



Reading Motivations, Strategies, and Interventions of Teachers in Bridging Learning Gaps

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ABSTRACT

The changes in the education landscape due to the pandemic allowed an agency to understand the situation in elementary schools in an urban poor area in the Philippines to strengthen literacy in reading. While most studies on reading, especially in the Philippines, investigated reading performance and ways to increase students' reading fluency, this qualitative study focuses on the teachers' motivations, strategies, and interventions to bridge learning gaps in reading. The study found that teachers are motivated because they want to teach the content better, and their concern for learners motivates them to find suitable strategies to increase learners' reading interest. Teachers use various reading strategies like free reading choice, phonological awareness activities, and empathy to level with students in the context of their schools. The teachers are responsible for developing programs and decisions that strengthen the strategies. They create reading materials such as online stories, videos, or projects to increase reading interest. At the same time, the student-oriented intervention allows students to choose what they want to read. Finally, parent or community-oriented intervention reminds us of the importance of parental or community involvement as an external factor that strengthens reading skills.

RESUMO

As mudanças no panorama educacional devido à pandemia permitiram que uma agência compreendesse a situação nas escolas primárias numa área urbana pobre nas Filipinas para reforçar a alfabetização em leitura. Embora a maioria dos estudos sobre leitura, especialmente nas Filipinas, tenha investigado o desempenho na leitura e as formas de aumentar a fluência de leitura dos alunos, este estudo qualitativo centra-se nas motivações, estratégias e intervenções dos professores para colmatar lacunas de aprendizagem na leitura. O estudo concluiu que os professores estão motivados porque querem ensinar melhor o conteúdo e a sua preocupação com os alunos motiva-os a encontrar estratégias adequadas para aumentar o interesse dos alunos pela leitura. Os professores utilizam diversas estratégias de leitura, como a livre escolha de leitura, atividades de consciência fonológica e empatia para nivelar os alunos no contexto de suas escolas. Os professores são responsáveis por desenvolver programas e decisões que fortaleçam as estratégias. Eles criam materiais de leitura, como histórias, vídeos ou projetos online para aumentar o interesse pela leitura. Ao mesmo tempo, a intervenção orientada para o aluno permite-lhe escolher o que quer ler. Finalmente, a intervenção orientada para os pais ou para a comunidade lembra-nos a importância do envolvimento dos pais ou da comunidade como factor externo que fortalece as competências de leitura.

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Introduction

Reading is an essential skill that students have to master. Being able to read allows students to function better in the society. Snow (2002) underscored that reading is critical to an individual's social participation especially today when literacy skills, reading in particular, are not viewed as a luxury but an economic necessity. Thus, enabling children to read and comprehend as early as pre-kindergarten gives them social leverage. However, there are significant challenges in good comprehension instruction, which are experienced by schools in challenged contexts.

Challenges in many areas of reading continue to be felt in terms of the backsliding performance of students in reading especially during the pandemic (Cano, Gomez, Cabrera, & Meneses, 2020). The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) critical findings in the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) revealed that fifteen-year-old students in the Philippines scored lower in reading and no country scored lower than the Philippines and Dominican Republic; while socio-economically advantaged students scored better or outperformed the disadvantaged ones. This means that the country has the most significant percentage of low performers in reading among socio-economically disadvantaged students (San Juan, 2019).

The Sustainable Development Goals 2022 report indicated that too many children needed more reading and numeracy fundamentals. Based on pre-pandemic data from 2015 to 2019, the proportion of children meeting the minimum required proficiency in reading at the end of lower-secondary school was between 70 and 90 percent in most high-income countries. That proportion fell below 60 percent in almost all middle-income countries, dropping to less than 10 percent in some countries. We can derive from said findings that children who live in poverty are the ones who are mostly affected by illiteracy. Then again, we can also direct our attention to the teachers who teach learners in dire circumstances and encounter challenges.

The Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics 2019 revealed that only 10% of the students in the Philippines met the minimum reading standard, which is expected at the end of primary education. The said minimum standard pertains to the ability to understand texts with familiar structures and manage competing information. On the other hand, while students are struggling to be proficient in the skill, the teachers, especially in Grade 5, have to struggle as well because most of them did not receive pre-service training in teaching foundational skills in the classroom, which, of course, pertains to reading, writing, and mathematics (Dela Peña, 2023).

Although the Philippines is one of the countries that did not start in-person classes in 2021 since the pandemic began (UNICEF, 2021), we must reflect on the role of the teachers during this transition time. UNICEF advocated support, especially for teachers, to address learning losses and gaps. Gutierrez and Bilefsky (2021) cited that even before the pandemic,

the Philippines had experienced a crisis in education. Although the reasons are beyond the scope of this present investigation, it nonetheless sheds light on its effects on the teachers' teaching performance—from low wages to crowded classrooms and shoddy public school infrastructure.

Despite efforts to keep up with the changing education landscape due to the pandemic, there are still enormous challenges. In hindsight, De Guzman (2021) stated that instructors can give lessons over video conferencing platforms or Facebook live in urban areas. However, 52.6% of the Philippines' 110 million people live in rural areas with unreliable internet connectivity.

The situations above are external occurrences that affect the internal processes in efficiently delivering education. We cannot deny the need to review internal school challenges, such as better administration of school services. However, there is also a need to focus our attention on the teacher responsible for attaining educational goals.

Mwesiga and Okendo (2018) view that a teacher is a remarkable factor that predicts effective performance and attainment of quality education. They also said that when teachers can fulfill professional responsibilities or achieve educational goals, they reflect learning commitment.

This responsibility places many teachers in public elementary schools, especially in the Philippines, in the spotlight, and they must double their efforts to teach online or in-person literacy subjects like reading and fulfill their other duties. The reading teacher knows that reading as an input skill is very important in the primary levels of education. It is the key to learning all other subject areas. We can always emphasize the need for more competent and committed teachers, especially during this challenge to teach children how to read.

Hence, based on the previous situations, the study aimed to answer the following research questions: What are teachers' motivations for teaching reading? What are their strategies for teaching reading? And what interventions do they employ in teaching reading?

Literature Review

The result of the PISA still haunts the educational system in the Philippines, and data on the result in 2018 is still used to this day as a basis to uncover aspects that caused the upsetting performance, especially in reading. Here, we must consider the teachers and their motivations, strategies, and innovations in teaching reading as they play a vital role in the educational process.

Aarnoutse and Schellings (2003) claimed that reading motivation activates and guides reading behavior. Along with Carr & Borkowski (1989) and Van Kraayenoord & Schneider (1999), Aarnoutse and Schellings affirmed that reading motivation influences reading strategies and vice versa. The researchers noted that teachers' strategies should be considered.

To them, reading strategies is a complex process consisting of sub-processes that strongly influence each other (Aarnoutse and Schellings, 2003, p. 390). They found that good readers employ different strategies before, during, and after reading a text (Aarnoutse and Schellings, 2003, p.391). Such is the scenario that enhances students' reading comprehension. In the context of the current study, the strategies of reading teachers would help understand the various ways in which they try to help students read.

Teachers who successfully teach both the skill and the love for reading provide a foundation for a lifetime of reading (Wigfield and Guthrie, 1997, cited in Brandt, Sharp, and Gardner, 2021). Teaching children how to read is only one part of a teacher's job. That is why it is also important to inspire children to value reading (Brandt, Sharp, and Gardner, 2021).

Of course, teachers may reflect on their motivation to teach reading. Yet this is nebulous as there is much focus on the learners rather than the teachers. Learners' little motivation reflects their scores or performance in reading, which in turn reflects the kind of teaching they received. Brandt et al. (2021) also echo this idea, claiming, "When motivation declines, reading scores typically do, too." Moreover, they explained the connection of this phenomenon to the *Matthew Effect*, a biblical reference to Matthew 25, which states that the "rich get richer and poor get poorer," implying that if teachers are not motivated to promote motivation in reading, then this affects the performance of students—poor teaching equates to poor student performance.

