

Teaching Of Reading in The Elementary Classes of San Isidro Integrated School in Toril, Davao City

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Abstract — This study is an attempt to analyze teaching approaches, challenges and insights in teaching reading in San Isidro Integrated School, Kilate, Toril, Davao City. The study is divided into three parts; first part is the teaching approaches in reading of elementary teachers, then the challenges encountered by teachers in teaching reading, and the last one, are the insights of teachers in teaching reading to elementary learners. The study used a qualitative method. It presents common challenges in teaching reading in general. The study has the following findings: The approaches used by teachers in teaching reading in the elementary grades: synthetic phonics, look and say method, sounds through pictures, syllables through singing, and words that have similar sounds. These were their sentiments on the challenges of teaching reading: inadequate training, big class size, limited reading materials, inadequate parents' involvement, and inadequate teachers' knowledge. Teachers shared the following insights: difficulty in pronunciation, professional training of teachers, learners have inadequate phonemic awareness, and use of scaffolding. Teachers indicated that they improvise some of the instructional materials although they were still inadequate to serve the purpose of teaching reading. Therefore, teachers need to make use of the locally available materials to make instructional materials for teaching reading.

Keywords — *Teaching of reading, elementary teachers and learners, experiences, challenges, insights, integrated school*

I. Introduction

Reading is important in the instruction process and if children are not taught how to read in lower primary classes, they might have challenges in reading when they reach other levels of education. This will make them fail to understand the concepts, competencies, and new knowledge during the instruction process hence failure to succeed in school life. More studies have shown that reading is not well taught in lower primary classes, for instance, a report by UNESCO on determining the reading proficiency of children worldwide published in 2020 shows that approximately 250 million out of the learners failed to acquire reading skills because the reading proficiency was still low. The statistics highlighted by UNSECO in 2020 showed that 65% of the population in the Sub Sahara is not able to read.

Reading is taught from primary one to primary three as a learning area under the thematic curriculum which was implemented in 2007 and learners cover reading lessons in the 'literacy hour' where reading is called "literacy 1" (Ssentanda, 2019). It is thought during this hour the vital

elements of literacy of a learner, which are sound, structure and meaning of words are enhanced (Mancheva et al., 2019). One of the aims of introducing a thematic curriculum was to improve the literacy and numeracy levels of pupils in lower primary classes. However, literacy levels especially reading in both English and local languages are still low among learners (Busingye & Najjuma, 2019). For example, in Bukedea district where this proposed study was carried out, reading skills are very low which affects their academic performance and the pass rate in Primary Leaving Examination is unsatisfactory (UNEB, 2018). Therefore, the study intended to explore the teaching approaches teachers use while teaching reading in lower primary in one government selected primary school in eastern Uganda.

Based on what is stated above, it was evident that there might be a challenge in the teaching and learning of reading. Therefore, the proposed study intended to examine the teaching approaches used in teaching reading to learners in lower primary classes as a pursuit of knowledge and understanding about the reading proficiency challenge facing Ugandan children. It is when we understand that we can begin to draft action plans and design effective interventions which are informed by research. The purpose of the study was to explore and understand the approaches of teachers to build the reading competencies of learners in the elementary level in Kilate, Toril, Davao City.

The study is guided by the following questions:

1. What teaching approaches do teachers use to teach reading in the elementary level?
2. What challenges exist when teaching reading to learners in the elementary level?
3. What insights are developed by teachers in teaching reading to the learners?

The development of early literacy skills can enable learners to perform well in school and life. These skills, especially reading, are vital in the academic performance of the learner since reading is a necessary aspect for an in-depth understanding of the content (Mosle, 2019). However, studies show that many experts advocated for various methods of teaching reading to learners in lower primary classes. In the 1930s and 1940s, teachers employed ‘look and say’ method which emphasized reading for meaning and in 1960s and 1970s, reading aimed at developing decoding and coding skills so teachers had to use phonetic approach. Whereas, in the early 1980s, teachers used the whole language approach which also emphasized reading for meaning it expanded the whole word approach and advocated for the integration of the language skills (reading, speaking, writing and listening) with the belief that children’s exposure to the environment would facilitate their learning naturally.

