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## **Lived Experiences of the Elementary School Teachers in Teaching Reading in the New Normal Education**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This phenomenological investigation was carried out to ascertain teachers' experiences in imparting reading instruction to students in the context of this new standard education. This study sought to understand the experiences, difficulties, learning insights, and coping methods of elementary school teachers in the context of students' reading competency under the new normal. An enrichment program was created as part of this study to assist teachers in meeting the needs of the students in terms of reading and comprehension. All of the primary school teachers at Montevista Central Elementary School took part in this study. The researcher-made semi-constructed questionnaires were the instrument utilized to collect the data. The researcher accurately and confidently assessed the data collected using Colaizzi's approach of data analysis.*

*The results of the study showed that identifying proficient and subpar readers is difficult because of new normal schooling. The research also revealed that teachers were urged to tighten their hold on supporting reading competency in the context of the new learning modality. The findings show that teachers worked hard to maintain a high standard of instruction that also paid attention to students' reading competency in the new usual setting. The study suggests that teachers be given the task of enhancing their students' reading abilities through comprehensive support, inspiration, and accurate assessments. In essence, the overall findings showed that instructors play an important role in helping students learn to read. They are also excellent motivators and can have an impact on students' ability to function effectively as persons.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Experiences of Teachers toward Teaching Reading amidst the New Normal Education; Reading Skills; Reading Proficiency; Learning Insights; Challenges Encountered; Coping Mechanisms; Enrichment Program*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on educational institutions and systems, affecting over 1.7 billion pupils, including 99% from low- and lower-middle-income households. It also had personal and social ramifications for students, instructors, and school staff, stressing their capacity and hindering initiatives to improve school operations.

In the United States, the new educational standard is difficult for both teachers and pupils to adapt to. Teachers worry that their kids will lag behind without the structures, assistance, and resources that schools can provide. Educators at the Literacy Lab work with 6000 children each day. Reading proficiency may end up being the most significant predictor of success.

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According to educators, many kids do not have adequate access at home to the same tools that allow them to learn to read effectively in the classroom (Wtop) [1].

The adoption of new normal education raises questions about how teachers and students can sustain a high-quality education that promotes reading literacy. Leonor Briones ordered the implementation of DepEd Memorandum No. 173 series of 2019 to align priorities towards the promotion of a reading culture.

This study aims to identify the problems with elementary school instructors and students adapting to the new standard of education in Montevista, Davao de Oro and Montevista Central Elementary School. It will also show how primary school teachers actually instruct students in reading and develop an enrichment program based on the findings. Parents shared that learners only know how to read English words, teachers were unable to monitor and focus on developing and honing their reading skills, and learners have little opportunity to practice reading skills.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The hypotheses that underpin this investigation are presented in this section. The ideas that underpin this research are examined through the lenses of Lev Vygotsky's Social Constructivism Theory from 1968, Roger Moore's Transactional Distance Theory from 1988, and Stephen Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory from 1982.

The social constructivism learning theory was first presented by Lev Vygotsky in 1968 and emphasizes the collaborative aspect of learning. It holds that language and culture are essential for a person's intellectual development and how they see the world. Vygotsky believed that all learning tasks (irrespective of the level of difficulty) can be performed by learners under adult guidance or with peer collaboration. As students interact with people, the material and immaterial environment, they gain understanding and gather experience needed to live successful and functional lives.

Moore's Transactional Distance Theory (Hanson et al.) [2] is a theory that examines students' autonomy and the distance between them and their professors in distant learning programs. It identifies three types of interactions between the educator and the student: Learner-content, Learner-Learner, and Learner-Instructor. Moore examines learner autonomy in a number of facets, noting that in traditional educational settings, students rely on teachers for direction.

The Second Language Acquisition Theory, developed by Stephen Krashen in 1982, is the final theory that underpins this research. It includes the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis, Monitor hypothesis, Natural Order hypothesis, Input hypothesis, and Affective Filter hypothesis. According to Krashen, passive moods lead to negative feelings such as lack of drive, low self-esteem, and anxiety. To help students improve their self-esteem and feel more secure and content, language teachers should design welcoming, lower affective filter, and motivation-stimulating study environments.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The study was conducted to investigate the lived experiences of the primary school teachers in teaching reading to struggling readers in the new normal education.

