



Beyond the Classroom: A Parent's Journey as a Teacher of Reading

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ABSTRACT

Reading is an essential skill for students and is the foundation of learning. The parent as the child's first teacher ensures that the child learns this skill. This study aims to explore and give meaning to the experiences of parents as teachers of reading to their children during and after the pandemic where limited face-to-face and modular distance learning modalities were employed. In this qualitative study, the lived experiences of seven parents who have children enrolled in kindergarten to grade 3 were explored. Using applied thematic analysis, four themes emerged from the interviews which describe the experiences of parents as reading teachers: when expectations and reality do not meet; the struggle to juggle multiple roles; the carrot and stick



policy to motivate; and, parents are indeed teachers too. The findings revealed the difficulties and insights associated with parents' roles as teachers of reading through the themes inferred from the defined meanings. Moreover, to empower the parents to contribute significantly to their children's literacy development, schools may provide these parents with the 'tools' they need to teach reading effectively. This study highlighted the importance of collaborative and practical reading intervention plans to support the existing reading programs implemented in schools.

Keywords: parents as teachers; phenomenology; reading; reading teachers

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a complex process involving a variety of skills. It is the most significant academic subject in the elementary school curriculum and in higher grades since most disciplines demand strong reading abilities (Kim et al., 2021). Rasinski (2017) pointed out that word recognition and reading fluency are two crucial reading skills that students need to develop in the primary grades if they are to advance in their reading. While fluency refers to the ingrained habit and synchronization of reading with speed, accuracy, and appropriate expression; word recognition pertains to the ability to recognize and pronounce words from the written format.

As mentioned by Topping et al. (2013), learning to read is an important accomplishment. It is a responsibility shared by both parents and teachers. Parents can have a significant impact on their children, but unfortunately, not every parent recognizes the value of their involvement in their child's reading development. While some parents believe that teaching their kids to read is the job of the teacher and the school, others will go above and beyond to support their struggling readers at home. In the recent past, primary grade teachers were the ones who had the responsibility of teaching reading. However, as the implementation of the education program progresses, the expectations and requirements for primary schools also change. The Department of Education (DepEd) is continuously implementing its mandate to develop productive and responsible individuals who are endowed with fundamental competencies and skills for lifelong learning in support of the implementation of the K–12 Basic Education program.

Snow and Matthews (2016) emphasize that although developing kids' reading and writing (literacy) abilities is a crucial and important learning goal in the primary grades (kindergarten, grades one to three), many children in these grades have a great deal of difficulty doing this. As commented by Collins et al. (2018), several experts found that reading issues are the most prevalent academic learning issue for students. The overall findings of the Philippine national assessment show that many early-grade students continue to have difficulty achieving the learning criteria in early literacy and language development. To address the aforementioned gap, DepEd aims to strengthen the Every Child A Reader Program (ECAP) to improve the reading proficiency of every learner and to nurture a culture of reading, which is a requisite skill in all content areas.

Early-grade proficiency issues can result in serious academic problems throughout a student's academic career (Coelho et al., 2015). As reported by the Philippine Department of



Education in 2019 (Besa, 2019), the overall result of the national assessment reveals that low achievement levels in academic subjects such as English, Math, and Science happen to be caused by gaps in learners' reading comprehension. Primary-grade students must be given ample opportunities and a supportive educational environment to develop early proficiency in reading. Parental involvement is one of the determinants of student academic success. However, according to Grolnick (2015), parents' involvement in their children's reading development has been proven to be quite minimal. There are several causes for this to happen. Williams and Sánchez (2013) pointed out that the parent's limited engagement in their child's reading activities is a result of their lack of time and lack of knowledge of how to get involved in their child's educational experiences.

Relative to DepEd Memorandum No. 173, the campaign to promote reading at home is extended through the project "Every Parent a Reading Teacher Program" with the commitment to developing high-quality home learning. This program added a strong emphasis on parental involvement in their child's educational literacy. Parents and teachers play an imperative role in improving a child's reading ability. The more informed a parent is about their child's reading instruction, the greater the chance of attaining success in reading (Gorski, 2017).

Parents who are knowledgeable and skilled in how to support their kids' reading instruction are better able to offer struggling readers high-quality support (Brown, 2014). In the Every Parent a Reading Teacher Program, parents are educated on how to be reading teachers at home. They are provided with reading materials that can be used by struggling, frustrated, instructional, and independent readers. They are also given materials that are appropriate for the learners' needs. Materials were created with the assistance of the English Head/Key teachers, reading coordinators, and select supervisors. School administrators and teachers are asked to encourage parents to participate in this project through their General PTA Officers, alumni associations, and barangay officials.