In recent years, teachers have started integrating the four language skills in all learning areas of the curriculum (Stewart et al., 2019). Therefore, all subjects are connected throughout the conceptual themes during the teaching and learning process where reading is involved. Learners are taught from their experiences and they are allowed to construct knowledge

using their prior knowledge by connecting current ideas with what they already know. The teacher's role is to support learners by building on their own experiences while using the prior knowledge to make meaning from what they read hence promoting reading among learners in lower primary. For example, children living in rural areas are encouraged to read stories about their environment to relate what they are learning to their own experiences. Through their experiences, children learn from the world of reality which enables them to understand their culture and identity because they make references to themselves and in most cases, they speak in their familiar language which enhances learning.

To clarify, Ngorosho (2019) states that there are five phases of reading development which include emergent literacy (6months - 6 years old), the novice reader (6- 7 years old), the decoding reader (7 - 9 years old), the fluent, comprehending reader (9 - 15 years old), and the expert reader. For the purpose of this study, the researcher dwelled on the first three phases as discussed below.

Emergent literacy begins from six months to the time of joining school; this affirms that reading is a continuous process. During this early childhood development, the child is exposed to the environment of literacy and that helps to determine the characteristics of that child being a fluent reader (Justice & Sofka, 2019). Snow et al. (2019) defines emergent literacy as the period of acquiring literacy skills from the time of birth to the time of attaining formal education. It further explains what a child can do from the time of birth to the beginning of formal education.

During the word recognition stage, the learner identifies and relates sounds and symbols. The child can know that letters show significant features of spoken language and later realizes the letters (graphemes) show sound (phonemes) in the text (Nation & Cocksey, 2019). In this stage, a child is expected to know the alphabet insight, recognize words and be fluent during communication (Shukia, 2019).

In the comprehension phase, the learner is expected to read and understand the text well. However, the ability to understand or comprehend the text depends on many factors like vocabulary, interest, background of the text, environment, thinking and reasoning ability and most importantly understanding the spoken language which is relevant in the comprehension during the reading process (Shukia, 2019). Similarly, Tankersley (2019) confirms that for a learner to comprehend the text effectively, s/he should be able to understand the spoken language. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to use familiar language when teaching beginners how to read.

The phases of reading development are important in the learner's reading process because this becomes easy for learners to move from one phase to another during the reading process hence improving reading. However, each phase has its own steps/methods of teaching which are influenced by the reading models.

Whole language approach. Roe et al. (2018) state that children's reading is not about dividing words into components rather it is about integrating the words into bigger units. Children

get a chance to achieve those tasks because the interactions they get in the environment enables children to acquire knowledge.

Additionally, Goodman and Goodman (2019) contend that learners should be exposed to the environment of literature to be able to read words holistically and contextually. The approach uses a look and say method when being employed during teaching and learning (Devine, 2019). Furthermore, the fundamental principle in this approach is that exposure of the children to a rich realistic literature environment that is connected to the text will enable the learner to read effectively. Also, Huang (2019) asserts that the whole language approach is grounded from the constructivist theory which suggests that teachers should give learners opportunities to construct knowledge from their society.

In addition, teachers ask learners to read the words and sentences holistically by sight rather than learning individual letter sounds that are formed by the words (Marima, 2019). During instruction of reading, the learners understand the meaning after associating it with the whole word as it is presented depending on the pictures drawn on the card.

On the contrary, Goodman and Goodman (2019) say that the whole language approach is better for learners to understand reading, but it does not develop the skills of word recognition and does not teach vocabulary, so it is maybe suitable only for pre-school learners and those who have been exposed to print. Children from a low socioeconomic background may not be exposed to print while at home making it hard for them to learn reading through the whole language approach (Jeynes, 2019). Therefore, teachers also must use a direct systematic approach like phonic that is equivalent to the children's level of development although it may not benefit learners with learning difficulties especially those with dyslexia because they achieve less in terms of developing decoding and word recognition skills (Westwood, 2019). Alternatively, teachers believe that the rules associated with the phonic approach to learning make learning boring and reading may only be meaningful when you give learners many reading materials to make meaning out of them. Therefore, teachers need to introduce prompts during the instruction of reading to trigger the schemata of the children to associate what they are learning with their prior knowledge (Thibaut & Curwood, 2020).

