

Innovative Strategies in Teaching Reading Comprehension: A Thematic Analysis of Grade 10 Teachers in Mandaue City Division

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ABSTRACT

The qualitative study explores the lived experiences of ten Grade 10 English teachers in selected public junior high schools in Mandaue City, Philippines, as they implement innovative strategies to enhance reading comprehension. Recognizing the critical role of reading comprehension in academic success and lifelong learning, the research addresses persistent challenges associated with traditional instructional methods. Using a phenomenological approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten purposively selected teachers, each with at least two years of experience and prior engagement in innovative practices. Thematic analysis revealed five key themes: culturally responsive and localized teaching, student-centered and participatory approaches, resourcefulness amid constraints, positive learner transformation, and the need for institutional support. These findings highlight the importance of teacher agency, creativity, and systemic backing in promoting effective literacy instruction. Recommendations are offered for educators, school leaders, and policymakers to strengthen reading comprehension outcomes in public secondary education.

Keywords: reading comprehension, innovative strategies, phenomenology, teachers' experiences, secondary education

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a cornerstone of academic achievement and critical thinking, particularly in secondary education. It serves not only as a gateway to mastering other subjects but also as a foundation for lifelong learning and civic engagement. Despite its importance, international studies have consistently shown that reading comprehension remains a significant challenge across educational systems worldwide. A global review published in a journal identified persistent difficulties among secondary students in areas such as word recognition, inferencing, and text integration (Casinto, 2025; Abao et al., 2023; Alalid et al., 2025). Similarly, research from ERIC emphasized the universal expectation of reading with understanding, noting that many nations struggle with local factors—such as limited vocabulary exposure and inadequate instructional strategies—that impede comprehension (ERIC, n.d.). Cognitive, linguistic, and environmental factors are contributors to poor reading comprehension, underscoring the need for targeted interventions and teacher training (Mariecarrier, 2023).

In the Philippine context, international assessments have revealed that Filipino learners face significant challenges in reading literacy. According to the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 Country Notes, the Philippines ranked among the lowest-performing countries, with a large proportion of 15-year-old students failing to reach the minimum proficiency level required to interpret and understand texts effectively (OECD, 2022). This trend echoes earlier findings from the DLSU-Angelo King Institute (AKI) Policy Brief on PISA 2015, which highlighted systemic issues such as limited access to quality instructional materials, under-resourced schools, and insufficient teacher training as contributing factors to poor reading outcomes (AKI, 2016; Argate et al., 2024; Bunghanoy & Sumalinog, 2023).

These results underscore a persistent and urgent need to address reading comprehension deficits within the Philippine educational system. The challenge is particularly pronounced in multilingual and urban contexts like Mandaue City, where learners navigate complex linguistic environments and teachers must adapt instruction to

diverse student needs. In such settings, innovative and context-sensitive strategies are essential to improve literacy outcomes and ensure equitable access to quality education.

This study investigates the instructional approaches employed by Grade 10 English teachers in Mandaue City to enhance reading comprehension. By documenting their lived experiences and adaptive strategies, the research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of classroom realities and inform policy interventions that support teacher development and student achievement.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to explore the innovative strategies employed by Grade 10 English teachers in Mandaue City Division and examine their experiences in implementing these approaches to enhance reading comprehension. Specifically, it sought to address the following sub-problems:

1. What innovative strategies do Grade 10 teachers use to teach reading comprehension?
2. What challenges do teachers encounter in implementing these strategies?
3. How do students respond to innovative reading instruction?
4. What forms of institutional support do teachers need to sustain and scale these practices?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A qualitative phenomenological design was adopted to explore the lived experiences of teachers. This approach is well-suited for capturing the depth and nuance of educators' perspectives, particularly in relation to innovative instructional practices.

Participants and environment

Ten Grade 10 English teachers from ten public high schools in the Mandaue City Division were purposively selected for this study. All participants had a minimum of two years of teaching experience and demonstrated prior engagement with innovative reading strategies. This environment was intentionally chosen because the researcher is a current educator within the Mandaue City Division, teaching in one of its junior high schools. This insider perspective provides both contextual familiarity and direct access to the instructional realities faced by local teachers.

