

## ACADEMIC CHALLENGES AND LOCUS OF CONTROL OF STRUGGLING READERS IN A PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL

Reynaldo B. Aranego, Jr.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Sultan Kudarat State University-Kalamansig Campus, Kalamansig, Sultan Kudarat, Philippines

Corresponding Email: [reynaldoaranego@sksu.edu.ph](mailto:reynaldoaranego@sksu.edu.ph)

Available Online: August 2023  
Revised: June 2023  
Accepted: June 2023  
Received: July 2022

Volume I Issue 3 (2023)  
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10017638  
E-ISSN: 2984-7184  
P-ISSN: 2984-7176  
<https://getinternational.org/research/>

### Abstract:

Reading proficiency plays a vital role in keeping up-to-date with technological advancements and innovations in education. However, there are Grade 7 students who need help with the essential skill of reading. These students need support for them to cope with the classroom demands. This transcendental phenomenological qualitative research aims to determine the academic experiences of struggling readers inside the classroom. Five struggling readers were the participants of this study. These five participants were purposefully selected after being recommended by the school reading coordinator. The interview guide questionnaire was the instrument of this study. The interview guide questionnaire contains open-ended questions that were validated by experts. One-on-one interviews were conducted for about 20 to 40 minutes each. Using an audio recorder, the interviews were recorded. After the interview, a verbatim transcription was made and thematic analysis was utilized to analyze the significant lines of the participants. The following themes were elicited from the participants' responses, namely: lack of computer skills, limited visual attention span, hesitation and anxiety to participate, difficulty in interaction, difficulty with the use of technology in education, confusion with letter-sound identification, less motivation to learn, problem understanding the lesson, and slow in taking down notes. The participants attributed their reading difficulties to themselves, their teachers, and their parents. In light of these findings, it is strongly recommended that a robust and comprehensive reading recovery program be implemented. This program should address struggling readers' multifaceted challenges and provide them with the necessary support to enhance their reading proficiency and overall academic performance.

**Keywords:** *Struggling readers, classroom experiences, locus of control*

### Recommended Citation:

Aranego Jr., R. (2023). ACADEMIC CHALLENGES AND LOCUS OF CONTROL OF STRUGGLING READERS IN A PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL. GUILD OF EDUCATORS IN TESOL INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL, 1(3), 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10017638>

## INTRODUCTION

Reading plays a vital role in the academic achievements of students. It allows a person to understand written concepts in various printed media and online sources. Many scholars have claimed the importance of reading in an academic context. Palani (2012) asserts that compelling reading is the most important avenue for effective learning, and achieving educational success requires successful reading. Similarly, Idulog et al. (2023) claim that reading plays a very crucial part in education. Students' capacity to analyze written texts is pivotal in comprehending all subject areas. The children's reading abilities are negatively impacted by their lack of abilities in word identification and vocabulary (Gedik & Akyol, 2022).

Evidently, a disturbing trend emerges as we observe a substantial number of elementary education graduates who lack competence in word recognition and reading comprehension. The 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) unequivocally place Filipino pupils at the bottom of the global ranking for reading proficiency. This sad reality aligns with the observations of Salaverria and Adonis (2022), who report that a significant proportion of Grade 3 to 6 pupils in the Bicol Region are non-readers. Decena (2021) further elucidates that children grappling with reading difficulties often spiral into low self-esteem, diminished motivation, and reduced persistence in academic pursuits, ultimately perpetuating a cycle of academic underachievement. This reality resonates with educators worldwide.

Filipino scholars conducted many surveys on the factors affecting students' reading ability and ways to improve it. Most of their studies were quantitative, such as descriptive and correlational. Despite being the subject of much research, problems in reading still need to be made evident.

In this light, the researcher goes in-depth into the real experiences of struggling students in their academic undertaking through a qualitative procedure. The researcher also determined which factors these students account for their reading struggles based on their locus of control. Results may shed light on the curriculum designers and implementer in crafting policy recommendations and possible school reading program interventions. .

## Objectives

This research described the academic challenges of Grade 7 struggling readers in a Public High School in the Philippines.

Specifically, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the academic-related challenges experienced by the struggling readers?
2. To whom do the struggling readers account for their failure in reading?

