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EXPERIENCES OF KEY STAGE 1 TEACHERS IN ADDRESSING EMERGING READERS

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ABSTRACT

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This qualitative phenomenological study examined the experiences and adaptive strategies of Key Stage 1 teachers in handling emerging readers in the Plaridel South District, Division of Misamis Occidental, during School Year 2025–2026. Specifically, it explored teachers' experiences in addressing emerging readers' needs, the instructional strategies employed to support reading development, and the challenges encountered in implementing these strategies, with the aim of proposing recommendations to improve reading instruction and support systems. Fifteen (15) purposively selected Key Stage 1 teachers handling Grades 1 to 3 participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Findings revealed that teaching emerging readers is a demanding yet meaningful task characterized by assessment-driven instruction, emotional labor, and strong professional commitment. Teachers employed phonics-based, differentiated, and learner-centered strategies, but faced constraints related to time, workload, resources, learner readiness, and home support. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated resilience and adaptability, highlighting the need for strengthened institutional and parental support.

Keywords: Key Stage 1 teachers, emerging readers, instructional strategies, challenges, qualitative phenomenological study

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Introduction

Reading is universally recognized as one of the most essential academic skills, serving as the foundation of learning across all disciplines. International research underscores that reading proficiency in the early years strongly predicts long-term academic success and social participation (Anderson & Smith, 2021). Learners who fail to develop basic reading skills in their early schooling are more likely to struggle in higher grades, experience academic disengagement, and face reduced opportunities in life (Johnson, 2020). Of particular concern are emerging readers, defined as learners who demonstrate limited accuracy, fluency, and comprehension, making reading both effortful and discouraging (Martinez, 2021). Globally, emerging readers present a challenge not only in terms of academic achievement but also in fostering positive attitudes toward lifelong learning (Lee & Chen, 2023).

In the Philippine context, the challenge of reading proficiency remains highly pronounced. National assessments and school-based literacy initiatives reveal that a large proportion of Key Stage 1 learners are still performing at the emerging level in oral and silent reading tasks (Santos & Dela Cruz, 2022). Local studies highlight that despite the implementation of the Department of Education's Every Child a Reader Program (ECARP), many pupils in Grades 1 and 2 continue to struggle with reading fluency and comprehension (Reyes, 2023). For instance, diagnostic assessments conducted through the Classroom Reading Level Assessment (CRLA) between 2021 and 2023 revealed that more than half of early-grade learners were unable to read grade-appropriate texts independently (Garcia, 2021; Bautista, 2022). The CRLA, a teacher-administered diagnostic tool, categorizes learners into beginning, emerging, and independent readers, providing a more developmentally sensitive measure of reading proficiency. These findings underscore that the issue of emerging readers is not merely an abstract concept but a pressing educational reality in Philippine classrooms.

Several scholars have examined how teachers respond to the challenge of supporting emerging readers. Brown and Miller (2020) found that differentiated instruction, targeted remediation, and the use of multimodal resources helped struggling readers progress to higher reading levels. Similarly, Navarro (2022) observed that teachers in Philippine elementary schools employed one-on-one coaching, peer-assisted learning, and visual aids to assist emerging readers. Flores (2023) further demonstrated that contextualized and differentiated reading activities significantly improved reading outcomes among struggling learners. These studies highlight that teachers are not passive deliverers of the curriculum; rather, they actively adapt their strategies to meet learners' diverse literacy needs. However, while such studies describe interventions and outcomes, they often overlook the lived experiences of teachers and the adaptive strategies they employ in everyday classroom contexts.

Despite prior literacy interventions, there remains a significant gap in understanding the lived realities of Key Stage 1 teachers who work daily with learners struggling to read fluently. The 2025–2026 Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) data of the district reveal that a large proportion of early-grade learners—averaging 60% to 70%—are categorized as emerging readers across Grade 1 to Grade 3 prior to any remedial or enrichment intervention. Specifically, consolidated results show that out of 914 learners assessed, 450 (49.23%) were classified as “emerging readers”—with many schools, such as Panalsalan IS, Mamanga ES, and Looc CS, recording rates above 60%. This pattern closely mirrors previous regional and national findings (Santos & Cruz, 2022; Reyes, 2023), underscoring that the issue is both persistent and systemic. Such data paint a clear picture of an urgent need to strengthen not only learner-focused reading programs but also teacher support systems that enable innovation and adaptive instruction amid constraints such as large class sizes, limited resources, and varied learner readiness.