Alternatively, Risinger (2013) believed that reading motivation plays a crucial role in reading performance, adding that teachers may consider dimensions of reading motivation when teaching reading. First, teachers may increase positive self-efficacy among students by providing genuine and positive feedback for students' progressive reading practices (Tilley, 2009, cited in Risinger, 2013). Second, students should have goals for reading practices as reading is also connected to social purposes. Students should be able to collaborate with others in a social setting where they can share what they have read with their peers. This includes adults who also participate in creating real-world experiences (Tilley, 2009, cited in Risinger, 2013).

Valuable results can also be derived from Risinger's (2013) study. Among them is that many content area teachers have attempted to motivate their students to read independently; these teachers felt that reading is vital in content areas and that the same teachers were confident of their reading motivational skills (p.28). Outside of the context of that study are insights on other reading strategies like modeling good reading practices, book talks, and reading during free moments in class (p.34). In addition, strategies like providing students with reading choices, using technological devices, and allowing them independent reading time were adequate. Since the research was quantitative, the researcher recommended conducting personal interviews to gain more information about literacy instruction.

To this end, the role of the teacher is to provide strategies for effective reading

instruction as well as interventions to open possibilities for discovering another approach that could be implemented in schools to help teachers become more motivated to teach reading and for students to be more motivated to read. Here, we can see the connection between using effective strategies and allowing a teacher to add interventions to maximize the learning of reading concepts.

We can link those mentioned above to the findings of Wanzek, J., Petscher, Y., Al Otaiba, S., Rivas, B. K., Jones, F. G., Kent, S. C., Schatschneider, C., & Mehta, P. (2017) who suggested that students receiving intervention made progress in closing the gap between their current level of performance and expected levels of performance in reading comprehension. Although Wanzek, et al's study focused more on upper elementary grades, there is a direct link to the present research on how teachers face challenges in identifying effective reading interventions. They suggested that reading interventions describe for whom the intervention is effective because it may vary from student to student. They also explored the relative and increasing intensity of reading interventions.

Methodology

To describe the motivations, strategies, and interventions of selected elementary teachers, the researcher used the qualitative descriptive method to explain how teachers bridge learning gaps in reading. The study was conducted in schools situated in urban poor areas of the city of San Juan. The school division office selected the schools for this study because they were the recipients of the Erasmus Plus Programme called "Project Forth," or the Formation of Teachers in Emerging Challenged Areas in the Philippines. Reading literacy in the context of the schools was the primary challenge of elementary school teachers. Similar teaching of reading challenges are experienced by teachers throughout the country, but each has a unique context and challenge to address. For this particular school division, the researcher analyzed the teachers' experiences in teaching reading during the pandemic. Although many challenges loomed at the height of the pandemic, thus, timelines crisscrossed as teachers recounted their experiences; hence, the researcher considered even post-pandemic challenges related to reading that the teachers shared.

Six elementary school teachers from three selected schools in the Division of San Juan City took part in the focused group discussion (FGD). They were recommended by their school head to represent the grade levels of their respective schools. The teachers have taught for more than five years in the school where they are teaching and have experienced difficulties in teaching reading, especially during the pandemic. The researcher gathered data using semi-structured interviews held using an online platform. The researcher sought participant consent before the interview.

The study's analysis of the interview transcripts was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), a rigorous and systematic process. This involved an

iterative process that followed these steps: First, becoming familiar with the data wherein the researcher reads and re-reads the entire data to become more familiar with it. From the transcribed interviews, notes were taken documenting essential thoughts and ideas from re-reading and recalling what occurred during the interview to tie it with the transcription. Second, initial codes were generated to identify which item in the data might address the research questions. These initial codes were grouped based on the common idea found in the teachers' responses. Third, the researcher identified the themes generated. Fourth, potential themes were further examined to identify the relationship with codes and data items and determine the homogeneity or heterogeneity of themes. Fifth, defining and naming themes was done by writing sample extracts that are shown in the discussion, then analyzing and interpreting them, and finally, producing the report by synthesizing the data found in the results portion.

