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Challenges and approaches in teaching emerging readers: Experiences of Grade School teachers in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Early literacy development is a critical foundation for learners' academic success, particularly in the primary grades, where reading skills are first established. This study aimed to explore the difficulties encountered by Grade I and Grade II teachers in addressing emerging readers and to identify the strategies they use to support learners with reading challenges in the classroom. The study utilized a qualitative descriptive research design, collecting data through open-ended survey responses from sixteen (16) Grade I and II teachers.

Findings revealed that teachers commonly experience several challenges in teaching emerging readers. These include learners' difficulty in recognizing letters and sounds, problems with word decoding, poor retention of previously learned reading skills, limited parental support at home, and insufficient time for individualized instruction due to large class sizes and multiple school responsibilities. These difficulties often affect learners' ability to comprehend lessons and perform well across other subject areas.

Despite these challenges, teachers employ various strategies to support struggling readers. These strategies include phonics-based instruction, such as the Marungko approach; the use of flashcards and reading materials; differentiated instruction; guided reading; peer tutoring; and individualized remediation sessions. Teachers also encourage parental involvement and establish reading routines to reinforce literacy skills outside the classroom.

The study concludes that teaching emerging readers requires patience, creativity, and continuous instructional adjustments to meet learners' diverse needs. Providing teachers with adequate training, instructional resources, and institutional support is essential in strengthening early literacy instruction and improving the reading proficiency of learners in the primary grades.

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Introduction

The transition to Grades I and II represents a crucial stage in the development of literacy skills, as learners move from emergent to more formal reading instruction. At this level, pupils are expected to develop

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foundational skills such as letter recognition, phonemic awareness, word decoding, and basic comprehension. According to Gillon (2017) and Torgerson, Brooks, and Hall (2018), systematic phonics instruction and phonological awareness training play a vital role in helping young learners acquire reading proficiency. The Science of Reading also emphasizes that early mastery of literacy skills strongly predicts future academic success, while failure to achieve reading proficiency in the early grades may lead to long-term learning difficulties, commonly referred to as the Matthew Effect in reading (Stanovich, 2024).

Previous studies have examined different approaches to improving early reading skills, including phonics-based instruction, mother tongue-based education, early intervention programs, and differentiated teaching strategies. These studies mainly focused on measuring learners' reading performance, evaluating intervention programs, or identifying factors affecting reading achievement. Some research also discussed the importance of parental involvement, the availability of instructional materials, and teacher competence in literacy instruction. However, despite the availability of these studies, limited research has examined the actual classroom difficulties experienced by Grade I and Grade II teachers when teaching emerging readers, particularly in real classroom settings where teachers work with diverse learners, manage large class sizes, and have limited time for individualized instruction. Moreover, earlier research often emphasized recommended teaching methods but did not fully describe how teachers practically apply these strategies while facing common classroom problems such as learners' difficulty in recognizing letters and sounds, poor retention of previously learned reading skills, lack of parental support, low learner confidence, and the influence of family background on reading development. These challenges show that teaching emerging readers involves not only the use of effective strategies but also teachers' ability to adjust instruction to their learners' needs and conditions.

In addition, although the literature supports the use of phonics-based approaches, instructional materials, peer tutoring, differentiated instruction, repetitive reading drills, and home–school collaboration, there is insufficient localized evidence describing how Grade I and Grade II teachers actually use these strategies to address emerging readers in the classroom. Existing studies rarely document the lived experiences of teachers, particularly in public elementary schools, where instructional constraints, learner diversity, and socioeconomic factors significantly affect the teaching and learning process.

Therefore, a gap exists in the literature regarding the specific difficulties encountered by Grade I and Grade II teachers and the practical strategies they employ to address emerging readers in real classroom settings. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the experiences of elementary teachers, identifying the challenges they face, and describing the strategies they use to support learners who struggle with early reading skills. The findings of this study are expected to provide useful insights for improving literacy instruction, strengthening teacher training programs, and developing more responsive reading interventions suited to the needs of young learners.