Phonics approach or bottom-up approach. According to Brown (2019) the phonic approach involves developing phonemic awareness and phonic. Phonemic awareness is where learners make sounds in the spoken words while phonics is the relationship between the written symbols and the sounds. The phonics method involves teaching the letter sounds first, which they blend to form syllables, words and sentences. For instance, /m/- /a/ will form /ma/ which when two are joined can form the word “mama” will be formed hence teaching reading effectively. The words can be later joined to form meaningful sentences.

According to Baker (2019), phonics is an approach where learners relate letters to sounds, for instance to pronounce the word “man” one should follow the following sounds /m/ae/n/=man/.

Hedgcock and Ferris (2019) add that teaching learners how to read based on the bottom-up approach is just as it sounds. Therefore, learners start reading by first recognizing the alphabet letters, letter names and then comprehending how they correspond to the sound. This method advocates for breaking the bigger reading tasks into simpler tasks.

Matchet and Pretorius (2019) argued that learners who cannot relate letters to sounds have problems in reading the way phonics is taught. However, teachers can support such learners using fun to teach phonics. For example a teacher can blend vowels and consonants in a story, a song and a game which helps learners to have various experiences using sounds, symbols and blending during practice. Therefore, teachers can support learners who cannot relate letter sounds by using fun to teach phonics while teaching reading. A teacher can blend vowels and consonants in a story, a song and a game to help them learn the sound symbols.

The primary one syllabus, the whole word approach, is used to teach children how to greet, ask for permission and tell stories in their context during the learning of the conventional language. According to Devine (2019), for the effective use of the whole language approach, the methods used should allow learners to observe the way words are used in the context of a sentence and presentation in various meaningful semantic associations.

The thematic curriculum states that the 3Rs program stresses the use of the phonic approach in teaching reading (Altinyelken, 2020) and the syllabus also advocates for the use of synthetic and analytical methods interchangeably. This implies that teaching of reading starts with teaching the letter sounds which are later blended with the consonants to form syllables, words and sentences hence encouraging learners to be able to identify sounds and syllables that have been used to form words and sentences.

Moreover, teachers also use a balanced approach which involves the use of whole word and phonics methods interchangeably, that is to say the whole word in a lesson. The phonic method helps teachers to teach learners sound identification and awareness and makes learners read short sentences and simple words without the help of the teacher while whole word method helps the learners to read the word on sight and learners get an opportunity to relate the pictures and the words which make them to read with ease (Shukia, 2019). Therefore, teaching methods that teachers use during the teaching of reading impact on the literacy development of a child, however, teachers face some challenges when teaching reading.

Challenges teachers face while teaching reading to learners in elementary classes.

Firstly, most government schools have limited reading materials for learners in the elementary level. According to Henry et al. (2019), most teachers are unable to effectively teach reading because of insufficient reading materials used during instruction, which has an impact on the instructional process. According to the OECD (2019), it is critical to involve parents in creating a conducive environment in schools in order to achieve academic goals and objectives.

In addition, Fitaloka (2019) confirms that when the reading resources are limited, the classroom activities are affected and teachers fail to give learners a chance to manipulate the reading resources because they are not enough or not in place thus the teachers use teacher-centered strategies for teaching reading which does not enhance the reading skills of the learners. They contend that effective teaching of reading requires teachers to have adequate teaching resources to develop the learner's manipulative, exploration and collaborative skills which are the skills for the 21st century learner and they enhance the reading skills.

