

The Imperative of Inclusive Literacy: Teachers Lived Experiences Fostering Struggling Readers Through the Lens of No Child Left Behind

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Abstract. This study explored the lived experiences of elementary teachers in supporting struggling readers within the context of inclusive literacy and examined the challenges they encountered and the instructional practices they employed to foster reading development. Using a qualitative phenomenological research design, the study captured teachers' perspectives on delivering responsive literacy instruction while addressing the diverse needs of learners experiencing reading difficulties. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with six purposively selected Grade 1–6 teachers from Las Navas Elementary School during the School Year 2025–2026. The interview transcripts were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns across participants' experiences. The findings revealed that teachers' efforts to support struggling readers were influenced by multiple instructional, contextual, and institutional factors. Participants described challenges associated with limited instructional resources, diverse learner needs, heavy teaching responsibilities, home and environmental constraints, and insufficient parental involvement, all of which affected the implementation of individualized reading support. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated instructional adaptability by employing explicit phonics instruction, guided and small-group reading, differentiated instruction, scaffolding, modified learning materials, continuous progress monitoring, and positive reinforcement to enhance learners' reading competence and confidence. Collaboration with parents, colleagues, and other stakeholders also emerged as an important component of sustaining literacy interventions. The findings underscore that fostering struggling readers requires not only evidence-based instructional practices but also supportive learning environments and collaborative efforts that address the broader conditions influencing literacy development. The study provides insights that may guide teacher professional development, strengthen school-based reading intervention initiatives, and inform policies aimed at promoting equitable and inclusive literacy education.

Introduction

Reading literacy is a fundamental skill that underpins academic achievement and lifelong learning, enabling learners to access knowledge, comprehend information, think critically, and participate effectively in both academic and social contexts. However, the global learning crisis has intensified following the COVID-19 pandemic, with an increasing number of children unable to acquire foundational reading skills. According to the World Bank (2022), approximately 70% of 10-year-old children in low- and middle-income countries are unable to read and

understand a simple written text, highlighting the urgent need to strengthen literacy instruction and ensure equitable learning opportunities. In response to this challenge, inclusive literacy has emerged as a critical educational priority, emphasizing the implementation of responsive instructional practices that address the diverse learning needs of all students while supporting accountability-driven educational policies such as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Central to the goals of NCLB is the development of reading proficiency as a foundation for academic success and lifelong learning. Despite the emphasis on standardized assessments and proficiency benchmarks, many students continue to experience persistent reading difficulties, creating significant challenges for teachers responsible for ensuring that every learner has meaningful opportunities to succeed. As the primary facilitators of literacy development, teachers are expected to implement inclusive instructional strategies while balancing increasing accountability demands. Understanding teachers' lived experiences in supporting struggling readers is therefore essential to gaining deeper insight into how inclusive literacy practices are enacted in authentic classroom settings. Accordingly, this study examines the challenges teachers encounter and the strategies they employ to support struggling readers, with the aim of identifying effective practices that can enhance literacy instruction, inform educational policy, and promote more inclusive and equitable learning environments.

Although national literacy policies aim to improve learners' reading proficiency, achieving expected literacy outcomes remains a significant educational priority. Teachers continue to encounter substantial challenges in supporting struggling readers, particularly in developing learners' foundational reading skills and reading comprehension. To strengthen literacy instruction, the Department of Education (DepEd) issued Memorandum No. 034, s. 2025, establishing the Literacy Remediation Program (LRP), which provides structured intervention guidelines, remedial learning materials, and teacher capacity-building to support low-emerging readers. Complementing this initiative, DepEd Memorandum No. 033, s. 2025, introduced the Bawat Bata Makababasa Program (BBMP), which delivers intensive reading tutorials, phonics instruction, and comprehension activities to enhance the literacy skills of early-grade learners before they reach critical stages of learning. Despite these initiatives, teachers continue to experience challenges in translating policy into effective classroom practice. Alcayde and Basilan (2023) reported that many elementary teachers experience difficulties in diagnosing and remediating reading problems because of limited preparation and instructional support, which constrains the effectiveness of literacy interventions. Furthermore, Dinoro et al. (2023) found that while instructional approaches such as phonics, pre-reading activities, and guided reading contribute to improved reading performance, reading comprehension remains a persistent challenge for many learners, highlighting the need for sustained instructional support and responsive literacy practices. Collectively, these findings suggest that although current literacy policies provide a strong framework for intervention, their successful implementation depends on teachers' instructional capacity, adequate resources, and the continued use of responsive, evidence-based literacy strategies.

