

Exploring The Lived Experiences of Grade 6 Struggling Readers in Elementary Schools in Quezon City

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Abstract

This study explored the lived experiences of Grade 6 struggling readers in selected elementary schools in Quezon City to understand the academic, emotional, social, and environmental factors influencing their reading difficulties and identify evidence that could strengthen literacy interventions. Guided by a transcendental-phenomenological approach, the study employed a qualitative research design involving six purposively selected Grade 6 learners with identified reading difficulties. Data were collected through researcher-developed semi-structured interviews, supported by document analysis and arts-based activities, and analyzed using Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological method with triangulation to enhance credibility. The findings revealed that participants experienced greater difficulty reading English than Filipino because of limited vocabulary, weak pronunciation, poor comprehension, and low reading fluency. These challenges negatively affected their emotions, motivation, classroom participation, academic performance, and self-esteem. Contributing factors included limited family and teacher support, inadequate reading materials, inconsistent reading practice, environmental distractions, excessive gadget use, and peer bullying. Despite these challenges, encouragement from parents, teachers, and peers promoted resilience, improved confidence, and strengthened learners' motivation to continue developing their reading skills. The study concludes that reading difficulties are shaped by interconnected academic, emotional, social, and environmental factors and require collaborative support from families, schools, and communities. It recommends strengthening home-school partnerships, implementing differentiated and phonics-based reading instruction, providing accessible literacy resources, fostering supportive classroom environments, and conducting further research on reading intervention programs. The study supports Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Quality Education, SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities, and SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals by promoting equitable literacy development, inclusive educational opportunities, and collaboration among educational stakeholders. Its findings contribute to educational and community sustainability by informing evidence-based literacy interventions, strengthening stakeholder partnerships, and supporting policies that improve learning outcomes and educational equity for struggling readers.

Keywords: Academic Performance, Grade 6 Struggling Readers, Literacy Development, Qualitative Research, Quezon City, Reading Difficulties, Reading Interventions, Transcendental Phenomenology

1. Introduction

Reading is a fundamental skill that supports learners' academic achievement, communication, and lifelong learning. However, many Grade 6 learners continue to experience persistent reading difficulties that affect their comprehension, pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, confidence, and academic performance. This study explores the lived experiences of Grade 6 struggling readers in selected elementary schools in Quezon City through a transcendental-phenomenological approach. Anchored on the goal of promoting equitable and quality education, the study examines the academic, emotional, social, and environmental factors influencing students' reading experiences, their coping mechanisms, and the implications for their overall well-being and educational development. It also seeks to provide evidence that can guide parents, teachers, school administrators, and policymakers in developing responsive reading interventions for upper elementary learners.

1.1 Background of the Lived Experiences of Grade 6 Struggling Readers in Elementary Schools in Quezon City

Reading proficiency is essential for learners' academic success and overall development. Despite continuous literacy initiatives, many Grade 6 learners continue to experience difficulties in word recognition, pronunciation, comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, and writing, limiting their academic performance and confidence (Libre III et al., 2021). Local evidence further demonstrates the seriousness of this concern, with the Quezon City Government reporting that a considerable proportion of learners remain non-readers or frustrated readers under its Zero Illiterate Tutoring Program (Quezon City Government, 2024). Reading difficulties extend beyond cognitive challenges and influence students'

emotional well-being, motivation, classroom participation, and social relationships. Persistent struggles often result in fear of making mistakes, low self-esteem, avoidance of reading activities, and reduced academic engagement. Although schools continue implementing reading interventions, many upper elementary learners still experience significant reading challenges, indicating the need to understand their lived experiences more comprehensively. This study therefore focuses on Grade 6 struggling readers to examine how they perceive and navigate their reading difficulties, identify the factors influencing their experiences, and provide evidence that may strengthen instructional practices and intervention programs for upper elementary learners.

