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Teachers' Experience in Integrating Reading Across Learning Areas: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract — This phenomenological study explored teachers' experiences in integrating reading practices across English, Science, and Mathematics at Sumoroy Agro-Industrial School in Northern Samar, Philippines during the 2024-2025 school year. Using Colaizzi's Phenomenological Thematic Analysis Model, fifteen teachers with at least three years of experience were interviewed to understand their strategies, challenges, and perceptions regarding reading integration. The findings revealed five key implementation approaches: selection and engagement with reading materials, collaborative real-world connections, enhancing critical thinking and comprehension skills, assessment and evaluation of reading comprehension, and utilization of reading strategies. Teachers encountered four major challenges: resource limitations, time constraints, instructional challenges, and integration difficulties. Despite these challenges, teachers perceived positive impacts including enhanced comprehension and critical thinking, improved vocabulary and language skills, increased engagement and participation, application and real-world connections, and effects on instruction. Based on these findings, a capability-building program titled "Unlocking Literacy: A Journey of Reading Integration" was proposed to enhance teachers' strategies and practices in integrating reading across various subjects.

Keywords — Reading Integration, Phenomenological Study, Cross-Curricular Literacy, Teacher Experiences, Capability Building, Reading Comprehension, Instructional Challenges

I. Introduction

Reading serves as a fundamental cognitive skill that extends beyond mere text decoding, functioning as a gateway to knowledge acquisition, critical thinking development, and informed decision-making (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The significance of reading proficiency extends to social and economic realms, driving innovation, informed citizenship, and overall societal advancement. In educational contexts, reading proficiency proves crucial for academic success across all disciplines. The relationship between robust reading skills and academic achievement is well-established. Students with solid reading abilities demonstrate superior comprehension, critical analysis, and problem-solving skills (National Reading Panel, 2000). They effectively navigate complex texts, synthesize information from multiple sources, and articulate their

understanding clearly. This relationship underscores reading's vital role in educational attainment, influencing not only academic performance but also future opportunities.

Despite reading's undeniable importance, a significant number of students worldwide struggle with reading comprehension and fluency. Poor reading habits and insufficient skills impede academic progress, creating cycles of underachievement and diminished self-esteem (Allington, 2012). These challenges manifest in various ways, from difficulty understanding complex texts to lack of motivation and engagement with reading materials. International assessments reveal concerning trends in reading proficiency. The 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results showed that while some countries performed above the OECD average, significant gaps persisted in mathematical and scientific literacy, often linked to reading comprehension difficulties (OECD, 2019). The Philippines' participation in PISA 2018 marked its first assessment, recording the lowest average scores among participating countries with students achieving 340 in reading, 353 in mathematics, and 357 in science (OECD, 2018).

The 2022 PISA results further highlighted significant deficiencies in mathematical, reading, and scientific literacy among 15-year-old Filipino students. Filipino students scored substantially lower than the OECD average in mathematics (355 vs. 472), reading (347 vs. 476), and science (356 vs. 485) (OECD, 2023). Only 16% of Filipino students achieved at least Level 2 proficiency in mathematics, well below the OECD average of 69%, indicating limited ability to apply basic mathematical concepts to real-world situations.

National assessments conducted by the Department of Education (DepEd) reveal similar concerning patterns. The National Achievement Test (NAT) results for Grade 6 during School Year 2021-2022 showed Mean Percentage Scores falling within the "Low Proficiency" category across all subjects: Filipino (54.02), Araling Panlipunan (44.01), Mathematics (40.09), Science (44.15), and English (43.57) (DepEd, 2022).

In Eastern Visayas (Region 8), educational challenges persist despite some schools ranking among top performers. The NAT results for Grade 12 students in Region 8 during academic year 2022-2023 showed that even top-performing divisions like Calbayog City (54.17%) and Western Samar Province (52.61%) remained classified as "Low Proficiency" (DepEd, 2023). This paradox indicates systemic issues regarding student competencies, particularly in foundational reading skills essential across all subjects.