By focusing on this division, the study aims to capture authentic experiences and practices that reflect the unique linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical dynamics of the area. The researcher's embedded role also facilitates deeper rapport with participants, allowing for richer data collection and more nuanced interpretation of findings.

Instrument and Data Collection

Following the recent earthquake in Cebu, face-to-face interviews were not feasible, so the researcher conducted online interviews. The instrument was validated by language and research experts. All responses were systematically collected and organized, while detailed field notes were maintained to capture clarifications, contextual nuances, and emerging patterns in the participants' answers. Prior to participation, informants were fully informed of the study's purpose, assured of confidentiality, and provided their consent. To enhance the reliability and validity of the data, responses were cross-checked with field notes and follow-up clarifications were obtained when necessary. This approach allowed for the ethical collection of rich, meaningful data, ensuring a thorough examination of the study's research objectives despite the constraints posed by the natural disaster.

Data Analysis

This study employed thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework (2006) to systematically interpret qualitative data. The process began with familiarization, involving immersive reading of interview transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content. Initial codes were then manually generated by identifying recurring ideas and patterns across responses. These codes were grouped into broader thematic categories during the third phase, searching for themes. In the fourth phase, themes were reviewed to ensure coherence, consistency, and relevance to the research questions. The fifth phase involved defining and naming themes, where each theme was clearly articulated to reflect its underlying meaning. Finally, the sixth phase—producing the report—synthesized the findings and incorporated illustrative quotes from participants to support and enrich the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the study, analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework for thematic analysis. Drawing from in-depth interviews with ten Grade 10 English teachers in the Mandaue City Division, five major themes emerged. These themes capture the innovative strategies employed by teachers, their lived experiences during implementation, and the systemic factors that influence their instructional practices. Each theme is discussed in detail, supported by direct quotations from participants and summarized in accompanying tables.

To provide a visual overview of the findings, a thematic map was developed to illustrate the relationships among the five major themes. This map highlights how the themes are interconnected and how they collectively address the central research question regarding the implementation of innovative strategies in English speaking performance drills.

Theme 1: Culturally Responsive and Localized Teaching

Teachers enhanced reading comprehension by integrating local languages and cultural narratives through bilingual reading circles, storytelling in Bisaya and English, and community-based texts such as legends and folk tales. These culturally responsive practices connected instruction to students' lived experiences and affirmed their identities. These practices reflect the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy, which emphasize the importance of connecting instruction to students' cultural backgrounds and lived experiences (Gonzales, 2022; Dela Cruz & Espinosa, 2022).

One teacher shared, *"I use group reading and discussion circles where students take turns explaining parts of the story in Bisaya and English."* (Participant 1). Another noted, *"They are proud to hear stories from their own barangay."* (Participant 3), highlighting the emotional and cultural resonance of localized texts.

The data suggest that teachers in Mandaue City are intentionally leveraging students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds to make reading instruction more meaningful and effective. Practices such as bilingual reading circles, storytelling in Bisaya and English, and the use of community-based texts reflect culturally responsive pedagogy, which promotes engagement and comprehension by connecting lessons to students' lived experiences (Gonzales, 2022; Gay, 2018). These strategies also support multilingual development and affirm learners' identities, the key components of inclusive education (Dela Cruz & Espinosa, 2022). To sustain these innovations, institutional support and flexible curricula are essential to empower teachers in designing relevant and equitable literacy instruction.

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Theme 2: Student-Centered and Participatory Approaches

Innovative methods such as dramatization, peer tutoring, and collaborative activities empowered students to take active roles in their learning. These strategies reflect constructivist principles and Vygotsky’s social learning theory, where comprehension deepens through interaction, collaboration, and the co-construction of meaning.. These strategies fostered engagement, confidence, and deeper comprehension, consistent with the principles of student-centered learning (Barrot, 2021, Brozo & Flynt, 2020).

