



Literacy Development Among Kindergarten Learners: Experiences in Banaybanay District

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Abstract— This phenomenological inquiry explored the experiences of kindergarten teachers in developing literacy skills of learners at Banaybanay District, Division of Davao Oriental. In exploring the experiences of the ten participants, I employed the qualitative-phenomenological study of which primary instrument of data gathering was through in- depth interview. Results revealed that the themes emerged on the experiences of teachers in developing literacy skills of kindergarten learners were individualized instruction, play-based learning, and collaborative engagement with families. Furthermore, the coping mechanisms of teachers with the challenges encountered in developing early literacy skills of kindergarten learners, there were three major themes that emerged namely differentiated instruction strategies, collaborative professional development, and engaging families and communities. Finally, the following were the emergent themes on the insights of teachers namely, early literacy foundations, fostering a love for reading and learning, and assessment and progress monitoring. The study could inform teachers and school administrators about effective instructional practices for early literacy development. Insights gained from teachers' experiences could lead to the refinement of teaching methods and the adoption of evidence-based strategies in kindergarten classrooms. The findings could also be used to tailor professional development programs for educators, focusing on enhancing their knowledge and skills in early literacy instruction. Teachers could benefit from targeted training that aligns with the challenges and best practices identified in the study. The research study on teachers' experiences in developing kindergarten literacy skills offered practical implications for improving early literacy instruction, teacher training, and support systems to ensure that all young learners had a strong foundation in reading and writing.

Index Terms— Literacy development, Kindergarten learners, Phenomenology.

1. Introduction

Literacy development among learners is rooted in the critical importance of literacy as a foundational skill for academic achievement and lifelong success. Literacy encompasses the ability to read, write, and comprehend written language, and it serves as a gateway to accessing information, communication, and cognitive development. This study is motivated by the recognition that literacy skills are not only essential for individual empowerment but also for societal progress. As such, researchers and educators have a vested interest in understanding the factors that influence literacy development, including cognitive, socio-cultural, and instructional variables,

to inform effective teaching strategies and interventions aimed at fostering proficient and confident readers and writers.

In the global setting, however, the available indicators suggest that despite the implementation of these programs and initiatives, there is insufficient progress in the development of early English language and literacy skills. In spite of concerted efforts, the available data on language and literacy in Thailand indicate that competence levels have shown little progress. The development of English language competency in the country is impeded by a combination of societal and policy-related challenges (Kaur et al., 2016). Similarly, the study conducted by Sutherland et al. (2018) revealed that children exhibiting disordered social-emotional patterns were more susceptible to encountering learning challenges throughout their developmental years, which might persist into adulthood. Moreover, it was shown that youngsters without adequate social, organizational, and interpersonal skills have difficulties in the process of acquiring knowledge.

According to the most recent figures released by the World Bank in 2021 on the topic of learning poverty, at least nine out of ten children in the Philippines who are 10 years old fail to read and write basic text. A total of 79 nations took part in the worldwide reading literacy evaluation in 2018, and the Philippines scored dead last among those countries. In the meanwhile, educators and other authorities in charge of education at the local level have brought attention to the fact that students' incapacity to comprehend difficult concepts has a negative impact on their performance in almost every other academic field, including history and the social sciences. The research advised that governments all around the globe develop adult and parental literacy programs in order to combat the problem of illiteracy (Chi, 2023).

In Banaybanay District, Division of Davao Oriental, kindergarten teachers were struggling with their learners' literacy development in the classroom. The factors included in this category are learning disabilities, limited proficiency in the English language, limited availability of books, and the capacity of educational institutions to address the individual reading difficulties of students. There are several explanations for the situation at hand; nevertheless, none of these issues pose insurmountable challenges. Acquiring literacy skills may provide challenges for some individuals, although it remains within the capacity of all individuals to develop proficiency in

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reading.

