

EXPLORING EARLY GRADE LITERACY DEVELOPMENT: VOICES OF TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored the experiences of teachers in developing early grade literacy among the learners in Laak North District, Division of Davao de Oro. This also investigated their coping mechanisms from the challenges they encountered, and their insights drawn from the findings of this study. Qualitative – phenomenological study was employed in exploring the views of the ten (10) elementary teachers of which primary instrument of data gathering was through in- depth interview. Major findings indicated that the experiences of teachers in developing early grade literacy among the learners included pedagogical strategies for literacy development, challenges and solutions in early literacy instruction, and teacher-student dynamics and impact on literacy development. Moreover, distinct themes emerge regarding the coping mechanisms employed by educators to navigate these hurdles. These coping mechanisms reflected adaptive strategies, collaborative efforts, and a focus on emotional support, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of teachers' responses to the complex landscape of early literacy instruction. Finally, several overarching themes had emerged, shedding light on their valuable insights. The major themes for the insights of the participants were holistic approach to literacy, individualized instruction and differentiated learning, and engagement through multimodal learning. These themes collectively portrayed a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced and multifaceted nature of literacy instruction. The research on enhancing early-grade literacy among learners held significant implications for both educational practice and policy. The in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences, conducted through qualitative-phenomenological methods, provided nuanced insights into the multifaceted dynamics of early literacy development. Understanding the lived realities and perceptions of individuals involved offered a foundation for tailoring interventions that went beyond mere academic effectiveness.

Keywords: early grade literacy development, voices of teachers

1. INTRODUCTION

“The goal of early childhood education should be to activate the child’s own natural desire to learn.” – Maria Montessori.

Early grade literacy development is a critical phase in a child's education. The ability to read and write proficiently by the end of the early elementary years is a strong predictor of future academic success. Teachers play a fundamental role in shaping the literacy skills and attitudes of young learners during this crucial stage. Therefore, understanding the experiences of teachers in early grade literacy development is essential for improving literacy instruction and ultimately enhancing student outcomes.

In Ethiopia, significant obstacles exist in the early grades, including a deficiency in subject-specific knowledge and teaching expertise, insufficient teaching resources, inadequate teacher training initiatives, a dearth of conducive literacy-rich settings, and a lack of ongoing professional development. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive training in both subject matter and pedagogy, access to phonological awareness materials, and in-service training to improve teaching capacity for native-language reading skills in the early grades (Haile & Mendisu, 2023). It is of utmost importance to impart early childhood reading skills through phonological awareness. To enhance children's literacy capabilities, educators should employ clear and methodical instruction during the initial school years. The overall effectiveness of teachers in reading instruction is closely linked to the reading accomplishments of their students. In numerous nations, educators specialized in particular subjects may lack essential reading pedagogical techniques and expertise. Teacher training programs before entering the profession may fall short in teaching literacy instruction and evaluation methods. More significantly, they may neglect to provide the fundamental elements of reading skills to be integrated into their respective subjects and teaching methods. Consequently, a considerable number of young students in the early grades do not attain the anticipated minimum learning competencies at their grade level (UNESCO, 2017a). In the Philippines, a study conducted by Tomas and colleagues in 2021 delved into the reading profiles of students in both English and Filipino, focusing on their challenges, difficulties, lessons learned, school agendas, and initiatives aimed at improving reading programs to address these challenges. The results revealed that the majority of learners experienced frustration in their reading levels. The perceived causes and contributing factors included a lack of mastery of fundamental reading elements, the presence of at-risk learners, and a deficiency

in promoting a culture of reading. Similarly, in Laak District, the Division of Davao de Oro, teachers experienced numerous obstacles in enhancing early grade literacy. Among these were difficulties in the basic foundation of phonological awareness, reading fluency, and reading comprehension and vocabulary. These problems hindered the teachers' ability to improve early grade literacy among the learners. Research on early grade literacy development as experienced by teachers is essential for improving literacy instruction and student outcomes. Addressing these research gaps can provide valuable insights into how teachers can best support early grade literacy development, resulting in improved literacy outcomes for young learners. Researchers and educators should collaborate to bridge these gaps and contribute to evidence-based practices in the field of early literacy instruction.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of teachers in developing early grade literacy among the learners in Laak North District, Division of Davao de Oro. This study also investigated their coping mechanisms for the challenges they encountered and their insights drawn from the findings.

At this stage of research, the experiences of teachers were generally defined as their learning and challenging experiences in terms of early grade literacy development in the classroom. Early literacy skills were the foundation upon which all other academic disciplines were built. Children who developed strong reading and writing skills in the early grades were better equipped to tackle more complex subjects as they progressed through their educational journey. Early literacy is a key component of educational equity, as students who struggled with reading in the early grades often face long-term academic challenges.

Research Questions

This study aimed to explore the experiences of teachers in developing early grade literacy among the learners in Laak North District, Division of Davao de Oro. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of teachers in developing early grade literacy among learners?
2. How do the teachers cope with the challenges they encounter in developing early grade literacy among learners?
3. What are the insights of teachers in developing early grade literacy among learners?

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study would contribute to the existing body of knowledge in developing early grade literacy among learners in the classroom. This study would also provide information about the learning resources that teachers develop to enhance learners' understanding, motivation, and classroom engagement.