To address this gap, the present study aims to investigate the experiences and adaptive strategies of Key Stage 1 teachers in handling emerging readers. Specifically, the objectives are to: (1) describe the teachers' lived experiences in dealing with emerging readers; (2) identify the adaptive strategies they employ to support these learners; (3) analyze the contextual factors that enable or hinder these strategies; and (4) generate recommendations that can inform teacher training, policy development, and school-level interventions.

The expected results of this study include: (a) detailed accounts of the challenges faced by Key Stage 1 teachers in supporting emerging readers, (b) documentation of adaptive strategies used in diverse classroom contexts, (c) identification of enabling and constraining conditions for teacher adaptation, and (d) practical recommendations for strengthening early literacy instruction through teacher support. Ultimately, the findings are expected to

provide meaningful insights into how Key Stage 1 teachers cope with and adapt to the realities of teaching emerging readers, thereby contributing to the broader goal of improving early-grade reading outcomes in the Philippine education system.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences and instructional strategies of Key Stage 1 teachers in addressing emerging readers in Plaridel South District, Division of Misamis Occidental. By utilizing in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the study seeks to capture the authentic voices, perceptions, and challenges faced by teachers as they support learners who are still developing foundational reading skills. The research focuses on how teachers adapt instructional practices, manage classroom realities, and respond to diverse learner needs despite challenges such as limited instructional materials, large class sizes, and varying levels of learner readiness. Through purposive sampling, selected teachers handling Grades 1 to 3 will provide meaningful insights into their experiences, strategies, and recommendations for improving early literacy instruction. The findings of the study are expected to contribute to the development of evidence-based interventions, teacher support programs, and contextualized literacy practices that can strengthen reading proficiency among emerging readers in Philippine public schools.

Results and Discussions

Teachers' Experiences in Addressing the Needs of Emerging Readers

The findings in Table 2 revealed that Key Stage 1 teachers experienced both instructional challenges and professional growth in addressing the needs of emerging readers. The themes generated from the participants' narratives include Assessment-Driven Identification of Emerging Readers, Engagement Strategies and Instructional Scaffolds, Individualized Support and Progress Monitoring, Support Systems and Collaborative Practices, Classroom and Institutional Constraints Affecting Instruction, and Teacher Emotions, Reflections, and Professional Commitment. The findings demonstrate that teachers view early literacy instruction as a multifaceted responsibility that requires assessment-based intervention, differentiated teaching practices, collaboration, and emotional resilience. Teachers described how they continuously adapt their instructional approaches to meet the diverse needs of learners despite systemic and classroom-related challenges. These findings suggest that the experiences of Key Stage 1 teachers extend beyond instructional delivery and involve emotional, professional, and institutional dimensions of literacy teaching. The findings support Fuchs and Fuchs (2020), who emphasized that systematic assessment and responsive intervention are critical in addressing early reading difficulties, while Jennings and Greenberg (2019) highlighted the influence of teachers' emotional well-being on instructional effectiveness and learner outcomes.

Instructional Strategies Employed by Key Stage 1 Teachers to Support Emerging Readers