1.2 Themes and Insights on the Lived Experiences of Grade 6 Struggling Readers

Existing literature consistently identifies reading difficulties as multidimensional, involving cognitive, linguistic, emotional, motivational, social, and environmental factors. Studies show that struggling readers commonly experience difficulties in comprehension, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and writing, all of which hinder academic achievement (Libre III et al., 2021). Reading interventions that incorporate structured instruction, teacher training, parental involvement, varied reading materials, interactive technologies, and individualized support have demonstrated positive outcomes in improving literacy skills (Concepcion & Melchor, 2024; Schiavo et al., 2023; Connor et al., 2022; Fulguierinas, 2024). Research further emphasizes that phonological awareness, vocabulary development, and language comprehension are fundamental to reading proficiency. Weak phonological awareness and limited vocabulary significantly reduce learners' ability to decode words and comprehend texts, while structured phonics instruction, peer tutoring, visual aids, remedial instruction, technology-assisted learning, and parental participation contribute to improved literacy development (Hezam et al., 2022; Nkurunziza, 2024; Garcia & Doronio, 2024; Librea et al., 2023; Martin, 2021; Pilongo et al., 2023; Rosyada-AS & Apoko, 2023). The literature also highlights the influence of the home environment and socioeconomic conditions on reading achievement. Limited parental involvement, low parental educational attainment, inadequate learning resources, financial constraints, and insufficient language exposure at home restrict children's opportunities to develop reading skills, whereas active family participation and literacy-rich environments strengthen reading performance (Dagada, 2022; Librea et al., 2023; Vázquez-Cano et al., 2020; Gay et al., 2020; Romeo et al., 2022; Qaribilla, 2024; Idulog et al., 2023; Cekiso et al., 2022; Aranego, 2023). Social interactions likewise shape learners' reading experiences. Supportive peer collaboration, teacher guidance, and family encouragement enhance literacy development, while bullying, peer judgment, and limited instructional support reduce learners' confidence and willingness to participate in reading activities (Stanton, 2021; Endo, 2024; Libre III et al., 2021). Emotional and motivational factors are equally important. Fear, anxiety, embarrassment, and low confidence often discourage struggling readers from participating in reading activities, whereas intrinsic motivation, encouragement, and consistent support promote greater engagement, improved academic performance, and personal development (Alharbi, 2022; Kanellopoulou et al., 2020; Libre III et al., 2021). Collectively, the reviewed literature demonstrates that effective support for struggling readers requires comprehensive interventions that integrate evidence-based instructional strategies, family involvement, emotional support, teacher capacity building, collaborative learning, and access to appropriate learning resources to improve literacy outcomes and overall learner development.

1.3 Local, National, and Global Context of Grade 6 Reading Difficulties

Reading difficulties remain a significant educational concern at the local, national, and global levels. In Quezon City, local assessments conducted through the Zero Illiterate Tutoring Program revealed that a substantial proportion of participating learners were classified as either non-readers or frustrated readers, demonstrating the continuing need for targeted literacy interventions (Quezon City Government, 2024). Locally, Grade 6 learners continue to experience challenges in reading comprehension, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and writing, which adversely affect their academic performance (Libre III et al., 2021). Nationally, studies have identified persistent literacy challenges among Filipino learners, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Limited parental support, inadequate instructional resources, and socioeconomic constraints continue to hinder reading development and reduce learners' access to effective literacy opportunities (Librea et al., 2023; Idulog et al., 2023; Aranego, 2023). These findings underscore the need for comprehensive school- and community-based reading interventions that address both instructional and environmental factors. Globally, reading difficulties are likewise recognized as complex issues influenced by cognitive, linguistic, emotional, motivational, and socioeconomic factors. International studies consistently report that weaknesses in phonological awareness, vocabulary, comprehension, motivation, and family support negatively affect literacy development, while evidence-based instructional approaches, technology-assisted learning, structured interventions, and collaborative support systems improve reading outcomes (Hezam et al., 2022; Nkurunziza, 2024; Martin, 2021; Schiavo et al., 2023; Connor et al., 2022; Romeo et al., 2022; Vázquez-Cano et al., 2020; Cekiso et al., 2022). Collectively, these local, national, and international findings demonstrate that reading difficulties require coordinated educational responses that address learners' academic, emotional, and social needs.

1.4 Theoretical and Conceptual Basis of the Lived Experiences of Grade 6 Struggling Readers

The reviewed literature supports the view that reading difficulties result from the interaction of cognitive, linguistic, emotional, motivational, social, and environmental factors. Reading proficiency depends on learners' phonological