Review of related literature

This literature review provides a foundation for examining the current study, which focuses on the difficulties and approaches of Grade I and II Teachers in addressing emerging readers in the classroom.

Difficulties and approaches of grade I and II teachers in addressing emerging readers in the classroom

One common difficulty faced by grade I and II teachers in addressing emerging readers is the difference in pupils' reading readiness. Many pupils enter Grade I and II without basic reading skills such as letter recognition, phonemic awareness, and word decoding, while others already know how to read simple words. This wide gap makes it difficult for teachers to teach at a pace that suits all learners. Research shows that variability in school readiness significantly affects early literacy development and instructional planning (Duncan et al., 2020). When classrooms comprise mixed-ability readers, teachers often struggle to give sufficient attention to non-readers while still extending learning for advanced pupils (Connor et al., 2019).

Another difficulty comes from the language backgrounds of pupils. Many Grade I and II learners speak their mother tongue at home, which may differ from the language used in reading instruction, such as Filipino or English. Because of this, pupils may have limited vocabulary and difficulty understanding reading lessons. Studies indicate that children learning in a second language often experience delays in vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension when instruction is not linguistically responsive (Benson et al., 2021). In the Philippine context, implementation challenges of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) have also affected early reading outcomes due to insufficient materials and teacher preparation (Manalo, 2020).

Classroom conditions also affect how teachers address emerging readers. Large class sizes, limited time, and lack of reading materials make it difficult to provide individualized support. According to UNESCO (2023), overcrowded classrooms and insufficient learning resources are major barriers to foundational literacy in many developing countries. Similarly, the World Bank (2021) reported that limited access to quality instructional materials contributes significantly to learning poverty, particularly in early grades. Despite these challenges, Grade I and II teachers use various approaches to support emerging readers. Teachers commonly use phonics-based instruction, repetition, flashcards, and visual aids to help pupils recognize letters and sounds. Systematic phonics instruction has been shown to improve decoding and word recognition among beginning readers (Ehri et al., 2020). Storytelling, songs, and interactive reading activities are also supported by research as strategies that enhance engagement and vocabulary development (Cabell et al., 2019). Some teachers use the pupils' mother tongue to clarify concepts before gradually introducing Filipino or English, a practice supported by research on multilingual education (Benson et al., 2021).

Teachers also apply remedial and differentiated strategies to help struggling readers. These include small-group reading sessions, peer-assisted learning, and targeted intervention programs. Small-group instruction has been shown to significantly improve reading fluency and comprehension among early-grade learners (Connor et al., 2019). Furthermore, Response to Intervention (RTI) models that provide

tiered support and early screening have demonstrated positive effects in preventing long-term reading difficulties (Stevens et al., 2021). However, the effectiveness of these approaches is often limited by insufficient training, lack of materials, and limited instructional time (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). As a result, teachers must continuously adjust their strategies to meet the diverse needs of emerging readers.

In summary, Grade I and II teachers face challenges related to pupils' reading readiness, language diversity, and limited resources. While research supports phonics instruction, differentiated teaching, and language-sensitive strategies, sustained institutional support remains necessary to improve early literacy outcomes.

Interventions needed to address the difficulties of grade I and II teachers in handling emerging readers

To address these difficulties, targeted professional development in early literacy is essential. Research shows that sustained teacher training in phonics instruction, assessment, and differentiated strategies significantly improves student literacy outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). In the Philippine context, programs implemented by the Department of Education, such as ECARP and Bawat Bata Bumabasa, emphasize capacity building through in-service training and reading interventions (DepEd, 2024).

Another important intervention is the provision of adequate and appropriate reading materials. Access to leveled readers, phonics tools, and contextualized storybooks significantly enhances early reading instruction (Cheung & Slavin, 2022). The World Bank (2021) also highlights that improving the availability of structured teaching materials is one of the most cost-effective ways to reduce learning poverty.

The use of differentiated and learner-centered approaches is also necessary. Since emerging readers have varying abilities, teachers benefit from structured small-group instruction and guided reading models (Connor et al., 2019). Research further supports repeated reading and peer-assisted learning strategies as effective interventions for improving fluency and confidence (Adlof & McLean, 2020).

