

TO LOCK AND TO UNLOCK: UNDERSTANDING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS WITH STUDENTS HAVING READING DIFFICULTY

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Abstract

Teaching a student with reading difficulty is absolutely a challenging experience but through it the researchers were able to analyze the study in which it aimed to understand and provide clear perspective of the lived experience of the ten (10) English teachers of Balibago National High School, Curriculum Year 2014-2015. Eventually, the study was evaluated for better understanding. The researchers employed a phenomenological approach in understanding the lived experience of teachers through intensive interviews and recorded their written responses grouping them into six (6) clusters. The initial 3 clusters were categorized into textural themes such as (1) life changing experience – resulted from real experience as they diagnose the reading difficulty of the students; (2) undergoing intense crisis- where teachers felt the heaviness of the challenge, and (3) dichotomy of emotions – about appreciation to the challenge encountered by the teachers; expressed after exerting their best efforts, time and sacrifice for students' welfare. The final 3 clusters were categorized into structural theme such as (4) overcoming challenges- the stage where teachers devised some teaching strategies for better output; (5) an urgency for wider awareness- another stage in which they applied remedial measures, and lastly (6) sustaining hope for the student's future. Moreover, based on textural and structural descriptions, the following conclusion were drawn: the live experience of teachers having students with reading difficulty is really a life changing experience and they acknowledged that they had to cope with the challenges encountered with positive attitude for the secular welfare of the students.

Keywords: Lived Experience, Lock, Public High School Teachers, Reading Difficulty, Students, Unlock

INTRODUCTION

The study focused on describing the lived experience of public high school teachers with students having reading difficulty in English subjects from Grades 7 through 10 with the intention of doing it as an educational and institutional advancement. To reach for a solution, the researchers worked out the central questions about the lived experience of teachers of students with reading difficulty and the how did the participants cope with the challenges they encountered having students with reading difficulty. Reading Difficulty is the most common

problem that the teacher usually encounters among students who are studying English as a second language.

Reading would be difficult to teach with the struggling students if the equity issues and some strategies wouldn't be considered. Therefore, to avoid setting up condition in which only few students will benefit, thus, good readers get better and poor readers get poorer. The teacher should think of a better way on how he or she could deal with the students with reading problem. Most of the time, the things that we want to attain through reading is knowledge, understanding and comprehension. Of course, letters and words are the primary foundation of understanding. But comprehending the reading material is happening in the brain not on the reading passage.

The researchers established a firm ground of this study on the principle of Piaget's (1953) theory of Cognitive Constructivism as cited by Wadsworth (2004). Piaget's theory of cognitive development proposes that humans cannot be given information, which they immediately understand and use; instead, humans must construct their own knowledge. He stated that children are going through four different stages of development such as sensory motor stage, which a child goes through from ages zero to two; preoperational stage (two to seven years old), concrete operational stage (seven to eleven years old), and the formal operational stage (eleven years old to adulthood). In Piaget's sensory motor stage children begin to discover their environment around them through their own senses and physical activity and then language, as they get older within this stage. Children in his next stage of preoperational develop their own language skills but still cannot grasp the thoughts of others. As Piaget described within this stage there is "symbolic function" where children begin to distinguish pictures or symbols for different objects in their immediate environment and another sub-stage of "intuitive thought" where children ask all sorts of questions about everything within their environment. Within Piaget's concrete operational stage, a pivotal growth point in the brain in logical development, children begin to replace intuitive thought with their own logical reasoning. In formal operational stage children, up to adulthood, will start using higher levels of thinking or abstract ideas to solve problems. Piaget's stages are well known and are accepted as the basis for depicting the growth of logical thinking in children.

The related literature and studies reviewed helped in the conceptualization and elaboration of the present study about reading difficulties among BNHS students. The researchers synthesized various papers and studies concerning the study to support its foundation and discussions. Reading as explained by Morgan, D.(2009) is a neurological process performed by the brain. When a child finds learning to read hard, the reason almost always lies in the mechanics of this neurological process. By understanding the process, how it can go wrong and the symptoms of each potential problem, it is far easier to understand the situation and fix it. This article is an overview of the seven main causes of reading difficulty and their symptoms. For more detail on any particular cause of difficulty, refer to my article on it. Also commented: Reading is an integral part of the language system and is closely linked to both spoken language and writing (Lerner, 2009). Reading is one of the guiding passions of my life (Bush, 2015).