Reading integration across learning areas has emerged as a promising approach to address these challenges. Research demonstrates that integrating reading practices into various subjects enhances critical thinking and comprehension skills (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002). Students develop disciplinary literacy, mastering specific reading skills required for different subjects while improving overall academic performance (Shanahan, 2012). Studies by Panela (2025a, 2025b) on educational assessment during challenging periods emphasize the importance

of comprehensive approaches to learning that address diverse student needs. However, implementing reading integration presents numerous challenges. Educators often lack adequate training or experience in incorporating reading into their subject areas, leading to resistance and inadequate implementation (Fisher & Frey, 2008). Resource limitations, time constraints, and diverse student reading proficiencies necessitate differentiated instruction and scaffolding techniques (Tompkins, 2014). Panela (2025d) highlights similar implementation challenges faced by teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing the need for capacity building and support systems.

This study investigated teachers' experiences in integrating reading practices across English, Science, and Mathematics at Sumoroy Agro-Industrial School in Northern Samar, Philippines. Through phenomenological inquiry, the research aimed to understand the strategies employed, challenges encountered, and perceived impacts of reading integration, ultimately proposing a capability-building program to enhance educational practices.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Vygotsky's Social Constructivism Theory and Content Area Literacy Theory. Vygotsky's theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction and cultural context in cognitive development, suggesting that learners construct knowledge through dialogue, collaboration, and active engagement with their environment (Vygotsky, 1978). In reading integration contexts, this theory highlights how reading becomes a collaborative activity influenced by social and cultural factors, enabling students to engage collectively with varied texts across disciplines.

Content Area Literacy Theory asserts that literacy skills should not be confined to language arts alone but must be integrated into all subject areas to promote comprehensive understanding and critical thinking. This theory underscores the significance of students developing abilities to read, interpret, and critically engage with texts in diverse fields such as science, mathematics, and social studies. Research by Panela (2025c) on teacher skills and competencies supports this comprehensive approach to literacy education.

Reading Across the Curriculum

Reading Across the Curriculum (RAC) is defined as the intentional integration of reading instruction into various subject areas (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). This approach transcends isolated reading instruction by embedding reading skill development within other subject contexts, thereby enhancing comprehension and knowledge application. Reading plays a crucial role in content-area learning, enabling students to access and comprehend information presented in various formats across disciplines.

Effective RAC implementation requires careful planning and coordination across subject areas. It involves selecting appropriate texts, designing engaging activities, and providing students with opportunities to apply reading skills in meaningful contexts. Various pedagogical models, including inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, and collaborative learning, can support reading integration while fostering active learning and deeper understanding.

Benefits of Reading Integration

Integrating reading across learning areas significantly enhances critical thinking and comprehension skills. Students develop disciplinary literacy, mastering specific reading skills required for different subjects, which positively impacts academic performance and fosters lifelong learning skills (Duke & Cartwright, 2011). These benefits extend beyond academic achievement, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills valuable in all life aspects.

Research demonstrates that students who engage regularly with reading during classroom work develop better vocabulary knowledge, higher-level language development, and more accurate interpretation abilities (National Council of Teachers of English, 2017). Regular engagement with texts deepens conceptual understanding and supports problem-solving with content-specific vocabulary.

Challenges in Implementation

Despite benefits, reading integration implementation presents numerous challenges. Educators may lack adequate training in incorporating reading into their subject areas, leading to resistance and inadequate implementation. Diverse student reading proficiencies necessitate differentiated instruction and scaffolding techniques to ensure all learners can access and engage with materials effectively.

Additional challenges arise from institutional and curricular constraints, including time limitations and lack of appropriate instructional materials. Teachers face difficulties in adapting reading practices to meet diverse student needs while maintaining curriculum requirements. These challenges align with findings from Panela (2025d) regarding barriers educators face in implementing innovative practices.

II. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically the phenomenological thematic analysis method. This approach combines phenomenology's philosophical foundation with thematic analysis methodological techniques, investigating and understanding individuals' lived experiences with emphasis on their subjective impressions of specific phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Design

Phenomenology, founded on Husserl and Heidegger's writings, aims to comprehend the essence or underlying character of experienced phenomena. It emphasizes examining phenomena as individuals experience them, without regard for preexisting hypotheses or frameworks (van Manen, 2016). When paired with thematic analysis, this approach allows researchers to identify recurring themes representing participants' common experiences while preserving individual distinctions.

Colaizzi's (1978) Phenomenological Thematic Analysis model was employed for data analysis. This systematic approach provides a structured framework for qualitative data analysis within phenomenological research, emphasizing uncovering and articulating the essence of participants' lived experiences while preserving authenticity.

Participants

The study was conducted at Sumoroy Agro-Industrial School in Palapag I District, Northern Samar Division. Fifteen teachers with at least three years of teaching experience participated, ensuring they possessed necessary insights and understanding of teaching profession complexities, especially regarding reading integration. This sample size demonstrates typical qualitative research design, allowing in-depth exploration of individual experiences while maintaining manageable scope for phenomenological analysis.

Data Collection

Data were collected through researcher-crafted interview questionnaires exploring participants' strategies and practices, challenges encountered, and perceptions of reading integration impact. To protect participant identity and privacy, codes were assigned (P1, P2, etc.). Data saturation was reached at the fifteenth participant.

Data Analysis

Following one-on-one interviews, participants' responses were transcribed, with Waray and Filipino responses translated into English. Analysis was conducted using Colaizzi's seven-step process: (1) obtaining general sense of each transcript, (2) identifying significant statements, (3) formulating meanings, (4) clustering themes, (5) integrating theme clusters into comprehensive descriptions, (6) establishing fundamental phenomenon structures, and (7) validating findings with participants.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical research standards, obtaining approval from the NwSSU Ethics Committee and relevant educational authorities. Informed consent was secured from all participants, and data confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process. The study

complied with RA 10173 (Data Privacy Act of 2012), ensuring participant privacy and communication rights protection.

III. Results and Discussion

Integration Strategies

The phenomenological analysis revealed five primary approaches through which teachers implement reading integration across subjects: selection and engagement with reading materials, collaborative real-world connections, enhancing critical thinking and comprehension skills, assessment and evaluation of reading comprehension, and utilization of reading strategies.

Selection and Engagement with Reading Materials. Teachers thoughtfully choose reading materials matching students' comprehension levels and relating to lesson topics. They incorporate engaging articles or excerpts on new subjects to ignite interest and encourage student expression, allowing meaningful material connections. As one participant noted: "I select reading materials that are easy to comprehend and are within the level of my students, and of course related to the topic being discussed" (P1).

This approach aligns with differentiated instruction principles, emphasizing the importance of tailoring educational content to match students' comprehension levels, interests, and needs (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013). Teachers' consideration of student interests and text complexity helps create positive and engaging learning environments, supporting findings from Alvermann and Moje (2015) regarding the importance of connecting reading materials to student experiences.

Collaborative Real-World Connections. Teachers promote collaborative real-world connections by encouraging students to participate in small group reading sessions exploring concepts like mathematics applications in real-life contexts. One participant explained: "Basically, I encourage collaborative reading among students, they work together in small groups to discuss math concepts, share ideas and help each other understand. I emphasize the real-world applications of math concepts" (P2).

This approach aligns with experiential learning principles, where real-world applications deepen understanding and foster meaningful connections between academic content and everyday experiences (Kolb, 2015). Activating students' prior knowledge and linking it to new information creates cohesive learning environments supporting retention and engagement.

Enhancing Critical Thinking and Comprehension Skills. Teachers emphasize questioning as a crucial tool for fostering critical thinking and understanding. They frequently ask questions about reading materials, encouraging students to analyze and explore content more deeply. By employing Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) questions, teachers challenge students to move beyond surface-level understanding. One participant shared: "I encourage them

to analyze and understand the information from the lesson by giving them higher-order thinking skills questions" (P7).

