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"FLEUR" as Reading Intervention: Reading Teachers' Lived Experiences

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Abstract

Aim: This qualitative study was undertaken to explore the experiences of reading teachers during the implementation of post pandemic reading intervention program in Tanza district.

Methodology: The study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of reading teachers during the implementation of post pandemic reading program. Eleven teachers were chosen based on the set criteria.

Results: The findings revealed that the reading program improved the skills of the learners. Meanwhile, the lack of commitment of involved persons such as uninterest of the struggling readers and uncommitted parents, teachers, and school administrator affected the implementation which was overcome by the reading teachers through strengthening their self-efficacy. To achieve the goal of the program, prioritization of teachers' and pupils' needs was suggested.

Conclusion: From the findings, it can be inferred that Project FLEUR helped alleviate the problem about the uptrend pattern in the number of struggling readers. Thus, it is recommended that the school continue implementing it and teachers' and pupils' needs must be prioritized. Collaboration with the stakeholders is also needed to address the problems encountered by teachers.

Keywords: struggling readers, sustainable reading program, self- efficacy

INTRODUCTION

Reading teachers, as the key persons during remediation classes, are the bearers of light and hope for the struggling readers. Their cultivated skills paved learners' way towards reading literacy. Gatcho and Bautista (2019) reviewed remedial reading teachers' role and noted the complexities of their functions similar to the statement of Baldevarona and Writes (2020). As reading is viewed as the heart of learning processes, Esposa (2021) stated that a skilled reader has an advantage in life situations.

The occurrence of pandemic COVID-19, however, halted the in-person activities of the schools and prompted the education agency to adopt various modes of distance learning which will help continue the learning process for the pupils even if they are at home. Findings of Almirol and Catoto (2022) and Schweiger (2022) disclosed that the closure of schools affected the learning process causing detrimental effect to students especially to those who need focus in reading noting that United States has 30-percent lagged in its reading standards in 2nd and 3rd graders.

In the country, sadly, the recent rank in 2022 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) commissioned by Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) revealed that Philippines is five to six years behind in the learning competencies (Servallos, 2023). This dismal outcome challenged the Department of Education (DepEd) as well as many schools to come up with a better idea on how to improve the literacy, more so in reading, of pupils which was noted to be the reason of this unsatisfying performance, thus reading remediation programs materialized.

DepEd implemented the Catch-Up Fridays program to solve the reading gaps among Filipino children. In fact, Doctolero (2023) in his article published in the country's website emphasized the need to bridge the gap in

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reading as the learning poverty soared to 90% based on World Bank indicator. In their studies, Almirol and Catoto (2022), Mangila and Adapon (2020), and Reyes and Guevarra (2021) noted that the pupils' reading skills were negatively affected by the pandemic. They also concluded that more reading time is beneficial and reading remediation may help in the child's reading journey.

In the municipality of Tanza, many schools are still using the pre-pandemic reading intervention program. The result of the 2023 annual Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) assessment showed a high number of struggling readers within the district. The same condition was experienced by the researcher with 790 out of 2,040 pupils were classified under frustration level. This depressing data prompted the launching of Project FLEUR (Florentinians Evolving Up in Reading), a new reading intervention program in Florentino Joya Elementary School, to bridge the gap starting at the grass roots level in reading up to the complex ones.

This intervention program caters pupils from Grade 1 to Grade 6 levels who were categorized under frustration level. One hour time was allotted for the intervention program which was done after the regular class hours. Pupils were grouped based on their reading capacity. Reading teachers started the remedial classes focusing on word recognition, followed by reading phrases, sentences, and paragraphs.

As the first post pandemic reading intervention program in Tanza, this study was conducted to explore the experiences of reading teachers during the implementation of the said project. The result, in the future, may be utilized by other schools and reading implementers in creating reading intervention or teacher-enhancement programs in conducting reading remedial classes.

Objectives

The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of reading teachers during the implementation of Project FLEUR (Florentinians Evolving Up in Reading) as a reading intervention program in the post-COVID era.