## METHODS

The study employed a transcendental phenomenological research method to elicit the lived experiences of struggling readers in terms of their academic difficulties. Accordingly, phenomenology studies and analyzes events as they are consciously experienced and its main goal is to have a precise and accurate description of how things look to us while we are intentionally thinking about them (Yee, 2019). This study focused on the experiences of struggling grade 7 students in reading and how they account for their frustrations. The participants of this research were the five (5) struggling readers in a public high school. These five students were purposefully selected upon the recommendations of the school reading coordinator. To gather the data, the researcher utilized an Interview Guide

Questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of three (3) parts: Opening, Interview Proper, and Closing. Questions are open-ended with supplemental questions as follow-ups. The instrument was validated by a poll of experts in the field of qualitative research. During the interview, participants were allowed to use their mother tongue to express their feelings. Then, significant lines from the interview were translated to English.

After completing the required entry protocols, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews to the selected participants. Each participant was interviewed in a reading center, and each was given enough time to answer each question freely. With the consent of the participants, the interview was recorded. After the interview, verbatim transcription was made. Further, data analysis was patterned from Colaizzi’s Method of Data Analysis cited from Praveena (2022) which includes: Lifting Significant Lines, Assigning Codes, and Reducing Codes to Themes.

## RESULTS and DISCUSSION

**Table 1.** Challenges Encountered by Struggling Readers inside the Classroom

Themes	Thematic Statement
Limited Visual Attention Span	Students’ visual span of attention during classes is short.
Difficulty of Interaction	Students have trouble in sharing their ideas during class activities.
Confused with Letter-sound Identification	Students are troubled in distinguishing the sounds of the letters in the alphabet.
Less Motivated to Learn	Students have less desire to study.
Poor Comprehension of the Lesson	Students have poor comprehension of the lesson discussed by the teacher.
Slow in Taking Notes	Students have difficulty in taking down notes during classes.

Shown in Table 1 are the themes and thematic statements elicited from the responses of the participants. As shown, students have limited visual attention span which means that the duration of their sight words during classes is quite short. It entails that students have difficulties in maintaining their focus during classes, particularly when reading. They feel sleepy and bored during classes, which hampers their ability to concentrate. This is evident in the lines of participants 1 and 3: P1: “I don’t want to look at the board that long”; and P3: “I feel sleepy in the class. I find it boring and it’s hard for me to focus on what I am reading.”

In addition, students have expressed that they experienced difficulty in interaction. This entails that students have trouble in sharing their ideas during group activities that require brainstorming. Students disclosed that they could hardly relate to the business of the group task and found it hard to cooperate. This further entails that participating in group activities is challenging for them and they lack understanding of their roles within the group. This is manifested in the lines of Participant 2: “During the group activities, I am silent because I do not know how to help my group mate”; and Participant 4: “I am ashamed that I could not contribute during group discussion because I have nothing to say.”

Participants 1 and 3 shared that they have difficulties in distinguishing letters from sounds. They can easily remember the letter, but they often get the wrong sounds of these letters which leads to severe confusion and difficulty in reading texts. This manifests that students experience discomfort while reading which is evident in the following lines:

P1: "I am confused with the letters. It seems that I have problems with my sight. Then once I had to blend the sounds, I became confused."

P3: "I feel pain in my eyes once I focus myself on words. Also, I am very confused about their sounds."

In addition, participants claimed that they feel less motivated to study. They disclosed that they are demotivated because of their experiences in their surroundings due to this difficulty in reading which made them think of not going to school anymore. It implies that frequent absences are noted, especially when reading is involved. This is evident in the lines: P2: "I lost my interest in studying"; P3: "My father advised me to stop schooling next year because I struggled a lot in learning.", and P5: "I am absent from the class especially if there is a schedule for reading".

Participants also shared that they are troubled in terms of understanding the lesson. It entails that the participants find the English lessons difficult to comprehend unless they are translated into their vernacular language. This is very evident in the lines of all the participants that they have poor comprehension during the class discussion.

P1: "I could not understand the lesson unless it was translated into Filipino by my teacher."

P2: "I could not comprehend what I read especially if it's English."

P3: "Honestly, it is hard for me to grasp the lesson."