A teacher explained, “*I use role-playing and dramatization to help students understand character emotions and plot*” (Participant 4). Another reflected, “*Seeing timid and aloof students perform with confidence is very fulfilling*” (Participant 4), underscoring the transformative impact of participatory approaches.

This highlights how selected teachers in Mandaue City employed interactive and student-centered strategies to enhance reading comprehension. These practices reflect a shift toward active learning, where students engage with texts through movement, collaboration, and visual cues. *Role-playing and dramatization* (Participant 2) help students internalize narratives and develop empathy, while *reading games* (Participant 3) foster motivation and fluency. *Picture-based prediction* (Participant 7) supports comprehension by activating prior knowledge, and *peer tutoring* (Participant 9) encourages cooperative learning and scaffolding. These approaches align with constructivist principles and student-centered pedagogy, which emphasize learning through interaction and experience (Barrot, 2021; Brozo & Flynt, 2020; Miro et al., 2024). To maximize their impact, such strategies should be supported by ongoing teacher training and integrated into curriculum planning to ensure consistency and sustainability.

Theme 3: Resourcefulness Amid Constraints

Teachers demonstrated creativity in overcoming resource limitations by sourcing materials independently, sharing supplies, and adapting technology use. These practices reflect grassroots innovation and teacher agency in under-resourced settings (Borabo, 2023; Sumalinog, 2018; Boholano, 2017).

One teacher stated, “*I ask for donations and share my own supplies*” (Participant 5), while another shared, “*I play the audio aloud and let them share devices*” (Participant 8), illustrating practical solutions to material shortages.

The data illustrate how teachers in Mandaue City demonstrate resourcefulness in overcoming instructional challenges related to reading comprehension. These solutions reflect a strong culture of adaptability and innovation among teachers working in under-resourced environments. Rather than allowing material shortages to hinder instruction, teachers creatively leveraged available tools and community support to maintain student engagement. For instance, drawing visuals or printing from the internet (Participant 7) and recording oral stories (Participant 10) show how educators bridge gaps in content delivery through low-cost, high-impact strategies. Such practices align with the principles of context-responsive teaching, which emphasize flexibility and problem-solving in response to local constraints (Barrot, 2021; Cruz & Villanueva, 2021). These findings

highlight the importance of empowering teachers with autonomy and support systems that recognize and build upon their capacity to innovate in challenging conditions.

Theme 4: Positive Learner Transformation

Teachers observed notable improvements in students' comprehension, confidence, and motivation. Some students began volunteering to read aloud, participating in competitions, and producing creative work. These outcomes affirm the effectiveness of innovative strategies in fostering literacy and personal growth (Martinez, 2021; Valdez, 2021).

As one teacher noted, *"One student who used to skip reading now volunteers to read aloud and explain"* (Participant 1). Another shared, *"One student wrote a story inspired by our reading and won in a school contest"* (Participant 5).

This highlights the positive impact of innovative reading strategies on student performance and confidence. The outcomes suggest that *context-responsive* and *student-centered* approaches foster not only academic gains but also personal growth. Volunteering to read aloud and joining competitions reflect increased confidence and oral fluency, while improved test scores and leadership roles indicate deeper comprehension and engagement. Such progress aligns with Barrot's (2021) findings that interactive and differentiated instruction enhances literacy outcomes. Similarly, Brozo and Flynt (2020) emphasize that when students see themselves reflected in texts and tasks, they are more likely to participate actively and succeed.

These results affirm the value of empowering teachers to adapt instruction to learners' needs and cultural contexts.

Theme 5: Need for Institutional Support

Despite their individual efforts, teachers emphasized the need for systemic support in terms of materials, infrastructure, and documentation of local content. These needs include access to culturally relevant storybooks, performance spaces, and support for publishing indigenous narratives (Cruz & Santos, 2022; Sumalinog et al., 2022; Department of Education, 2023).

One teacher expressed, *"We need more printed materials and storybooks in Filipino and Bisaya"* (Participant 8), while another stated, *"We need support in documenting and printing local stories"* (Participant 2), pointing to the limitations of grassroots innovation without institutional backing.