When it comes to reading, James, D. (2015) stated that second-language students face many problems such as pronunciation, fluency and intonation, practice, difficult reading materials and teachers who don't really care. Furthermore, Smith, F. (2004) explained explicitly; "The more we read, the more we are able to read. . . . Every time a reader meets a new word, something new is likely to be learned about the identification and meaning of words. Every time a new text is read, something new is likely to be learned about reading different kinds of text. Learning to read is not a process of building up a repertoire of specific skills, which make all kinds of reading possible. Instead, experience increases the ability to read different kinds of text." According to Salvia, J. et al, (2013) A number of tests and subtests are designed to assess the accuracy and/or fluency of a student's oral reading. Oral reading tests consist of a series of graded paragraphs that are read sequentially by a student. The examiner notes errors and behaviors that characterize the student's oral reading.

The reading process is definitely not one of applying skills like those of the Reading First initiative separately and sequentially. It is a process of orchestrating various skills into effective strategies for processing text: strategies like predicting (thinking ahead) and confirming or correcting. It is not a strictly linear process, either, even when a reader reads a text out loud linearly, one word and one sentence after another, word perfectly. No, it is a nonlinear process, as eye fixations amply demonstrate and—when effective—it is strategy-driven, yet in fine detail

unpredictable from moment to moment, for any reader reading any text at any given time (Weaver, 2009).

Some American studies have shown that many adolescent boys lose interest in reading because they do not see its relevance to real life (Chua, 2011). Take note of this statement: For students of every ability and background, it's the simple miraculous act of reading a good book that turns them into readers, because even for the least experienced, most reluctant reader, it's the one good book that changes everything. The job of adults who care about reading is to move heaven and earth to put that book into a child's hands. Atwell(2007) "Perhaps the most powerful way to encourage children to read is to expose them to light reading, a kind of reading that 13 schools pretend doesn't exist, and a kind of reading that many children, for economic or ideological reasons, are deprived of. I suspect that light reading is the way nearly all of us learned to read... There is [some] evidence that light reading can serve as a conduit to heavier reading. It provides both the motivation for more reading and the linguistic competence that makes harder reading possible (Krashen, 2004)."

Layne, in his book [Igniting a Passion for Reading](#) (2009) on p.16 and in Appendix D provides examples of the reading and interest surveys he does with his students. His strategy is to observe the students who need help the most. And then, using the survey, and with the librarian's help, "start to do our thing - pulling books, finding, hunting, searching for any type of print that matches a given student's targeted interest... then we pull him or her aside and deliver the message in both word and deed: *I thought of you...*" Reading difficulties present serious and potentially lifelong challenges. Children who do not read well are more likely to be retained a grade in school, drop out of high school, become a teen parent, or enter the juvenile justice system (Connor, et. al., 2014). On the other hand, one of the causes of reading difficulty is the ailment called dyslexia. Dyslexia refers to disturbance in the ability to learn in general and the ability to read in particular (Inciong, 2007). It is a specific reading disorder characterized by difficulties in decoding single words (Kaplan, 2013). "School Success for Kids with Dyslexia and Other Reading Difficulties" provides parents and teachers with goals that will meet the needs of students who are struggling with reading, leading them to work through their difficulties and enjoy reading (Dunson, 2012).