Language-sensitive instruction is another key intervention. Using the mother tongue as a bridge in early reading instruction supports comprehension and foundational literacy skills (Benson et al., 2021). Strengthening the implementation of MTB-MLE through teacher guides and localized materials can ease language-related reading difficulties (Manalo, 2020).

Lastly, school and community support strengthen reading interventions. UNESCO (2023) emphasizes that whole-school literacy initiatives, parental involvement, and reduced class sizes significantly improve foundational reading outcomes. Aligning classroom practices with national reading programs administered by the Department of Education ensures that Grade I teachers are better equipped to help emerging readers develop essential reading skills.

Theoretical foundations of early reading development

Reading development theories continue to underline early literacy skills as foundational to later academic success. The Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) remains widely cited in recent research as a framework explaining that reading comprehension is the product of decoding and language comprehension (García & Cain, 2019). Studies grounded in this framework emphasize strengthening phonemic awareness and decoding skills among beginning readers — a key challenge noted in Grade I classrooms.

Recent research also supports emergent literacy theory by illustrating that meaningful literacy experiences before formal schooling (e.g., picture books and oral language interactions) improve later reading achievement (Neuman & Celano, 2018). These theoretical foundations justify the need for targeted early literacy practices in Grades I and II.

In addition, contemporary cognitive research highlights the importance of explicit and systematic instruction in foundational literacy skills. According to Castles, Rastle, and Nation (2018), effective early reading instruction must integrate phonics with vocabulary and comprehension strategies to support long-term literacy development. Their findings stress that early intervention in decoding difficulties prevents future reading failure. This reinforces the responsibility of Grade I and II teachers to provide structured phonics instruction, particularly for emerging readers who demonstrate weak letter-sound correspondence skills.

Moreover, Scarborough's Reading Rope model, which has been widely referenced in recent literacy research, illustrates how skilled reading develops through the interaction of word recognition processes (phonological awareness, decoding, sight recognition) and language comprehension processes (background knowledge, vocabulary, syntax) (Petscher et al., 2020). The model suggests that weaknesses in any strand can hinder reading development. For Grade I and II teachers, this theoretical perspective supports the implementation of balanced literacy practices that simultaneously develop decoding skills and oral language competence in beginning readers.

Reading difficulties in early grades

Recent findings from the Department of Education Early Language, Literacy, and Numeracy (ELLN) assessments indicate that many Grade I learners continue to struggle with early reading skills, particularly letter-sound recognition and word decoding (DepEd, 2023). These results align with global evidence showing persistent early literacy challenges in developing countries.

According to the World Bank (2021), learning poverty affects a significant number of children worldwide, meaning many cannot read and understand a simple text by age 10 — a problem rooted in weak early reading foundations.

UNESCO (2023) further emphasizes that overcrowded classrooms, insufficient instructional support, and a lack of quality reading materials are widespread barriers to reading development.

A study by López-Escribano et al. (2021) found that early-grade pupils with limited language exposure and fewer home literacy experiences demonstrate slower reading acquisition, a finding that echoes local observations of diverse language backgrounds among Grade I and II learners.

Recent large-scale assessments further confirm the seriousness of early reading gaps. Results from the OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 revealed that Filipino learners continue to perform below the global average in reading literacy, suggesting that foundational reading difficulties in the early grades may persist into higher levels of schooling (OECD, 2023). These findings indicate that unresolved reading problems in Grades I and II can have long-term academic consequences if not addressed through early intervention.

Moreover, research by Snowling and Hulme (2021) highlights that early identification of at-risk readers is critical in preventing long-term reading failure. Their study emphasizes that children who do not receive timely support in phonological awareness and decoding during the first years of schooling are more likely to experience continued reading difficulties in later grades. This underscores the importance of equipping Grade I and II teachers with assessment tools and intervention strategies to identify and support emerging readers as early as possible.

