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Teaching Of Reading In The Midst Of Uncertainties: The Narratives Of Elementary Laboratory School Teachers

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Abstract

Teaching of reaching brought a monumental implication to teaching and learning. This qualitative-narrative research aimed to determine the narratives of Cotabato Foundation College of Science and Technology Elementary Laboratory School. Results showed that teachers were challenged by unresponsive learners, lack of parental support, and lack of reading materials. Meanwhile, they provided their learners with remedial reading activities. They advised that teachers must be passionate and compassionate in handling learners to enhance their reading skills.

Keywords: Challenges , narrative, reading activities , Teaching of Reading, CFCST

Introduction

1.1 Rationale

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought an enormous impact in the delivery of learning to students. Schools were shattered in which isolated the learners in their respective homes because of the fear that they might be infected by the virus. Hence, teachers find ways in reaching the learners so that they could be able to surpass the challenges especially in reading.

As a matter of fact, the study of Bao et al (2020) that reading books to children could have helped them developed their reading ability. Meanwhile, the study of Chamberlain et al (2020) revealed that the utilization of virtual platform in teaching the children integrated the different concepts of reading strategies in different facets of learning. This is also essential as they cope with the burdens brought by the pandemic. Teachers resorted to online teaching which is the easiest way of dealing with their learners needs (Gao & Zhang, 2020).

Conversely, lockdowns brought by the pandemic caused a detrimental effect to students with special needs especially in reading. With the absence of the face-to-face classes this made a gargantuan impact on their abilities to easily grasp the contexts of their lessons (Sepulvida-Escobar & Morrison, 2020). Generally, it affected the learning process. Added to this is the lack of available gadgets which they could use in communicating with their teachers considering that they belonged to the low socioeconomic status (Asri et al., 2021).

On the other hand, teachers showed the essence of resiliency especially in responding using the technology-based instructional strategies, technology-based consultation, feedback for teaching and learning improvement and the like (Quezada et al., 2020). However, researches on the teaching of reading in this of the pandemic focused mainly on the foreign studies (Ardington et al., 2021), on pre-service teachers of English as a Foreign language (Karatas & Turner, 2020). In the Philippine settings, these are on readiness on flexible learning (Barrera et al., 2020) and on the lived experiences of PWD students (Dianito et al., 2020). Hence, the gap of the study.

This study would like to build a gap in the contexts of the teaching of reading during the health crisis brought by the COVID-19 on the teaching of reading among the elementary pupils. Also, this is timely and relevant since it listened into the challenges experienced by the teachers, the activities that they gave, as well as the pieces of advice to teachers who are in the same situation. Thus, it is important to conduct this research endeavor.

1.1.1 Research Questions

1. What are challenges experienced by teachers in teaching reading in the midst of the uncertainties?
2. What activities do teachers give to students to enhance their readings skills even at the height of COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What pieces of advice can teachers share to other teachers who are facing the same dilemma?

1.1.2 Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

This study was limited in listening to the narratives of the elementary teachers in the laboratory school of Cotabato Foundation College of Science and Technology during the First Semester of 2021-2022. Themes were extracted based on the responses of the participating teachers.

1. Methodology

1.1 Research Design

This study employed the qualitative-narrative approach. Qualitative research made used on dealing with the meaning which people have constructed based on their lived experiences and worldviews. It usually used the methods such as participant observation or cases which can be taken from the narratives. Interviews, field notes, conversations, photographs, recordings, are some of the best sources of the data (Silverman, 2020; Mays & Pope, 2020; Hennink et al., 2020; Flick, 2018; Darlington & Scott, 2020). The researcher conducted the study in the natural setting (Richards, 2020; Campbell, 2014) in order that they could make the interpretations clear based on the meanings drawn by the people.

Similarly, there are no numerical value employed since the narrations of the phenomenon played a pivotal role in the interpretation of the data. Consequently, the narrative research deals with the collection of the stories being told by the people (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Butina, 2015). This was done in detail so that all details of the phenomenon will be identified. Their experiences will be described and

discussed based on the person's story (Wiles et al., 2011). Results were interpreted through the identification of significant themes.

This study is qualitative-narrative since this dealt with the stories of elementary teachers in the laboratory school of the Cotabato Foundation College of Science and Technology. In particular, this listened to their narratives in the teaching of reading to the innocuous minds.

1.2 Informants of the Study

There were 7 informants who participated in this study. They were chosen using the following criteria:

1. A full-time faculty of the CFCST Elementary Laboratory School during the School Year 2021-2022;
2. Teaching the English subjects; and
3. Employed in the institution since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.3 Locale of the Study

This study was conducted at the Cotabato Foundation College of Science and Technology in Doroluman, Arakan, Cotabato. This State College caters the children of adversity where it handles orphaned children. Many of the learners in the Elementary Laboratory School are coming from the diverse family, but majority of them come from the low socioeconomic status.