I have read various studies about the challenges of teachers in literacy development of learners but none of those were conducted in the local setting. Yang's (2022) study shows that Filipino students in grades K-3 score worse on international reading and arithmetic assessments. Their poor performance may have started in childhood. Starting math early increases their chances of success in school and life. The Department of Education prioritizes primary school reading performance. Reading is essential for a child's full and effective engagement in contemporary society. The department now recognizes that early language, literacy, and numeracy abilities are the basis for all subsequent learning (DepEd Order No. 12, Series of 2015). Thus, children need age-appropriate, culturally sensitive tools to learn language, literacy, and numeracy (Ronquillo, 2016). However, this study focuses on the literacy development of kindergarten learners in Banaybanay District thus, the need to conduct this study.

The establishment of strong reading skills throughout the early stages of infancy is crucial for achieving academic excellence and unlocking future prospects. Proficiency in reading, writing, and communication skills facilitates access to greater educational opportunities, better levels of academic achievement, and the pursuit of fulfilling professional trajectories. The present study has the capacity to contribute to current scholarly knowledge and serve as a valuable tool for practitioners in the local community. It has the potential to influence the approaches employed by kindergarten educators in designing and executing instructional plans, routines, and activities, specifically targeting the improvement of students' literacy abilities. Teachers may enhance their teaching methodologies and enhance the quality of education provided to their students by actively seeking opportunities to broaden their students' engagement with reading and other literacy-focused activities outside the confines of the classroom.

2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of kindergarten teachers in developing literacy skills of learners at Banaybanay District, Division of Davao Oriental. This also investigated their coping mechanisms from the challenges they encountered, and their insights drawn from the findings of this study.

In this research, the experiences of teachers in developing literacy skills of kindergarten learners were generally defined as their positive and challenging experiences relative to addressing their issues in reading and other literacy development activities in the classroom. The acquisition of literacy has significant importance in the entire developmental trajectory of a kid. Literacy serves as a fundamental basis for achieving academic success, fostering social interactions, engaging in effective problem-solving, making informed choices, attaining independence, managing financial resources, and participating in the workforce.

3. Methods

This inquiry used a qualitative methodology. Qualitative research used descriptive data to facilitate the investigation of phenomena that possessed limited knowledge. Creswell (2015) posited that an individual might acquire a qualitative comprehension of social and cultural phenomena by means of watching the sentiments, thoughts, and actions shown within a given community.

This study employed a phenomenological approach and included a sample of ten (10) kindergarten teachers from Banaybanay District, Division of Davao Oriental. Comprehensive virtual in-depth interviews (IDI) were conducted with all ten participants. I followed some criteria in selecting the participants such as: (a) the participants must have held a permanent position, at least Teacher I, in public elementary schools at Banaybanay District, Division of Davao Oriental; (b) they were assigned in the kindergarten level; (c) these teachers had experienced various challenges in developing the literacy skills of kindergarten learners; (d) they were composed of either male or female teachers; and (e) they were not members of any ethnic minority or Indigenous People (IP) group and were willing to participate in this study. Furthermore, the inclusion of 10 participants in the in-depth interviews was deemed sufficient to facilitate the identification and generation of themes.

Further, data were analyzed through data coding and thematic analysis. Highlighters and colored pens were used on the text being analyzed that represent important and reoccurring themes. Then, the texts were grouped with the same color of pens and highlighter and described it with words and short phrases.

4. Results and Discussions

A. Experiences of Teachers in Developing Literacy Skills of Kindergarten Learners

After analyzing the responses of the participants about their experiences in developing literacy skills of kindergarten learners, certainly, here are three major themes namely, individualized instruction, play-based learning, and collaborative engagement with families.

1) Individualized Instruction

Teachers often find that tailoring their literacy instruction to meet the diverse needs and abilities of kindergarten learners is a significant theme. This involves recognizing and addressing variations in students' readiness for reading and writing and adapting teaching strategies to provide personalized support, whether through one-on-one interventions or differentiated instruction within the classroom.

The findings of this study provide novel evidence about the enduring relationship between early language acquisition, literacy skills, and the growth of reading proficiency and vocabulary acquisition (Suggate et al., 2018).

2) Play-Based Learning

Kindergarten teachers frequently emphasize the importance of integrating play-based and interactive activities to foster literacy development. This theme underscores the significance

of creating a rich and stimulating learning environment that encourages children to explore and engage with books, storytelling, and language through hands-on experiences, such as storytelling, dramatic play, and interactive reading.

