

Understanding Learning Poverty: Teachers' Lived Experiences in Supporting Grade IV Non-readers

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ABSTRACT:- Learning poverty, defined as the inability of learners to read and understand simple text by age 10, has emerged as a significant issue in the Philippines over the past three years. This study aims to explore learning poverty through the lived experiences of teachers working with Grade IV non-readers. Utilizing phenomenography as the research design, data were collected from sixteen purposively selected Grade IV teachers who provided informed consent to participate. The findings reveal that a substantial number of 10-year-old learners are reading below age-appropriate levels, with notable disparities across different localities and socio-economic groups. The study highlights the urgent need to address educational deficiencies and improve access to quality education. Key contributors to this literacy crisis include the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, absenteeism, limited parental involvement, language barriers stemming from the transition from Mother Tongue-Based (MTB) instruction to English in Grade 4, and the practice of mass promotion without sufficient academic preparation. Additionally, economic hardships and the inaccessibility of schools further exacerbate poor attendance. In response, teachers have employed various strategies to engage parents, including motivation initiatives, follow-up communications, parent-teacher conferences, and enrichment programs. The study concludes that targeted interventions are essential for enhancing literacy outcomes, particularly in marginalized communities, and calls for future research to develop effective strategies addressing these challenges.

Keywords: Learning Poverty, Teachers' Lived Experiences, Phenomenography

I. INTRODUCTION

In the World Bank's recent report (2022), it stated that the Philippines's learning poverty ranks among the highest in the ASEAN region, at 90%. For the last three years, the Philippines fared the worst among the ASEAN countries, except Lao PDR (97.7%) and Brunei (no assessment). This means that nine in every 10 Filipinos aged 10 years old need to be taught how to read and to develop their reading comprehension. This latest estimate on learning Poverty in the country reflects new data from the 2019 Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM). In this vein, the World Bank (WB) defines learning poverty as the inability to read and comprehend a simple text by the age of 10 (World Bank, 2019). It estimated that as many as 91 percent of children in the Philippines at late primary age "are not proficient in reading" compared with that of its neighbors in the region, the Philippine learning poverty rate was higher by 56.4 points and more than double the regional average of 34.5 points. As in most other countries, learning poverty is higher for boys than for girls. The World Bank considers schoolchildren who are

unable to reach minimum proficiency levels in reading tests to be “learning deprived.”

In 2019, the Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) results showed that 80% of Filipino learners have not reached the Global minimum competency levels for education. The country scored the lowest in reading, and the second lowest in math and science among the 79 participating countries. To address this learning crisis the Eighteenth Congress created EDCOM 2 to provide an objective assessment and examination of our education system. Without foundational learning, students often fail to thrive later in school or when they join the workforce. They don't acquire the human capital they need to power their careers and economies once they leave school, or the skills that will help them become engaged citizens and nurture healthy, prosperous families, (World Bank, 2022).

Moreover, research has shown that students experiencing learning poverty face significant challenges in developing critical cognitive skills, particularly in areas such as analytical reasoning, problem-solving, and creative thinking. These skills are foundational components of critical thinking, which is vital for academic success across a range of subjects (Bialystok, 2018; Facione, 2015). Limited exposure to enrich learning environments often restricts their cognitive development, resulting in notable difficulties in not just English, Science, and Math, but also in broader contexts requiring critical evaluation and decision-making (Bialystok, 2018; McCoy et al., 2020). Moreover, interventions targeting the improvement of critical thinking capacity have shown promise in mitigating the adverse effects of learning poverty; education systems are increasingly recognizing the importance of embedding critical thinking skills in curricula to foster overall academic growth (Baker, 2017). Therefore, addressing these cognitive deficiencies through structured education and supportive policies is essential for enabling students from disadvantaged backgrounds to realize their full academic potential.

Correspondingly, teachers play a crucial role in mitigating the impact of learning poverty on students' critical thinking skills (Nguyen, 2020). Studies suggest that teachers' pedagogical approaches and instructional strategies significantly influence students' ability to develop critical thinking skills, particularly in subjects like English, Science, and Math (Nguyen, 2020; Halpern, 2014). Critical thinking skills are essential not only for academic success but also for real-world problem-solving and decision-making in disciplines such as English, Science, and Math (Halpern, 2014). Meanwhile, understanding teachers' lived experiences on learning poverty is indispensable for a multitude of reasons. Firstly, it directly addresses the urgent issue of learning poverty, where students struggle with basic literacy skills, by uncovering the challenges teachers face in this realm. This understanding forms the foundation for devising effective strategies to tackle learning poverty. Moreover, it enables the improvement of educational practices by tailoring interventions and support systems to better meet the needs of students affected by learning poverty. Additionally, such exploration enhances teacher training programs, ensuring educators are equipped with the necessary skills and resources to support these students effectively. Importantly, it contributes in fostering equity and inclusion within the educational system by identifying and addressing barriers to eliminate learning poverty in the country.