Department of Education

The findings could inform the development of evidence-based policies, curricula, and guidelines for early grade literacy education. It helps the department in shaping effective strategies to improve literacy outcomes.

School Administrators

School principals could utilize the study results to identify gaps in teacher training and professional development. This knowledge allows them to provide targeted support and resources for their teaching staff. The study also helps principals make data-driven decisions for their schools, from resource allocation to implementing effective literacy programs.

Teachers

Teachers could benefit from insights into their own experiences and those of their peers. They could gain a better understanding of effective strategies, challenges, and pedagogical approaches for early grade literacy development. The study could also empower teachers to adapt and refine their teaching methods, incorporating successful strategies and addressing common challenges. Knowledge of best practices and support systems can lead to reduced stress and burnout, contributing to teacher well-being and job satisfaction.

Students

Students stand to benefit the most as the study leads to better teaching practices. Early grade literacy development can have a lifelong impact on students' academic success and personal growth. Further, the research findings may lead to more engaging and effective literacy instruction, ultimately improving students' literacy skills and their ability to succeed in their education.

Future Researchers

This study could serve as a foundational piece of research for future scholars, providing them with valuable insights and areas for further exploration in the realm of early grade literacy development. Future researchers could draw upon the study's methodology and build on its approach, thereby advancing the field and contributing to the growing body of knowledge.

Early Grade Literacy Development

In this study, early grade literacy development refers to the process of acquiring essential reading and writing skills during the early years of a child's education, typically encompassing kindergarten through third grade or equivalent. This crucial developmental phase is characterized by the acquisition of fundamental literacy skills, such as letter recognition, phonemic awareness, comprehension, and the ability to decode written text. Early grade literacy development aims to lay the foundation for proficient reading and writing abilities, fostering a love for reading, and preparing students for future academic success. It involves both formal instruction by teachers and informal learning experiences, often within a classroom setting, to equip young learners with the tools necessary to become competent readers and writers.

Voices of Teachers

"Voices of teachers" in the context of developing early grade literacy in the classroom refers to the perspectives, experiences, and insights shared by educators who are actively involved in teaching young students how to read and write, particularly in Laak North District, Division of Davao de Oro. These voices represent the thoughts, challenges, successes, and strategies articulated by teachers as they engage with the critical task of fostering early grade literacy.

Early grade literacy development, as experienced by teachers, holds significant social relevance in various aspects of society. It is a crucial element in promoting educational equity. Teachers play a pivotal role in ensuring that all students, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds, have equal access to quality literacy instruction. When teachers effectively foster early literacy skills, they contribute to narrowing the achievement gap and creating a more equitable educational system. Furthermore, teachers who focus on early grade literacy often engage parents and caregivers in their child's learning process. This engagement strengthens the family unit and encourages parents to take an active role in their child's education, which benefits not only the child's literacy development but also their overall well-being.

Finally, in our increasingly digital world, early grade literacy includes digital literacy. Teachers who teach students how to use technology and navigate the digital landscape prepare them for a technology-driven workforce. This, in turn, has social relevance by enhancing employability and participation in the digital society. Early grade literacy also impacts overall social well-being. A literate society tends to be more aware, informed, and capable of addressing social challenges and inequalities. Teachers who prioritize early literacy development are thus instrumental in fostering a healthier and more socially conscious society.

2. METHODS

In this chapter, important sections are presented, including philosophical and qualitative assumptions of the study, research design, research participants, ethical considerations, the role of the researcher, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness of the study.

Philosophical Assumptions of the Study

In examining teachers' experiences in fostering early-grade literacy among students, it is essential to acknowledge the fundamental philosophical principles that shape the research. These principles serve as the core beliefs and values guiding the study, influencing its methodology and the interpretations of the collected data. This investigation navigates the intersections of constructivism, pragmatism, and humanism, emphasizing the importance of teachers' autonomy, the interactive and context-dependent nature of resource development, and the profound influence of educators' insights on students' learning experiences.

According to Creswell (2015), recognizing and articulating the foundational philosophical beliefs underpinning a study is crucial. These beliefs shape the research design, methods of data collection, and interpretation of results. Creswell and Poth (2016) identify four philosophical assumptions:

1. **Ontology:** This refers to the nature of reality and existence. Researchers consider their ontological stance when designing their studies because it shapes how they perceive and interpret the social world. Ontological positions in qualitative research include realism, constructivism, and pragmatism, each with different perspectives on reality.
2. **Epistemology:** This explores questions about the nature and origin of knowledge. Epistemological considerations inform the researcher's perspective on how knowledge can be acquired and what constitutes valid knowledge. The choice of epistemological stance influences the research process, including data collection and analysis.
3. **Axiology:** This deals with values and ethics. Axiological considerations help researchers navigate ethical dilemmas, acknowledge personal biases, and make value-based decisions throughout the research process.

4. **Rhetoric:** This refers to the persuasive and communicative aspects of research, including the use of language, discourse, and narrative to convey findings, arguments, and insights. Rhetoric shapes how researchers communicate their findings and the impact those findings have on the audience.