Language and mother-tongue-based instruction

Language continues to play a central role in research on early literacy instruction. Studies consistently show that beginning reading in the mother tongue improves comprehension, vocabulary, and confidence before transitioning to a second language (Benson et al., 2021).

In the Philippines, the Department of Education implemented Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) within the basic education curriculum. Recent evaluations revealed that pupils taught in their first language during early years performed better in both decoding and comprehension than those taught primarily in Filipino or English (Reyes & Chua, 2022).

However, challenges persist, including a lack of mother-tongue reading materials and limited teacher preparation to effectively implement MTB-MLE in public schools (Manalo, 2020).

Recent international evidence further supports the effectiveness of mother-tongue instruction in early grades. According to UNESCO (2023), children learn to read more efficiently when literacy instruction is delivered in a language they understand, particularly during the first three years of schooling. The report highlights that cognitive development and reading comprehension are strengthened when learners build literacy skills in their first language before gradually transitioning to additional languages. This approach reduces confusion, increases classroom participation, and enhances learner confidence.

Moreover, a study by Seid (2021) on multilingual classrooms found that pupils receiving mother-tongue-based instruction demonstrated stronger phonological awareness and faster word recognition compared to those instructed solely in a second language. The study emphasized that language familiarity supports decoding accuracy and comprehension, especially among beginning readers. These findings reinforce

the importance of equipping Grade I and II teachers with appropriate training and localized instructional materials to effectively implement language-sensitive reading strategies in diverse classrooms.

Effective reading interventions for emerging readers

A strong body of research continues to support structured interventions for early readers. Systematic phonics instruction — involving the explicit teaching of sound-letter relationships — has consistently been shown to improve decoding and word recognition among beginning readers (Ehri et al., 2020).

Guided small-group instruction also shows significant benefits. For example, Connor et al. (2019) found that structured small-group reading interventions raised reading fluency and comprehension among struggling early readers more effectively than whole-class teaching alone.

In the Philippine education context, programs aligned with the Department of Education's reading policies — such as the Every Child a Reader Program (ECARP) and Bawat Bata Bumabasa — are associated with improved early literacy outcomes when supported by adequate materials and teacher training (DepEd, 2024).

Intervention studies also find that repeated reading practices (Adlof & McLean, 2020) and peer-assisted learning strategies improve fluency and motivation among beginning readers.

Recent meta-analyses further emphasize the importance of data-driven and targeted interventions in the early grades. A review by Stevens et al. (2021) found that Response to Intervention (RTI) models, which involve early screening and tiered instructional support, significantly improve reading outcomes for at-risk learners when implemented consistently. The study highlights that early identification combined with structured intervention reduces the number of pupils who develop persistent reading difficulties. This approach is particularly relevant for Grade I and II teachers who manage mixed-ability classrooms and must address varying levels of reading readiness.

Additionally, digital and technology-assisted reading interventions have gained attention in recent years. According to a study by Cheung and Slavin (2022), educational technology programs that incorporate phonics practice, interactive reading exercises, and immediate feedback can moderately improve early literacy skills when used alongside teacher-led instruction. However, the study stresses that technology should supplement — not replace — explicit teaching and guided practice. For schools with limited resources, combining structured phonics, small-group instruction, and consistent monitoring remains the most effective strategy for supporting emerging readers.

Statement of the problem

This study aims to explore the struggles/experiences, approaches, and strategies/interventions needed to overcome the difficulties faced by Grade I and II Teachers in addressing emerging readers in the classroom in the Schools Division of Ilocos Norte.

Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the difficulties of Grade I and II Teachers in addressing emerging readers in the classroom?
2. What are the approaches of Grade I and II Teachers in addressing the difficulties of emerging readers in the classroom?

Methodology

This chapter presents the research design and sources of data, including the study locale, population, sampling, data-gathering instrument, and data analysis, along with its ethical standards.

Research design

This study will employ a descriptive qualitative research design to identify the difficulties encountered by Grade I and II teachers when addressing emerging readers, as well as the approaches they use in the classroom. This design is appropriate as the study focuses on describing teachers' experiences and instructional practices in early reading instruction.