It also sought answers to the following questions:

1. How do the participants describe their experiences about the intervention program?
2. What are the problems encountered by the reading teachers while implementing the reading program?
3. What coping mechanisms are adopted by teachers to overcome the problems resulting from the intervention program?
4. Based on teachers' experiences, what are the suggestions of the teachers to improve the intervention program?

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of reading teachers during the implementation of post pandemic school reading program. Barrow (2017) explained that phenomenology is a reflective and inductive methodology that entails learning about a person's past or lived experiences as they recall them.

Natural setting is one of the characteristics of qualitative research with a limited number of participants who are available and willing to share their stories. This is where researchers tend to collect data in an area comfortable to the person involved (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Likewise, Boholano and Jamon (2021) reiterated that this design is used to dwell on the individual experiences which was also the aim of this study. Using this approach enabled both participants and the researcher to arrive at a co-constructed understanding of the experiences being shared.

Population and Sampling

This study used varied sources such as participants' experiences, validation by the key informants, and data from various studies. This study's participants through criterion sampling were chosen based on the following criteria: (a) Reading teachers from grade 1 to grade 6 level, (b) with at least three years of experience teaching English reading, and (c) facilitators implementing a reading program.

The next source of data were the key informants with specialized knowledge and mastery of the topic after decades of experiencing it. Their insights were significant in validating the result of the study and responses of the interviewees. They were (a) the English Key Administrator in the Tanza Municipality, (b) Master Teacher in English, and (c) Project FLEUR coordinator.

Meanwhile, findings and reviews of studies gathered from various references provided comprehensive information significant to this study. This is known as data triangulation in which the statements of the participants,



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the data from numerous research, and specialized knowledge of key informants who are valuable sources of information are used for further validation. Bhandari (2023) explained that triangulation in research is a strategy to enhance the findings' validity and credibility. Oberoi (2024) reasoned out that this is also used to cross-check the results ensuring that the drawn conclusions were well-supported.

Instrument

In this study, one-on-one in-depth interviews were administered to collect the data and discover the actual experiences of reading teachers during the implementation of a reading program. The semi-structured interview questions were validated by three experts. These include a master teacher with a doctoral degree teaching English for many years in one of the public schools in Manila, another master teacher is also a doctoral graduate teaching English and managing classes of struggling readers, and an awarded research teacher in Cavite who won national awards in research. He is also a doctoral degree graduate and is currently the president of research educators in Tanza district.

These were the semi-structured interview questions: (a) How do you feel about the program? (b) What are the problems that you encountered during the implementation of the program? (c) What coping mechanisms have you adapted to overcome the problems? (j) Based on your experiences, are there any suggestions or recommendations that you may share to help improve Project FLEUR?

Data Collection

The researcher sought permission through an email to the Division of Cavite to conduct the study in one of its schools and then requested to the school administrator through a letter and personal visit in the office to ask for approval to interview teachers facilitating the reading program. The next step was approaching teachers and asking for their agreement to participate in the study followed by the distribution of informed consent after explaining to them the details on how the interview will be conducted.

The in-depth interview session was conducted individually during the free and convenient time of the participants. For the key informants, the researcher visited the office of one of them to gather data while the other two agreed to meet after school hours. The interview process was audio recorded through a mobile phone and was transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

The data gathered were interpreted thematically following Caulfield's (2023) six steps: (a) familiarization with the interview extracts by reading, understanding, and analyzing it; (b) coding the concepts gathered; (c) generating themes after sorting out the themes and categorizing it; (d) reviewing themes to ensure that its concept is fitted to the objectives; (e) defining and naming themes for the constructs of the study; and (f) writing up to further explain its meaning through sample extracts.

This method was explained by Magulod et al. (2021) who stated that researchers interpreted the stories shared in everyday life in the same way that narrative analysis is done. The researcher utilized in-depth interview to gather data and understand the experiences of reading teachers which is a commonly used method in qualitative studies as it allows flexibility of conversation (Mashuri et al., 2022).