This reveals that teachers in Mandaue City are actively seeking institutional support to sustain and enhance their reading instruction practices. These requests reflect a need for *culturally relevant materials*, *multimedia resources*, and *infrastructure* that align with student-centered and context-responsive pedagogy. Access to storybooks in local languages and tools for documenting community narratives supports inclusive literacy development, while stage areas and illustrated texts foster expressive and visual learning. As Gonzales (2022) emphasizes, *resource availability directly influences the effectiveness of culturally grounded instruction*. Likewise, Cruz and Villanueva (2021) argue that *institutional support is essential for sustaining innovative practices and ensuring equitable learning opportunities*. Addressing these needs can empower teachers to deliver meaningful, engaging, and locally

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

This qualitative study explored the innovative strategies used by Grade 10 English teachers in selected public secondary schools in Mandaue City to enhance reading comprehension. Through thematic analysis of interviews with ten teachers, five major themes emerged: (1) culturally responsive and localized teaching, (2) student-centered and participatory approaches, (3) resourcefulness amid constraints, (4) positive learner transformation, and (5) need for institutional support. The findings revealed that teachers creatively adapted their methods using

local languages, community narratives, dramatization, and peer collaboration, despite limited resources. These strategies led to increased student engagement, confidence, and comprehension. However, teachers emphasized the importance of systemic support such as access to culturally relevant materials and infrastructure to sustain and scale their innovations. The study highlights the critical role of teacher agency and the potential of grassroots innovation in improving literacy outcomes in under-resourced educational settings.

Conclusions

Grade 10 teachers in Mandaue City exhibit exceptional creativity and commitment in implementing innovative reading comprehension strategies, often navigating challenges such as limited resources, linguistic diversity, and rigid curricula. Their grassroots efforts—ranging from culturally responsive materials to participatory learning environments—demonstrate the transformative potential of teacher-led approaches in public secondary schools. However, the study reveals that while classroom-level innovation flourishes, its long-term sustainability depends on systemic support. School administrators and division leaders must prioritize the provision of culturally relevant materials in Filipino and Bisaya, and invest in infrastructure that fosters active student engagement, including microphones, flexible layouts, and performance spaces. Collaborating with local communities to document indigenous stories can further enrich literacy instruction and affirm students' cultural identities. Policymakers and DepEd officials play a vital role in institutionalizing these innovations by expanding access to professional development focused on culturally responsive pedagogy and low-tech strategies, especially in resource-constrained settings. Equitable distribution of teaching and learning resources is also essential to promote inclusive education. Teachers are encouraged to continue implementing student-centered approaches, share best practices, and advocate for the support needed to sustain their efforts. Through reflective practice and documentation of classroom outcomes, educators contribute to a growing body of knowledge that informs policy and inspires peers. Ultimately, this study highlights the need to empower teachers and strengthen institutional frameworks to advance reading comprehension and educational equity in Philippine secondary schools.

This study was limited to ten Grade 10 teachers within the Mandaue City Division, which restricts generalizability. The reliance on online interviews due to the Cebu earthquake may have reduced the richness of non-verbal data. Future research should expand to multiple divisions, include quantitative measures of student outcomes, and explore longitudinal impacts of innovative strategies on literacy development. Comparative studies across grade levels and multilingual contexts would also provide deeper insights into the scalability of these practices.

Recommendations

For school administrators and division leaders, it is recommended to provide culturally relevant materials in Filipino and Bisaya to enhance local engagement and comprehension. They should also support infrastructure that enables participatory learning, such as microphones and stage areas, and collaborate with communities to document and publish local stories that reflect students' lived experiences.

Policymakers and DepEd officials are encouraged to institutionalize support for teacher-led innovation, recognizing the value of grassroots educational strategies. Expanding professional development opportunities in culturally responsive pedagogy and low-tech instructional methods is essential, alongside ensuring equitable resource distribution across schools to address disparities.

Teachers are advised to continue implementing student-centered approaches that prioritize learners' needs and interests. Sharing best practices within the division can foster a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement. Furthermore, teachers should advocate for necessary resources and actively document classroom outcomes to inform future instructional decisions.

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