Qualitative Assumptions

Qualitative assumptions in a study on teachers' development of early-grade literacy refer to the foundational beliefs and expectations that underpin the research design, data collection, and interpretation of findings. These assumptions shape the qualitative methodology employed in the study:

1. **Subjectivity:** Teachers' experiences and perspectives are subjective and shaped by their unique contexts, backgrounds, and beliefs. Variations in interpretations provide valuable insights.
2. **Contextual Influence:** The development of early-grade literacy is influenced by specific classroom and school contexts, including the classroom environment, curriculum, and local culture.
3. **Social Construction of Knowledge:** Literacy skills and knowledge are socially constructed through interactions between teachers and students.
4. **Complexity:** Literacy development is multifaceted, including reading, writing, socio-emotional aspects, cultural dimensions, and critical thinking.
5. **Non-linear Process:** Literacy development is an ongoing, non-linear process influenced by teachers' evolving beliefs and practices over time.

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research approach, focusing on subjects characterized by incomplete understanding. Qualitative research is valuable for gathering comprehensive information and delving deeply into intricate topics. As Creswell (2015) points out, immersing oneself in the observation of emotions, thoughts, and behaviors within a distinct group can provide a qualitative understanding of social and cultural phenomena.

The study uses a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of educators and students involved in early-grade literacy development. By conducting open-ended interviews and employing ethnographic methods, the researcher captures the multifaceted nature of literacy learning as it unfolds in the classroom. This approach provides valuable insights into the complexities of early literacy instruction and helps uncover the evolving strategies and innovative practices teachers adopt.

Research Participants

In this study, ten elementary teachers from Laak North District, Division of Davao de Oro, will participate. These educators play a pivotal role in offering valuable insights into classroom practices and experiences surrounding early literacy instruction. Creswell (2015) suggests a sample size of 5 to 25 participants in qualitative research, determined by the concept of data saturation. Purposive sampling is employed to select teachers with specific characteristics relevant to the research topic, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of early-grade literacy development.

Participants must meet the following criteria:

- A minimum of one year of experience as a Teacher I in public elementary schools within the Laak North District.
- Currently assigned to Grade 1 to 3 levels.
- Encountered difficulties in developing early-grade literacy.
- Either male or female teachers.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are paramount throughout the research process. The researcher ensures informed consent from participants, maintains transparency regarding research objectives, and protects participants' confidentiality and privacy. Ethical principles such as beneficence, non-maleficence, respect for autonomy, and justice guide the research, upholding the integrity of the qualitative inquiry.

Key ethical principles include:

1. **Respect for Persons:** Ensuring participants' autonomy and informed consent, acknowledging their unique perspectives and cultural values.
2. **Beneficence:** Maximizing benefits and minimizing potential harm to participants, ensuring their well-being throughout the study.
3. **Justice:** Ensuring fair treatment of participants, avoiding bias and discrimination, and promoting inclusivity and equity in the research process.

Compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173) is essential, ensuring the protection of participants' personal information and maintaining data privacy and security.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher plays a multifaceted role in qualitative research, encompassing various critical stages of the research process:

1. Interviewer: Crafting effective interview protocols, establishing rapport with participants, and guiding conversations to elicit rich responses.
2. Transcriber: Converting audio or video recordings into written text, capturing both verbal and non-verbal cues.
3. Translator: Ensuring accurate translation and interpretation of data in multi-lingual or cross-cultural studies.
4. Data Analyst: Coding, categorizing, and analyzing data to identify patterns, themes, and meaningful insights.
5. Verifier: Ensuring the accuracy and trustworthiness of interpretations and findings through peer review or member checking.

The researcher remains committed to ethical standards, safeguarding participants' rights, well-being, and privacy throughout the research process.

Data Collection

The data gathering procedures in qualitative research are designed to capture the multifaceted dimensions of the research topic. These procedures include:

1. Preparing the Research Instrument: Crafting interview guides, observation checklists, or document analysis frameworks, and pilot-testing them to refine data collection methods.
2. Seeking Informed Consent: Transparently explaining the research purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits to participants, ensuring voluntary and informed participation.
3. Administration of the Instrument and Interview: Engaging in interviews, observations, or document analysis, following established protocols to elicit comprehensive responses.
4. Transcribing, Translating, and Analyzing Data: Converting recordings into written text, ensuring accuracy and consistency, and conducting data analysis to identify patterns and themes.
5. Endorsement to Data Analyst: Enhancing rigor and trustworthiness through peer review or member checking.
6. Ensuring Data Privacy: Upholding data privacy and security, following legal and ethical standards, and employing anonymization or pseudonymization techniques.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research involves coding and thematic analysis:

1. Data Coding: Assigning labels or codes to segments of text to organize, categorize, and make sense of the data. This process helps identify patterns, themes, and relationships within the data.
2. Thematic Analysis: Systematically identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data. The steps include familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and refining themes, defining and naming themes, writing the analysis, and data interpretation.

Environmental triangulation is employed to examine the research topic from multiple environmental or contextual perspectives, enhancing the credibility and richness of the research.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness in qualitative research embodies the reliability, credibility, and validity of the research findings, ensuring the robustness of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. This research adheres to the principles of credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985):

1. Credibility: Ensuring the findings and interpretations are believable and trustworthy through data triangulation, member checking, and rich contextual descriptions.
2. Transferability: Extending the relevance of findings to comparable situations or settings, ensuring practical applicability and broader impact.
3. Dependability: Maintaining consistency, reliability, and transparency in research methods, data collection, and analysis procedures.
4. Confirmability: Ensuring objectivity and impartiality of findings through member checking, maintaining an audit trail, reflexivity, and transparent data analysis procedures.