The researcher developed a framework that shows the interrelationships of the themes. Using this framework, we can understand the interconnections of the teacher's motivations, strategies, and interventions.

Results and Discussion

The answers to the research questions for this study are presented in the following discussions, which elaborate on the motivations, strategies, and interventions employed by elementary school teachers to bridge learning gaps in reading.

Motivations of Teachers in Teaching Reading

During the pandemic, it is a challenge to be personally motivated. It is equally challenging if you are trying to encourage others. The views shared by teachers on the importance of motivation, whether it is intrinsic to them or extrinsic, are expressed in the following extracts:

Teacher A believes that it is essential for teachers to "do their best in teaching. At the same time, as teachers, we must believe that our students can make it by offering our support so that they can improve and reach a level of achievement."

Here, Teacher A feels that teachers who do their best to help students can support them in reaching the achievement level. The students inspired Teacher A.

Teacher B cautioned teachers who wish to motivate their students to "be careful with our teaching." According to her, it is essential to pay attention to the lesson's content "because when we give the wrong content, it is difficult to correct them."

Teacher B is concerned with how teachers deliver the content of the lesson.

On the other hand, Teacher C believes that a “teacher should be a role model to the students so that one day she [they] can be like them. [A] teacher should show love and care; should also know how to listen to what the students’ [are] saying.”

In Philippine classrooms, teachers are regarded as role models. Teacher C emphasized this vital role of the teacher. Teacher C’s response implies that her motivation is prompted by her concern for the students, showing love, care, and empathy.

Teacher D supports the idea that "teachers as facilitators of learning have an important impact on the learners' performance." She suggested "changing the ambiance of the classroom to motivate learners so that it will be conducive to learning." In addition, she said that a "teacher should have a pleasing personality so that children will be motivated to learn."

The motivation of Teacher D is also focused on the students. She considers the learning environment and the teacher's personality important to motivate learners to learn. Being concerned about the ambiance of the classroom also points to the teacher's concern for the students.

Teacher E said, "The teacher should smile and relax, but the strictness remains. There's always a limitation, but try to connect always with the kids; a simple tap on their shoulder was [would be] a big thing.”

Teacher E's motivation is on the students' welfare. She believes that it is essential for teachers to smile and relax. Being strict may limit a teacher's connection with students.

Meanwhile, Teacher F said, “We can make [a] difference. We can make or break them [students] as individuals [...] You should be energetic and inspired in front of them. Let us ensure that we give them something every day that they can use in the future.”

Like Teachers A, C, D, and E, whose motivations are inspired by the students, Teacher F believes that teachers can make a difference. She sees that the teacher's role in shaping a student's future is significant.

From the teachers' experiences, the two evident sources for their motivation are the students and the content. The teachers' motivation gravitates toward their desire to teach students better by being understanding, caring, and concerned for their welfare and needs. They also believe that teaching the content for their reading classes well is a valid reason to motivate them in their profession. This type of motivation stems from the idea that the teachers' goal in teaching reading is fluency and effectiveness. Of course, there is a need for teacher training and professional development so that teachers can expose students to new and varied ways of learning by strengthening the teaching of content.

Strategies of Teachers in Teaching Reading

Aarnoutse and Schellings (2003) believe that students who consciously apply knowledge and strategies to understand a text tend to have high reading motivation. Research has shown a reciprocal relationship between reading motivation and the use of reading

strategies that influence reading motivation (Carr & Borkowski, 1989; Van Kraayenoord & Schneider, 1999). In light of these ideas, the following extracts from the interview reveal the reading strategies of elementary school teachers in teaching reading:

Teacher A said that she uses “stories as a basis for discussion in building the lesson. Give [ing] more activities that further deepen their [learners'] understanding and mastery of the lesson. And [use] differentiated instruction ... [in] teaching reading.”