Evidence suggests that the engagement of teachers in decision-making processes leads to the formulation of educational strategies that are more effective and more attuned to the realities of classroom challenges (Talbot *et al.*, 2020). By addressing the specific obstacles faced by educators and learners, policymakers can help cultivate a more inclusive and supportive learning environment that enhances student participation and success (Fullan, 2016).

Besides adopting interdisciplinary methods and collaborative teaching practices can significantly enrich students' educational experiences. Research has demonstrated that interdisciplinary teaching promotes critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities, fostering a well-rounded development of students' learning capabilities (Beers, 2011). Additionally, collaborative strategies such as co-teaching and peer learning enhance student interaction and engagement, which can ultimately lead to better academic performance (Friend & Cook, 2013).

On top of that, it is crucial to continuously assess and evaluate these educational strategies to determine their effectiveness and support ongoing improvements in teaching practices. Current literature underscores the significance of data-informed decision-making in education, which enables timely adaptations based on the evolving needs and outcomes of students (Hattie, 2012). Implementing consistent feedback mechanisms not only aids in the professional growth of teachers but also enhances student learning by fostering a dynamic and responsive educational atmosphere (Guskey, 2003).

Furthermore, reading is a crucial educational outcome of primary school. The ability to read is vital for learners' overall learning, the development of broader literacy skills, and their future active participation in society, including in the workforce. To guarantee that every learner becomes a proficient reader, the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines has intensified the *Every Child A Reader Program* (ECARP) and urged all offices, including those at the Central Office, Regional Offices, Schools Division Offices, and individual schools, to support the "*Hamon: Bawat Bata Bumabasa*" (3Bs Initiative) with the goal of ensuring that every student becomes a reader at their appropriate grade level. Addressing this program during the pandemic has posed significant challenges, particularly in meeting the needs of non-readers and those at the frustration reading level. According to Mondero (2009), children who do not develop adequate reading skills at a certain educational stage often find reading to be a boring and difficult task, which hampers their academic progress and overall learning experience.

The COVID-19 pandemic has likewise complicated the implementation of these initiatives. Schools have had to adapt to remote learning environments, making it more difficult to provide the necessary support for struggling readers. As noted by DepEd, ensuring that every child reaches the appropriate reading level is crucial for their academic success and lifelong learning. The importance of reading proficiency extends beyond academic performance; it is essential for students' future engagement in society and their ability to participate effectively in the workforce (DepEd, 2020). Relative to this, schools nationwide are tasked with supporting learners in improving their reading skills through the creation and implementation of various projects (DepEd Memorandum No. 173, s. 2019). However, national assessments have revealed that early grade learners struggle to meet the standards in early language, literacy, and numeracy. Many underperforming learners fail to comprehend (read and understand) math and science word problems written in English, with even high school students displaying deficiencies in literacy skills across both language and content areas, particularly in reading.

It is against this backdrop that the study was conducted. It primarily aimed to understand how teachers perceive and define learning poverty, shedding light on their conceptualization of this phenomenon. Secondly, it explored the challenges and barriers teachers encounter in addressing learning poverty and fostering critical thinking skills among students, identifying key obstacles within the educational landscape. Lastly, the research investigates the strategies and approaches employed by teachers to mitigate learning poverty, highlighting effective pedagogical practices. In addition, insights from this study can inform evidence-based policies aimed at addressing learning poverty, thus driving systemic reforms for the betterment of education as a whole.