Data were gathered through interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observations involving selected Grade I and II teachers. The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common challenges and teaching approaches related to emerging readers.

This research design will provide an in-depth understanding of the instructional realities of Grade I and II teachers and serve as a basis for recommending appropriate reading interventions.

Locale of the study

The study was conducted in selected public elementary schools in the Municipality of Dingras, Ilocos Norte. Dingras is a first-class municipality located in the northern part of the province of Ilocos Norte. The schools in this area serve learners from diverse family backgrounds, many of whom speak Ilokano as their mother tongue.

This locale was chosen because Grade I and II teachers in Dingras encounter common challenges in addressing emerging readers, particularly in multilingual classroom settings. The setting provides a relevant context for examining the difficulties and teaching approaches of Grade I and II teachers in early reading instruction.

Population and sampling

The study involved Grade I and II teachers from selected public elementary schools in Dingras, Ilocos Norte. Purposive sampling will be used to select teachers who are directly involved in teaching emerging readers.

Data gathering instrument

The study will use a researcher-developed questionnaire, interview guide, and classroom observation checklist to gather data on the difficulties encountered by Grade I and II teachers and the approaches

they use to address emerging readers. These instruments will help collect the relevant and reliable information needed to achieve the study's objectives.

Data gathering procedure

Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires distributed to the participating Grade I teachers. The questionnaires were designed to encourage reflective and descriptive responses, allowing teachers to share their experiences, difficulties, and approaches in addressing emerging readers. Selected responses were further clarified through informal follow-up interviews to expand and validate the information provided.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the school authorities, and the participants were informed about the purpose of the study. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality of the teachers’ identities and responses was ensured. All data gathered was used solely for academic purposes.

Data presentation and analysis

This section presents findings from an online interview questionnaire administered to 16 teachers from different elementary schools regarding their experiences teaching emerging readers in Grades 1 and 2. The data were analyzed and organized into major themes based on recurring ideas in the participants’ responses. These themes highlight the experiences, challenges, teaching strategies, and instructional adjustments that teachers use to support struggling and emerging readers.

Problem 1: What are the difficulties of Grade I & 2 Teachers in addressing emerging readers in the classroom?

Table 1: Instructional difficulties of Grade I & II teachers in addressing emerging readers

Merged Idea	Participants
Learners have difficulty recognizing letters, sounds, and decoding words	P1, P4, P5, P7, P10
Learners easily forget previously learned reading skills	P6, P9, P14
Lack of parental support and follow-up at home	P3, P8, P11, P14
Large class size and limited time for individualized instruction	P2, P10
Learners lack confidence or avoid reading activities	P4, P7
Family background affects learners’ reading development.	P15
Difficulty understanding written test questions due to poor reading skills	P16

Note. Data were gathered from open-ended questionnaire responses and follow-up informal interviews with ten elementary teachers from Dingras I and II Elementary School.

Theme 1: Instructional difficulties of teachers in addressing emerging readers

Teaching emerging readers in the early grades presents numerous challenges that affect both instruction and learners' literacy development. Grade I and II teachers often encounter difficulties, including learners' inability to recognize letters and sounds, slow reading development, lack of parental support, and limited time to provide individualized instruction. These challenges require teachers to devote additional time, patience, and strategic teaching approaches to help learners develop foundational reading skills.

Participants' responses reveal that teaching emerging readers is both demanding and rewarding. While teachers experience frustration when learners struggle to acquire basic literacy skills, they also feel a sense of fulfillment as students gradually develop the ability to read. These experiences highlight the importance of effective literacy instruction, early intervention programs, and strong collaboration between teachers and parents to support struggling readers.

Research emphasizes that early literacy instruction plays a crucial role in children's academic success because reading is the foundation of learning across subject areas. When learners struggle with reading in the early grades, it can affect their comprehension and performance in other subjects (Castles, Rastle, & Nation, 2018). Therefore, teachers must employ appropriate instructional strategies to support emerging readers and ensure they develop the literacy skills needed for future learning.