Secondly, teachers also have inadequate pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) especially in naming of letters. According to Ssentanda (2019), the first levels of teaching reading are letter identification and naming, however, teachers face a challenge when teaching reading most especially those in rural areas where the study was conducted because reading is taught in the area language or in the Mother Tongue. In my study area, reading is taught in 'Cebuano.' The Cebuano alphabets are shared with the English apart from only two letters for instance /ŋ/ and /ɲ/, which are included in the Cebuano orthography. Letter sounds in English have names like [di] for /d/, [ef] for /f/ among others. The same letters are assigned different sounds for example, [da] for /d/, [fa] for /f/. In total, all letters in Cebuano have an additional of /a/ to each consonant. Therefore, teachers find challenges when differentiating for learners the 'Cebuano' letter names from the English while teaching reading because of orthography.

Additionally, teachers face the challenge of big-size classes which is because of UPE implementation. Kewaza and Welch (2019) posited that the instructional materials, facilities, working space and other requirements that may lead to a conducive learning environment in schools are inadequate because of the big numbers that have been enrolled in schools. This reveals that seemingly, the supply of materials in schools is low even though the numbers are high. Similarly, Keller (2019) reports that most primary schools are in a worse state because of inadequate teaching materials and inadequate teachers compared to the enrollment. Kewaza and Welch (2019) emphasize that schools are supplied with reading materials but they are not proportional to the number of learners due to big-size classes making it hard for teachers to use the materials during instruction.

Based on the above discussion, this study was designed to explore how teachers use the approaches in teaching of reading in the elementary classes in Toril, Davao City, a context filled with various challenges such as inadequate teaching and learning materials.

Vygotsky (1978) as cited in Keller (2019) contends that to explore how reading is taught in lower elementary classes, the study needs to adopt a socio-cultural theory because it aims at connecting the children's social-cultural aspects to their learning. Teachers need to consider both the surroundings of the child and the stimuli during instruction. Socio-cultural theory affirms that human mental activities are formed because of the interactions of an individual with the surrounding. It emphasizes that learning should be within the learner's society and culture. Behroozizad et al. (2019) argue that when children learn from a familiar environment, there is free

interaction hence acquiring knowledge that is later assimilated and internalized. Additionally, if learners freely interact with the more experienced peers and adults, they may find few challenges in accomplishing their tasks because they have the opportunity to always seek help from the experienced partner then later, they can finish the task independently.

For purposes of learning to read, Vygotsky (1978) as cited by Ghafar Samar and Dehqan (2019) states that teachers need to help learners who have reached the zone of proximal development when learning new skills and concepts and this process is called scaffolding. To emphasize, Mahan (2020) contends that scaffolding is a temporal help that a learner seeks from an expert to complete the task independently. This helps teachers to plan activities within the learner's environment and assist learners appropriately. Consequently, scaffolding is important in teaching reading because this will necessitate the teacher to teach different sounds and later guide learners to connect those sounds to form meaningful words, phrases and sentences which they can read independently (Freund et al., 2019).

Additionally, it guides teachers to appreciate and acknowledge the children's prior knowledge during the teaching and learning of reading. Rowsell et al. (2019) posit that before children join the school, they interact with the environment where they attain knowledge. This implies that teachers should not take learners as black slates but they should develop on the learner's prior knowledge and correct them in case of any misconceptions. Butler (2020) asserts that teachers should allow learners to construct new knowledge and concepts using prior knowledge during the instruction of reading.

II. Methodology

A quantitative study was useful as it allowed the researcher to go to school and enter the classes to examine in-depth the teaching activities which enabled the researcher to get the real picture of what takes place in the elementary classes as far as methods used for teaching children are concerned.

To get information on how reading is taught in lower elementary classes, I had to align with Wallen and Fraenkel (2021) who stated that there is a need for the researcher to select a sample of individual(s) to participate in the study. Additionally, Sharma (2019) argues that for a researcher to discover, understand and get the insight information about the phenomenon, purposive sampling should be employed. Therefore, the study adopted a purposive sampling of 6 teachers, 2 from each lower primary class (grades 4, 5 and 6) because they work directly with the children in the classroom therefore, they told the researcher the methods they use when teaching reading to learners in lower primary classes, the impact of those methods to the learners, challenges they face when teaching reading and later suggested strategies of how to effectively teach reading.