By adhering to these principles, the research ensures the integrity, reliability, and impact of its findings on early-grade literacy development.

3. RESULTS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of teachers in developing early-grade literacy among learners in Laak North District, Division of Davao de Oro.

This investigation delves into their coping mechanisms for the challenges encountered and the insights drawn from the findings. At this stage of research, the experiences of teachers are defined as their learning and challenging experiences in early-grade literacy development in the classroom.

Early literacy skills form the foundation upon which all other academic disciplines are built, and children who develop strong reading and writing skills in the early grades are better equipped to tackle more complex subjects as they progress through their educational journey. Early literacy is a key component of educational equity, as students who struggle with reading in the early grades often face long-term academic challenges.

Experiences of Teachers in Developing Early Grade Literacy Among the Learners

The experiences of teachers in developing early-grade literacy include pedagogical strategies for literacy development, challenges and solutions in early literacy instruction, and teacher-student dynamics and their impact on literacy development. By exploring these experiences, a nuanced understanding emerges through the identification of major themes that encapsulate the multifaceted aspects of this critical educational endeavor. This exploration provides profound insights into the diverse and impactful ways educators navigate the landscape of fostering literacy skills in young learners.

Pedagogical Strategies for Literacy Development

This theme explores the various instructional methods, techniques, and pedagogical strategies employed by teachers to foster early-grade literacy. It delves into the specific approaches that teachers use to teach reading, writing, and other literacy skills, examining the effectiveness of different strategies in addressing the diverse needs of learners.

IDI-01:

"In my classroom, I've found success through differentiated reading instruction. Recognizing that each student learns differently, I tailor my approach to cater to various learning styles. For instance, during our reading sessions, I incorporate small-group activities, allowing me to provide targeted support to students at different proficiency levels. This way, I can address individual needs and foster a more personalized and effective learning experience."

IDI-05:

"One of the key strategies I employ is integrating phonics-based interactive activities into our literacy sessions. I've observed that engaging students through games, rhymes, and interactive exercises not only makes learning more enjoyable but also reinforces phonetic awareness. By incorporating these activities, I've noticed a significant improvement in their ability to decode words and grasp foundational reading skills, setting a strong foundation for their literacy journey."

IDI-06:

"I've embraced the concept of literature circles as a comprehensive literacy strategy. Creating small groups where students explore a shared reading experience has been transformative. Each student takes on a role, such as discussion leader or vocabulary enricher, fostering collaboration and critical thinking.

This approach not only enhances their reading comprehension but also cultivates a deeper appreciation for literature. It's rewarding to see how these discussions spill over into their independent reading choices and contribute to a holistic literacy development."

Teachers demonstrated a rich tapestry of pedagogical strategies aimed at fostering early-grade literacy development. Common threads across their responses include a commitment to personalized learning, the integration of interactive and engaging activities, and the incorporation of comprehensive literacy approaches. These strategies underscore the teachers' dedication to creating an enriching environment for early-grade literacy development.

Challenges and Solutions in Early Literacy Instruction

This theme focuses on the challenges faced by teachers in developing early-grade literacy among learners, including limited resources, classroom management issues, and adapting to diverse learning styles.

It also explores how teachers navigate and overcome these challenges, identifying innovative solutions, strategies, or support systems implemented to ensure effective literacy instruction.

IDI-02:

"One of the significant challenges we face is the limited resources for early literacy instruction. Our school lacks updated reading materials, and we struggle to provide a variety of books catering to different reading levels. This impacts the effectiveness of our instruction."

IDI-03:

"In my classroom, the challenge lies in catering to the diverse learning needs of students. Some enter with strong language skills, while others need additional support. It's a balancing act to ensure every child gets the attention they require for optimal literacy development. I've implemented a flexible grouping strategy, allowing me to address specific needs within small groups. We've also incorporated individualized instructions to provide one-on-one support. Additionally, regular assessments help in identifying individual strengths and weaknesses, guiding our instructional planning."

IDI-07:

"Getting parents actively involved in their child's literacy journey is a constant struggle. Many are unaware of the impact they can have at home. It's challenging to foster a home environment that complements what we do in the classroom. To tackle this, we've initiated a series of workshops and events to educate parents on simple literacy activities they can do at home. We've created take-home reading kits and established a communication platform to share tips and resources. Building a strong home-school connection is vital."

In exploring the theme of challenges and solutions in early literacy instruction, teachers universally grapple with limited resources, diverse student learning needs, and challenges in fostering parental involvement. Despite these hurdles, educators showcase resilience and creativity in their pedagogical approaches, adopting differentiated instruction strategies and continuous assessments to cater to varied learning needs. Efforts to strengthen the home-school connection include innovative parental engagement initiatives. Continuous improvement and collaboration underscore teachers' commitment to enhancing early literacy instruction.

Teacher-Student Dynamics and Impact on Literacy Development

This theme examines the interactions, relationships, and dynamics between teachers and early-grade learners and how these factors influence literacy development. It explores the role of teacher-student relationships in creating a positive and supportive learning environment for literacy acquisition.