Teacher B uses the "chunking strategy." She elaborated, "It can be done by reading stories and writing." She also advised on checking "the spelling of the children."

Teachers A and B have “stories” as a strategy for teaching the students to read. It allows them to incorporate or give more activities to deepen students’ understanding and help them in other skills.

Teacher C uses a "word wall, graphic organizer, vocabulary wall, phonological awareness" to "build pupils' confidence to learn words."

Teacher D employs the strategy of giving learners “poems that they need to memorize” because, according to her, "words from the poem can be used as [for] vocabulary and spelling." This, she asserts, enables learners to "easily remember the words and phrases being studied."

Teacher D's strategy is similar to Teacher B's, and Teacher C focuses on the pupils' ability to increase their vocabulary and improve their spelling. Alternatively, Teacher D uses poetry as a springboard to teach words and phrases. Activities that build on vocabulary were seen as a way to boost students' confidence in learning new words. Shea & Ceprano (2017) believe that teachers' ability to discern and identify a few new or challenging words can effectively enhance students' vocabulary development.

Meanwhile, Teacher E's strategy is to “relate the lesson with the content or prior knowledge.” She said that "leveling" with the students is essential. She believes that reaching the students' level can help them process the reading instructions better, primarily when the teacher uses words that students are familiar with.

On the other hand, Teacher F believes in the importance of teaching styles and strategies. She said she employs "modification to reach the learner's full potential." This modification may be due to Teacher F's desire to maximize students’ learning of reading concepts in the classroom.

Both Teacher E and F use strategies that show their various teaching styles. They are also student-centered. Their empathy for the students enables them to develop activities that tap into their level and potential. In doing this, both teachers exert effort to ensure that the students show some improvement at the end of each lesson,

It can be gleaned that there are three observable strategies in teaching reading. First is the utilization of literary pieces such as stories and poems. This allows the teacher to present new vocabulary to the learners. The stories and poems also become a springboard for teachers to introduce and deepen the reading lesson. They were selecting materials that can be useful

in teaching reading where students encounter words and perform differentiated tasks, memorize, and build new vocabulary.

Meanwhile, the second strategy employs activities for phonological awareness to learn words and sounds. It also highlights the necessary skills for developing and learning vocabulary, spelling, and word familiarization. This approach focuses on developing the learner's reading skills, which help them study and learn literary pieces. At the same time, the teachers find value in teaching their students what they believe are interesting literary pieces. We should also note that the teachers also allowed "free choice" as one of the strategies to boost reading interest. This free choice enables learners to discover and find materials they like to read while teachers allow them to learn other reading materials.

Empathy in teaching reading is a unique strategy in this investigation. It is a strategy that certainly relates to students. This strategy can be considered "leveling" for adjusting the possible reading strategies to students according to their needs and background. When used effectively, teachers allow students to discover more. In the study context, these students from urban poor areas struggle to be motivated because of their personal and economic circumstances. This is one of the reasons why some teachers use empathy as a strategy to understand where students are coming from. At the same time, this can be an opportunity for the teachers to find reading materials that students can relate to.

The strategies mentioned revealed four strategies for teaching reading—from the smallest unit, such as activities for phonological awareness, to deciphering and memorizing material, such as literary text, to social and emphatic approach, such as "leveling."

Interventions Used by Teachers in Teaching Reading

Teachers who provide reading intervention receive reading gains from students. In the same way that students who receive reading interventions gain greater reading comprehension compared to students who did not receive any (Wanzek, J., Petscher, Y., Al Otaiba, S., Rivas, B. K., Jones, F. G., Kent, S. C., Schatschneider, C., & Mehta, P., 2017). The various interventions of the teachers in the current study are presented to provide insights into how they apply reading interventions:

Teacher A said her intervention is "creating video lessons about different stories with follow-up questions that students will answer." She believes this will be a "good way to enhance learners' reading comprehension skills."