II. METHODOLOGY

a. Research Design

This study adopted a phenomenographic approach as its research design, employing a second-order perspective that requires active engagement when formulating research questions, gathering data, and analyzing findings. The aim was to enhance understanding of learning poverty by exploring the experiences of teachers who support Grade IV students struggling with reading. The foundations of phenomenography were established by Marton in 1981, primarily within the realm of educational research. Unlike traditional methods that rely on predefined categories, phenomenography permits the development of hierarchical categories derived from participants' responses, facilitating a more nuanced exploration of the topic (Cossham, 2017; Marton & Booth, 1997; Straub & Maynes, 2021).

b. Research Locale

The study was conducted in the selected schools of Region X, Northern Mindanao. It comprises five provinces: Bukidnon, Camiguin, Misamis Occidental, Misamis Oriental, and Lanao del Norte, including two cities classified as highly urbanized, all occupying the north-central part of Mindanao Island, and the island province of Camiguin. The regional center is Cagayan de Oro.

c. Research Participants

The participants of the study are the purposively selected 16 elementary teachers of Region X, Northern Mindanao, who gave their free and prior informed consent to participate in the study.

d. Research Instrument

The key informant interview (KII) guide and the researchers themselves were the main research instruments used to gather the data. Prior to its administration with the key informants, the KII guide underwent a thorough process of content validation. This step was crucial to ensure that the questions were

aligned with the objectives of the research and capable of eliciting the necessary information to address the research questions comprehensively. The validation process involved subject matter experts who assessed the relevance, clarity, and comprehensiveness of the items, ensuring that they would prompt insightful and accurate responses from the participants.

e. Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers secured the permission from the district supervisors and school heads before the conduct of the interviews. Participants were interviewed by the researchers at a pre-agreed time and scheduled for 40 minutes each, assuring them of the confidentiality of the data. They were also informed that they can opt-out at any time during the study.

The recorded interviews were transcribed, and the interviewer's reflective notes of the observations of the interviews were collected and added to the interview data. The participants were then asked to review the drafts of the written report of the study to have additional feedback to establish accuracy.

f. Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical research standards. Researchers ensured that all participants were fully informed about the study's objectives and significance. The principles of autonomy and respect for individuals were prioritized through the process of obtaining informed consent. Prior to the interviews, participants received written documentation outlining the study's purpose, potential benefits for themselves or others, measures taken to protect confidentiality, and the researchers' contact information for any questions related to the study. Additionally, participants were made aware of their rights regarding participation, including the ability to refuse or withdraw at any point without facing any penalties. The researchers emphasized that participation was entirely voluntary, allowing participants the freedom to decline involvement at any time during the interview.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the collected data, two primary themes emerged: the manifestation of learning poverty and teachers' perceptions of the factors contributing to this phenomenon. Several sub-themes were identified among the underlying factors, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, absenteeism, inadequate scaffolding, and language barriers.

Manifestation of Learning Poverty

Learning poverty refers to the inability of children to read and understand a simple text by the age of 10. This theme encapsulates various dimensions of educational deficiencies observed among learners. The data revealed that many learners struggle with basic literacy and numeracy skills, indicating a significant gap in foundational education.

This is demonstrated by the following significant statements shared by the participants:

I/We have several learners who are considered struggling readers due to their pronounced difficulty with word recognition. This challenge significantly hampers their ability to read fluently and comprehend text effectively. (P1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16)

In my experience these learners cannot comprehend, some of them can read simple Tagalog words better than English. However, their comprehension level is very low. (P10, P12,)

Being able to read is the foundation for all learners. However, it is disheartening for me to see that three of my pupils can hardly read. (P13)

I think the most challenging encounter is when a Grade 4 learner does not know how to read. Phonological awareness is crucial in reading and should be taught in kindergarten. Thus, a learner should have mastered reading for critical thinking skills to develop. (3)

As a result, their reading proficiency is far below the expected standard for their grade level. Despite being in a particular grade, their reading skills are comparable to those of learners several grades lower. (P1, P2, P6, P11)

The learners' struggles with reading indicate they are not ready for Grade 4. This highlights a systemic issue of promoting students without ensuring they have mastered the necessary competencies for the next grade level. Consequently, their difficulties extend beyond English to subjects like Science and Mathematics, which are also taught in English. (P10, P11, P15)

Poor reading comprehension was identified as a significant factor contributing to learning poverty. One participant highlighted a serious concern regarding learners' inability to comprehend and decode text-based concepts and discourses. The teacher participants emphasized that difficulties in reading comprehension create a cascade effect, impairing all other aspects of learning competencies. Given that reading is a fundamental skill required for advancing through the spiral structure of learning (Herring, 2023), problems in reading comprehension hinder overall academic progress. This concern is further supported by the statements of several participants, who echoed the critical impact of reading difficulties on learners' educational development. This finding highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions to support the learners' literacy development and bridge the gap between their current abilities and grade-level expectations.

Teachers' Perceptions of Contributing Factors and Interventions

Teachers' perceptions provide valuable insights into the root causes of learning poverty. The collected data has identified several key factors, which are discussed below.