Campbell's (2018) study on the instruction of literacy revealed a disparity in the understanding of phonics among early childhood educators compared to their comprehension of other components of early language and literacy development. This study also makes a valuable contribution to the ongoing discourse on the importance of phonics instruction throughout the early years of education, as well as the impact of instructors' viewpoints on code-related reading, particularly phonics, on the developmental experiences of young learners. The present exploration focuses on the difficulties that arise between play-based pedagogical concepts and the demands of high-stakes performativity within the early childhood curriculum (DepEd, 2017). This study aims to examine the ongoing debate around adult-led phonics instruction versus child-led play-based reading approaches.

3) *Collaborative Engagement with Families*

Another essential theme is the collaboration between teachers and families to support literacy development. Teachers often work closely with parents and guardians to reinforce literacy skills outside the classroom, providing guidance on reading at home, suggesting age-appropriate materials, and facilitating communication about a child's progress. This theme highlights the significance of a partnership between educators and families to create a strong foundation for literacy development in kindergarten learners.

The home literacy environment has been widely recognized as a reliable indicator of children's language and literacy development. The latent characteristics that describe mother language show a notable influence on the level of exposure to storybooks. However, these factors did not have a substantial impact on the provision of direct literacy instruction. The language skills shown by mothers and the phonological abilities demonstrated by children were found to be significant predictors of the language proficiency and reading/spelling aptitude of the children. Nevertheless, when considering the fluctuations in mother language, the exposure to storybooks did not emerge as a statistically significant predictor of children's results. On the other hand, it is worth noting that direct literacy training continued to exhibit a significant correlation with the development of children's reading and spelling abilities. This study posits that the correlation between early informal home literacy activities and children's language and reading abilities may be mostly attributed to mother skills, perhaps indicating the presence of hereditary factors (Puglisi *et al.*, 2017).

In a study conducted by Inoue *et al.* (2020), the researchers examined the correlation between the home literacy environment (HLE) and the development of early literacy skills. The study focused on a group of children who were learning four alphabetic orthographies that varied in terms of orthographic consistency, namely English, Dutch, German, and Greek. The findings of the study indicate that there is a significant relationship between parent teaching (PT) and the development of letter knowledge or phonological awareness in

both Dutch and Greek languages. Additionally, the availability of literacy resources (ALR) is shown to be correlated with the emergence of literacy skills across all languages examined in the study. The relationship between shared book reading (SBR) and cognitive and early reading ability was shown to be non-predictive across all languages. Furthermore, the study found that both PT (phonological awareness) and ALR (alphabet letter recognition) had an indirect influence on literacy outcomes. This influence was shown via the enhancement of certain developing literacy skills across different languages. The findings suggest that the various components of home literacy environment (HLE) do not have equal importance in relation to the advancement of reading fluency, emerging literacy skills, and spelling. The analysis of the aforementioned correlations did not reveal any noticeable pattern about the influence of orthographic consistency.

B. Coping Mechanisms with the Challenges in Developing Literacy Skills of Kindergarten Learners

After analyzing the responses of the participants about the coping mechanisms with the challenges encountered in developing early literacy skills of kindergarten learners, there were three major themes that emerged namely differentiated instruction strategies, collaborative professional development, and engaging families and communities.

1) *Differentiated Instruction Strategies*

Educators often employ a range of differentiated instruction methods to address the diverse needs and abilities of kindergarten learners. This theme encompasses the use of various teaching techniques and materials tailored to individual students, including those who may be struggling with reading readiness, those who require advanced challenges, and those with diverse learning styles. Teachers adapt their approaches to provide the necessary support, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to progress at their own pace.

The results of the study provide evidence for a correlation between the ability to perceive rhythm, phonological awareness, and understanding of letter-sound associations, which is a crucial skill that precedes the development of reading proficiency. The results of the mediation study indicate that the relationship between rhythm perception and letter-sound knowledge is mediated by phonological awareness. In addition, the unique contribution of metrical perception to letter-sound knowledge was shown to be significant, surpassing the influence of other linguistic and cognitive measures. The findings of this study indicate that the processing of temporal regularity plays a distinct and significant role in the relationship between musical rhythm and literacy development in young children (Ozernov-Palchik *et al.*, 2018).