To encourage more participation from students, Teacher A exerts effort to create video lessons to enhance her students' reading comprehension.

Teacher B perceived that the starting point of literacy is the home. She said, "Start at home and start very simply. Begin where the student is coming from. Find strategies that are effective for the students." She thinks, "All strategies/ innovations are good, [so] choose which

one suits the students best." She also suggested that "reading through pictures and picture clues" would help students unlock difficult words.

It is said that "charity begins at home"; thus, knowing students' backgrounds helps Teacher B develop interventions to support students. Teachers who use various interventions and implement motivational principles benefit the students. Brandt et al. (2021) believe that when a sense of community grows, it also extends to families.

Teacher C agrees with the other teachers regarding leveling with the students to enhance their reading skills. She advised, "We should not forget to do some follow-up, especially when it comes to allowing students to choose stories to read or if they like the story the teacher asked them to read."

Encouraging students to choose stories they like to read is an intervention that Teacher C employs to level with the students. It is a way for her to connect with the students. Moreover, this "leveling" may be considered a synergistic response to enjoyment derived from reading. According to Brandt et al. (2021), the newfound enjoyment of teachers and students can be attributed to the discovery of the changes in attitude regarding their heightened love for reading.

Teacher D's intervention focused on involving parents. She said, " We should not forget to involve parents. We need the help of parents, especially during online classes, but parents must be cautioned not to give their children the answer to the reading question because we can still hear them coaching their kids online. Maybe parents can help the learner after class to read."

Seeking the help of parents and involving them in the reading experience of their children is an intervention that Teacher D believes to be helpful. Hemmereichs, Agirdag, and Kavadias (2017 cited in Kayunou & Firat, 2020) determined that participation in literacy activities significantly affects students' acquisition of reading skills. However, Teacher D sees that parents could maximize learning time if they teach their children after class, not while their children attend it.

Teacher E uses the "Four Pronged Approach to develop learners' passion for reading." To her, "It is effective, especially reading using many graphic materials."

The passion for reading touches the first prong of the said approach to ignite students' love for reading. Teacher E firmly believes that among the many approaches to instilling a passion for reading, the Four-Pronged approach as a reading intervention is a sure way to develop reading interest. Developing reading interest among learners may also reflect the teachers' reading interest. Brandt et al. (2021) found that when teachers' reading motivation and interest are apparent, it encourages students to read.

Meanwhile, Teacher F uses an intervention she calls "syllable hike". She said, "I draw stairs to show students how to syllabicate words."

Using syllable hikes helps beginning readers to read and spell words correctly. The intervention of teacher F encourages students to learn by reading and sounding out words.

The discussion shows that there are three noticeable modes of intervention: teacher-oriented intervention, student-oriented intervention, and parent or community intervention. Teacher-oriented intervention relies on the teachers' developed programs and decisions. In this, teachers of reading classes create reading materials such as online stories, videos, or reading projects, which entail syllabication and word familiarization activities. Most teacher-oriented interventions rely on the teacher's prior knowledge and training. The effective execution of these learned strategies, whether from the pre-service education days or from the professional training they received from their school or other organizations, could directly or indirectly impact the students' reading motivation and interest.

The student-oriented intervention allows students in the reading class to select reading material according to their interests. In this strategy, students practice their agency to polish their reading skills by choosing activities for reading, like selecting visuals and unlocking unfamiliar words. Similarly, Resinger's (2013) findings resonated in terms of how teachers empower students to choose what they want to read, using technological devices for online activities, and giving students the freedom to have independent reading time.

Finally, parent or community intervention as an external influence affects the student's reading development. In this strategy, parents or adults from the household or community may suggest and guide the students in developing and strengthening their reading skills.