Miscese, R. (2007) suggest seven (7) steps for the teachers on how to help students who struggle with reading: (1) Learn More!, (2) Understand the Intent of Effective Remediation (3) Recognize Direct Intervention is Essential, (4) Evaluate the Student and Identify Deficiencies in Necessary Skills (5) Set an Effective Remediation Plan: (a) Use effective instruction, (b) Target instruction, (c) Directly teach all skills, (d) Teach complete skills and knowledge, (e) Present information systematically, (f) Use an intensive remediation schedule, and (g) Individual tutoring is ideal! (6) Explain the Reading Remediation Plan to the Student, (7) Take Action! Teach the Student with Effective Targeted Direct Instruction. He continued saying: In essence, children who are likely to have difficulties learning to read can be readily observed in the initial stages of their literacy development. They approach the reading of words and text in a laborious manner, demonstrating difficulties linking sounds (phonemes) to letters and letter patterns. Their reading is hesitant and characterized by frequent starts, stops, and mispronunciations. Comprehension of the material being read is usually extremely poor. However, it is often not because he or she is not smart enough. In fact, many children who have difficulty learning to read are bright and motivated to learn to read – at least initially. Their difficulties understanding what they have read occur because it takes far too long to read words, leaving little energy for remembering and comprehending what was read. Unfortunately, the slow and inaccurate reading of words cannot be improved in any appreciable way by using the context of what is read to help pronounce the words correctly. Consequently, while the fundamental purpose of reading is to derive meaning from print, the key to comprehension starts with the rapid and accurate reading of words. In fact, difficulties in decoding unfamiliar words and learning to recognize words rapidly are at the core of most reading difficulties. These difficulties can be traced systematically to initial difficulties in understanding that the language that is heard by the ear is actually composed of smaller segments of sound (e.g., phonemic awareness). And here we come full circle - many of these early difficulties in developing phonemic awareness are due to a lack of literacy and oral language interactions with adults during infancy and early childhood. Thus, because the environments most bereft of these interactions are those characterized by poverty, the cycle continues.

Lyon, G. (2001) expressed this statement: Poor readers lag far behind in vocabulary development and in the acquisition of strategies for understanding what they read, and they frequently avoid reading and other assignments that require reading. By high school, the potential of these students to enter college has decreased substantially. Students who have stayed in school long enough to reach high school tell us they hate to read because it is so difficult and it makes them feel “dumb.” As a high school junior in one of our studies remarked, “I would rather have a root canal than read.” The other major form of reading difficulty is reading comprehension impairment. These children typically read aloud accurately and fluently, but have difficulty understanding what they have read. Reading comprehension impairment appears to arise from weaknesses in a range oral language skills including poor vocabulary knowledge, weak grammatical skills and difficulties in oral language comprehension (Snowling & Holme, 2012).

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Moats, L, & Tolman, C. (2009) stated that researchers have identified three kinds of developmental reading disabilities that often overlap but that can be separate and distinct: (1) phonological deficit, (2) processing speed/orthographic processing deficit, and (3) comprehension deficit. Likewise they proposed that they are three kinds of developmental reading disabilities that often overlap but that can be separate and distinct: (1) *Phonological deficit*, implicating a core problem in the phonological processing system of oral language. (2) *Processing speed/orthographic processing deficit*, affecting speed and accuracy of printed word recognition (also called *naming speed problem* or *fluency problem*). (3) *Comprehension deficit*, often coinciding with the first two types of problems, but specifically found in children with social-linguistic disabilities (e.g., autism spectrum), vocabulary weaknesses, generalized language learning disorders, and learning difficulties that affect abstract reasoning and logical thinking.

In an attempt to simply get students to read more, many teachers have carved out blocks of uninterrupted class time for students to practice reading independently. This approach, sometimes known by the acronym SSR (Sustained Silent Reading) or DEAR (Drop everything and Read), seems intuitively appropriate. While SSR and DEAR clearly communicate the value schools attach to reading and serve to alleviate the surface-level problem of students spending

too little time practicing, there are other factors to consider beyond merely providing this basic encouragement for students to read more(Reed, D., 2005).

Learning disabilities are usually first noticed when children begin to fail in school 17
Parents and preschool teachers are often the first to see early signs of learning disabilities.
Children may have difficulty learning basic skills in reading or understanding reading.
Students with learning disabilities in reading or dyslexia often have difficulty comprehending text in books and other reading material that is written at their grade levels. This can occur for several possible reasons. *First*, the material may be written at a level that is beyond their current independent reading skill level. *Second*, they may have limited prior knowledge about the content being read or have limited vocabulary knowledge. This can lead to confusion during reading and in class discussion about what is being read. *Third*, they may not be aware of how the reading material is structured as in the elements of story structure, the organization of the material in a text book, or the characteristics of the genre of literature being read. *Fourth*, the meaning of sentences and passages may become lost as the reader struggles with the mechanics of reading. This leads to difficulty remembering what was read. *Fifth*, they may have difficulty determining what information is important in written passages. It is a common misconception about learning disabilities that people who have them cannot learn or are less intelligent than their peers. Actually, this is not the case. People with learning disabilities are actually as intelligent as their peers. In fact, it is even possible to have a learning disability and be gifted as well. The actual difference is that people with learning disabilities learn differently and may need a variety of instructional practices to learn effectively (Logsdon, 2014).