Difficulty in recognizing letters, sounds, and words

One of the major challenges experienced by teachers is learners' difficulty in recognizing letters, identifying sounds, and decoding simple words. Many respondents reported that some learners enter Grade I or Grade II without basic knowledge of the alphabet, making it difficult for them to participate in reading activities.

One participant shared:

"I have several learners who are still at the syllable level, while others cannot recognize letters and sounds yet. It requires extra time, patience, and effort to help them develop reading skills." (P1, P5, P7)

Similarly, another teacher stated:

"Some learners cannot match letters with their sounds even after repeated practice, which makes it difficult for them to decode words." (P4)

These findings are supported by recent research indicating that phonemic awareness and decoding skills are essential components of early reading development. Learners who lack these foundational skills often struggle with reading fluency and comprehension (Castles, Rastle, & Nation, 2018). Likewise, **Ehri (2020)** emphasized that systematic phonics instruction is critical in helping beginning readers understand the relationship between letters and sounds, enabling them to read words more accurately.

Learners easily forget previously learned reading skills

Another difficulty teachers experience is learners' inability to retain previously learned reading skills. Some respondents reported that, even after repeated instruction, learners sometimes forget letter sounds or struggle to recall previously practiced words.

One respondent explained:

"There are times when learners forget the sounds of letters that we already practiced several times, and we have to go back and review again." (P6)

Another teacher noted:

"Sometimes learners cannot remember what they learned the previous day, which makes reading progress slower." (P9)

This challenge reflects the importance of consistent practice and reinforcement in literacy instruction. According to **Snowling and Hulme (2021)**, struggling readers often require repeated exposure to phonics instruction and reading activities to strengthen memory and reading fluency. Frequent practice and reinforcement help learners retain their reading skills and gradually improve their literacy.

Lack of parental support and home follow-up

Several teachers also highlighted the lack of parental support as a major challenge in addressing emerging readers. Many respondents explained that learners have limited opportunities to practice reading at home, which slows down their progress.

One participant shared:

"It is difficult when there is no follow-up at home because parents rely only on the teacher to help the learner read." (P3)

Another teacher added:

"When parents are not able to guide their children at home, learners struggle more in reading activities." (P8)

Research shows that parental involvement significantly influences children's literacy development. When parents actively participate in their child's reading practice, learners are more likely to develop stronger reading skills and greater motivation to read (Sénéchal & Young, 2018). Therefore, collaboration between teachers and parents is essential in supporting emerging readers.

Limited time for individualized instruction

Teachers also reported difficulty in providing individualized instruction due to large class sizes and multiple responsibilities in school. Several respondents mentioned that balancing teaching duties with other tasks limits the time they can devote to struggling readers.

One teacher stated:

“Because of the large class size, it is difficult to give one-on-one attention to every learner who struggles with reading.” (P2)

Another respondent explained:

“Time is also a challenge because we have many school activities and responsibilities.” (P10)

According to **OECD (2020)**, teachers often face time constraints when implementing differentiated instruction, especially in classrooms with diverse learning abilities. Providing individualized reading instruction requires sufficient time and resources to ensure that struggling learners receive the support they need.

Problem 2: What are the strategies of Grade I & 2 Teachers in addressing emerging readers in the classroom?

Table 2: Strategies Used by Teachers to Address Emerging Readers

Merged Idea	Participants
Use of phonics-based strategies (Marungko approach, decoding, blending)	P4, P5, P9
Use of instructional materials (flashcards, picture cards, reading materials)	P1, P6
Peer tutoring or buddy reading	P2, P13
Differentiated instruction and individualized support	P3, P7
Home–school collaboration and reading routines	P1, P14
Reading drills and repetitive practice	P6, P12

Note. Data were gathered from open-ended questionnaire responses and follow-up informal interviews with ten elementary teachers from Dingras I and II Elementary School.

Theme 2: Strategies used by teachers to address reading difficulties

Despite the challenges encountered in teaching emerging readers, teachers employ various strategies to help learners develop foundational reading skills. These strategies include phonics instruction, differentiated teaching, peer tutoring, and collaboration with parents.