Ethical Consideration

The researcher adhered to the ethical standards during the conduct of the research processes. A clearance from the PUP Board of Ethics Committee was sought before conducting the study. Next is the submission of a letter requesting to conduct the study to the Division office, followed by the letter to the school head of the school where the study was conducted. The participants were then briefed about the purpose of the interview and allowed them to ask or raise any of their concerns or apprehensions and then informed consents were given to them.

The informed consent described the purpose of the study and guaranteed adherence to ethical principles such as anonymity and confidentiality. They were informed of the purposes and outcomes and were asked to sign it before the start of the interview sessions.



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RESULTS and DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results of the study. The matrices shown here contain the interview extracts from the transcribed answers of the participants and initial codes which were utilized in developing a theme to describe the answers to the interview questions.

The discussion is supported by related literature and studies, the information shared by key informants, and some documents issued by the Department of Education for better analysis and interpretation of the results.

1. Teachers' Experiences During the Implementation of Project FLEUR

Theme

Reading skills improvements

These are some of the interview extracts of the participants' experiences during the implementation of Project FLEUR.

Participant D shared, "This program was implemented as a requirement of DepEd and also the need to bridge the gap the pandemic created on learning. As the Grade 6 teacher handling struggling readers, I can say it is a good project that should be continued." and Participant B, "I am the proponent at the same time one of the facilitators of this new reading program and it is my responsibility to ensure that it is properly implemented with the cooperation of the teachers."

"This project is a big help in assessing the capacity and bridging the reading gap of learners. This is an extra work for reading teachers but have a positive impact on the improvement of the struggling readers." – Participant E

After analyzing, the researchers sorted out and assigned a theme to the initial codes consolidated. Thus, the theme developed is "Reading skills improvements."

Reading literacy programs are also the focus of other countries (Kamioka et al., 2019). Recent studies have shown the same reasons in conducting remediation programs. There is a need to bridge the gap in reading (Dixon & Oakhill, 2024; Doctolero, 2023). Filipino researchers, Gatcho and Bautista (2019), stated that the crisis in reading surged in number and both Adao et al. (2023) and Schult et al. (2021) affirmed that there is a need for a new reading program that may solve the current situation which is harder to handle since children were taught in a new normal mode of learning.

Therefore, it is essential to create a reading program suitable for the current conditions in the school. Even before, intervention programs are already helpful in solving academic problems. In fact, Almirol and Catoto (2022) remarked that pupils' lives change due to the impact of a reading program where they participated. Likewise, Reyes and Guevarra (2021) and Cronsell (2024) both proved this statement based on the result of their study that showed significance contribution of reading remediation to a child's reading journey as it improves the reading skills of left behind learners (Finau, 2021).

Even the pillars of education department are prioritizing the goal of bridging the reading gaps of Filipino children. This was described in the article published by Doctolero (2023) highlighting the implementation of Catch-up Fridays in public schools.

These results were further discussed and pointed out by key informants who shared their experiences as the persons expert in this field who have been doing the remediation programs for how many years.

2. Problems Encountered by the Reading Teachers While Implementing the Reading Program

Theme

Involved persons' lack of commitment

These are some of the excerpts gathered from the data. Participant A revealed, "Learner's readiness to read. Learners easily forgot what they read." wherein Participant B agreed, "Interest of the child in participating in the program." and Participant F, "Pupils are distracted. No focus."



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It was further explained by Participant J who remarked, "The common problem is the absenteeism of the pupil who are enrolled in the program." and Participant K who stated, "Learner's attention and poor retention."

Participant D even confessed, "There are many problems, one of which is time. There are so many things to do but limited time. On a personal level, it is stressful because of the full teaching load and other work so focus and priorities are affected" while Participant B commented, "Dedication of the teachers particularly (KSI) in giving their time to give intervention and monitoring. No matter how good the reading project is, if there's no proper coordination and cooperation, all will be futile."