IDI-04:

"A teacher might express the significance of building positive relationships with students to enhance literacy development. They could emphasize the impact of creating a supportive and trusting environment where students feel comfortable expressing themselves. For instance, the teacher might highlight how cultivating a personal connection helps identify individual learning styles and preferences, ultimately tailoring instructional approaches to better meet each student's needs."

IDI-09:

"Another teacher may discuss the role of promoting active participation in the learning process. They might describe interactive classroom activities, group discussions, and collaborative projects that engage students in meaningful literacy experiences. By fostering a dynamic and participatory atmosphere, the teacher believes students are more likely to develop a genuine interest in literacy, leading to improved comprehension and critical thinking skills."

IDI-10:

"A teacher could underscore the importance of offering constructive and personalized feedback to students. By regularly assessing their progress and providing targeted guidance, the teacher aims to address specific literacy challenges and reinforce strengths. This approach, the teacher contends, not only supports academic growth but also contributes to the development of self-confidence and a positive attitude toward literacy."

The synthesis of interview responses underscores the critical role of educators in shaping students' literacy skills. Teachers highlight the significance of tailoring instruction to individual needs, fostering a love for reading, and establishing trust and open communication. Positive teacher-student dynamics contribute significantly to fostering a conducive atmosphere for literacy development.

Coping Mechanisms with the Challenges in Developing Early Grade Literacy Among the Learners

In exploring the experiences of teachers grappling with the challenges in developing early-grade literacy among learners, distinct themes emerge regarding the coping mechanisms employed by educators. These themes reflect

adaptive strategies, collaborative efforts, and a focus on emotional support, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of teachers' responses to the complex landscape of early literacy instruction.

Adaptation and Flexibility in Teaching Methods

Teachers often discussed their ability to adapt and modify their teaching methods based on the diverse needs and challenges of their students. This theme highlights the importance of flexibility in instructional approaches, allowing educators to tailor their strategies to accommodate different learning styles and overcome specific literacy challenges.

IDI-01:

"Given the diverse needs and varied learning styles among early-grade learners, I've found that being adaptable in my teaching methods is key. For instance, if a certain approach doesn't seem to resonate with a group of students, I quickly adjust and try a different strategy. Flexibility allows me to tailor my lessons to the individual needs of each child, ensuring that they can engage with the material in a way that suits them best."

IDI-03:

"One of the coping mechanisms I've embraced is embracing technology. Integrating educational apps and online resources into my lessons has been instrumental, especially when faced with disruptions like school closures. By incorporating digital tools, I aim to maintain a dynamic and interactive learning experience. This adaptability not only caters to the tech-savvy nature of today's students but also serves as a valuable backup plan for unforeseen challenges."

IDI-05:

"Flexibility comes into play when dealing with students at different literacy levels. Instead of adhering strictly to grade-level materials, I often modify assignments to accommodate diverse skill sets. This approach helps struggling learners catch up while allowing those who excel to explore more advanced topics. Being adaptable in this way ensures that every student feels challenged yet supported in their literacy development journey."

Teachers emphasized the paramount importance of being adaptable and flexible in their teaching methods as a coping mechanism for challenges in developing early-grade literacy. A common thread among their responses was the need to tailor instructional approaches to meet the diverse needs and learning styles of students. This adaptability ensures continuity in learning and addresses varying literacy levels among students, creating an inclusive and effective learning environment.

Collaborative Problem-Solving with Colleagues and Parents

Teachers frequently shared experiences of collaborating with colleagues and involving parents in addressing challenges related to early-grade literacy. This theme emphasizes the significance of a collaborative approach, where educators work together and engage parents as partners in the learning process.

IDI-06:

"Collaborative problem-solving has been a game-changer in our school. We've initiated regular meetings where teachers from different grades and subjects come together to share experiences and brainstorm solutions. This has not only improved our own teaching methods but also allowed us to identify effective strategies for early-grade literacy development. Additionally, we've started involving parents more actively. We organize literacy workshops and encourage open communication. It's amazing to see the positive impact when teachers and parents work together towards a common goal."

IDI-09:

"Our collaborative efforts with colleagues and parents have been pivotal in overcoming literacy challenges. We've established a system of peer observations and feedback sessions, enabling us to learn from each other's teaching styles. Moreover, parent-teacher associations have become more dynamic. We conduct regular meetings where we discuss literacy goals, share success stories, and address concerns. The collaboration has not only improved our teaching practices but has also created a supportive community that extends beyond the classroom."

IDI-10:

"In our school, we've implemented a team-based approach to tackle literacy challenges. We formed literacy development teams comprising teachers, administrators, and even parents. This interdisciplinary collaboration has allowed us to explore a range of solutions. We conduct joint planning sessions, share resources, and involve parents in literacy initiatives. The collaborative problem-solving model has fostered a sense of shared responsibility, leading to more effective and sustainable strategies for early-grade literacy development."

The synthesis of teachers' responses highlights the transformative impact of collaborative problem-solving with colleagues and parents in developing early-grade literacy. Teachers emphasized the positive outcomes of interdisciplinary collaboration, involving regular meetings, peer observations, and feedback sessions among colleagues. The integration of parents into the collaborative process emerged as a key element, creating a supportive community that extends beyond the classroom.