COVID-19 Pandemic. The pandemic has worsened the already low level of reading skills of the children inside the classroom, cutting all of the teacher-learner face-to-face interaction has drastically exacerbated the existing problem of learning poverty. It was noted that the pandemic significantly affected learners' learning due to a lack of support from parents whose priority is on the survival of the whole family during the pandemic. It shares a similar result from the study of Ondras, L. B., & Alvero, J. (2023) wherein due to the challenges faced by the parents of the learners, education became less of the priorities as most families tend to focus more on survival. As a result of the disruption caused by the shift to remote learning and other challenges, many students fall behind in their education. This is captured by the narratives of the participants:

Based on my observation, the pandemic contributed significantly to learning poverty. The impact was profound, such that when students reached grade 4, their reading levels were comparable to those of grade 1 students. (P5, P13, P15)

In the most severe cases, some learners' reading skills appeared as though they had not even completed grade 1. This regression can be attributed to several pandemic-related factors, including prolonged school closures, inconsistent access to remote learning resources, and limited engagement with educational materials." (P3, P5, P6, P7, P14, P16)

The lack of regular, structured classroom instruction and the absence of direct teacher support during critical early learning years have left many students struggling with fundamental literacy skills. (P1, P12, P13, P16)

As what the participants have cited, the pandemic has significantly created a wide learning gap for the learners due to the absence of in-person support coming from the teachers and parents. This affirms Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as discussed in the study of Sizikova & Kudryavtsev (2023), which suggests that learning occurs most effectively when individuals are challenged to learn just beyond their current level of understanding with the guidance of a more knowledgeable other individual, such as a teacher or a peer or a parent. However, this support was not a priority during the pandemic since bigger concerns relating to survival were the top priority.

Absenteeism and Irregular School Attendance. Several participants highlighted absenteeism and irregular school attendance as significant precursors to poor reading skills. They noted that frequent absences disrupt the continuity of learning, making it difficult for students to build and reinforce essential literacy skills. This lack of consistent instruction and practice in reading hampers students' ability to progress, ultimately leading to gaps in their reading proficiency and overall academic performance.

Regular school attendance is essential for learners to develop their reading proficiency. However, due to challenging socio-economic conditions, some of my pupils are often absent because they need to assist their parents with farm work or their buy-and-sell business. This not only disrupts their learning but also hinders their ability to achieve the reading skills necessary for academic success. The demands of supporting their

families financially take precedence over their education, creating a cycle of educational disadvantage that is difficult to break. I hope the government will come up with programs that provide additional resources to families, ensuring that children's education is prioritized without compromising their family's economic stability. (P14, P16)

My school is located in a geographically disadvantaged area where families live in dire poverty and face poor health conditions. Many of my pupils frequently fall ill due to poor nutrition, which leads to irregular school attendance. This ongoing health issue not only affects their academic performance but also impedes their overall development, making it challenging for them to keep up with their studies and achieve their full potential. (P15, P16)

I conduct home visits for pupils who have frequent absences from school, particularly focusing on non-readers in my class. During these visits, I discovered that most of these pupils come from large families. Often, their parents ask them to stay home to take care of younger siblings while they work to earn a living. This responsibility leaves the children with no time to attend school or practice reading at home, significantly hindering their development of basic reading skills. The necessity to help with child-rearing thus jeopardizes their educational progress and overall literacy. (P12, P13)

High rates of absenteeism are linked to lower reading proficiency. Factors such as economic hardship, health issues, and lack of parental support contribute to irregular school attendance, further hindering students' ability to develop essential reading skills.

Inadequate Scaffolding. Inadequate scaffolding as a factor in the learning poverty of pupils refers to the lack of appropriate support and guidance that learners need to acquire new skills and knowledge effectively. Scaffolding in education involves providing temporary support to learners until they can perform tasks independently. When scaffolding is inadequate, learners may struggle with complex concepts or tasks without the necessary incremental steps and support to understand and master them. This lack of support can lead to gaps in understanding, reduced confidence, inconsistent progress, increased dropout rates, and limited skill development, all of which contribute to the overall learning poverty observed among pupils.

Scaffolding has been proven to boost learners' motivation to learn, as learning is inherently a social process. The removal of social interaction due to various external factors, such as the pandemic and lack of parental support and involvement, has resulted in a rapid deterioration of learning among children. This disruption has halted the slow and delicate progress of learners (Alharbi, 2021; Kim and Park, 2020).