2) *Collaborative Professional Development*

Collaborative approaches to professional development are essential for teachers to cope with the challenges of fostering literacy skills in kindergarten. This theme emphasizes the value of ongoing training, peer mentoring, and sharing best practices among educators. By working together and learning from one another, teachers can enhance their instructional strategies, stay updated on the latest research and methodologies, and better

address the evolving challenges in literacy development for young learners.

Furthermore, the researchers asserted that a significant proportion of the educators seen in their study would benefit from further professional development opportunities aimed at enhancing their understanding of the significance of lesson preparation and execution, specifically within the context of preschool education. Hence, it is essential to prioritize the provision of sufficient training and preparation for preschool educators to effectively execute suitable methodologies in early English literacy education. Preschool educators may learn the necessary information and skills for instructing early English literacy via appropriate training and assistance. This acquisition enables them to effectively cultivate young children's motivation and early reading abilities (Hendi & Asmawi, 2018).

3) *Engaging Families and Communities*

Coping with literacy challenges in kindergarten often involves engaging families and communities as partners in the learning process. This theme highlights the importance of building strong connections with parents, caregivers, and local resources to create a supportive and enriching environment outside of the classroom. Encouraging family literacy activities, involving parents in their child's learning journey, and fostering community partnerships can help address challenges and promote a holistic approach to literacy development in kindergarten learners.

The results of the study revealed that there were statistically significant disparities between the two cohorts, as the children in the experimental group had superior performance on the early literacy assessment in comparison to the control group. There was no significant difference seen in the early literacy scores between males and girls in the study population. Moreover, the results revealed that there was no significant variation attributed to the interaction effect of group and gender. The present study addresses suggestions for the implementation of family literacy programs in Qatari kindergarten settings, taking into consideration the findings obtained (Ihmeideh & Al-Maadadi, 2020).

Similarly, a selection of early literacy development indicators was made, with a specific focus on those that exhibit cultural sensitivity. This entails a strong effect from the social environment, which offers a wide range of reading experiences. The findings indicate a statistically significant correlation between story listening comprehension, monitoring comprehension, and narrative production, specifically in relation to the identification of implicit meaning. Once again, it was shown that there were significant group disparities in the understanding of narratives and implicit meaning. On the other hand, there were no observed alterations in the indices of phonemic awareness, comprehension monitoring, and explicit meaning understanding (Petrová *et al.*, 2020).

C. Insights of Teachers in Developing Literacy Skills of Kindergarten Learners

After analyzing the responses of the participants about their insights as in developing literacy skills of kindergarten learners, the following were the emergent themes namely, early literacy

foundations, fostering a love for reading and learning, and assessment and progress monitoring.

1) *Early Literacy Foundations*

Teachers emphasize the critical role of establishing strong early literacy foundations. They recognize the significance of foundational skills like phonemic awareness, letter recognition, and basic reading and writing abilities as the cornerstones for future literacy development in kindergarten and beyond.

The academic achievement and future prospects of children are contingent upon their proficiency in reading. During the early stages of life, the foundational skills necessary for reading are established. The objective of reading development is to facilitate the achievement of effective reading comprehension, which entails the capacity to comprehend and understand written language (Kelly, 2021).

The introduction of a literacy promotion program during the early stages of infancy was shown to be correlated with the presence of more enriched home reading settings at the age of 6 months. However, it did not yield any significant improvements in language development. While the implementation of an early literacy program seems to be viable, more investigation is required to evaluate possible supplementary advantages (Suggate *et al.*, 2018).

2) *Fostering a Love for Reading and Learning*

Educators highlight the importance of instilling a love for reading and learning. They understand that creating an engaging and nurturing classroom environment, where children are encouraged to explore, ask questions, and develop a deep passion for reading and learning, is as essential as teaching specific literacy skills.