There is a wealth of literature on the impact and effects of parents when it comes to supporting and assisting their children in school. Hammer et al. (2014) recognized the significance of parents and the critical role they play in their children's reading development. Various research focused on the results and how they affect the learners; however, little research focused on the parents' experience as they teach reading. This presented a gap in the current literature.

Ma et al. (2016) emphasized the importance of mutual understanding of the phenomenon of parental involvement and its contribution to a child's academic and educational achievement. Recognizing the perspectives and experiences supports the notion that mutual understanding may be acknowledged and used to improve student achievement, which reflects the goals of parents, teachers, and students. The gap in the literature is apparent because so few studies exist that take into account the experiences of these parents as they teach their children to read. The goal of this phenomenological study is to give meaning to their experiences and to describe the experiences of parents as teachers of reading in limited face-to-face and modular distance learning.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE



This study aims to explore the experiences of parents as teachers of reading to their children in limited face-to-face and modular distance learning modalities. Further, the premise of this study is to give meaning to their experiences.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Design

This study utilized the descriptive approach in exploring the parents' experiences in imparting reading instruction to their children. This approach requires the researcher to draw from the depths of parents' real-world experiences as teachers of reading. Using this empirical method, an Individual Interview (IDI) is conducted to learn more about people's thoughts, perceptions, and views regarding a specific phenomenon. To find the core of the experiences, a variety of approaches are used, including developing questions and methods, data gathered in a natural environment, data analysis, and meaning-making (Bacus & Alda, 2022). Since neither a causal explanation nor interpretative generalizations are made, the emphasis is on explicitly conveying the experiences of parents who are teaching reading.

Environment and Participants

This study was conducted in one of the cities in Region 7. There were seven parents selected to constitute the study participants. They come from Cebu City, a highly urbanized city in the region with a mixed population. Purposive sampling was used with the following inclusion criteria: a parent who is a resident in the city for at least two years; who has a child or children enrolled in kindergarten to Grade 3; who engaged in teaching their child/children how to read; and, who willingly participated in the study. These parents of children in the beginning level of reading, coming from different walks of life and parts of the city were interviewed because their experiences may have an impact on their children's reading ability by the way they see and carry out their tasks and obligations as partners in the academic process. The process of gathering data came to an end when the researchers reached the saturation point of responses. The researcher utilized an audio recording machine using a cellphone recorder with the informants' permission to capture more significant answers that led to more in-depth analysis and findings.

Instruments

The researchers served as the primary data-gathering tool in this phenomenological investigation. The ability of the researchers to extract the participants' responses determined how the participants' experiences came to light. Instead of approaching an experience from a theoretical perspective, a phenomenological researcher is more concerned with explaining something as it is experienced by the participant (Bevan, 2014). A validated semi-structured interview was used to collect pertinent, significant, and in-depth data from them.

Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedure

To ensure ethical considerations of research, all participants are informed about the details of the study. Participation in the study is voluntary and the informants could withdraw at any time without any consequences. The participants were provided with transmittal letters and consent. Participants' informed consent was obtained after describing the nature of their involvement, the objective of the study, time commitment, advantages to be expected, and secrecy of their



identity. To produce a comprehensive explanation and thorough analysis of parents' experiences in giving reading instruction to their children, the researchers followed Guest et al.'s (2012) Applied Thematic Analysis which included 6 steps for data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, parents who taught their children to read were examined in terms of their actual experiences. The data collection and analysis were directed by descriptive research, and a qualitative framework and methodologies were applied. The study's findings discussed the difficulties and insights associated with parents' roles as teachers of reading through the themes inferred from the defined meanings. Face-to-face interviews with the identified participants constituted the source of the information gathered for this study. When the 5th participant reached the point of saturation, the researcher interviewed two more to make sure that no novel, significant notions surfaced in the next interviews. These participants were selected based on the inclusion criteria stated above. Each parent-participant is coded as PP and then the participant number.

From The Qualitative Database to Themes

Following Guest et al.'s (2012) six-step method of data analysis, the meanings attributed to the narratives are presented thematically. The researcher paid attention to how personal narratives of experience are woven into societal and academic contexts. This was accomplished when interview transcripts were structured to record the many exchanges and thoughts on and of their experiences. The following section provides a comprehensive overview of the four themes that described these parents' experiences as teachers of reading to their children: *When expectations and reality do not meet*; *The struggle to juggle multiple roles*; *The carrot-and-stick policy to motivate*; and *Parents are indeed teachers too*.