1.4 Data Gathering Procedure

I adhered to the following research protocols. It was my duty to write a letter to the Dean of the College of Education and the principal of the Elementary Laboratory School of the Cotabato Foundation College of Science and Technology. Upon approval, another set of letters was sent to the respective informants. On the contrary, the Consent-to-Participate form was given to them where their rights to participate and withdraw were articulated. They were asked to affix their signature affirming their full participation in the study.

Likewise, they were not forced to participate. Their participation was based on their willingness. Prior to the interview, they were the one who set the date and time. Their availability would be always considered. No intimidation or whatsoever was done that could ruin the flow of the study.

Corollary, the interview guide questions underwent face validation by the experts in the field. During the date of the interview, they were allowed to share their stories using the vernacular where they can freely express their thoughts and ideas. Consequently, their narrations were recorded. After which, these were transcribed and translated into English.

Henceforth, the data were analyzed by the data analyst. After this process, I returned back to them and show them the results where they could make some confirmations. The sense of reciprocity was also observed by giving a token to them. Meanwhile, their identities were hidden as an observance to the ethical standards in the conduct of the research. Names were changed into codes. Member checks were also done where my peers from the College of Education could also give their comments and suggestions. Lastly, the debriefers reviewed the analysis of the study.

1.5 Data Analysis

The informants of the study were interviewed individually where they shared their life's stories in teaching reading in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thematic analysis was done where significant themes were extracted based on the narratives of the informants.

2. Results and Discussions

3.1 Challenges Experienced by Teachers in Teaching Reading

Unresponsive Learners. Because of the absence of face-to-face classes, some of the learners failed to respond to the tasks given to them by their teachers. In the same manner, since many of the learners are orphaned where they resorted to looking for the means of survival. Though, there were supports coming from the institution, but they felt that education is not that important in this of the pandemic. More so, many of them thought that learning reading could not help them in their

quest for a higher learning because they do not have the teachers or even an adult that would guide them.

During the interview, one of the informants reiterated that:

“Majority of my pupils in Grade Six did not mind improving their reading skills. They prefer to look for ways where they could survive. Also, they need to help their parents in farm.” (IDI2).

Another informant revealed that orphaned students did not show any interest in reading, though there is a dire need for them to further enhance their skills.

“Actually, I already did my best to reaching them out because I see that they really need to improve their skills even in the comfort of the orphanage. I know that they were well-fed and almost everything is provided. I just cannot understand what they wanted to happen.” (IDI4)

It was supported by the findings of Çelik (2020) that one of the reasons of unresponsiveness among the learners is that they are anxious and stressed which to their unwillingness to communicate and participate in all activities. It was suggested by Sklar and McMahon (2019) that there should have a trust between the teacher and learners and there should have a close proximity. A gap must also be removed so that there is an openness between them (Hockings, 2005).

Lack of Parental Support. One of the challenges faced by teachers in teaching reading is the lack of the support of parents. Supposedly, parents have to make some follow-ups on the reading abilities of their children. However, they could not make it since some of them do not even have the proper education. This predicament complicated the situations.

As shared during the interview, the informant verbalized that:

“Parents did not make any interventions especially on the problems with reading. They just allowed their children to play at home.” (IDI3)

In the same vein,

“The problem with parents is that they do not mind the efforts that we are doing for their children. They must have to help us especially in this time of the pandemic especially that their children are only at home. Parents have sufficient time in honing the reading abilities.” (IDI4)

“Parents lacked the skills in motivating their children that they need to pursue their skills in reading. Reading is coupled with comprehension. That is why it is their role to demystify the texts to their children. Also, one of the problems is that some parents do not have the proper education.” (IDI6)

It conforms to the findings of Ugwuanyi et al (2020) that poor parenting and parental support resulted in poor performance of the learners. Thus, they recommended that there should have a sufficient time that parents have to give to their children. In the same manner, the support given could also boost optimism and identify (Kealy et al., 2020). A suggestion was given that parents must be trained to embrace the new normal of education (Dong et al., 2020).

Lack of Reading Materials. The availability of reading materials as supplemental tools in promoting the importance of reading among the children at home is one of the challenges that brought an enormous impact on the readiness and comprehension skills of the learners. Even the school does not have the books which could be given to them since textbooks are only for the teachers. Though, modules are given for the learners, however, the need for additional reading materials at home could suffice the need of the learners in enhancing their reading skills.

One of the informants expressed that:

“I wish that all of the learners will be given books where they could read at home. I know that this is crucial in helping them to improve their reading skills, but we are all hopeless because we do not have enough funds in procuring the said materials.” (IDI1)

This statement is supported by Informant 2 who stated that:

“I have more than 30 pupils yet I only have my references. I could not allow them to borrow my books since I am also using them in making their Self-Learning

Modules.”

The availability of reading materials implies in school and at home is crucial in promoting children’s reading ability. This can be done through the support of parents and teachers (Myoma, 2017). Conversely, one of the factors that contributed to the low reading abilities is the absence of available reading materials (Mohammed & Amponsah, 2018).