awareness, vocabulary development, language comprehension, and fluency, which are strengthened through structured instruction, explicit phonics teaching, vocabulary enhancement, peer tutoring, technology-assisted learning, and differentiated interventions (Hezam et al., 2022; Garcia & Doronio, 2024; Librea et al., 2023; Martin, 2021; Pilongo et al., 2023; Rosyada-AS & Apoko, 2023). The literature further emphasizes that learners' reading development is influenced by family involvement, teacher support, peer relationships, and the availability of educational resources. Supportive home environments, literacy-rich experiences, positive peer interactions, and consistent teacher guidance foster reading growth, whereas limited parental involvement, socioeconomic disadvantages, inadequate learning materials, and negative social experiences impede literacy development (Dagada, 2022; Gay et al., 2020; Romeo et al., 2022; Qaribilla, 2024; Stanton, 2021; Endo, 2024). Emotional and motivational factors likewise shape learners' engagement with reading. Fear, anxiety, embarrassment, and low confidence discourage participation in literacy activities, whereas intrinsic motivation, encouragement, and positive learning experiences strengthen persistence and reading achievement (Alharbi, 2022; Kanellopoulou et al., 2020; Libre III et al., 2021). These perspectives collectively provide the conceptual foundation for examining the lived experiences of Grade 6 struggling readers and understanding the multiple factors influencing their literacy development.

1.5 Research Gaps and Rationale for Exploring the Lived Experiences of Grade 6 Struggling Readers

Previous studies have extensively examined the cognitive, linguistic, emotional, motivational, and environmental factors associated with reading difficulties and have proposed various instructional interventions (Libre III et al., 2021; Concepcion & Melchor, 2024; Fulguerinas, 2024; Garcia & Doronio, 2024). However, existing literature has largely focused on beginning readers and lower elementary learners, with limited attention given to the lived experiences of Grade 6 struggling readers who continue to experience persistent reading difficulties despite years of formal instruction. Moreover, while previous research has identified factors influencing reading performance, there remains limited qualitative evidence describing how upper elementary learners personally experience reading challenges, cope with academic and emotional difficulties, interact with peers and teachers, and navigate their learning environments. Understanding these experiences is essential for developing interventions that extend beyond improving reading skills to addressing learners' emotional well-being, motivation, and social participation (Libre III et al., 2021; Stanton, 2021; Alharbi, 2022). Accordingly, this study seeks to fill these gaps by exploring the lived experiences of Grade 6 struggling readers in elementary schools in Quezon City. Through a transcendental-phenomenological approach, it aims to generate deeper insights into the academic, social, emotional, and environmental factors affecting learners with reading difficulties and provide evidence that can guide more responsive literacy programs, instructional practices, and stakeholder support systems.

1.6 Alignment of the Study with Relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

This study aligns primarily with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 – Quality Education, which promotes inclusive, equitable, and quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. By examining the lived experiences of Grade 6 struggling readers, the study contributes to understanding the barriers that hinder literacy development and educational participation. Its findings support the development of responsive reading interventions, learner-centered instructional strategies, and strengthened collaboration among schools, families, and communities to improve reading outcomes and educational equity. The study also relates to SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities, as it highlights how socioeconomic conditions, limited parental support, inadequate learning resources, and unequal access to educational opportunities contribute to reading difficulties among learners (Dagada, 2022; Librea et al., 2023; Vázquez-Cano et al., 2020; Romeo et al., 2022; Qaribilla, 2024; Idulog et al., 2023). Addressing these disparities through targeted literacy interventions can help reduce educational inequalities and improve learning opportunities for struggling readers. Furthermore, the study supports SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals, recognizing that improving literacy requires collaborative efforts among teachers, parents, school administrators, local government units, and other educational stakeholders. The literature consistently emphasizes that coordinated support systems and shared responsibility strengthen learners' reading development and academic success (Libre III et al., 2021; Concepcion & Melchor, 2024; Stanton, 2021).