Despite sustained policy efforts and the implementation of early reading intervention programs, significant gaps remain in understanding how teachers support struggling readers within the realities of everyday classroom practice. Existing studies have largely concentrated on evaluating the effectiveness of reading interventions and measuring learners' literacy outcomes, while comparatively less attention has been given to teachers' lived experiences in implementing inclusive literacy practices across diverse classroom contexts (Lemons et al., 2025). In practice, teachers continue to encounter challenges such as limited preparation for intensive reading interventions, inadequate instructional materials, heavy workloads, and insufficient time for individualized instruction, all of which influence the quality of literacy support they are able to provide (Washburn & Pierce, 2025). Although previous research has identified effective instructional strategies for improving reading performance, there remains limited understanding of how teachers adapt these approaches to address the complex and evolving needs of struggling readers in authentic classroom settings. This gap highlights the need for research that explores teachers' lived experiences, the challenges they encounter, and the strategies they employ to foster reading development among struggling readers.

In response to these gaps, this study explores the lived experiences of teachers in supporting struggling readers within inclusive classroom settings. Specifically, it examines the challenges teachers encounter in ensuring that learners continue to develop their reading abilities and are provided with equitable opportunities to achieve literacy. The study also investigates the instructional strategies teachers employ to address reading difficulties and explores how these practices are shaped by classroom realities, learners' diverse needs, and institutional support. By capturing teachers' firsthand experiences, this study seeks to generate a deeper understanding of how reading intervention practices are implemented, adapted, and sustained in authentic educational contexts. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on inclusive literacy education by informing evidence-based instructional practices, strengthening school-based reading intervention programs, and supporting the development of policies that promote equitable literacy outcomes for struggling readers.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to explore teachers' challenges, and strategies in fostering struggling readers in the elementary setting, specifically at Las Navas Elementary School during the School Year 2025–2026. Recognizing that reading is a fundamental

skill for academic success, this research focuses on understanding how teachers identify and support learners who face difficulties in reading.

Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What challenges do teachers encounter in addressing the needs of struggling readers?
2. What instructional strategies and practices do teachers use to improve the reading abilities of struggling learners?

Methodology

Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the challenges, and strategies of teachers in fostering struggling readers at Las Navas Elementary School during the School Year 2025–2026. A phenomenological approach focuses on understanding and describing how individuals perceive, interpret, and make meaning of their lived experiences within the context of a particular phenomenon. This design enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences in supporting struggling readers in their everyday classroom practice. This approach enabled the researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of how teachers perceive and navigate the challenges of supporting learners with reading difficulties.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing teachers to share their personal experiences and approaches in addressing reading challenges. The interview responses were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, a systematic method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting recurring patterns within qualitative data. The analysis involved familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and refining themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. This process enabled the researchers to uncover the essence of teachers lived experiences, challenges, and intervention strategies in supporting struggling readers. Thematic analysis provided a rich and contextualized understanding of the practical and pedagogical approaches employed by teachers, as well as the factors that facilitated or hindered their efforts to promote reading proficiency among struggling learners (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Research Locale

This study was conducted at Las Navas Elementary School, located in Las Navas, Prosperidad, Agusan del Sur. The school was selected as the research site because it offers a highly relevant environment for examining how teachers support struggling readers within a diverse classroom population. Its learners exhibit varying levels of reading proficiency, making it an ideal setting to explore the real-world experiences, challenges, and instructional strategies teachers employ in addressing reading difficulties.

The research focused on the experiences of teachers during the school year 2025–2026. Conducting the study in this context enabled the researchers to obtain in-depth, contextualized accounts of the approaches, interventions, and adaptive practices implemented to foster reading development. The insights gathered from this school setting not only shed light on the specific instructional realities of Las Navas Elementary School but also provide valuable implications for enhancing reading support practices in similar elementary schools facing comparable literacy challenges.