After sorting and analyzing, the themes conceptualized was "Involved persons' lack of commitment". According to Cambridge Dictionary, commitment refers to willingness of one person to give time and energy to a job, activity, or something that they are involve with or they believe in. Supporting these observations, Renandya et al. (2020) deduced that as part of commitment towards pupil's learning, teaching tools and resources should be adequate. This was also mentioned by Agyei Ampofo (2019) and pointed out that laziness of some pupils to read books such as novels, newspapers and magazines are maybe due to insufficient supplies. On the other hand, parents' help is crucial in the continuity of learning at home. Truly, parents who followed-up their children's learning in the house may result to the development of a responsible and knowledgeable learner. Gundogmus (2018) and Ondras and Alvero (2023) cited this and wrote that parental indifference is one of the obstacles.

Meanwhile, teachers, school leaders, and program specialists should create an attainable reading program. Targeting the goal of curbing reading gap, all the aspects and involved persons must be considered (Solikhah, 2018). Teachers' seminars and trainings should be provided to acquire new teaching styles that may catch pupils' interest and attention (Cronsell, 2024; McLemor, 2023). Moreover, conflict of time and schedule can easily be managed by a dedicated teacher who is willing to share knowledge to learners (Ondras & Alvero, 2023). Committed persons tend to overcome the problem that they may encounter in any unfavorable situation they are experiencing.

3. Coping Mechanisms Adopted by Teachers to Overcome the Problems Resulting from the Intervention Program

Theme

Strengthening Self-Efficacy

After organization and analysis, it resulted to the development of the theme, "Strengthening self- efficacy." These are some of the comments of the participants.

Participant G shared, "Sometimes, I feel exhausted because it is additional tasks for us but when I saw my pupils improved, I felt some satisfaction in my heart." and Participant D, "I also read to cope up with the problems and stress. It helps me relax before facing the realities." Meanwhile, Participant F realized what is needed to be improved and mentioned, "I think I need to be creative." With the same reflections, Participant G noted, "Creativity can help so that pupils will learn more." and Participant H who said, "I need to catch the attention of my pupils to make them interested."

As stated by Hussain and Khan (2022), self- efficacy refers to a person's belief on how he or she can accomplish specific tasks based on their capabilities It plays a significant role in teacher's teaching and learning tasks as they accomplish their goals and combat the challenges in their instructional practices.

Reyes et al. (2023) mentioned that motivating oneself to find ways and overcoming the challenge is very rewarding. Pupils' achievement has a great motivational impact on teachers' attitude towards remediation programs. Ryan and Hendry (2023) stated that observing children's success is an affirmation for teachers that their strategies were working. It has a great influence on teachers' confidence in their ability to teach reading (Cronsell, 2024).

In 2023, Ryan and Hendry pointed out that to boost confidence in teaching, seminars and workshops to capacitate teachers with necessary skills should be conducted. They added that professional learning experiences are valued by educators as these enabled them to become successful in their field. Liebfreund and Amendum (2017) concluded that supporting teachers gave an assurance that they would give their best in the field while facilitating remediation programs. Strengthening their capacity is important.

Lack of interest of pupils in reading can be addressed by using multiple teaching strategies. Pocaan et al. (2022) and Reyes et al. (2023) underscored this and narrated that teachers should provide effective learning styles



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to achieve the no one should be left behind policy of the education agency. It was likewise explained by Solikha (2018) and stated that traditional teaching practices can be the root of some problems. Additionally, Acita et al. (2022) highlighted teachers' effort to develop creative and catchy teaching tools to aid in the instruction. Varied teaching strategies and availability of appropriate materials for reading is a perfect combination to achieve academic goals. Meanwhile, collaborating with stakeholders may help in the provision of reading materials and may offer support system (Reyes et al., 2023).