Emotional Support and Building Resilience

Coping mechanisms often involve providing emotional support to students and fostering resilience in the face of literacy challenges. Teachers highlighted the importance of creating a positive and encouraging classroom atmosphere, where students feel emotionally supported and empowered to persist in their literacy development.

IDI-02:

"In our school, we recognize that emotional well-being is integral to effective learning. One strategy we employ is creating a nurturing classroom environment. We start each day with a brief emotional check-in, allowing students to express their feelings. This helps build a sense of community and trust. Additionally, incorporating literature that addresses emotions helps students relate and understand their feelings. We've observed that when students feel emotionally supported, they are more engaged in literacy activities and exhibit greater resilience in facing challenges."

IDI-04:

"Understanding that some learners may face emotional challenges, our literacy program includes activities focused on emotional intelligence. We integrate discussions about characters' emotions in stories and encourage students to relate them to their own experiences. To further support resilience, we've introduced a 'buddy system' where students mentor others. This fosters a sense of belonging and provides emotional support. By addressing emotional needs, we've noticed improved concentration, participation, and ultimately, literacy skills."

IDI-07:

"Recognizing that emotional well-being impacts learning, our school has implemented a mindfulness program. We incorporate short mindfulness exercises into our daily routine, helping students manage stress and focus better. When it comes to literacy, we've seen a positive correlation between emotional regulation and improved reading abilities. Additionally, we organize workshops for teachers on recognizing signs of emotional distress in students and providing appropriate support. By prioritizing emotional health, we believe we're laying a foundation for successful literacy development."

The teachers highlighted several effective strategies for providing emotional support and building resilience in the context of developing early-grade literacy. A common thread among their responses was the emphasis on creating a positive and nurturing classroom environment. This included daily emotional check-ins, integrating literature that addresses emotions, and incorporating mindfulness exercises into the daily routine. Additionally, mentorship programs, such as the 'buddy system,' were noted as valuable practices to foster a sense of belonging and provide peer support. The synthesis underscores the significance of an emotionally supportive learning environment in enhancing early-grade literacy outcomes.

Insights of Teachers in Developing Early Grade Literacy Among the Learners

In delving into the experiences and perspectives of teachers engaged in developing early-grade literacy among learners, several overarching themes have emerged, shedding light on their valuable insights. The major themes for the insights of the participants were a holistic approach to literacy, individualized instruction and differentiated learning, and engagement through multimodal learning. These themes collectively portray a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced and multifaceted nature of literacy instruction.

Holistic Approach to Literacy

Teachers emphasized the importance of adopting a holistic approach to literacy development, recognizing that it extends beyond basic reading and writing skills. They highlighted the integration of critical thinking, creativity, and communication skills into literacy activities, aiming to nurture well-rounded learners capable of applying literacy in various contexts.

IDI-02:

"In my experience, taking a holistic approach to literacy in early grades is fundamental. It's not just about teaching children to read and write; it's about nurturing a love for learning. I incorporate activities that integrate literacy into different aspects of their lives, from storytelling sessions that enhance language skills to hands-on projects that make

reading and writing more meaningful. By addressing the social, emotional, and cognitive aspects of learning, we create an environment where students view literacy as a tool for understanding the world around them."

IDI-03:

"I firmly believe in the holistic development of young learners, especially in the realm of literacy. It goes beyond the textbooks and includes cultivating critical thinking, creativity, and emotional intelligence. Through literature circles, where students discuss not only the plot but also the characters' emotions and motivations, we're fostering a deeper understanding of narratives. This approach ensures that literacy becomes a vehicle for personal growth and self-expression, laying the foundation for lifelong learning."

IDI-08:

"In my classroom, a holistic approach to literacy means recognizing and celebrating diversity. I integrate culturally relevant texts and explore different genres to cater to the varied interests and backgrounds of my students. By incorporating diverse perspectives, we not only enhance literacy skills but also promote inclusivity. Students feel a sense of connection to the material, making the learning experience more authentic and impactful. It's about nurturing well-rounded individuals who can navigate a globalized world through the power of literacy."

The synthesis of teachers' insights on the theme of a holistic approach to literacy reveals a shared commitment to extending literacy beyond mere reading and writing skills. Teachers consistently emphasize the importance of integrating literacy into various aspects of students' lives, fostering critical thinking, creativity, emotional intelligence, and a love for learning. Moreover, there is a consensus on the significance of cultural relevance and inclusivity in literacy education, creating a holistic vision of literacy development that cultivates well-rounded individuals prepared for lifelong learning and equipped to navigate a globalized world.

Individualized Instruction and Differentiated Learning

Teachers consistently underscored the significance of recognizing and addressing the diverse learning needs of their students. They discussed strategies such as personalized lesson plans, varied instructional materials, and flexible teaching methods to accommodate different learning styles and paces. This theme reflects the understanding that tailoring literacy instruction to individual students enhances overall comprehension and skill acquisition.

IDI-01:

"In my experience, implementing individualized instruction and differentiated learning has been a game-changer. Recognizing that each student has unique strengths, interests, and learning styles, I tailor my lessons to accommodate diverse needs. For example, during literacy activities, I offer various reading materials and assignments, allowing students to choose topics that resonate with them. This approach not only enhances engagement but also supports personalized skill development. Through regular assessments and observations, I identify areas where each student needs extra support or challenge, ensuring that they progress at their own pace."

