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Utilizing Technology to Improve Reading Skills: Intermediate Grade Teachers in Focus

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Abstract: This phenomenological study looked into the experiences of intermediate-grade teachers in using technology to strengthen the reading skills of elementary learners. A total of ten teachers from the Compostela West District, Division of Davao de Oro participated in the research. Drawing from in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the findings showed that teachers made effective use of digital tools and visual strategies to make reading lessons more engaging and interactive. These approaches helped students better understand texts and retain what they learned. The results also revealed that technology not only captured students' interest but also made it easier for teachers to adjust lessons to different reading levels and learning needs. Despite these benefits, the teachers encountered several challenges, such as weak technological infrastructure, limited access to updated devices, and insufficient training in digital literacy. These issues often disrupted consistent technology integration, which in turn made it difficult to maintain innovative classroom practices. To respond to these concerns, the study suggested several interventions: investing in reliable digital infrastructure, preparing offline resources for learners in areas with poor connectivity, and organizing teacher training programs that strengthen digital skills. It also emphasized the value of school-community partnerships and active involvement of stakeholders in planning and supporting such initiatives.

Keywords*: Utilizing Technology to Improve Reading Skills, Intermediate Grade Teachers.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The use of technology in the classroom, especially to improve students reading abilities, is becoming increasingly essential. With today's digital advancements, educators now have more tools at their disposal to strengthen teaching strategies and support the development of students' foundational skills, especially reading. As in many professions, technology has become an integral part of teaching, serving as a valuable resource in literacy instruction (Alaa, 2024).

Okueso et al. (2021) observed that students today are more inclined to read content on digital screens than from traditional books. This shift underscores the importance of encouraging learners not only to read but also to understand what they read. With technology evolving rapidly, teachers are challenged to embrace and adjust to these changes in how they approach reading instruction.

Given how deeply technology is embedded in everyday life, it's important to move beyond simply introducing it into lessons. Instead, it should be fully integrated into the educational experience to help students learn more effectively. From lesson planning to classroom delivery, technology now plays a central role, posing both opportunities and challenges for teachers (Ahmadi, 2018).

In Malaysia, Dunstan and Ismail (2024) noted that ICT-based programs have sparked interest in learning English as a second language among children in rural schools. These interventions help create a more interactive and engaging environment which boosts learners' motivation to read and supports the development of a more positive attitude toward reading English materials.

When it comes to tools like the Interactive Whiteboard (IWB), Karthigesu and Mohamad (2020) found that it can significantly improve students' reading comprehension. The IWB offers an engaging learning experience, increases student participation, encourages independent learning, and helps maintain focus during reading activities. It also supports teachers in delivering more effective instruction.

In the Philippine context, Vidal (2022) emphasized the impact of multimedia and text-based reading strategies on students' reading comprehension. These approaches are especially important for language educators and curriculum developers aiming to address reading difficulties. Similarly,

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digital storytelling has proven effective in helping students improve their comprehension, particularly those who struggle with traditional reading tasks (Cantago et al., 2024).

Regionally, Rebucas and Dizon (2020) highlighted Tagum City's proactive approach to integrating ICT in education. Technology has become a vital channel for knowledge transfer between teachers and learners, offering fast and convenient access to learning materials and supporting improved reading outcomes.

In Davao de Oro Division, specifically in the Compostela West District—the site of this study, teachers continue to face challenges in improving students' reading skills. School reading profiles show low performance in comprehension and fluency. In response, educators are turning to technology to make reading activities more engaging and effective, hoping it will help boost literacy levels. This situation prompted the researcher to explore how teachers are using technology in their reading instruction.

Focusing on the lived experiences of intermediate grade teachers, this study aims to shed light on how technology is used to enhance students' reading proficiency. It seeks to provide relevant, practical strategies that can be applied in the classroom. By examining both the innovative methods and the challenges educators face, the study offers valuable insights for improving the integration of technology into reading instruction for intermediate learners.

II. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to gather data that address the research questions. Phenomenology aims to uncover the essence of lived experiences by capturing participants' perspectives in the most authentic and unfiltered form. According to Tomaszewski et al. (2020), and as highlighted by Flood (2010), the phenomenological approach is particularly valuable in qualitative research because it explores the essential structures of a lived experience.

This study explored the strategies employed by teachers to enhance the reading skills of learners through the use of technology. A total of ten (10) participants were involved, all of whom are intermediate grade teachers from a public school in the Compostela West District, Division of Davao de Oro. These participants were purposively selected based on their relevance to the study and their potential to provide rich, meaningful insights. Purposive sampling was employed in selecting the participants. Since research involved human subjects, it was imperative that researchers followed ethical guidelines to safeguard the welfare, rights, and dignity of research participants.

In-depth interviews served as the primary data collection method for this phenomenological study. These interviews allowed for deep, reflective conversations with ten (10) intermediate grade teachers in public school, each with at least three (3) years of teaching experience. The use of well-structured, open-ended questions, coupled with active listening and thoughtful probing, enabled participants to share their lived experiences regarding the utilization of technology to improve the reading skills of their pupils and the obstacles they encountered along the way.