The findings in Table 3 revealed that Key Stage 1 teachers employ varied and intentional instructional strategies to support the literacy development of emerging readers. The themes identified include Foundational Phonics-Based Instruction, Structured Reading Instruction, Individualized and Differentiated Instruction, Contextualized and Meaning-Based Strategies, Motivational and Engagement Strategies, Home-School Reading Support Strategies, and Data-Informed Instructional Decision-Making. Teachers emphasized the importance of explicit phonics instruction, guided reading, differentiated activities, storytelling, literacy games, parent-assisted reading, and continuous progress monitoring in strengthening learners' reading skills. Participants explained that these strategies help improve decoding, fluency, comprehension, confidence, and learner motivation. The findings indicate that teachers recognize the importance of combining foundational reading instruction with meaningful, engaging, and learner-centered approaches to effectively address reading difficulties. These findings support Ehri et al. (2020), who emphasized the effectiveness of systematic phonics instruction in developing early reading skills, and Tomlinson (2021), who highlighted differentiated instruction as an essential approach in addressing learners' diverse academic needs. Similarly, Guthrie and Klauda (2019) stressed that motivation and engagement significantly influence reading achievement and literacy development among struggling readers.

Challenges Encountered by Key Stage 1 Teachers in Implementing Instructional Strategies for Emerging Readers

The findings in Table 4 revealed that Key Stage 1 teachers encounter numerous challenges in implementing

instructional strategies for emerging readers. The themes generated include Time and Workload-Related Constraints, Classroom and Instructional Constraints, Resource-Related Constraints, Learner-Related Challenges, Home and Family-Related Challenges, Institutional and Policy-Related Challenges, and Teacher Emotional and Professional Challenges. Teachers described difficulties related to limited instructional time, excessive workload, large class sizes, mixed reading levels, inadequate instructional materials, limited parental support, and emotional exhaustion. Participants explained that these challenges often limit their ability to provide consistent individualized remediation and differentiated instruction. Despite these difficulties, teachers remained committed to supporting learners' literacy development and expressed strong professional dedication toward helping emerging readers succeed. The findings suggest that while teachers employ effective instructional strategies, systemic and institutional barriers continue to affect the sustainability and effectiveness of reading interventions. These findings support Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), who argued that excessive workload, insufficient resources, and large class sizes significantly affect teachers' capacity to provide responsive literacy instruction. Likewise, UNESCO (2021) emphasized that institutional and resource limitations continue to hinder the quality of early literacy education, particularly in resource-constrained school settings.

Conclusions

This study concludes that addressing the needs of emerging readers in Key Stage 1 classrooms is a complex and emotionally demanding endeavor that requires strong professional commitment, instructional adaptability, and systemic support. Key Stage 1 teachers employ a wide range of evidence-based, structured, and learner-centered strategies grounded in assessment, phonics instruction, differentiation, engagement, and home-school collaboration to support early reading development. However, the effectiveness of these strategies is significantly influenced by persistent challenges related to time constraints, workload, limited resources, learner-related difficulties, home and socioeconomic factors, and institutional and policy demands. Despite these constraints, teachers demonstrate resilience, dedication, and reflective practice, drawing motivation from learners' progress and breakthroughs. The findings underscore the need for strengthened institutional support, adequate resources, manageable workloads, enhanced parental involvement, and attention to teachers' emotional well-being to ensure sustainable and effective early literacy instruction for emerging readers in Key Stage 1 classrooms.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, it is recommended that Key Stage 1 teachers continue strengthening their use of assessment-informed, differentiated, and learner-centered reading strategies to effectively address the diverse needs of emerging readers. Teachers are encouraged to regularly monitor learners' progress, implement flexible grouping, and integrate engaging and contextualized reading activities to sustain learners' motivation and improve literacy outcomes. School heads and administrators should provide strong instructional and emotional support by allocating protected time for reading remediation, minimizing excessive non-teaching workloads, ensuring manageable class sizes, and providing adequate instructional resources such as leveled reading materials, reading corners, and ICT-based learning tools. The Department of Education is likewise encouraged to refine early literacy policies and programs by streamlining reporting requirements, strengthening professional development on phonics instruction and differentiated reading strategies, and increasing investments in localized reading materials and literacy interventions. Parents and guardians are also encouraged to actively participate in their children's reading development by supporting home-based reading routines and collaborating closely with schools to reinforce literacy learning beyond the classroom. Furthermore, future researchers may conduct similar studies in other districts or regions, develop intervention-based programs, and explore teacher well-being and emotional resilience in early literacy instruction to further strengthen support systems for emerging readers.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares that they have no conflicts of interest

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