Specifically, this study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What are the learning insights gained by the elementary school teachers in teaching reading in the new normal education?
2. How do elementary school teachers describe the challenges encountered in teaching reading in the new normal education?
3. How do elementary school teachers cope with the challenges encountered in teaching reading in the new normal education?
4. What enrichment program can be developed based on the results of the study?

## **METHODS**

This study is a qualitative research using thematic analysis essential tool for coming up with more meaningful data on the lived experiences of the primary school teachers in teaching reading to struggling readers in the new normal education. Specifically, the Colaizzi's (1978) as cited by Wirihana et al. [4] distinctive processes were applied in the data analysis. The study was conducted in Montevista Central Elementary School involving ten primary school teachers. The study used criterion-based sampling as its sampling design. The participants were selected based on some criteria. The criteria for selecting the participants were: (1) participants must teach English subject or Reading Class; (2) encounters first-hand experiences in teaching reading in new normal education; and, (3) able to describe all necessary and relevant experiences related to the study.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Learning Insights Gained by the Elementary School Teachers in Teaching Reading in the New Normal Education**

Encouragement is the key to maintaining learners' interest in reading. Teachers may greatly influence students' interest in and desire for reading by stimulating and encouraging them. Interests are the awareness, desire, and focus on a certain thing that is connected to intense emotions.

Honey affirmed:

*"As a teacher, my first responsibility is to instill in them the belief that reading is both enjoyable and essential to learning."*

The findings suggest that the majority of elementary school teachers consider themselves as motivators. Encouragement of the learners to maintain their motivation in learning will depend on the type of learners. Introvert learners' motivation comes within themselves, unlike extrovert learners, whose motivation influences by outside factors like teachers' encouragement. Hence, Information Processing Theory claims that extroverts may prefer active, highly collaborative environments while introverts prefer less interaction and less collaboration.

In this new normal education, the learners' reading proficiency is at risk. As to Llego [5], effective readers understand the purpose of their reading and adjust their reading behaviors (according to the purpose (skimming, scanning, or reading attentively for detail). They discover that writings seem different depending on who is reading them. Goal, audience, and context Understanding the characteristics of various text forms aid readers in making sense.

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Honey and Gemma claimed:

*"I couldn't dispute that this new normal education learners have weak reading skills and low performance. And this saddens me."*

With these statements, the researcher concludes that teachers are claiming that the reading proficiency of today's learners is in poor condition. As Llego [5] supported, the 3Bs initiative will play a crucial role in improving reading during this new normal education. In terms of intensifying reading skills, the Department of Education (DepEd) released Memorandum No. 173, s. 2019: "Hamon: Bawat Bata Bumabasa (3Bs Initiative). The said memorandum is an Early Literacy Program, where learners "Learn to Read" will follow the elements of reading called "The Big Six."

Maddie supported:

*"It is unfortunate that several poor readers still require a great deal of assistance and support, especially during this pandemic."*

The COVID-19 pandemic is causing more than 1.6 billion children and youth to be out of school in 161 countries, with 53% in low- and middle-income countries. Distance is a barrier between teacher and learner interaction, leading to reading deficiency. Teachers must provide holistic support to aid the learners' deficiency in understanding, especially in reading and comprehension. Khamalludeen [6] emphasized that lecturers need to remember that learning must go on, and Segovia [7] emphasized that the education systems have taken a heavy beating from the pandemic.

May said:

*"My first step in assisting learners is to compose or prepare another sheet of activity that is easier for struggling learners to know, particularly in reading comprehension."*

One thing that possibly happens in teachers' support to the learners' reading proficiency is that they prepare substantial learning materials. Nowadays, it implements the new normal education. Teachers have been indifferent in preparation for conducting classes by any means. Before the pandemic, teachers prepared their lessons a few days or weeks before discussing it with the learners. However, this time around, their time had to be longer. They need to prepare and finish all the modules for the entire school year before classes get started (Segovia) [7].