This practice aligns with research by Brookhart (2017), demonstrating that HOTS questions effectively foster critical thinking by challenging students to explore multiple perspectives and make connections between ideas. Such approaches enhance cognitive engagement, enabling students to construct meaning and apply knowledge in different contexts.

Assessment and Evaluation of Reading Comprehension. Teachers utilize various techniques to assess students' understanding of reading materials, including comprehension checks, quizzes, and reflective journals. They implement reading quizzes and project-based assessments to monitor comprehension and evaluate how well students apply concepts learned from readings. As one participant noted: "I use comprehension checks, quizzes or reflective journals to gauge how well students are understanding and synthesizing the information from the reading" (P4).

These assessment methods align with Black and Wiliam's (2018) assertion that formative assessments provide critical insights into students' learning progress and identify areas requiring additional support. Project-based assessments encourage students to demonstrate comprehension through real-world applications, fostering both critical thinking and practical skills.

Utilization of Reading Strategies. Teachers employ specific reading strategies such as previewing and skimming to enhance students' reading comprehension and efficiency. One participant explained: "I used previewing and skimming. By incorporating previewing and skimming strategies, readers can optimize their reading experience, enhance comprehension and save time" (P10).

These strategies align with research by Paris and Hamilton (2019), demonstrating that effective reading strategies empower students to navigate complex texts with greater confidence. Teaching these strategies promotes active reading, encouraging students to interact with texts and focus on structure and key elements.

Challenges Encountered

The analysis revealed four major challenges teachers encounter while implementing reading integration: resource limitations, time constraints, instructional challenges, and integration difficulties.

Resource Limitations. Teachers reported significant challenges due to lack of suitable reading materials that effectively combine literacy skills with problem-solving, particularly in mathematics. One participant noted: "There are limited reading materials within the campus designed for Mathematics subject that integrate literacy skills with problem-solving" (P1).

Curriculum constraints often limit flexibility in incorporating such materials, while insufficient funding restricts access to high-quality resources.

These findings align with research by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), emphasizing that access to high-quality educational resources is essential for effective teaching and learning. The process of locating and evaluating suitable reading materials places additional burdens on teachers, particularly given limited schedules.

Time Constraints. Teachers expressed that time constraints significantly impact their ability to integrate reading practices effectively. Preparing to adapt reading practices for students with different reading levels proves challenging under tight schedules. One participant explained: "Time constraints can impact my ability to integrate reading in my lesson due to limited instructional time" (P10).

Limited instructional time hampers teachers' ability to fully integrate reading practices into lessons, leaving both teachers and students struggling to maintain pace. This challenge is particularly pronounced when accommodating diverse learners with varying reading abilities, as noted by Tomlinson and Moon (2013) regarding the careful planning and sufficient time required for effective differentiated instruction.

Instructional Challenges. Teachers reported difficulties adapting reading practices to meet diverse student needs, exacerbated by time constraints hindering effective differentiated instruction implementation. Insufficient time allocated for reading within lessons often results in superficial engagement with materials, limiting opportunities for deeper discussion, analysis, or application.

These challenges impact teachers' ability to maintain inclusive and engaging classroom environments. As observed by Parsons et al. (2018), instructional practices failing to accommodate varied reading levels risk alienating struggling readers and reducing their motivation to participate.

Integration Difficulty. Teachers indicated that incorporating reading into science lessons proves particularly challenging due to hands-on activities' nature and limited time for teaching reading skills. One participant noted: "Integrating reading in science is quite difficult because we have hands-on activities. Since we have limited time in our lesson, there is insufficient time to teach reading to the learners" (P7).

Students often face difficulties with poor reading comprehension, slow reading pace, and limited vocabulary, hindering their understanding of complex scientific texts. These issues align with Shanahan and Shanahan's (2014) research emphasizing that disciplinary literacy in science necessitates developing specialized reading and comprehension skills for navigating dense, technical texts.

Perceived Impact

Teachers perceived five positive aspects of reading integration implementation: enhanced comprehension and critical thinking, improved vocabulary and language skills, increased engagement and participation, application and real-world connections, and impact on instruction.