Students who receive consistent support and encouragement from their parents at home often demonstrate proficient reading skills. However, a concerning trend is observed among a significant portion of my students, particularly those in the lower grade levels, who face challenges in reading due to the lack of parental involvement and support. (P5)

Some parents send their children to school not out of a desire for them to learn, but simply to keep them out of the house. They don't even follow up on their children's school performance. (P8)

I believe that a lack of parental support is one of the reasons why there is learning poverty. Some parents are unable to teach their children at home, and as a result, some students never complete their homework because their parents don't have the time to guide and help them. (P8)

Some students attend school only when they feel like it, which clearly indicates a lack of parental control and discipline. As a result, these children fall behind in reading and comprehension. (P4)

This lack of support manifests in various ways, including limited access to reading materials at home, minimal engagement in literacy-promoting activities, and a lack of encouragement and guidance in developing reading skills.

Among these struggling readers, there is a noticeable disparity in reading proficiency compared to their peers who receive robust parental support. Many of these learners exhibit difficulties in decoding words, comprehending texts, and sustaining interest in reading activities. As a result, they often lag behind in their academic progress and may experience frustration and disengagement from learning (National

Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; Hattie and Yates, 2014).

The impact of inadequate parental support on reading proficiency extends beyond the classroom, affecting students' overall educational experiences and future opportunities. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach that involves fostering partnerships with parents, providing resources and strategies to support at-home learning environments, and implementing targeted interventions to enhance students' reading skills and motivation. By recognizing and addressing the challenges faced by students lacking parental support, we can work towards creating a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for all learners (Epstein, 2010; Sheridan et. al., 2019).

Parents' support has a huge impact on the learning and growth of the child. Pupils lack motivation and can't focus well in class; they seem to be uninterested in learning. Some of the parents just send their children to school since they are not at home, and most do not even bother to ask about their children's whereabouts.

This is strengthened by Vygotsky's theory on Proximal Development and Scaffolding, where he believed that when a student is in the Zone of Proximal Development for a particular task, providing the appropriate assistance will give the student enough of a "boost" to achieve the task (Macleod S.2024).

Drawing upon the Theory on the Simple View of Reading (Gough and Tunmer, 1986), as highlighted in the study by Paige, Rupley, and Ziglari (2024), P1 recognized the critical components of word recognition that her students were lacking. She understood that phonological awareness, decoding skills, and sight recognition of familiar words are foundational before students can achieve language comprehension and proficient word recognition.

P16, a passionate educator, encountered a troubling issue in his fourth-grade classroom: several of his 10-year-old learners could not read. This situation, known as learning poverty, was a significant barrier to their academic progress and self-confidence.

Guided by the Theory on the Simple View of Reading (Gough and Tunmer, 1986), as elaborated by Paige, Rupley, and Ziglari (2024), P2 recognized the importance of word recognition skills. He realized that his students needed a strong foundation in phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition of familiar words before they could develop language comprehension and achieve proficient reading.

P2 started addressing these deficiencies. He began by assessing each learners' phonological awareness and decoding abilities. He discovered that many of his learners struggled with recognizing sounds and blending them into words. In response, he incorporated daily phonics drills, multisensory learning activities, and frequent practice with high-frequency words.

Despite these efforts, P2 noticed that progress was uneven. Some students improved, while others continued to struggle with reading comprehension, underscoring the critical nature of foundational word recognition skills. The breakdown in their reading development highlighted the gaps in phonological awareness and decoding that prevented them from becoming skilled readers.

Undeterred, P2 sought additional resources and support from other teachers. He also engaged parents, encouraging them to reinforce these skills at home. P2's commitment to his learners' literacy development was unwavering, as he understood the profound impact that overcoming learning poverty would have on their educational journeys.

Addressing inadequate scaffolding is crucial for ensuring that all students receive the support they need to thrive academically and develop essential skills for lifelong learning (Sweller, 2010; Wood, et. al., 1976).

Language Barrier: The Transition from the Mother-tongue-based Instruction to English. DepEd Order No. 74, series of 2009, initiated the Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) program, which uses learners' first language (L1) as the medium of instruction, particularly from Grades 1 to 3. According to participants, this policy has significantly contributed to learning poverty among students.