The interviews were guided by the interview guide. Punch, et al (2019) states that an interview guide reminds the researcher on the topics to be discussed and the vocabulary to be used

during the interview process. Therefore, the interview guide reminded the researcher on the topics and vocabulary to be used when getting information on which methods teachers use when teaching reading, the impact of the methods and the challenges they face during the process of reading instruction.

This study employed a thematic analysis process to analyze the data collected. Owen (2019) states that thematic analysis involves breaking down, classifying and categorizing facets of the information that will be used during report writing and it is normally started when the data collection process is about to end. Therefore, I used thematic analysis because it reasoned that it will produce an insightful analysis that answers the three subsidiary research questions in this study (Jugder, 2019).

This study analyzed the first coding process through *Initial* coding. This type of coding was chosen to examine, compare and search for similarities and differences throughout the data, and as Charmaz (2019) contextualizes “to remain open to all possible theoretical directions indicated by your readings of the data.” The second level coding chosen was *Pattern* coding.

Pattern coding gave this study the basis to explain major themes underneath the segments of the data; patterns in human relationships, the search for causes and explanations to the possible phenomenon, and finally, the platform to construct frameworks and processes. To conclude, a *Triangulation* of the patterns and themes creates new levels of understanding the existing knowledge by reviewing the interviews in a comparative analysis with the previous two levels of coding (Saldaña, 2020).

III. Results and Discussion

Teaching approaches teachers use to teach reading in the elementary level

The following are approaches used by teachers in teaching reading in the elementary grades: *synthetic phonics, look and say method, sounds through pictures, syllables through singing, and words that have similar sounds.*

Challenges that exist when teaching reading to learners in the elementary level

Teachers were asked about the challenges teachers face while teaching reading. These were their sentiments on the challenges of teaching reading: *inadequate training, big class size, limited reading materials, inadequate parents' involvement, and inadequate teachers' knowledge.*

Insights developed by teachers in teaching reading to the learners

Teachers shared the following insights: *difficulty in pronunciation, professional training of teachers, Learners have inadequate phonemic awareness, and use of scaffolding.*

Discussion

It was also revealed that crowded classes also hindered the effecting teaching of reading. The Department of Education stipulates that teacher pupil ratio should be 1:45, however looking at the population in the classes as seen in the setting and research site in methodology; it is evident that the classes are crowded. Additionally, during interviews, teachers stated that they use various learner centered methods to cater for all learners in crowded classes. This is in line with Kewaza and Welch (2019) emphasize that schools are supplied with reading materials but they are not proportional to the number of learners due to big size classes making it hard for teachers to use the materials during instruction so teachers should employ learner centered methods to cater for individual differences.

Apart from the above, teachers also thought of the existing opportunities which when harnessed could solve and/or minimize the challenges regarding the teaching of reading in lower primary classes as discussed below.

On the issue of training and inadequate pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), teachers suggested that the training should be given to all teachers regardless of the class s/he is teaching so that he is informed about any innovation in education. On the same note, head teachers should also be trained on the PCK on how to teach reading to offer support supervision to the teachers of lower primary classes. This may help in case the teacher is absent, transferred among others. Additionally, teachers should also be trained on how to teach syllables so that they can avoid teaching them as a song because it negatively affects the reading competence of the learners.

During interviews, teachers indicated that they improvise some of the instructional materials although they were still inadequate to serve the purpose of teaching reading. Therefore, teachers need to make use of the locally available materials to make instructional materials for teaching reading. For example, they can use beads, seeds, stones, clay, manila pares for making many shapes, flashcards, sentence cards, which they can paste on the walls of the classrooms. Additionally, teachers can draw pictures that are with the learner's social-cultural context on manilas for learners to watch, match, arrange during the lesson because children can become inspired to learn if such materials and activities are in class (Asokhia, 2019).

