in the Schools, 55(10), 1274–1286. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22184

27. Rabia, M., Mubarak, N., Tallat, H., & Nasir, W. (2017). A Study on Study Habits and Academic Performance of Students. International Journal of Asian Social Science, 7(10), 891–897. https:// doi.org/ 10.18488/ journal. 1.2017.710.891.897

28. Rintaningrum, R. (2019). Explaining the Important Contribution of Reading Literacy to the Country's Generations: Indonesian's Perspectives. International Journal. https:// www .academia.edu/ 42063969/ Explaining_the_Important_Contribution_of_Reading_Literacy_to_the_Countrys_Generations_Indonesians _Perspectives

29. Rupley, W. H., Blair, T. R., & Nichols, W. C. (2009). Effective Reading Instruction for Struggling Readers: The Role of Direct/Explicit Teaching. Reading & Writing Quarterly, 25(2–3), 125–138. https:// doi.org/ 10.1080/ 10573560802683523

30. San Juan, R. (2019, December 3). Philippines lowest in reading comprehension among 79 countries. Philstar.com; The Philippine Star. https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/12/03/1974002/philippines-lowest-reading-comprehension-among-79-countries

31. Slavin, R. E., Lake, C., Davis, S., & Madden, N. A. (2011). Effective programs for struggling readers: A best-evidence synthesis. Educational Research Review, 6(1), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2010.07.002

32. Smith, Bonnie S.(2015), "A Case Study of the Impact of Reading Intervention in Early Elementary School Grade Levels" (2015). Education Dissertations and Projects. 144. Study.com. https://study.com/ academy/ lesson/differences-between-good-struggling-readers.html

33. Vaknin-Nusbaum, V., & Tuckwiller, E. D. (2022b). Reading motivation, well-being and reading achievement in second grade students. Journal of Research in Reading, 46(1), 64–85. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9817.12414

34. Venegas, E. M. (2018). Strengthening the Reader Self-Efficacies of Reluctant and Struggling Readers Through Literature Circles. Reading & Writing Quarterly, 34(5), 419–435. https:// doi.org/ 10.1080/ 1057356 9.2018. 1483788

35. Wanzek, J., Wexler, J., Vaughn, S., & Ciullo, S. (2009). Reading interventions for struggling readers in the upper elementary grades: a synthesis of 20 years of research. Reading and Writing, 23(8), 889–912. https:// doi.org/10.1007/s11145-009-9179-5

36. Wertsch, J. V. (1985). APA PsycNet. Psycnet.apa.org. https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1985-98183-000

37. Yousif, T. A., & Mohammad Taha, A. H. A. (2020). Problems Encountered by Students in Reading Skill: A Case Study. International Journal of Current Research, 12(Issue 01). ISSN: 0975-833X. https:// doi.org/ 10.2 4941/ ijcr.37815.01.2020.