The study conducted by Maureen *et al.* (2022) examined the efficacy of a structured series of narrative interventions designed to promote the advancement of early reading skills. The assessment of children's early reading skills development was conducted before and after the implementation of the intervention. This evaluation included the use of two standardized tests and one non-standardized test. The standardized test results indicated that there was comparable and robust progress in literacy development across all experimental circumstances. The experimental group outperformed the control group on the non-standardized post-test. The discourse highlights the distinct characteristics of the intervention aimed at promoting early literacy development, as well as the advantages of assessing this progress using a combination of standardized and specialized assessments.

3) *Assessment and Progress Monitoring*

Teacher empowerment often results in a heightened emphasis on student-centered approaches and educational innovation. This theme delves into the insights of teacher-leaders regarding their roles in championing practices that prioritize individualized learning, engagement, and holistic student development. It explores their experiences in implementing innovative teaching methods, leveraging technology, and fostering a culture of curiosity and growth among students.

The available indicators suggest that despite the implementation of these programs and initiatives, there is

insufficient progress in the development of early English language and literacy skills. In spite of concerted efforts, the available data on language and literacy in Thailand indicate that competence levels have shown little progress. The development of English language competency in the country is impeded by a combination of societal and policy-related challenges (Kaur *et al.*, 2016).

Similarly, the study conducted by Sutherland *et al.* (2018) revealed that children exhibiting disordered social-emotional patterns were more susceptible to encountering learning challenges throughout their developmental years, which might persist into adulthood. Moreover, it was shown that youngsters without adequate social, organizational, and interpersonal skills have difficulties in the process of acquiring knowledge.

5. Implications and Future Directions

The study can inform teachers and school administrators about effective instructional practices for early literacy development. Insights gained from teachers' experiences can lead to the refinement of teaching methods and the adoption of evidence-based strategies in kindergarten classrooms.

The findings can also be used to tailor professional development programs for educators, focusing on enhancing their knowledge and skills in early literacy instruction. Teachers can benefit from targeted training that aligns with the challenges and best practices identified in the study.

Likewise, the study may influence the development of literacy curricula for kindergarten, emphasizing the importance of early literacy foundations and the need for differentiated instruction. Curricular materials and resources can be designed to align with the specific needs of kindergarten learners.

In addition, teachers' experiences in identifying and addressing challenges in literacy development can inform interventions and support systems for at-risk kindergarten learners. Early identification of struggling students and tailored interventions can help prevent reading difficulties from persisting into later grades.

Consequently, the study can highlight the importance of engaging families and communities in early literacy development. Schools and educators can work to foster partnerships with parents and community organizations to create a supportive network for young learners. Policymakers may use the research to guide decisions related to kindergarten literacy education. This could include funding for professional development, class size considerations, and investments in early childhood education programs.

The research on the experiences of teachers in developing the literacy skills of kindergarten learners offers several promising future directions for continued study and exploration. These future research directions can contribute to a deeper understanding of the experiences of teachers in kindergarten literacy instruction and inform strategies and policies aimed at improving literacy outcomes for young learners.

Comparing the experiences of teachers in different educational settings, such as public and private schools, urban and rural areas, or schools with diverse demographics. Comparative research can shed light on how various factors

influence early literacy development.

Moreover, investigating how technology and digital resources are integrated into early literacy instruction and how they affect students' reading and writing skills. This can include studies on the use of educational apps, online resources, and e-books in kindergarten classrooms.

Likewise, exploring how the experiences of teachers and the literacy development of kindergarten learners vary in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. Research in this area can address the needs of English language learners and students from various cultural backgrounds.

Investigating also the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs and professional development initiatives in equipping educators with the knowledge and skills needed to support early literacy development. This research can inform improvements in teacher training.

Furthermore, extending the study to examine the impact of different levels of parent and community involvement on students' literacy outcomes. Research can assess the effectiveness of family literacy programs and community partnerships.

Evaluating the validity and reliability of assessment tools used to measure early literacy skills. Research can contribute to the refinement and development of assessment instruments that align with best practices in early literacy instruction.

Consequently, investigating the impact of teacher collaboration and professional learning communities on the development of literacy skills among kindergarten learners. This research can explore the benefits of sharing best practices and resources among educators.

Lastly, studying the influence of educational policies, including standardized testing, curriculum standards, and funding initiatives, on early literacy instruction. Research can assess how policy changes affect teachers' practices and students' outcomes.

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