Rose said:

*"I am sending/providing reading materials with exercises. I also follow up with my learners by text and chat, and home visits for individuals close to the school."*

The teacher is in charge of monitoring the progress of the learners. Learners can contact the teacher by email, phone, text message/instant messaging, and other methods. The teacher shall do home visits to learners needing remediation or help. Any family member or other stakeholders in the community need to serve as para-teachers (Briones) [8].

Maddie added:

*"I do my best to create a safe and comfortable learning environment for them because some learners aren't non-readers; they're just afraid of making mistakes in reading, especially when asked to read aloud."*

Llego [5] suggests that all language teachers and other teachers willing to be tapped for reading literacy programs should serve as reading teachers. Briones [8] suggests tailored teaching that enables students to use self-learning modules (SLMs) in paper or digital format. Elementary school teachers' learning insights in teaching reading in the new normal education focused on moral and holistic support. Online platforms are helpful and valuable during this new normal education.

Table 1 illustrates the initial codes, subthemes, and emerging themes based on the learning insights gained by the elementary school teachers in teaching reading in the new normal education.

**Table 1.** *The Learning Insights Gained by the Elementary School Teachers in Teaching Reading in the New Normal Education*

Subthemes	Emerging Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers encourage learners to develop their reading skills.</li> <li>• Maintain learners' interest and love of reading despite the current situation.</li> <li>• Teachers serve as facilitators and motivators to all learners especially learners with poor performance in reading.</li> </ul>	<p>Encouragement is the key to maintaining learners' interest in reading</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In this new normal education, reading proficiency is at its lowest.</li> <li>• Learner's reading comprehension declined.</li> <li>• The new mode of education greatly affects the learners' reading proficiency and comprehension.</li> </ul>	<p>In this new normal education, the learners' reading proficiency is at risk</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers exert effort for learners to keep learning especially in reading despite the new normal education.</li> <li>• Teachers provide various materials and other methods to support the learning of the learners.</li> <li>• Teachers ask assistance to the parents when it comes in supervising the learners in reading at home.</li> </ul>	<p>The holistic support of teachers is necessary</p>



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### Challenges Encountered

Reliability is essential in the design of assessments due to imperfect design and extraneous influences. Moore's Transactional Distance Theory suggests that the teacher-learner relationship plays a critical role in new normal education, with unique teaching-learning strategies needed to assess learners' reading skills and proficiency.

Emma claimed:

*"My challenges in ensuring that my learners have truly learned what they have read in reading materials or modules are the learners' honesty in answering their module, not their parents or another family member."*

Moore's [9] Transactional Distance Theory is in play in this premise as the teacher has little to no interaction with her learners. The degree of responsibility magnifies since there is an idea of solidarity due to the distance between learners. The content may not be able to transpire with the learners, and the teacher does not have control over this.

Karen supported:

*"I'm not sure if the learners answered the materials supplied to them honestly or just copied their responses from the internet and other learners in the same level or if their guardian or parents answered the materials."-*

The absence of teacher-learner interaction diminishes the effectiveness of the content, and teachers need more effort and intervention. Parents can help by motivating their children to answer papers with their own words.

Neneng said:

*"So, first and foremost, it is a challenge for us, teachers, because we don't know if the reading materials we have distributed to our learners were all answered by them. Or, the parents search on the internet and answer the module themselves."*

Kapur [10] observed that social construction of knowledge takes place in various ways, but teachers cannot intervene. Briones [8] proposed homeschooling as an ADM, but challenges remain in its execution. Krashen [4] suggests language teachers should create a comfortable, lower affective filter and motivation stimulating study environments to help learners develop higher self-esteem and confidence.

Teachers struggle to identify if learners' answers came from their own or others, and the new model of education is more complex. Reading comprehension is the pinnacle end goal, and Moore's Transactional Distance Theory focuses on learner autonomy. In remote education, learners must be responsible for the learning program's behavior, as there is a divide between teachers and learners.