1.7 Importance of the Study to Educational and Community Sustainability

This study contributes primarily to educational sustainability by generating evidence that can improve literacy instruction, strengthen reading intervention programs, and support inclusive educational practices for Grade 6 struggling readers. Understanding learners' lived experiences enables educators and schools to design interventions that address not only reading skills but also learners' emotional, motivational, and social needs, thereby promoting sustainable improvements in learning outcomes. The study likewise contributes to socio-economic sustainability, as improved literacy enhances learners' academic achievement, educational attainment, and future opportunities. By identifying barriers related to socioeconomic conditions, parental involvement, and access to learning resources, the findings may inform policies and community initiatives that promote equitable educational opportunities for disadvantaged learners (Romeo et al., 2022; Qaribilla, 2024; Idulog et al., 2023). In addition, the study supports community and institutional sustainability by encouraging stronger partnerships among families, schools, local government units, and other stakeholders in promoting literacy development. Strengthening these collaborative efforts can foster supportive learning environments that sustain students' academic growth, emotional well-being, and long-term educational success.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative research design using a transcendental-phenomenological approach to explore how Grade 6 struggling readers perceive and experience reading difficulties. This design enabled participants to describe their personal experiences while allowing the researcher to identify common meanings and patterns across their narratives. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, supported by document analysis and arts-based activities to facilitate deeper expression of participants' experiences.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in selected elementary schools in Quezon City, Philippines. The research setting was chosen because it provided access to Grade 6 learners experiencing reading difficulties, allowing the researcher to investigate their lived experiences within an authentic educational environment.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents consisted of six Grade 6 students with identified reading difficulties from selected elementary schools in Quezon City. They were 10 to 13 years old and were identified through teacher observations, reading assessment results, or standardized examinations. Participants demonstrated difficulties in decoding, comprehension, or vocabulary acquisition and voluntarily participated after obtaining parental consent, participant assent, and school authorization. The participants' demographic information included pseudonyms, age, grade level, English reading level, academic standing, and school affiliation.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who met predetermined inclusion criteria relevant to the study. Eligible participants were Grade 6 learners experiencing reading difficulties, as evidenced by teacher observations and reading assessment results. Selection also required informed consent from parents or guardians, participant assent, approval from school authorities, and willingness to participate. This procedure ensured that the participants could provide rich and meaningful information regarding the phenomenon under investigation.

2.5 Research Instrument

The primary research instrument was a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide that contained open-ended and probing questions to encourage participants to describe their lived experiences freely while maintaining alignment with the study objectives. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent to ensure accurate transcription. To strengthen data credibility, document analysis, including reading assessments and report cards, was conducted for triangulation. Arts-based activities, such as drawing roads and symbols, were also utilized to help participants express emotions and experiences that were difficult to communicate verbally.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection involved conducting semi-structured interviews guided by the interview protocol after obtaining the necessary permissions and informed consent. Participants responded to open-ended questions regarding their reading experiences, while supporting documents were collected to validate the findings. Arts-based activities complemented the interviews by allowing participants to illustrate their feelings and perceptions of reading challenges. The combination of interviews, documents, and artistic outputs provided multiple sources of evidence that enhanced the credibility of the study through triangulation.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis followed Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological approach. The researcher first performed bracketing to minimize personal biases before transcribing interviews and identifying significant statements through horizontalization. Similar statements were coded, grouped into categories, and synthesized into themes representing participants' lived experiences. Direct quotations were used to support the textural descriptions, while structural descriptions examined how factors such as time, environment, relationships, and resources influenced participants' experiences. Data were organized using Microsoft Excel, and a comprehensive Book of Themes was prepared to facilitate systematic analysis. Overall, 175 codes were generated and organized into 20 categories and seven major themes. Credibility and dependability were strengthened through triangulation of interview data, documents, and arts-based outputs.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were observed throughout the study following accepted research ethics standards (Miteu, 2024). Participants' rights, dignity, privacy, and confidentiality were protected through informed consent, informed assent, voluntary participation, and the use of pseudonyms. Participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. The researcher minimized potential risks by maintaining a safe interview environment and protecting

participants' emotional and psychological well-being. Justice was ensured through fair participant selection, while fidelity and responsibility were maintained through secure data storage, restricted access to research records, and planned data destruction after five years. Integrity was upheld by maintaining transparency throughout the research process and providing participants with copies of their interview transcripts and study findings. The study also complied with the ethical principles of the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board (PHREB) and the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Although formal ethics committee approval was not required, the research proposal was reviewed and approved by the panel of evaluators, and permission to conduct the study was granted by the Schools Division Office of the Department of Education.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Main Findings

3.1.1 Overcoming Reading and Language Challenges

The findings revealed that most Grade 6 struggling readers experienced greater difficulty reading English than Filipino. Participants struggled with vocabulary, pronunciation, reading comprehension, and fluency, making it difficult to understand English words, sentences, and classroom instructions. To cope, they skipped unfamiliar words, guessed meanings from context, sought assistance from others, or remained silent when they could not understand the text. Despite these strategies, difficulties in decoding and comprehension persisted, contributing to anxiety and avoidance when reading English materials. These findings indicate that limited vocabulary and decoding skills continue to hinder reading comprehension and language acquisition among struggling readers. Similarly, Romero et al. (2023) reported that learners with weak English proficiency experience reading difficulties associated with teacher influence, peer pressure, humiliation, diminished self-esteem, and limited language exposure, which are consistent with the experiences reported by the participants.