Conclusions

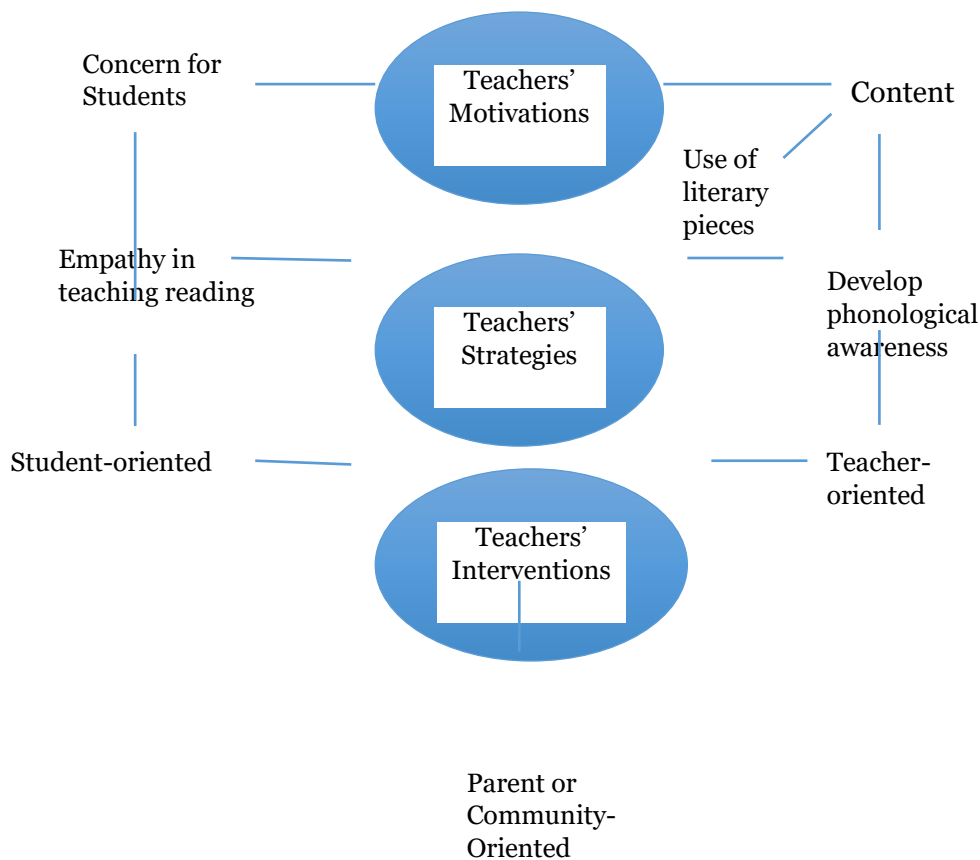
In sum, the shared insights of elementary school teachers provided an understanding of the lacuna regarding where teachers' motivations, strategies, and interventions lie. The impetus of the motivation to teach reading comes from two sources: to teach students better by being understanding, caring, and concerned for their welfare and needs and teaching the content which will reflect the kind of "products" teachers' produce. It also shows the desire of the teacher to teach reading concepts. Teachers' strategies reveal that they (1) use literary pieces and allow students to choose what they read or have "free choice"; (2) develop phonological awareness in learning vocabulary, spelling, and word familiarization; and (3) use empathy to level with the students. Moreover, to increase reading motivation, the teachers employ reading interventions that are teacher, student, and parent or community-oriented. To illustrate the conclusions, it is framed in Figure 1, "Framework for Understanding Teachers' Motivations, Strategies and Interventions in Bridging Learning Gaps."

Figure 1 presents how one might understand the teachers' motivations in the delivery of teaching content, specifically in the use of literary pieces. The phonological awareness strategy ensured that students learned the content; this is considered a teacher-oriented intervention. On the other hand, teachers' motivations can be due to their concern for their

students. Because of this, teachers use empathy in teaching reading, which is also known as “leveling” with the students. Teachers employ student-centered and parent or community-centered interventions to strengthen students’ reading skills through the care and guidance of those around them.

Figure 1.

Framework for Understanding Teachers’ Motivations, Strategies, and Interventions in Bridging Learning Gaps



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