Parental involvement is important in the academic life of any child. During interviews, teachers' experiences noted that some children experienced reading problems because of the low level of parental involvement. After children have learned how to read, they need to practice what has been read through revision and reading other related reading materials after school. Thus, parents must ensure that their children have constant support while at home because children who had support from their parents progressed academically in reading more than their counterparts as observed during the interviews. To ensure that parents make follow-ups, teachers had to communicate to the parents about the learner's performance through meetings and where necessary, they were given books and directed on how to assist their children to read those books

while at home. Rowsell et al. (2019) suggest that parents must be given books and guided on how to assist children to read while at home.

About the issues of crowded classes, teachers asked learners to read aloud by column or row to ensure that all learners read. This allowed teachers who had some space in class to move around while the learners were reading to identify those who had difficulties in reading. On the contrary, teachers who have little space in the classes sometimes use the outdoor space for the instruction process to get enough space for purposive movements during the lesson.

IV. Conclusion

When the teacher was asked about the impact of the methods on the learner's reading competences, she said children without pre-primary background find challenges to read through phonics methods because they lack knowledge of phonemic awareness which is taught in pre-primary. Therefore, the phonic method confuses some learners during the process of reading.

A teacher was also asked to explain how she teaches a reading from the beginning to the end just like other teachers. She said that she starts her lesson by teaching learners sounds, after learners mastering sounds, she blends the sounds to make syllables, words and sentences respectively, for example, she said /p/ can be blended with /a/ to form /pa/, which later /pa/ and /pa/ form "*papa*"(father) and lastly the word can be used in sentence formation for example "*father is sick.*"

Another teacher was also asked the same question related to the above and she replied that she starts with teaching the sounds that are in the word and later joins the sounds to enable the children to read the words she intends to teach. Secondly, when she is to teach the learner how to read a story, she brings storybooks in the class and instructs learners to open a certain page, and then she reads as they repeat after her. This agrees with other teachers, however, for this teacher when she realizes that the learners have mastered, she makes them read without her help. She added that later asks a learner to read independently to identify challenges to cater for individual differences.

Additionally, she uses pictures with corresponding words to teach some words. She added that when assessing learners, she asks them to match the pictures to words. This is in agreement with other teachers, who also explained that they use pictures during the teaching of reading. Moreover, for beginners, this teacher first teaches them how to hold the book, then the vocabulary they may find while reading the text and later allows them to read. This indicates that the teacher uses guided reading to help children to read.

As earlier said by other teachers, she also asks one learner to read the text or the word as she listens so that it is easy for her to identify reading difficulties and cater to individual differences during the reading instruction.

This statement agrees with other teachers, who said that they start a reading lesson by teaching letter sounds to the learners. Moreover, a teacher comes with pictures of things that are found in the learner's environment but are related to the words intended to be taught to the learners in class which helps learners to grasp quickly what they are learning.

After the above, the teacher was asked about the challenges faced by teachers during the teaching of reading and she said, pronouncing some letters is challenging for example of sound /ŋ/ which she wrote on the paper but still failed to pronounce it. This is also in line with another teacher who said that sound /u/ confuses learners when it comes to teaching words like "cup". This implies that the teacher has little knowledge of how some sounds are pronounced and therefore she suggested that it would be better for teachers to have CPDs to solve such challenges.

According to some teachers, while in college, they were not taught how to teach reading in lower primary and during practice, they found unfamiliar ways of teaching reading because in the college they learned how to teach English where reading is an aspect so she tried to use that knowledge to teach reading in lower primary. This implies that the education curriculum does not specifically train specific teachers on how to teach reading and in case they get to the field there is little knowledge. Therefore, there is a need for continuous professional development to improve the teacher's knowledge on how to teach reading in lower primary.

Additionally, learners lack writing materials during the lesson which becomes a challenge to her during the lesson because she wants learners to practice what they read through writing.

Closely related to the above, she said that the reading books are very few given the number of learners in class and she continued explaining that even the books that are there are the same so learners end up reading the very books which do not enhance their learning. However, she suggested that teachers should be creative in improvising reading materials for learners.

Knowledge entails the understanding of the teacher on how to assist learners during the teaching and learning process of the subject matter (Park & Oliver, 2008). Therefore, the above data shows that teachers have inadequate knowledge about how reading is taught and this makes it a challenge during the reading instruction.

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