Laura, R.,& Johnson, S.(2014) stated that under the new requirements, a child has a specific learning disability if the child does not achieve adequately for the child's age or to meet the state-approved grade-level standards in one or more of the following areas, when provided with learning experience and instruction appropriate for the child's age or state-approved grade-level standards: (i) oral expression (ii) listening comprehension (iii) written expression (iv)basic reading skill (v) reading fluency skills (vi) reading comprehension (vi) mathematics calculation (viii) mathematics' problem solving.

METHODOLOGY

Considering the research problem of this study which focused on describing and understanding the lived experiences of teachers regarding students with reading difficulties which is an example of phenomena, the researchers employed phenomenological research design. Through in-depth interviews, guided by the interview protocol, with 10 teachers who have lived the experience of being a teacher of students with reading difficulty. The researchers opted to study 10 English teachers from Balibago National High School utilizing purposive sampling strategy through which they intentionally selected the individuals and sites for study so they could purposely inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study thus providing quality assurance. The students with reading difficulties were those enrolled under Grades 7 to 10. The researchers conducted multiple in-depth interviews using a research protocol that is a predesigned form containing the research questions which are general and open-minded considering the guidelines of Moustakas (1994) as reintroduced by Creswell (2007). However, the interview form was self-made and not standardized, so the researcher presented it to credible authorities in qualitative research for comments and recommendations for validity.

Data were gathered considering the availability of the participants, gaining access and establishing a rapport with them, which are all important to procure good data. The researchers in proper approach explained to them the relevance of this study; interviewed individually and applied the validation research instrument utilized in the study. To make it happen, the researchers contacted each participant personally and through phones to obtain consent and set up appointments. They also considered the willingness of the participants before conducting the in-depth interview. Finally, the researchers obtained the consent of the participants to take note and record their responses. Ethical standards were maintained throughout the course of the study by giving careful attention. For the procurement of the necessary data, the researchers considered the free time of each participant in order to avoid class interruption and made assurance that their confidential data would be in good hands. In case of incomplete data, the researchers used their gadgets by contacting them and ask questions not in unholy hours.

Social cognitive theory was the framework that guided data collection and data analysis. According to social cognitive theory children are products of their social and cultural environment (Piaget, 2010). When there is a mismatch of environment, expectations, tasks and a child’s developmental level learning is not at an optimal level for the child. All responses of the participants were recorded in writing by the researcher then carefully analyzed for accuracy. Through this strategy, she was able to review the transcripts to find its relevance to her research.

Preliminary interpretations were also discussed with participants during and following each interview, which could help to uncover and lend support for the emerging essential themes. Finally, the researcher performed verification of the overall “essence” of the phenomenon under study again by meeting the participants and asking them to verify or correct the synthesis of their responses. This was taken as the last so the validity of the essence was obtained thus credibility was established.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

At the start, the researchers expressed her passion, desire, and what motivated her to do this part which is popularly called as **bracketing**. The horizontalization of this study is presented through listing the significant statements that were extracted from the verbatim transcriptions of the participants’ responses. These statements were read, verified and analyzed for several times by the researcher with the occasional assistance of her professional husband, and to answer two central questions with probing questions in the research protocol. From the tabulated word-for-word transcriptions, the researchers presented the following data.