These instructional practices aim to strengthen learners’ phonemic awareness, decoding skills, and reading confidence. Teachers also provide additional practice opportunities and individualized support to ensure that struggling readers receive the assistance they need to improve their literacy skills.

Research highlights that effective early literacy instruction should include explicit phonics teaching, guided reading, and opportunities for meaningful reading practice (Ehri, 2020; Snowling & Hulme, 2021). By implementing these strategies, teachers can create supportive learning environments that promote literacy development among emerging readers.

Use of phonics-based instruction

Many respondents emphasized the use of phonics-based approaches such as the **Marungko method**, decoding exercises, and blending activities to help learners understand the relationship between letters and sounds.

One participant explained:

“I use the Marungko approach and phonics activities to help learners decode words more easily.” (P5)

Another teacher shared:

“Explicit phonics instruction and repeated practice help learners recognize sounds and read simple words.” (P4)

Research supports the effectiveness of phonics instruction in improving early reading skills. According to **Ehri (2020)**, systematic phonics teaching helps learners develop word recognition skills, which are essential for reading fluency and comprehension.

Use of instructional materials and interactive activities

Teachers also reported using various instructional materials such as flashcards, picture charts, reading corners, and storybooks to support reading instruction.

One teacher stated:

“I use flashcards, picture charts, and reading materials to make reading activities more engaging.” (P6)

Similarly, another respondent explained:

“I created a reading corner with different storybooks so learners can practice reading regularly.” (P1)

According to **Guthrie and Klauda (2019)**, engaging reading materials and interactive activities increase learners’ motivation and encourage active participation in literacy instruction.

Peer tutoring and collaborative learning

Peer tutoring was also identified as an effective strategy for helping struggling readers. Teachers pair emerging readers with more advanced readers to provide additional support during reading activities.

One participant shared:

“I assign reading buddies so that struggling learners can practice reading with classmates who can guide them.” (P2)

Research indicates that peer-assisted learning strategies improve reading fluency and comprehension while promoting collaboration among learners (Topping, 2019).

Results and discussion

The findings of the study highlight that Grade I and II teachers face persistent challenges in developing foundational reading skills among emerging readers, particularly in letter recognition, phonemic awareness, and decoding. These findings align with recent research emphasizing that early literacy acquisition depends heavily on mastery of basic reading components, especially phonological awareness and decoding skills. Studies show that learners who fail to acquire these early skills often experience long-term reading difficulties and reduced academic performance (Wulandari & Pujaningsih, 2025).

The issue of learners forgetting previously learned reading skills suggests gaps in retention and mastery. This supports contemporary cognitive research indicating that repeated, structured, and multisensory learning experiences are necessary to strengthen memory and automaticity in early reading (Wulandari & Pujaningsih, 2025). The teachers' use of reading drills and repetitive practice in the study reflects evidence-based practices that promote fluency and long-term retention.

Another major finding is the lack of parental support and follow-up at home. Recent studies strongly confirm that the home literacy environment significantly influences children's reading development. For instance, parental engagement in reading activities such as storytelling, shared reading, and discussions enhances vocabulary development, comprehension, and reading motivation (Caban et al., 2024). Similarly, a 2024 study found that children's literacy outcomes are closely linked to parental beliefs and involvement in literacy-related activities at home. This reinforces the idea that literacy development is a shared responsibility between school and home.

The findings also emphasize large class sizes and limited time for individualized instruction. This is consistent with recent educational research, which shows that effective literacy instruction requires targeted, individualized support, especially for struggling readers. Without sufficient time for intervention, learners may fall behind in acquiring essential reading skills (Vaknin-Nusbaum et al., 2025).

Furthermore, learners' lack of confidence and avoidance of reading activities observed in the study align with current findings that motivation and emotional engagement play a critical role in reading success. Learners who experience repeated difficulty often develop negative attitudes toward reading, which further hinders progress (Vaknin-Nusbaum et al., 2025).