3.1.2 Common Emotions of Struggling Readers

The participants commonly experienced fear, embarrassment, nervousness, and low self-confidence when asked to read, particularly in front of classmates. Fear of making mistakes and being ridiculed reduced their classroom participation and concentration. Nevertheless, they also expressed pride, happiness, and increased confidence whenever they successfully read texts, especially in Filipino, recognizing that reading is important for their future despite the challenges they encountered. These findings suggest that emotional experiences significantly influence learners' reading engagement and confidence. Likewise, Stanley et al. (2023) found that a growth mindset improves reading comprehension, word recognition, and fluency by strengthening learners' motivation and positive attitudes toward reading. Encouragement and successful reading experiences therefore contribute to improved self-esteem and literacy development.

3.1.3 Motivation and Learning Behaviors

The findings showed that many participants lacked consistent reading habits because of limited family support, inadequate guidance, and repeated reading difficulties. Some learners remained motivated through self-reflection and determination, while others avoided reading tasks or relied heavily on external assistance. Reading practice at home and in school was generally irregular, and distractions such as gadgets further reduced opportunities to develop reading skills. These findings emphasize the importance of motivation, consistent practice, and supportive learning environments in reading development. Hezam et al. (2022) noted that poor motivation and frustration negatively affect reading comprehension. Likewise, Du et al. (2022) emphasized that productive habits are essential for mastering complex learning tasks, while Van Bergen et al. (2020) explained that regular reading practice promotes reading fluency, comprehension, and lifelong literacy habits. Together, these studies support the need for sustained encouragement and structured reading practice to improve learners' reading abilities.

3.1.4 Social and Peer Relationships

The findings revealed that social relationships significantly influenced the reading experiences of Grade 6 struggling readers. While some participants sought help from peers, teachers, and family members, many experienced teasing, comparison, bullying, and limited encouragement because of their reading difficulties. Teacher support and family involvement also varied, with inconsistent assistance reducing students' confidence and willingness to participate in reading activities. As a result, learners often felt discouraged despite their desire to improve their reading skills. These findings demonstrate that positive social support strengthens reading development, whereas negative peer interactions and inconsistent family involvement hinder learners' confidence and literacy growth. Similarly, Julianto and Umami (2023) emphasized that limited family engagement weakens the literacy culture at home, while consistent parental support promotes better reading achievement.

3.1.5 Learning Resources and Environment

The findings indicated that access to learning resources and a supportive environment affected participants' reading development. Although some students had books or digital resources, these were not consistently used because of limited guidance and irregular practice. Participants also identified household noise, peer distractions, and excessive gadget use as

barriers that reduced their opportunities to practice reading, particularly in English. These conditions limited the effectiveness of available learning resources and slowed the development of their reading skills. These findings suggest that learning resources alone are insufficient without consistent supervision and structured reading practice. Likewise, Caraig and Quimbo (2022) found that noisy environments and inappropriate use of reading platforms interfere with reading comprehension, supporting the participants' experiences of environmental and technological distractions.

3.1.6 Academic Challenges and Performance

The findings showed that reading difficulties negatively affected students' academic performance, particularly in English, Mathematics, and Science, where reading comprehension was essential. Participants reported difficulty understanding classroom instructions, examinations, and word problems, resulting in low academic performance and concerns about failing Grade 6. Many also experienced forgetfulness, regression in reading skills, and continued difficulty recalling previously learned English lessons. These findings indicate that reading difficulties extend beyond literacy and directly affect learners' overall academic achievement. Aranego, R. B., Jr. (2023) reported that struggling readers often experience limited visual attention, confusion in letter-sound identification, and poor lesson comprehension. Similarly, Madrid et al. (2025) found that even modest reading comprehension problems significantly reduce students' academic performance, emphasizing the importance of continuous reading intervention and academic support.

3.1.7 Personal Growth Through Support

The findings revealed that encouragement from family, teachers, and peers contributed to participants' personal growth and resilience despite persistent reading difficulties. Although many students experienced fear, embarrassment, and low confidence, positive reinforcement motivated them to continue practicing reading and gradually overcome their challenges. Appreciation from significant people increased their confidence, while ridicule and neglect often caused withdrawal and discouragement. Arts-based activities also showed that self-motivation and supportive relationships strengthened students' perseverance in learning to read. These findings highlight the important role of emotional support and positive reinforcement in promoting literacy development. Relationships and social engagement help struggling readers manage both emotional and academic challenges (Stanton, W. C., 2021). Likewise, Libre III et al. (2021) emphasized that motivating learners to practice reading improves their self-confidence, academic performance, communication skills, and personal development. These findings reinforce the value of creating supportive learning environments that encourage continuous reading practice.