Significant Statements of Teachers Lived Experience with Students having Reading Difficulty
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. poor foundation for the development of skills 2. so hard and full of sacrifice 3. disappointing when they fail to meet the expected competencies 4. difficult but challenging and fulfilling 5. magnified perception of different growth and maturation 6. pleasant despite student’s inadequacy 7. much gratifying when you succeed helping them 8. pains a lot seeing a non-reader 9. diagnose first and be treated 10. It is like going back to the lower steps in the ladder of learning 11. hardships and disappointments were turned into challenges 12. give extra time to let them read and be corrected

13. need to adjust according to their level and needs
14. It's like you're in helpless situation
15. great patience is needed
16. work with dedication and be always innovative
17. boost their confidence and give them more challenges
18. devise teaching strategies
19. add pictures and/or video clips to the reading material
20. lack of attention from parents and teachers during their early age of schooling
21. remedial lessons needed
22. need motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic
23. no reading habit, no reading resources
24. schools should allocate space and teachers for the reading improvement program
25. promote positive attitude towards effective reading through innovative projects/programs
26. conduct reading intervention personally one by one
27. tailor questions according to their level
28. provide appropriate materials
29. initiate group reading; if they hear, they can imitate the sound of the word
30. use technology for more applications
31. there is always a bright future for students who are motivated to do what is right.
32. stressful and needs long patience
33. has pity to the students but proud and dignified after seeing his/her improvement
34. can't achieve the actual reading level and satisfaction for high school readers
35. poor reading habits that often led to poor reading advancement
36. easily get discouraged when the class started to laugh at them
37. they need to be surrounded by positive people (parents, teachers, peers)
38. tough and patience-enduring task, but feel privileged upon seeing the progress on their performance
39. lesson should be from the specific or basic to general
40. teach students based on their level of understanding

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1. As to what is lived experience of teachers of students with reading difficulty

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Three themes about the experiences of teachers came up. *Theme 1* focused on the life-changing experience of teachers as they courageously faced the challenges, pains, and difficulties which in turn allowed them to realize and appreciate the reason why they chose their noble career in this mortal life. *Theme 2* centered on a description of teachers' dichotomy of emotions which explicitly revealed their feelings as they share their talents and skills for the secular welfare of their students. Basically, all these themes supported the over-all perception of teachers' experience having students with reading difficulty.

2. As to how the teachers cope with the challenges encountered having students with reading difficulty

Three essential emerging themes explained on how the participants cope the challenges they encountered in helping a student with reading difficulty. *Theme 4: Overcoming Challenges* emphasized the teachers' successful struggle as they applied different strategies and intervention that would benefit the students with difficulty in reading.. *Theme 5: Urgency for Wider Awareness* highlighted the participants' desire to diagnose and remedy the prevailing problem in order to produce better outcome in the end and finally, *Theme 6: Sustaining Hope for the Student's Future* positively affirmed teachers' optimism about their students' future through their full support and in cooperation with parents and the government. Moreover, the participants acknowledged that even though this endeavor was not easy to perform, still they showed willingness to do their part and contribute to the bright future of their students and to realize their importance to the better life of them. 41

Essence. In reality, the lived experience of teachers in helping the students with reading difficulty, when applied personally with deep meditation, would result to a life –changing scenario, the mutual transformation in the inner selves of the teachers as well as the students as they positively approach their day-to-day activities.

CONCLUSIONS

The researchers emerged with the following conclusions based on the textural and structural descriptions: the lived experience of teachers having students with reading difficulty is truly a life-changing experience coupled with many facets of challenges, and the participants have acknowledged that they need to cope with the challenges encountered with positive attitude and strong determination to fully help the students with reading difficulty – for them to be productive and useful in the society. The researchers, after taking into consideration the findings and conclusions of this study, drew forth the following recommendations anticipating favorable actions: teachers should expect light, moderate, and heavy challenges as they try to help the students with reading difficulty and be ready with whatever demands that come along their roles as teachers, teachers should be given sufficient training through workshops and seminars to enable them to understand the importance of acceptance to the student's conditions and limitations and eventually leading them to give their services with quality and best output, teachers should help advocate the wider awareness and education of other professionals, families, friends and communities regarding the students' difficulty in reading,

teachers handling students with reading difficulty should collaborate with their parents in order to create a better atmosphere of learning, Occupational Therapist and other concerned professionals working collaboratively with the school teachers through individualized programs and activities for the benefit of the students, School Administrators must specifically address the concerns and expectations of parents and teachers by providing the more precise facilities and service to meet the needs of the student with reading difficulty, and Administrators, teachers, and parents need to work collaboratively in order to develop and facilitate the most effective program for children with reading difficulty. This program should be included in the School Improvement Plan (STP). 43

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