Theme 1. When expectations and reality do not meet

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, reading sessions at home were seldom observed. Parents heavily rely on school teachers as the primary reading teachers of their children. Thus, the sudden shift of taking learning from school to home has afforded parents, especially working parents, opportunities, and challenges to take on the role of becoming the reading teacher. These parents have established certain expectations toward their child, and toward the "job" of being the reading teacher, however, in reality, what transpired during the child's teaching and learning moments, may not match up to these expectations. When expectations and reality are not met, it can lead to frustration.

For parents, it is inevitable not to expect and set standards for their children. They always want the best and right for them. However, this is not always the case. Children's response to their parents varies significantly. In teaching reading, parents, as teachers, do not always get the expected or desired outcome as children's interests, motivation, attention, learning ability, learning behavior, and stimulus-response always differ and change. Consequently, parents may face frustrations and struggles in teaching reading to their children. Frustrations arise when students resist the reading activity or practice, are slow in following instructions and comprehending reading inputs, and are unmotivated to learn. On the other hand, struggles refer



to parents extending their patience in teaching reading repeatedly, making time for reading practice despite busy schedules, and handling misbehavior and indifference to learning reading at home. The majority of the participants disclosed that,

“When we begin reading, we would tussle every time. I would always say hurry up and not lose time but she’s so stubborn. She has different reasons just to make delays. I did not expect it would be this difficult.” (PP1)

Two parents also stressed that teaching their kids becomes more frustrating as each child has different abilities. They expected that they could use one way to teach and their kids could learn immediately. But they say,

“...the other one needs much more time and more effort compared to my other child.” (PP4)

“It’s a struggle and I’m disappointed because no matter how you teach, she can’t learn it all and immediately. It’s not what I expected.” (PP5)

“I experienced having these two types of learners- my first child who easily understands, and my younger kid who struggles. It often takes days of practice before my younger child can remember how to pronounce a word. It is frustrating.” (PP6)

Some of these parents also shared that sometimes, due to their frustrations, they get physical. As one parent elaborated,

“I struggled. There were times when I got too physical during our practice. Every time I do that, Gian (my son) suffers too. He cries whenever we practice reading. I made him read the material over and over again, and though I always do that, he still forgets how the words are pronounced. There were times that I got frustrated, especially when his focus was elsewhere. I get too physical. There were some instances when I followed the urge to throw things at him and smack him using the practice materials that we own (chalk and pencils).” (PP7)

Parents automatically become the first teachers to their children at home. Despite all possible hindrances, they tend to educate their children according only to what they know and what they are exposed to. Handling children’s misbehavior and learning challenges in reading is a constant battle for parents, especially parents with less educational attainment or from vulnerable groups. However, it is recommended that parents take time to read daily, practice asking and answering questions, activate prior knowledge, and read different things of interest to promote and connect through learning experiences (Waters-Jackson, 2021). Parents can always request assistance from their children’s teachers as home-school partnerships maximize students’ learning outcomes (Lau & Ng, 2019). Moreover, Silinskas et al. (2013) revealed that maternal teaching may contribute positively to children’s reading skills if high levels of controlling behavior are supported with positive emotional support in homework situations.

Theme 2. The struggle to juggle multiple roles

Although various works of literature point out the different influences of parents and teachers on child development, they also share relevant characteristics (Ertaş et al., 2023). For instance, the contact time is shared with either the teacher and the child, or the parent and their child. Parents share more time with their children starting from an early age and are thus considered the first



teachers. Thus, apart from the work and household responsibilities brought by being parents, mothers, as the key figure who is recognized as the child's first teachers are the ones who allot their time to aiding their children's education. For working parents, their responses revealed how they juggle multiple roles at home. With the onset of the school lockdown, more responsibility is given to the parents.

When asked about how frequently and how long they devote time for reading instruction and other literacy learning activities, parents' responses on the duration of the instruction are commonly within 30 minutes to an hour per session. Parents also emphasized that teaching reading to their children can be taxing as they need to allot ample amounts of time guiding, reviewing, and even maintaining the interest of their children throughout reading and other literacy learning activities. The time spent and frequency of reading instruction and activities provided to students are deemed important whether it has to be done by a parent or by the teacher. If done by parents, these activities are identified as a home literacy practice and are shown that parental support has a significant bearing on children's reading skills (Axford et al., 2019). Some studies support the claim that there are positive associations between parental involvement and reading skills, especially for kindergarten children (Park & Holloway, 2017). These parents are aware of the importance of allocating time to teach reading, especially during the homeschool setup amid the pandemic. They tried to provide time for their children despite the other responsibilities that they also needed to do. This setup is exhausting for most of these parents. They shared,