3.2 Activities Teachers Gave to Learners that Enhance Reading Skills

Giving of Remedial Reading Activities. Series of remedial activities were given by teachers. Some of them sent their learners with reading materials with simplified contents. In some event, they reached the learners through online where they could guide them well with their journey in reading especially in comprehension. The enthusiasm being shown by teachers in these contexts provided them with a wide range of clear objectives which they could think for more activities that suit to the needs of their learners.

The informant shared that:

“I provided them with remedial activities. Though, I understand they are already bombarded by their self-learning modules but I see to it that the activities that I am giving them will help them grow and foster as learners. I make it sure that their reading comprehension skills must be developed even without my presence.”
(IDI4)

In the same manner, another informant shared that:

“To those who have gadgets and internet connections, I make it sure that we have our session because I can cater their needs and guide them well in their quest for a higher learning. (IDI7)

Remedial instructions given by teachers in reading in enhanced the pedagogical skills as well as their philosophical views in handling their learners (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019). Meanwhile, Ugwuanyi et al (2012) revealed that that there was a significant relationship on the remedial instruction to word recognition

skills. Proper feedbacking must be given so that the learners will be motivated to pursue learning (Widiastuli et al., 2020).

3.3 Pieces of Advice shared to Teachers

Be Passionate and Compassionate. Teachers always show the love for teaching. Because of their passion, they selflessly gave all their best even they too have a lot of challenges to hurdle. They treat their learners as their children and hone them to be ready to the next chapter of their educational endeavors. Also, teachers with compassion are what the school needed. Through this, they could be able to sustain that their learners will be successful in all facets of life. The teaching of reading also needs skills and patience.

As shared by the informants:

“When you want that your learners be able to survive in this chaotic world, teach them with compassion. Listen to their stories.” (ID11)

“As a teacher, it is always my passion to look into the opportunities on the lives of every learner. I can see that they will become successful in the near future. Thus, I always encouraged and motivated them that the pandemic should not be the hindrance for them to develop their skills. Therefore, as teachers we need to continue with our oath and make ourselves as a role model. May we have different strategies in teaching but at the end of the day we have the same purpose.” (ID12)

It appeared that compassion in teaching enhanced sustainability (Shea et al., 2016). Similarly, teaching must highlight love and compassion because it could enhance learning (Miller, 2019). In the same vein, Jalongo (2014) reiterated that teaching must be coupled with compassion.

1.1 Implications for Practice

Teaching reading in this time of pandemic is always coupled with a lot of challenges. Teachers endured all the pains just to allow their learners savor quality education. Even in the midst of the uncertainties brought by COVID-19, teachers did not fail in fulfilling their duties and responsibilities. They are stalwart and cognizant

enough in designing reading activities that would help their learners.

One of the major problems in reading is the lack of comprehensiveness of the learners. Even though they know how to read but then they could not internalize it. This calls that teachers as the partners of change must have to do something that raise the quality of instruction. Comprehension is not only limited in teaching language but in all subjects. A learner cannot solve mathematical problems if their level of comprehension is poor.

Nevertheless, the teaching of reading is a skill that every teacher must have to possess. They can transform the lives of their learners because they opened the doors of opportunities wherein they could see the values in their respective lives. In turn, they could utilize them in improving their family and their society.

Teachers in this time of the pandemic showed an endless concern for the welfare of their learners. They unselfishly provided their learners with different learning opportunities which could be crucial for their growth and development. Though, they faced a lot of challenges yet they were able to see the beautiful colors in the horizon that enabled them to create a better learning opportunity for everyone.

Likewise, this study implied that teachers need to hurdle all the challenges because they are trained to be transformative even though some of the learners did not realize the importance of all the efforts that they are doing for them. They must have to reach their learners and let them feel that they are important. More importantly, partnership with parents must also be strengthened so that they could teacher their own children even at the comfort of their homes.

4.2 Implications for Future Research

Listening to the narratives of the language teachers in this time of the pandemic manifested their biggest roles in society. This study is limited only on the narrations of the teachers relative to the problems that they encountered in teaching reading in the elementary setting. From the responses, it transpired that they created a boundless opportunity in the world of research.

Hence, this study suggested that future researchers should have to apply the

phenomenological approach by adding more numbers of informants and participants. This provides that there could be more stories that are hidden in their boxes. More so, this study will also tackle the problems of teachers in the secondary level in the same institution to find out whether there are similarities and differences.

4.3 Concluding Remarks

Teaching reading in this time of the pandemic widens my horizon. Indeed, it is challenging to handle learners and enhance their reading skills. More importantly, this study created a room of opportunity which could be suggested to the administration especially in the provisions of reading materials that will be essential to enhancing the reading abilities of the learners in the elementary laboratory school of CFCST.

As an educator and researcher, I realized that compassion generates the sense of resiliency and positivism that amidst the turmoil brought by the health crisis and the absence of face-to-face classes teachers are willing to sacrifice everything. I can say, that they are the unsung heroes worth to be emulated.

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