IDI-04:

"Differentiated learning has been particularly effective in my classroom. I use a range of instructional strategies to address varying literacy levels and learning preferences. For instance, during reading sessions, I incorporate small group activities, peer collaborations, and even technology-based exercises. This approach ensures that every student receives the necessary support and challenges, fostering a positive and inclusive learning environment. It requires extra planning and flexibility, but the outcomes are rewarding. Students not only improve their literacy skills but also gain confidence as they see their individual progress acknowledged and celebrated."

IDI-10:

"Embracing individualized instruction has revolutionized how I approach early-grade literacy. I take the time to understand each student's unique learning profile, considering factors like language background, interests, and cognitive styles. This knowledge informs my lesson plans and allows me to tailor literacy activities accordingly. For example, for students with diverse linguistic backgrounds, I integrate multilingual materials to make the learning experience more inclusive. By recognizing and accommodating individual differences, I've noticed increased enthusiasm for literacy, and students are more likely to take ownership of their learning journey."

The insights on individualized instruction and differentiated learning underscore a shared commitment to recognizing and addressing the diverse needs of students. Teachers highlight the importance of tailoring lessons to accommodate varied strengths and learning styles, fostering engagement and personalized skill development. The emphasis on differentiation, integrating small group activities, peer collaborations, and technology-based exercises creates an inclusive learning environment that supports students at different literacy levels. These insights collectively advocate

for a holistic and flexible approach prioritizing individual student needs, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of early-grade literacy instruction.

Engagement Through Multimodal Learning

Teachers shared insights on the effectiveness of incorporating diverse learning modalities to engage students in literacy activities. This theme encompasses the use of multimedia resources, interactive technologies, and experiential learning approaches to make literacy instruction more dynamic and captivating.

IDI-05:

"In my classroom, I've seen remarkable results by incorporating multimodal learning strategies. I integrate visuals, interactive games, and hands-on activities to make literacy lessons engaging and memorable. This approach not only caters to diverse learning styles but also sparks enthusiasm among students. For instance, we create multimedia projects where students express their understanding of a story through drawings, acting, or even short videos. It's amazing to witness how this multimodal approach not only enhances literacy skills but also fosters creativity and critical thinking."

IDI-06:

"Multimodal learning has been a game-changer in my literacy instruction. By integrating technology, such as educational apps, I tap into the digital interests of today's young learners. The combination of reading, listening, and interacting with content has shown positive outcomes in literacy development. I often design activities where students create digital stories, enhancing their comprehension and digital literacy skills simultaneously. It's about meeting them where they are and making the learning experience dynamic and relevant."

IDI-09:

"I've found that incorporating multiple modes of learning is essential for early-grade literacy. Beyond traditional methods, I use music, movement, and even nature-based activities to immerse students in the learning process. For example, we might act out a story, use rhythmic patterns to enhance phonemic awareness, or take our literacy lessons outdoors for a change of scenery. This approach not only captures their attention but also reinforces literacy concepts in a holistic way, fostering a deeper connection between students and their learning journey."

The teachers highlighted the transformative impact of engagement through multimodal learning in developing early-grade literacy. They emphasized the versatility of integrating various modes of learning, such as visuals, technology, movement, and nature-based activities, to cater to diverse learning styles. The use of multimedia projects, interactive eBooks, and digital storytelling emerged as effective strategies, aligning with the digital interests of contemporary learners. These approaches not only enhanced literacy skills but also fostered creativity, critical thinking, and a deeper connection between students and their learning journey. The synthesis underscores the importance of making learning dynamic, relevant, and enjoyable for a comprehensive approach to early-grade literacy development.

4. DISCUSSIONS

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of teachers in developing early grade literacy among learners in Laak North District, Division of Davao de Oro. This study also investigated the coping mechanisms teachers employed to overcome challenges and the insights they gained from their experiences. Early literacy skills are the foundation upon which all other academic disciplines are built. Children who develop strong reading and writing skills in the early grades are better equipped to tackle more complex subjects as they progress through their educational journey. Early literacy is a key component of educational equity, as students who struggle with reading in the early grades often face long-term academic challenges.

The study utilized a qualitative-phenomenological approach, which allowed for an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences and perceptions of both students and teachers. By conducting in-depth interviews and observations, the researcher uncovered unique insights into factors influencing early literacy acquisition, such as teaching methods, classroom dynamics, and socio-cultural influences. The major findings indicated that teachers' experiences included pedagogical strategies for literacy development, challenges and solutions in early literacy instruction, and teacher-student dynamics impacting literacy development. Additionally, the study identified distinct themes regarding coping mechanisms, such as adaptation and flexibility in teaching methods, collaborative problem-solving with colleagues and parents, and emotional support for students. Finally, several overarching themes emerged from teachers' insights, including a holistic approach to literacy, individualized instruction and differentiated learning, and engagement through multimodal learning.

Implications

The research on enhancing early-grade literacy among learners holds significant implications for educational practice and policy. The in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences provides nuanced insights into the multifaceted dynamics of early literacy development. These findings offer educators a holistic understanding of effective teaching strategies, classroom dynamics, and socio-cultural influences on literacy acquisition. Policymakers can leverage these insights to shape contextually relevant policies that promote a conducive environment for early-grade literacy education.