On the other hand, the strategies employed by teachers—such as phonics-based instruction, use of instructional materials, peer tutoring, and differentiated instruction—are strongly supported by recent literature. Phonics-based approaches remain one of the most effective methods for teaching early reading, as they help learners systematically understand sound-symbol relationships. Additionally, multisensory and contextual learning strategies have been shown to significantly improve reading outcomes among struggling learners (Wulandari & Pujaningsih, 2025).

Peer tutoring or buddy reading also reflects collaborative learning approaches, which have been found to improve engagement and comprehension through social interaction. Meanwhile, differentiated

instruction ensures that diverse learner needs are addressed, which is critical in inclusive classrooms with varying ability levels.

Theoretical implications

The findings of this study contribute to and extend several contemporary theories in literacy and education:

1. Interactive and social nature of literacy learning

The results support sociocultural perspectives of learning, which emphasize that literacy develops through interaction with teachers, peers, and parents. The effectiveness of peer tutoring and guided instruction highlights that reading is not an isolated skill but a socially mediated process.

2. Emergent literacy theory

The findings reinforce emergent literacy theory, which posits that reading development begins long before formal schooling and is shaped by early exposure to language and print. The lack of parental involvement observed in the study demonstrates how limited early literacy experiences can hinder reading acquisition.

3. Cognitive theory of skill acquisition

The need for repetition, drills, and structured phonics instruction supports cognitive theories emphasizing practice and automaticity in learning. Reading becomes fluent when learners repeatedly engage with text and gradually internalize decoding processes.

4. Ecological systems theory (contemporary application)

Recent research highlights that children's literacy development is influenced by multiple environments, including home, school, and community. The study's findings on parental involvement and classroom challenges support this multi-layered perspective of learning.

Practical implications

The findings provide several important implications for educational practice:

1. Strengthening early literacy programs

Schools should implement structured and evidence-based literacy programs that emphasize phonics, decoding, and comprehension strategies. Training teachers in updated literacy instruction methods is essential.

2. Enhancing parental involvement

Schools should actively engage parents by providing reading programs, workshops, and home-based literacy activities. Research shows that consistent parental involvement significantly improves children's reading outcomes.

3. Use of multisensory and contextual learning

Teachers should incorporate multisensory strategies such as visual aids, storytelling, and interactive reading activities, which have been proven effective in improving early reading skills.

4. Implementation of differentiated instruction

Educators should assess learners regularly and provide targeted interventions based on their reading levels. Small group instruction and individualized support are critical for struggling readers.

5. Promotion of peer-assisted learning

Schools should institutionalize peer tutoring programs such as buddy reading to foster collaborative learning and improve reading confidence.

6. Addressing structural constraints

Educational leaders should consider reducing class sizes or providing additional support (e.g., teacher aides or reading specialists) to allow more time for individualized instruction.

7. Developing a positive reading culture

Teachers and parents should work together to create a supportive reading environment that encourages practice, builds confidence, and fosters positive attitudes toward reading.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Grade I and Grade II teachers face several challenges in supporting emerging readers. Many pupils struggle with basic reading skills such as letter recognition, phonemic awareness, and word decoding, which affect their comprehension in different subject areas. Other contributing factors include limited parental involvement, diverse learning abilities, and limited time for individualized instruction due to large class sizes.

Despite these challenges, teachers show strong dedication by using different strategies such as phonics-based instruction, guided reading, differentiated learning activities, peer tutoring, and interactive reading materials. These strategies help learners gradually improve their reading skills and build confidence in reading.

The study found that emerging readers require consistent guidance, structured support, and engaging learning activities. Teachers play an important role in identifying learners' needs and providing appropriate interventions. Parental involvement, collaborative learning, and the availability of instructional materials also significantly contribute to improving learners' reading development.

Schools should strengthen early literacy programs and reading intervention activities to support struggling readers. Teachers should be provided with continuous professional development to enhance their reading instruction strategies. Schools should also ensure the availability of adequate reading materials and strengthen partnerships with parents to support reading practice at home. Through collective efforts, learners can develop the foundational literacy skills necessary for academic success.

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