In the data analysis of this study, the data gathered were thoroughly analyzed to identify themes and findings. First, I organized the information, ensuring participants' accounts were accurately transcribed. All data, including field notes, were labeled with dates, times, and identification numbers or pseudonyms for easy retrieval. Next, I read and re-read the transcripts, reflecting on each participant's sharing and jotting down notes. Throughout the process, I compared observations, interview responses, questionnaire data, and participant insights to assess consistency. I sorted and categorized the data to identify embedded concepts, then coded the organized information. After categorizing and coding, I developed themes through thematic content analysis, this involved threading together underlying meanings across categories to interpret latent content. Thematic Content Analysis according to Dawadi (2020) was employed to systematically organize complex data and capture narrative themes through repeated engagement with transcripts.

Moreover, to ensure validity and reliability, I used triangulation which according to Nightingale (2020) is analyzing results via different methods to enhance validity, deepen understanding, and interrogate diverse perspectives. Specifically, I applied environmental triangulation, comparing findings from small, medium, and large schools to determine consistency. As Vivek (2023) notes, this strategy mitigates biases arising from single-context studies by cross-verifying data across diverse environments. Finally, I presented the findings by weaving participant narratives with supporting literature, using graphs and diagrams to elucidate results clearly.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Technology has become an essential part of today's classrooms, providing new and creative ways to strengthen reading skills among elementary learners. Teachers remain at the center of this process, acting as facilitators who carefully integrate digital tools into their instruction. From their shared experiences, themes emerged regarding how technology supports reading development:

- *Utilizing Digital Tools and Platforms to Make Reading Engaging*

Teachers highlighted that digital platforms help sustain students' interest and make reading more interactive. Many reported incorporating reading apps and e-books such as Raz-Kids, Epic!, and Kahoot, which offer features like read-aloud

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options, leveled texts, and built-in quizzes to reinforce comprehension. Multimedia resources, such as animated stories, YouTube read-alouds, and audiobooks from services like Audible and Learning Ally, were especially helpful for both visual and auditory learners, making reading more accessible and enjoyable. These accounts align with Goh (2023), who observed that digital literacy tools broaden students' access to diverse reading materials and encourage active engagement through multimedia elements like video and animation.

➢ *Integrating Visual Learning to Capture Learners' Attention*

Findings also show that visual tools play a crucial role in capturing learners' attention and supporting their reading progress. Teachers frequently used digital videos, animated stories, and classroom displays to enhance comprehension. Colorful visuals and YouTube read-alouds shown through projectors or LED TVs were found to be particularly effective in motivating reluctant readers. One participant noted that consistent use of video-based instruction helped Grade 5 learners advance from reading simple consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words to tackling longer texts. These insights resonate with Ordetx (2020), who recommended blending traditional reading practices with digital tools by projecting texts to model reading strategies. Likewise, Heick (2020) argued that technology encourages "patient reading" by presenting texts in visually rich, interactive formats that allow students to explore ideas more deeply.

Meanwhile, teachers face considerable challenges in integrating technology to support elementary learners' reading development. These difficulties include limited access to digital devices, inadequate training in educational technology, and the struggle to choose tools that are developmentally appropriate. From the narratives gathered in this phenomenological study, key themes surfaced regarding these challenges:

➢ *Technological Infrastructure Limitations*

One of the most pressing concerns raised by teachers is the lack of adequate technological infrastructure in many elementary schools. Participants frequently described problems such as unreliable internet connections, recurring power outages, and the limited availability of functional devices like laptops and tablets. These recurring issues make it difficult for teachers to consistently implement technology-driven reading activities. Djebbari (2019) similarly pointed out that technical and social barriers, including unstable e-learning platforms, hinder the integration of technology in education. In the same vein, Teach.com (2024) noted that elementary teachers often lack the necessary resources to maximize the potential of digital tools in the classroom.

➢ *Lack of Digital Literacy*

Another key challenge highlighted by teachers is the limited digital literacy of both educators and learners. Several participants admitted to having only basic ICT skills, which made it difficult for them to navigate or fully utilize educational applications. Learners, too, often struggled with unfamiliar reading apps and devices, leading to frustration and disengagement. Teachers stressed the disparity in technological competence among students, pointing out that some lacked even the most fundamental skills needed to interact with digital resources. Djebbari (2019) echoed these findings, identifying cultural and structural barriers such as insufficient training opportunities and outdated digital content, which discourage meaningful use of technology in education.

Furthermore, this study also provided practical insights for improving learners' reading skills by addressing the challenges teachers face. Three key recommendations emerged: adopting interactive and gamified learning tools, ensuring access to offline resources, and strengthening teacher training in digital literacy. Al Ali et al. (2024) highlighted that gamification in education not only enhances fluency, creativity, and engagement but also deepens students' understanding of language. In addition, making offline resources available is essential to guarantee equitable access to technology-supported reading instruction, especially in contexts with limited connectivity. Equally important is teacher training, as developing digital competence equips educators to confidently integrate technology into reading lessons. Atmojo, Ardiansyah, and Wulandari (2022) stressed that digital literacy enables teachers to design more dynamic and engaging learning materials.

Overall, the findings affirm that technology, when effectively integrated, is a powerful tool for enhancing elementary learners' reading skills. Teachers were able to make reading more interactive, engaging, and supportive of comprehension and retention through digital platforms and visual learning strategies. These results are consistent with Rumelhart's (1980) Schema Theory, which underscores how learners activate and expand prior knowledge through multimedia-rich, interactive experiences. At the same time, the study resonates with Vygotsky's (1978) Cognitive Development Theory, particularly the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), as teacher-guided, technology-mediated activities scaffold literacy skills and allow learners to reach higher levels of understanding through collaborative, socially embedded learning.

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