The teacher-learner relationship in new normal education is essential to observe the lapses of learners, supported by Transactional Distance Theory.

Table 2 illustrates the initial codes, subthemes, and emerging themes based on the challenges elementary school teachers meet when teaching reading in the new normal education.

*Table 2. The Challenges Do Elementary School Teachers Meet When Teaching Reading in the New Normal Education*

<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Emerging Themes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty to figure out if answers were coming from the learners itself.</li> <li>• Teachers can't determine if learners did reading activities and working sheets.</li> </ul>	The challenges of unreliable assessment results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners have difficulties understanding the given reading materials</li> <li>• Poor comprehension skills that resulted into poor answers to comprehension questions</li> </ul>	The struggle of having learners with poor reading comprehension
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers can't identify good in reading learners and learners with poor reading skills.</li> <li>• Some activity sheets weren't answered by the learners itself; thus, teachers can't classify good readers from poor readers.</li> </ul>	The challenge of distinguishing between proficient and poor readers

### **Coping with Challenges Encountered**

**Setting and Maintaining An Effective Schedule.** A study timetable is a structured schedule that allows one to plan out study times, classes, and the necessities in life—eating, sleeping, and exercising. Making a study timetable, it is also preparing for success in studies. Using a study timetable le also lets one visualize what we have on the schedule for the day and across the week. Most importantly, preparing a study timetable will ensure that one doesn't forget any upcoming exams or assessments.

Honey confirmed:

*"Plan ahead of time and set a goal, make a study calendar, and schedule time each day. Set the alarm, a reminder, or whatever other way you like."*

The statements reveal that during this time that learner spends time at home, time management is increasingly challenging for learners who juggle different priorities in life at such a young age. They have to help do household chores, and even work together with their parents to have food to eat every day. Because the ability to prioritize is the key to maintaining a happy and balanced lifestyle, time management is critical for both parents and students. Good time management has several advantages that will benefit you, your friends, and your family.

Jeux asserted:

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*"Use an alarm clock, a reminder, or whatever method works best for you to plan ahead of time, don't multitask, develop a timeline, and set aside time each day."*

The researcher agrees with Briones [8] that learners can seek help from the teacher via email, phone, text message/instant messaging, and other means. The teacher will visit learners who require remediation or support at home. Anyone from the family or the community should offer to be a para-teacher.

The researcher infers that this finding is presented in Information Processing Theory proposed by Carl Jung. Creating and following a practical timetable falls into the learning style. The theory suggests that each unique dimension can influence an individual learning style; learning styles are likely based on these dimensions. For example, a learning style might include elements of extroversion, sensation, feeling, and perception as personality dimensions.

Online learning has been a valuable tool for maintaining skill development during school closures, but there are concerns about lack of infrastructure and inadequate teacher and student preparation. Social constructivism emphasizes the importance of language in shaping children's understanding. Academic achievement is the level of development that the learner can reach under guidance from teachers and parents.

Honey claimed:

*"We used digital channels as part of our plan for those learners who prefer social media."*

These statements suggest that teachers nowadays are highly using accessible online platforms. In modular distance learning, learners can employ self-learning modules (SLMs) in paper or digital format, depending on the learner's context and other learning resources such as materials, textbooks, activity sheets, study guides, and other study materials. The teacher is in charge of keeping track of the learners' development. The learners may ask for assistance from the teacher via email, telephone, text message/instant messaging, etc., Briones [8].

Gemma added:

*"I'm going to make use of social media (messenger VC) technology (cellphones) (reading via phone call—make sure you're both reading the same content and on the same page)."*

Learners use a computer, tablet, PC, or smartphone to access electronic copies of learning materials, according to Briones [8]. E-learning resources, including offline e-books, can be delivered through CDs, DVDs, USB storage, and computer-based apps. The teacher is responsible for keeping track of the learners' reading development. Learners can contact the teacher by email, phone, text message/instant messaging, and other methods.