"Sometimes I can teach her on Friday nights or Saturday and Sunday during my rest days because I am working as a nanny as well. I can only teach her in the evening after dinner from 8 pm to 9 pm. It is a difficult schedule." (PP1)

"During the pandemic and Modular Distance Learning, I just rely on my free time because I'm a housewife and I have to do household chores and stuff. On Sundays, most people in the house are off from work so I have them babysit my second child and then I teach my eldest son. Our reading practice does not exceed 30 minutes. Even if the schedule is too difficult, I give time to teach my kids." (PP3)

"As a mother, I attend to so many concerns at home and work. It was difficult to schedule a time to teach my kids to read." (PP4)

Instructional time has a more significant effect on students' progress in developing their reading abilities. It is proof that making time for reading is crucial for closing the achievement gap between proficient readers and struggling readers (ur Rehman, 2021). Helping their children with their literacy learning activities at home is one way parents can make a good impact on their education, in general. However, even though parents know this, they are also bombarded with other responsibilities at home and work making this endeavor more challenging for them. Juggling multiple roles "successfully" has been an underrated parenting milestone, especially for working parents.

Theme 3. The carrot-and-stick policy to motivate



The use of systems of rewards and sanctions has been established by parents as an approach to teaching and learning. Carrot-and-stick is a motivational approach that involves offering a “carrot” (a reward—for good behavior) and a “stick” (a negative consequence for poor behavior). Parents offer their children things to persuade them to do something and punish them if they refuse to do it. They believe that this positive reinforcement somehow motivated their children extrinsically. Parents informed their children beforehand of their expected goals and made their children aware of the rewards when they meet these expectations. Most of the rewards are compliant with the interest of their children; some enticed their kids with food and achievement recognition in the form of stickers; while others opted to motivate them in the form of monetary bribes. The parent participants in this study affirm this:

“Yes, I reward them just like their teachers. We will collect the rewards or pile them up. We would give them snacks or eat together in some restaurants and stroll in the mall. They can also use their gadgets after a day. We will take them to the beach and enjoy swimming or buy video tapes so we can enjoy watching together.” (PP2)

“We praise them for what they did right. I don't need a prize anymore. Before, I rewarded him, but now I don't because he's reading by himself. In contrast, before, during the pandemic, I punished him for not obeying my instructions and rewarded him by encouraging him to read.” (PP3)

“I would give him stars once in a while, once you can answer it, I'll buy him some ice cream or a drawing book. He likes coloring or doing art. That's why he tries to do good and is eager to study.” (PP5)

Parent-participants 6 and 7 provide monetary allowance to their kids which the kids use in playing computer games. This motivates them to do good and perform the activities. These parents firmly believed that sanctions are imposed mostly as a warning and only given when they fail to comply. Most of the sanctions are in the form of revocation of fun time privileges and in some cases, corporal punishment. It must be noted that some of these physical punishments are a mere product of parents' frustration and tiredness from other work and home-related responsibilities – and not punishments intended for the sole reason of inflicting pain.

Though corporal punishments are sometimes given, parents are aware of their limitations. They are also cognizant of the fact that they are dealing with children who do not have the proper mental faculties to achieve what they want their children to achieve - which is to remember the pronunciation and spelling easily. Reinforcement is a process of increasing the rate of behavior by presenting a stimulus shortly after the display of behavior. Though defined by Skinner as behavior “controlled by its consequences” its practice is little different from what had previously been termed “instrumental learning” and what most people would call habit. Any well-trained “operant” is in effect a habit (Staddon & Cerutti, 2003). The reinforcers being used by the parents are both positive reinforcement and negative punishment. Parents provide rewards whenever their children do something positive such as: following and obeying the rules and instructions or when their children remember the pronunciation of the words they taught (Cline & Fay, 2020). This has proven to be a very good motivator. However, parents also give punishments when their children disobey the agreed rules. They remove a privilege to decrease negative behavior. This has often worked both as a lesson and a warning.

Theme 4. Parents are indeed teachers too



When asked about the materials used during the guided reading instruction, the parents provided printed, digital authentic reading and learning materials. Essentially, books and educational resources geared at beginning readers are necessary. Digital texts are downloadable, available offline, and compatible with a variety of electronic devices. Interactive resources like video lessons may also be present in digital texts. Further, some digital books contain interactive capabilities that enable the sharing of highlighter notes and the asking of questions while reading the book. Print media, on the other hand, refers to written printed media with a message, such as books, pamphlets, periodicals, and leaflets. Additionally, the term "authentic materials" refers to the utilization of texts, pictures, videos, real-world examples, and other educational resources that are typically present in everyday environments, particularly at home. These contextualized materials are very helpful, especially to children whose mother tongue is not the medium of instruction used in school.