P4: "Nothing sir. I understand only a few of the topics. It's very difficult for me to comprehend it."

P5: "I often get confused. I pretend that I understand the lesson."

The aforementioned themes imply that struggling readers are troubled with a variety of learning challenges, such as issues with focus, motivation, interaction, phonemic awareness, and comprehension. To help these students overcome their difficulties and achieve academic success, addressing these challenges would probably require specialized teaching tactics and support.

**Table 2.** Perceived Locus of Control of Struggling Students

Themes	Thematic Statement
Home Factors	The students blame their family for not teaching them how to read at home.
Personal Factors	Students blame their own self for not approximating their skills in reading.
Teacher Factors	Students blame their teacher for not providing them opportunities to cope with their difficulties.

Table 3 reveals the locus of control of struggling readers. Lines of Participant 1: "My family doesn't care about me; No one was teaching me at home to read"; Participant 3: "At home, I am not taught to read because my grandmother could hardly see"; and Participant 5: "If someone had taught me at home, I could have read well" disclosed that they have not received any support from family members at home in terms of reading. Students blame the people at home for not giving them attention to help them with their difficulties in reading. It means that most of the students account for their reading difficulties at home. This implies that participants consider their home as one of the most important nurturing grounds for their skills.

Meanwhile, one of the participants disclosed that his/her teacher in elementary grades has not provided him attention in terms of reading. This means that this particular participant accounts for his difficulties to his teachers. This implies that teachers are viewed by this participant as important people in his reading development. This is

evident in the line of Participant 4: "In elementary school, we seldom had a one-on-one reading tutorial. Teachers don't care much."

Lastly, four (4) or a majority of the participants disclosed that they blamed themselves for not exerting efforts to approximate the reading. Evident in the lines of P1, P2, P3, and P4 that personal drive matters for them to overcome their reading difficulty.

P1: "I was always absent from the class, and I admit that it's my fault."

P2: "If I had studied hard, I could have read well."

P3: "Then, I was always absent from school even though grandma was angry of me."

P4: "But sir, I really don't want to read. I'm tired of memorizing."

## CONCLUSION

In light of the findings, it is evident that Grade 7 struggling readers face a multitude of challenges throughout their classroom experiences. These challenges significantly impede their ability to meet the academic requirements of basic education. The participants attributed their reading difficulties to themselves, their teachers, and their parents. It manifests that students firmly believe that their teachers and parents are significant in their academic success. Consequently, it is imperative that a robust and concerted effort be undertaken to provide the necessary remediation and support to help these students overcome these challenges and thrive academically.

## REFERENCES:

- Decena, A. (2021). Survey on the reading difficulties of K-12 learners in selected Tagalog-speaking provinces: basis for intervention. Retrieved from <https://ijase.org/index.php/ijase>
- Gedik, & Akyol. (2022). Reading difficulty and development of fluent reading skills: An action research. *International Journal of Progressive Education*, 18 (1)
- Idulog, M., Gladiano, R., Toledo, E., Hermosada, M., Casaldon, H., Mariposa, M., Geron, C. Dequito, E., Genanda, J., Malipot, M., Pentang, J., & Bautista, R. (2023). Filipino students' reading abilities: A note on the challenges and potential areas for improvement. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/371470260\\_Filipino\\_Students'\\_Reading\\_Abilities\\_A\\_Note\\_on\\_the\\_Challenges\\_and\\_Potential\\_Areas\\_for\\_Improvement/citations](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/371470260_Filipino_Students'_Reading_Abilities_A_Note_on_the_Challenges_and_Potential_Areas_for_Improvement/citations)
- Palani, K. (2012). Promoting reading habits and creating a literate society. *International Refereed Research Journal*, 3 (2), 90–94.
- Praveena, K. (2022). Application of Colaizzi's method of data analysis in phenomenological research. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/363573402>
- Salaverria, & Adonis. (2020). Pupils' problem is not literacy but reading comprehension – DepEd. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1230013/pupils-problem-not-literacy-but-reading-comprehension-deped>
- Yee, S.F. (2019). The framework of transcendental phenomenology: In a phenomenological inquiry into Science teachers' case method learning. *SpringerBriefs in Education*. Springer, Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-2679-0\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-2679-0_1)