May add:



*"I'll also provide quick explanations, particularly for specific topics learners and parents have difficulty with, and I'll send it to them through our group chat."*

The researcher agrees that today's teachers maximize the use of available online platforms for learning, such as Facebook messenger. With the advent of online learning, teaching considerations have shifted. Teachers' current priority is to ensure that the online teaching plans are reasonable, flexible, and human-centered.

Social constructivism is a learning theory propounded by Lev Vygotsky in 1968 that states that language and culture are the frameworks through which humans experience, communicate, and understand reality. Teachers monitor learners' progress through phone communication or home visitations, and the teacher is in charge of keeping track of the students' development. Para-teachers should volunteer to be para-teachers.

Table 3 presents initial codes, subthemes, and emerging themes based on the coping mechanisms employed by elementary school teachers in teaching reading in the new normal education.

**Table 3.** *The Coping Mechanisms Employed by the Elementary School Teachers in Teaching Reading in the New Normal Education*

Subthemes	Emerging Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Always sets time to avoid chaotic schedule between teachers, parents and learners.</li> <li>• Let parents and learners know the schedule.</li> <li>• Always follow the schedule to be more effective and avoid confusions.</li> </ul>	Setting and maintaining an effective schedule
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use available resources to monitor the learners' progress.</li> <li>• Encourage the parents to keep in line with respective advisers if they have questions.</li> <li>• Use other means of communication to express ask some help from teachers.</li> </ul>	Maximizing the available online platforms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers exert more effort in doing home visitation to monitor the learners.</li> <li>• Always ask the parents participation in conducting follow-ups.</li> <li>• Use available resources like online platforms to keep in track of the learners' progress.</li> </ul>	Monitoring the learners' development regularly via phone or home visitations

### **Enrichment Program Developed Based on the Results of the Study**

The COVID-19 Pandemic greatly affects the reading performance of the learners due to no face-to-face class and less teachers' supervision. Thus, this enrichment program will be able to:

1. help learners attain the proficiency in each grade level
2. help learners achieve basic reading knowledge and skills
3. help learners develop their reading comprehension level

## **CONCLUSION**

The COVID-19 pandemic shocked education systems in most countries around the world, constraining educational opportunities for many learners at all levels and in most countries, especially for poor learners, those otherwise marginalized, and learners with disabilities. Moreover, the pandemic causes a lot of struggles for elementary school teachers who haven't experience teaching in no face-to-face setting especially in one of crucial part in learning, the reading. Teachers struggle, cope with the challenges and learn a lot from the new normal education setting.

Thus, elementary school teachers' learning insights in teaching reading in the new normal education focused on the support they gave. The support can be moral support (motivating learners) and holistic support (providing suitable quality learning materials). Most teachers' experiences in new normal education regarding reading proficiency were centralized in the struggle to determine who poor and proficient readers are. The distance between the teacher and the learners is a significant factor to consider. The teacher-learner relationship in new normal education is vital to keep observing the lapses of learners, especially those poor ones. Lastly, teachers maximize online learning platforms to rescue readers who have difficulty reading and those who have problems comprehending the text.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

After a thorough assessment and considering the previous findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are presented:

Teachers of Montevista Central Elementary School may continue the passion for serving and rendering service for the benefit of the learners. Teachers may continue to provide holistic help to improve the present educational status due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, teachers of Montevista Central Elementary School may conduct Formative Assessment to know which learners that are proficient in reading and learners with poor reading proficiency.

The learners of Montevista Central Elementary School with poor reading comprehension and proficiency performance should be encouraged to continue developing reading despite the absence of teachers. Moreover, learners of Montevista Central Elementary School may try their best to answer the given materials to have reliable sources for proper assessments and feedbacks.

Parents of the learners of Montevista Central Elementary school may continue to give full support and participation in helping and assisting children to develop the reading comprehension especially to those learners who struggle in reading and might enhance the reading proficiency. Since parents are the ones who assist the learners at home, it plays an essential role in the teaching-learning process in the new normal education.

Officials from the DepEd Montevista Division may consider combining efforts to develop new strategies and approaches to support the teaching-learning process and improve learners'

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reading proficiency to meet desired curriculum standards despite the new mode of education brought on by the pandemic.

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