Pedagogical Strategies for Literacy Development

The identified pedagogical strategies serve as valuable insights for educators and policymakers, offering concrete examples of approaches that have proven successful in enhancing early literacy. These implications extend to professional development programs for teachers, where a focus on effective strategies can contribute to improved teaching practices. Policymakers can use these findings to inform educational policies that promote the integration of successful pedagogical approaches.

Teacher-Student Dynamics and Literacy Development

Insights into the dynamics between teachers and students highlight the socio-emotional aspects influencing literacy acquisition. Understanding how these dynamics facilitate or hinder literacy development provides valuable guidance for educators and school administrators. The research implications extend to teacher training programs, emphasizing the importance of fostering positive relationships to create an optimal learning environment.

Challenges and Solutions in Early Literacy Instruction

Identifying challenges faced by teachers provides a foundation for targeted interventions and support systems. Recognizing effective solutions proposed by teachers enhances the sharing of best practices within the educational community. These implications extend to professional development programs, emphasizing the importance of equipping teachers with the skills and resources to address challenges effectively.

Adaptation and Flexibility in Teaching Methods

Understanding how teachers adapt their approaches to meet the diverse needs of students offers valuable insights for educational practitioners and policymakers. Recognizing effective strategies in different contexts allows for the development of adaptable teaching frameworks, informing the creation of professional development programs to equip educators with versatile instructional skills.

Collaborative Problem-Solving with Colleagues and Parents

This collaborative approach underscores the importance of involving educators, parents, and colleagues in the literacy development process. The findings suggest that fostering strong partnerships between teachers, parents, and colleagues can contribute to a supportive and enriched learning environment. Educational institutions may consider implementing strategies to encourage and facilitate collaboration among teachers and parents.

Holistic Approach to Literacy

The emphasis on a holistic approach suggests that literacy development should extend beyond traditional academic components to include social, emotional, and cultural dimensions. Educators and policymakers can design literacy programs that incorporate diverse activities, including arts, sports, and community engagement. This approach calls for a reevaluation of curriculum frameworks to ensure a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to literacy education.

Individualized Instruction and Differentiated Learning

The findings underscore the importance of recognizing and addressing individual differences in learning styles, abilities, and preferences. Educators and curriculum developers can design literacy programs that cater to diverse needs, allowing for personalized learning experiences. This personalized approach enhances literacy outcomes and promotes a positive and inclusive educational experience for all learners.

Engagement Through Multimodal Learning

The findings highlight the effectiveness of incorporating diverse and interactive learning modalities in literacy instruction. Educators can leverage various modes such as visual aids, hands-on activities, technology, and collaborative projects to engage students in meaningful literacy experiences. Policymakers and curriculum developers can advocate for the integration of multimodal approaches in early-grade literacy programs, fostering an enriched learning environment that promotes active participation and comprehension.

Future Directions of the Study

Exploring future directions for the study on enhancing early-grade literacy among learners opens the door to continued advancements and improvements in literacy education. Future research could delve deeper into the integration of emerging technologies, the impact of remote or hybrid learning environments, and the role of socio-cultural factors in shaping literacy development. Additionally, investigating the long-term effects of the identified pedagogical strategies, collaborative problem-solving, and holistic approaches on students' literacy outcomes can provide insights for sustained improvements in early-grade literacy education.

Department of Education

The study's findings can inform the development of comprehensive literacy programs, incorporating effective pedagogical strategies, collaborative problem-solving initiatives, and a holistic approach to cater to diverse learning needs. The Department can explore integrating emerging technologies into literacy education, considering the potential benefits of remote or hybrid learning environments.

School Administrators

For school administrators, the study's future directions guide the implementation of evidence-based practices that enhance early-grade literacy within their institutions. Administrators can focus on creating supportive environments that encourage teacher collaboration and the involvement of parents in literacy development initiatives. The insights gained from the study can inform professional development programs for teachers, ensuring they are well-equipped with effective pedagogical strategies and tools.

Teachers

Future directions emphasize ongoing professional development opportunities that empower teachers with innovative pedagogical strategies, encourage collaborative problem-solving approaches, and promote a holistic understanding of literacy. Teachers are encouraged to embrace technology in their instructional methods and adapt to evolving educational landscapes, fostering a dynamic and engaging learning experience for students.

Future Researchers

The study provides a foundation for further investigations into emerging trends and challenges in early-grade literacy. Research in the future could explore the sustained impact of identified pedagogical strategies, delve into the effectiveness of new technologies, and consider the long-term outcomes of collaborative problem-solving initiatives. Future researchers are encouraged to build upon this study, contributing to a growing body of knowledge that continually informs and improves early-grade literacy education.

5. CONCLUSION

The future directions of this study offer a roadmap for advancing early-grade literacy education, emphasizing evidence-based strategies, collaborative efforts, and holistic approaches. These directions pave the way for the Department of Education, school administrators, teachers, and future researchers to collectively contribute to the enhancement of literacy outcomes for young learners. By embracing innovation, adapting to changing educational landscapes, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement, stakeholders can play a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of early-grade literacy education. The study's insights serve as a catalyst for ongoing dialogue, exploration, and action, fostering an environment where each child can develop strong literacy skills, unlocking a world of opportunities for their future endeavors.

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