My Grade 4 students, who struggle to read, had MTB-MLE in their earlier grades. Therefore, I believe that

MTB-MLE is one of the main reasons for our learning poverty. (P15)

Imagine introducing Science and Math under MTB-MLE for the first three years of primary school, only to abruptly switch to English in the 4th grade. This sudden change has caused significant confusion for the learners. (P4)

These students used MTB in Grades 1 and 2, but then switched to entirely English in Grade 4. As a result, they are likely to stutter or not recognize the words at all, especially when taking exams where everything, including Science and Math, is in English. (P5)

One factor affecting learning poverty is language barrier. At home they speak their own dialects, such as Cebuano and Ilonggo. As regards Tagalog, there may be no problem because they learn the language while watching Probinsyano (a popular long-running Tagalog TV series). However, the only English words they can grasp are yes, no, what and when. (P10, P11)

Teaching in the post-COVID-19 is particularly challenging, as even in the top Grade 4 section, there are learners who struggle with English as the medium of instruction. Some are slow readers, and others have scored zero in spelling quizzes (P8, P16).

The World Bank reports that 90.9 percent of 10-year-olds in the country cannot read and understand simple texts. According to Albano (2023), this issue cannot be solely attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, as the rate was already 69.5 percent in 2019.

Although the literacy problem existed before the MTB-MLE policy, it worsened during its implementation. It wasn't until November 2019 that the DepEd addressed the issue with DepEd Memorandum No. 173, series of 2019, (Hamon: Bawat Bata Bumabasa), which highlighted the crisis.

While multiple factors contribute to the reading crisis, it is notable that many pupils affected by learning poverty experienced three years of MTB-MLE and still struggle to read effectively, despite the policy's aim to accelerate reading acquisition (Albano, 2023).

IV. CONCLUSION

The EDCOM 2 Report underscores critical issues regarding the literacy levels of 10-year-old learners in the Philippines, particularly the alarming number of children who struggle with reading. This study reinforces the report's findings by identifying the underlying factors influencing literacy and detailing the actions taken by participating teachers to address these challenges.

The results reveal that a significant proportion of 10-year-old learners are reading below age-appropriate levels, with disparities evident across various localities and socio-economic groups. This study contributes valuable insights into the current state of reading proficiency, highlighting the urgent need to address educational deficiencies and improve access to quality education.

One major contributor to this literacy crisis is the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has severely disrupted the educational system and necessitates a prolonged period of recovery. Additionally, factors such as absenteeism, limited parental involvement, language barriers—particularly the transition from Mother Tongue-Based (MTB) instruction in early grades to English in Grade 4—and the practice of mass promotion without adequate preparation further exacerbate the issue. Many learners are promoted despite lacking the necessary language comprehension skills, hindering their academic progress.

Moreover, economic challenges, domestic circumstances, and the inaccessibility of schools also lead to poor attendance, compounding the problem. In response, teachers have implemented strategies to engage parents, such as motivation initiatives, follow-up communications, parent-teacher conferences, and enrichment programs facilitated by school leadership.

Moving forward, future research should focus on developing targeted interventions to enhance literacy outcomes, particularly in marginalized communities. Studies could explore the effectiveness of specific teaching strategies, the role of parental engagement in learning, and the long-term impacts of the pandemic on educational attainment. Additionally, investigating the implications of mass promotion policies and alternative assessment methods could provide deeper insights into fostering academic readiness among learners. By

addressing these areas, we can work towards a more equitable and effective educational system that supports all students in achieving literacy proficiency.

Recommendations

Based on the study results, the following recommendations are forwarded:

There is an apparent need to launch comprehensive reading initiatives in Grade IV that emphasize phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension, particularly in marginalized communities to combat disparities in literacy.

Additionally, the districts of the Department of Education with incidence of learning poverty should provide professional development for teachers focused on scaffolding, differentiated instruction, and effective transition strategies from local languages to English to support diverse learners.

Lastly, it is imperative for school heads to foster robust parent-teacher partnerships through regular communication and literacy workshops, empowering parents to support their children's learning and improve school attendance within the community.

V. CONTRIBUTIONS OF AUTHORS

FTC-was involved in conceptualizing the study, collecting, processing and analyzing the data, editing, writing the research report, and revision of the manuscript; MVC- participated in the conception of the study, designing the methodology, data collection, analysis, and writing the manuscript; DDA- did the review of related literature and studies, data collection, analysis, and writing the manuscript; HGJ- did the review of related literature and studies, data collection, analysis, interpretation, writing, and editing the manuscript; CSC- did the review of related literature and studies, data collection, analysis, and writing the manuscript; AMB – was involved in designing the methodology, data collection, analysis, and writing the manuscript; IOS – participated in the conceptualization of the study, data collection, analysis, and writing the manuscript; EFB- participated in the data collection, analysis, interpretation, and writing the manuscript.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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