Aydin and Erol (2021) stressed that teachers should provide a facilitative reading environment that includes appropriate techniques, methods, and materials to enable interest in early reading. This is also true for parents assuming the role of reading teachers during the pandemic. As most of these parents recounted, they have provided this kind of reading environment to their children the best way they can. In the process, they became resourceful school teachers looking for the best materials and methods for their students. They shared,

"I cut and paste words in bond papers for them to identify and utter the sounds." (PP1)

"For example, identifying the objects at home. Like is this a table? a chair? etcetera. After naming the objects, I proceed to identify the beginning sound. I model how the sound is produced. "I use the objects at home. I let them name the object and the beginning sounds of the object. The learning materials don't need to be grand or costly." (PP3)

"I bought him a chart with letters and a picture. I begin by telling him what is in the pictures so that he can learn. Sometimes, I leave him with colorful flashcards so he won't get bored, while I'm doing household chores. I also bought him coloring books. My second child is different from my eldest child. What I did was expose him and let him watch Ms. Rachel's videos, most recommended by mothers online. Ms. Rachel's content is suitable to the learning stage and ability of a child at a specific age. My youngest son imitates some of her actions or words." (PP4)

For parent-participants 5 and 6, they made use of YouTube videos to assist them in teaching the letter sounds. As one parent recalls, *"I let them listen and watch YouTube videos and it is effective. They learn easily from what they hear and watch."* Parents, although limited in materials and resources, still find various ways to teach their children reading. They look for alternatives to help their children remember the words that they are teaching. Some parents used books and modules provided by the school, some used realia available in their homes, some demonstrated their creativity by making their materials, while others with the advantage of easy access to digitals, used media to help their children be familiarized with words and how they are uttered. Similarly, the findings in the study of Singer and Alexander (2017) showed a definite preference for digital materials, and while reading digitally, most pupils expected to understand what they were reading. Even while there were no variations in how well students identified the text's primary theme across all media, they remembered essential details related to it and other pertinent information more vividly when they were working with print (2023 Even with limited



knowledge as to how to assist and teach their children to read, these parents have been very resourceful in looking for methods and materials they find best for their children.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Parents, as the child's first teachers, hold the utmost responsibility of ensuring that they can provide strong instructional support to their children. The experiences of parents as teachers of reading enable them to share their stories of what they experienced during and amid the pandemic. Parents are aware of their children's limitations and limited learning capacities. Because of this, they tailored their instruction in ways they knew were appropriate to their child's age, learning level, and motivation. Despite the affection they held towards their children and the awareness they had of these limitations; parents are not exempted from frustrations. They struggled to reign in their frustrations at the attitude and motivational level of their children towards reading. The stress accumulated from work and household responsibilities is sometimes directed to their children. Their experiences of these frustrations are described in this study. Furthermore, this study also gives evident descriptions of the parents' ways and strategies of handling their children when it comes to teaching reading. Despite the struggles of juggling multiple roles, parents manage to allocate time to teach their children. Many parents, regardless of their socioeconomic, educational, or racial or ethnic origins, are prepared and capable of engaging in supportive parenting and learning activities at home with their young children.

The study did not examine the effectiveness of parents' teaching reading performance in significant areas of students' literacy learning achievement; instead, it concentrated primarily on the experiences of parents who are teaching reading to their children at the beginning reading level. Based on the findings, it is recommended that at the start of the academic year, school authorities and teachers schedule a separate session for parent orientation and instruction about the value of home reading and the role that parents may play in their children's reading performance. This may be achieved by utilizing resource speakers who are knowledgeable about teaching student behaviors, learning styles, and teaching strategies for beginning readers. For a more approachable and practical learning intervention, the school might also offer educational tools helpful in the teaching-learning process. Additionally, school administrators are encouraged to strengthen existing programs such as *Every Parent a Reading Teacher Project*, *Every Child a Reader Program (ECRAP)*, and *Bawat Bata Bumabasa* and provide team-building activities involving students, educators, and parents during *Parents' Weekend* and other monthly culmination programs.



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Conflict of Interest

The authors affirm that there are no financial or personal relationships that could be perceived as potential conflicts of interest with respect to this research article.




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Authors' Contributions

JS, JA, MMB, and RA contributed to the conception and preparation of the design of the study. JS, JA, and MMB interviewed the participants and coded their responses, and wrote the first draft of the analysis. RA finalized the draft and prepared the paper for publication. All authors gave their insights in all parts of the paper and helped in its revision.

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