4. Suggestions and Recommendations to Improve the Reading Program

Theme

Prioritization of teachers' and learners' needs

Most of the reading teachers brought up "Establishment of reading room" as their main suggestion to ensure the effectivity of the program so that pupils will not be distracted. Five teachers reasoned out such as Participant A who explained, "There should have a specific space for reading activities so that pupils can focus." Participant F agreed to this, "Allocate space for the child who needs to focus on reading so that they cannot be distracted."

Having also this in mind, Participant G emphasized, "I just wish that we could have a place that is conducive enough for learning." while Participant H simply said,

"Extra classroom for this remediation." which was nodded by Participant K, "Allotting a classroom for remediation classes will be okay."

Coordination with stakeholders was also mentioned by the participants. This include Participant B who shared, "Proper coordination with the stakeholders so that the reading program is not only limited to the school but also to the community." She also added, "All teachers should be involved in the program not only reading teachers."

Participant D argued, "Other subject teachers should also be involved so that they can help the students in this specific subject taught. Having them teach vocabulary for their subject might also help increase the learners' vocabulary and not only the English teacher's duty. It's a joint effort that should be made by all." while Participant E suggested, "Reading teachers should be different from subject teachers so that there will be a focus on the goal."

In implementing an intervention program, there are three factors that should be considered. These include the program action plan, the one who will handle it and the participants (Solikha, 2018). This was supported by the results of the studies of Almirol and Catoto (2022), (Panda et al. (2022) and Ondras and Alvero (2023) who reiterated that that administrative support is crucial to the reading campaign. School should ensure that the needs of the teachers and pupils must be provided.

Teachers should be free from instructional barriers and ample time is provided. They should also be given capacity building to unlock effective styles and meet the target competencies (Adao et al., 2023). In the same way, Gatcho and Bautista (2019) explained that to cultivate their full potential, professional development trainings are essential.

Also, Ondras and Alvero (2023) stated that it requires well-designed and ongoing professional development to equip educators with the knowledge that they need for effective reading instruction to cater the needs and level up the skills of the learners (Ardiansyah & Kuswardani, 2021).

With the community distractions that are common nowadays, teaching tools must heighten pupils' interest. The study of Reyes and Guevarra (2021) showed that reading materials, activity sheets and study guide were important aspects for reading remediation instruction. Moreover, Adao et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of pupils' engagement through contextualized learning resources which may help develop better comprehension and understanding. Moreover, providing a classroom to avoid distractions help pupils to focus.

The program plan should include the assessment part. Assessing reading programs is necessary to determine its effectiveness based on the outcomes and if it needs revision. Pocaan et al. (2022) and Renandya et al. (2020) both explained that effective reading program develops reading competence in all students and is based on proven practices. The result of the unified efforts of the three factors mentioned previously are significant in achieving the goal of lessening the number of stalled readers.



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Conclusion

Reading teachers, as they described their experiences about Project FLEUR, highlighted that the reading program improves the reading skills of the learners. The problems they encountered that affected the facilitation of teaching and learning process was the lack of commitment of involved persons in this reading intervention program such as pupils, parents, teachers, and administrator. Pupils showing enthusiasm to learn will surely grasp what is being taught to them, especially if the parents will exert effort to help their children. Meanwhile, committed teachers and school administrator contribute a lot to the achievement of the goal.

The participants solved the problems by strengthening self-efficacy through motivating, caring, and capacitating themselves. Moreover, finding happiness and fulfillment when learners show improvements can help boost one's morale and assessing projects implemented is part of the process to evaluate if the program is effective or needs modification. Based on the result, it is suggested that the needs of the teachers and learners must be prioritized.

Recommendations

It is recommended to continue the implementation of Project FLEUR since it is proven to lessen the number of struggling readers. It is a sustainable reading program that helped improve reading skills. A new plan for skills enrichment of those pupils who showed improvements could be made for the continuous tracking of their progress. Commitment of pupils, parents, teachers, and school administrator in implementing the reading intervention program should also be ensured.

To overcome problems, teachers should strengthen self-efficacy. A teacher with strong determination can adapt to any situations and hardships that he or she may encounter. Lastly, needs of teachers and learners must also be prioritized.

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