3.2 Contributing Factors to Reading Challenges

The findings showed that several internal and external factors contributed to the reading difficulties experienced by Grade 6 struggling readers. Participants identified limited motivation, inadequate family and teacher support, peer bullying, insufficient reading materials, irregular reading practice, time constraints, environmental distractions, and excessive gadget use as barriers to reading improvement. Despite these challenges, some learners remained motivated because of the encouragement they received from their families and friends. However, inconsistent support and limited opportunities to practice continued to hinder the development of their reading skills. These findings suggest that reading difficulties are influenced by multiple interconnected personal, social, and environmental factors. Limited support from families and teachers, together with inadequate learning resources and distractions, reduces learners' motivation and opportunities to practice reading consistently. Conversely, encouragement from significant individuals strengthens learners' persistence despite existing challenges. The findings emphasize the importance of collaborative support from parents, teachers, peers, and the school community in creating an environment that promotes regular reading practice and literacy development.

3.3 Effects of Reading Difficulties on Academic Performance and Self-Esteem

The findings revealed that reading difficulties negatively affected participants' academic performance and self-esteem. Learners struggled to understand lessons in English, Mathematics, and Science because these subjects required strong reading comprehension. Many expressed concern about receiving low grades and failing Grade 6. Participants also reported regression in reading skills due to insufficient practice and experienced feelings of embarrassment, anxiety, and low confidence when reading English aloud, particularly when classmates laughed at or bullied them. Although they felt proud when reading Filipino texts successfully, reading English continued to evoke fear and insecurity. These findings demonstrate that reading difficulties influence not only academic achievement but also learners' emotional well-being and self-perception. Limited reading proficiency reduces students' ability to comprehend classroom instruction, complete academic tasks, and participate confidently in class. Negative peer experiences further diminish self-esteem, while successful reading experiences and supportive environments help strengthen confidence and encourage continued learning. Overall, the findings highlight the need for sustained academic, emotional, and social support to improve both reading performance and learners' overall development.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

This study explored the lived experiences of Grade 6 struggling readers in selected elementary schools in Quezon City. The findings revealed that participants experienced greater difficulty reading English than Filipino because of limited vocabulary, weak pronunciation, poor comprehension, and low reading fluency. These reading challenges negatively affected their motivation, emotions, academic performance, and study habits. Contributing factors included limited family and teacher support, inadequate reading materials, inconsistent reading practice, environmental distractions, and peer bullying. Consequently, participants experienced low academic performance, reduced self-confidence, fear of reading aloud, and anxiety about failing their subjects, although encouragement and consistent support helped strengthen their motivation and confidence to improve their reading skills.

The study recommends that students actively develop their reading skills by seeking guidance from teachers and family members while practicing reading regularly. Parents should encourage reading at home, provide appropriate reading materials, and participate in literacy programs to better support their children. Teachers should implement differentiated and phonics-based reading instruction, integrate engaging group and art-based learning activities, and foster a supportive classroom free from bullying. School administrators should strengthen partnerships with stakeholders to provide updated reading resources and improve access to literacy materials. Future researchers are encouraged to investigate the effectiveness of reading intervention programs and examine the long-term effects of reading difficulties on learners' academic performance and emotional well-being.

This study was limited to exploring the lived experiences of six Grade 6 struggling readers from selected elementary schools in Quezon City using a qualitative phenomenological approach. The findings reflect only the participants' experiences and therefore cannot be generalized to all Grade 6 learners or other educational settings. In addition, the study focused on identifying students' experiences, contributing factors, and their effects on academic performance and self-esteem, without evaluating the effectiveness of specific reading intervention programs.

Compliance with ethical standards

The authors conducted this study in accordance with accepted research ethics standards (Miteu, 2024), the ethical principles of the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board (PHREB), and the Data Privacy Act of 2012. The authors ensured the protection of participants' rights, dignity, privacy, and confidentiality through informed consent, informed assent, voluntary participation, and the use of pseudonyms. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. The authors maintained a safe interview environment to protect the participants' emotional and psychological well-being, ensured fair participant selection, implemented secure data storage with restricted access and planned data destruction after five years, and upheld transparency by providing participants with copies of their interview transcripts and study findings. Although formal ethics committee approval was not required, the research proposal was reviewed and approved by the panel of evaluators, and permission to conduct the study was granted by the Schools Division Office of the Department of Education.

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