Enhanced Comprehension and Critical Thinking. Teachers reported significant improvements in students' understanding of lessons and problem-solving skills due to reading integration. One participant shared: "They have improved in understanding math lessons and also their solving skills" (P3). By incorporating reading into instruction, students develop critical thinking skills, moving beyond basic problem-solving to analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating information.

This finding supports Shanahan and Shanahan's (2014) research on disciplinary literacy practices, demonstrating that students can learn to read and interpret increasingly complex texts while developing knowledge within specific disciplines. The integration allows students to engage in profound intellectual conversations, fostering critical thinking development.

Improved Vocabulary and Language Skills. Teachers discovered that reading integration greatly enhances students' learning experiences by improving problem-solving skills, vocabulary, and understanding of real-world applications. One participant noted: "It improved students' problem-solving skills, enhanced understanding of math vocabulary and made better connections to real-world applications" (P1).

Regular engagement with texts during classroom work results in better vocabulary knowledge, higher-level language development, and more accurate interpretation abilities (National Council of Teachers of English, 2017). This exposure strengthens students' ability to analyze and evaluate arguments, fostering stronger critical thinking skills.

Increased Engagement and Participation. Teachers noticed that integrating reading practices significantly improves students' classroom participation. When reading is included in lessons, students become more engaged and active during discussions and activities. One participant observed: "It increased classroom participation" (P10).

This improvement involves not only increased verbal participation but also deeper engagement in the learning process. As students gain confidence in reading and comprehension skills, they take more initiative in their education, becoming more willing to explore topics independently.

Application and Real-World Connections. Teachers noted that incorporating reading into lessons greatly enhances students' understanding while helping them recognize concept relevance to real-world situations. One participant explained: "They gain understanding of the lesson and they can connect our lesson to real-world applications" (P6).

This connection makes learning more relevant and engaging, aligning with Kolb's (2015) experiential learning theory. The integration develops student involvement by making learning processes more meaningful, as students see classroom learning relevance to their lives.

Impact on Instruction. Teachers acknowledged that incorporating reading practices can affect time allocation for other subjects, but believe benefits outweigh drawbacks. One participant noted: "It may affect the time allotted for that subject" (P13), while another added: "It brings understanding of the lesson" (P5).

Despite time concerns, teachers find that reading integration helps students connect with material more meaningfully, enhancing comprehension and making learning experiences more impactful. This finding aligns with research emphasizing that approaches building understanding and engagement should take priority when they make students' learning experiences more effective.

IV. Conclusion

This phenomenological study revealed comprehensive insights into teachers' experiences with reading integration across learning areas. The implementation occurs through five key approaches: selection and engagement with reading materials, collaborative real-world connections, enhancing critical thinking and comprehension skills, assessment and evaluation of reading comprehension, and utilization of reading strategies. While teachers successfully integrate reading across various subjects, they encounter significant challenges including resource limitations, time constraints, instructional challenges, and integration difficulties. These challenges reflect broader systemic issues requiring comprehensive solutions involving institutional support, professional development, and resource allocation.

Despite challenges, teachers perceive substantial positive impacts from reading integration, including enhanced comprehension and critical thinking, improved vocabulary and language skills, increased engagement and participation, application and real-world connections, and beneficial effects on instruction. These findings support the value of reading integration while highlighting implementation support needs. The study's findings align with broader research on educational challenges and innovative practices, as demonstrated in studies by Panela (2025a, 2025b, 2025c, 2025d) examining various aspects of educational assessment, teacher competencies, and implementation barriers during challenging periods.

Based on these findings, a capability-building program titled "Unlocking Literacy: A Journey of Reading Integration" was proposed to enhance teachers' strategies and practices in integrating reading across various subjects. This program addresses identified challenges while building on successful practices, providing comprehensive support for effective reading integration implementation. The study contributes to understanding reading integration's practical realities in specific educational contexts, offering evidence-based recommendations for improving literacy instruction and fostering lifelong reading appreciation among students. Future research

should explore long-term impacts of systematic reading integration programs and investigate effective professional development models for supporting teachers in this critical educational endeavor.

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