Participants

The study employed purposive sampling involving all six (6) teachers from Grades 1 to 6 in the school. The participants were selected based on their direct experience in handling struggling readers and their involvement in administering and interpreting reading assessments such as CRLA and Phil-IRI, ensuring that they possess relevant knowledge and firsthand experience aligned with the objectives of the study. Learners categorized as Non-Readers, at the Frustration Level, or performing Below Grade Level in both the CRLA and Phil-IRI were used as the foundation for determining which students required additional support. This ensured that participants were identified through validated and reliable assessment results before any intervention or targeted instruction was conducted.

Focusing on teachers as key informants enabled the study to capture rich, detailed, and context-specific insights into the realities of supporting learners with reading difficulties, particularly in understanding how interventions are implemented, how instructional strategies are adapted, and how classroom challenges influence reading development. The participants were selected based on the following criteria: (1) currently teaching Grades 1 to 6 in the locale of the study, (2) having at least three years of teaching experience, (3) directly handling learners identified as struggling readers, and (4) having experience in administering or interpreting school-based reading assessments such as the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) and the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI). Participants were drawn from the same

group of teachers but were further identified based on their active involvement in implementing reading interventions, monitoring learner progress, and their willingness and ability to provide in-depth, reflective insights, thereby ensuring that the data gathered are rich, credible, and grounded in actual classroom practice.

Research Instrument

The study employed a researchers-made semi-structured interview guide consisting of open-ended questions designed to elicit the lived experiences of teachers in supporting struggling readers, particularly within the accountability-driven context of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The questions encouraged respondents to articulate how NCLB's emphasis on measurable reading proficiency, annual progress benchmarks, and intensified instructional accountability shaped their day-to-day practices, challenges, and interventions for learners performing below reading standards. Through individual interviews, teachers were able to share nuanced and in-depth insights into the pressures, expectations, and adaptive strategies they developed while navigating mandated proficiency goals. This approach generated rich, contextualized narratives that captured both the pedagogical realities and systemic demands influencing instruction for students with reading difficulties.

To ensure the credibility and relevance of the interview guide, it was subjected to an expert validation process involving three (3) Master Teachers from different schools. Their insights were instrumental in refining the clarity, depth, and contextual appropriateness of the questions, ensuring that each item resonated with the study's objectives and its phenomenological orientation. Particular care was given to shaping questions that would surface how teachers understood, experienced, and navigated the expectations of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy within their literacy instruction. Through this iterative review, the interview guide evolved into a more meaningful and responsive tool capable of capturing rich, nuanced accounts of the instructional challenges and accountability pressures teachers encounter while supporting struggling readers.

Data Collection Procedure

Before collecting data, permission to conduct the study was secured from the school administration of Las Navas Elementary School, ensuring adherence to ethical guidelines and respect for participants' rights. The researchers explained the purpose, objectives, and scope of the study to the teacher participants and obtained their informed consent. Data was collected through individual semi-structured interviews using the researchers-made interview guide. Interviews were conducted at a time convenient for the participants, in a private and quiet setting within the school to ensure comfort and confidentiality. Each session was audio-recorded with permission and supplemented by field notes to capture non-verbal cues and contextual details.

After the interviews, the data were transcribed, organized, and analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns, challenges, strategies, and insights related to teachers' experiences in supporting struggling readers. The entire process ensured that the information gathered was authentic, detailed, and reflective of the participants lived experiences.

Ethical Considerations

This study ensured that the rights, dignity, and welfare of the teacher-participants were protected throughout the entire research process. Before data collection, participants were clearly informed about the purpose of the study, the interview procedures, and their freedom to participate or withdraw at any time without consequence. Informed consent was obtained to guarantee voluntary participation, and all explanations were given in simple, understandable language to avoid any form of coercion. As the study explored lived experiences related to fostering struggling readers, care was taken to avoid causing emotional discomfort, especially when discussing challenges in the classroom. Participants were treated with respect, and their professional insights were valued as essential contributions to understanding inclusive literacy practices.

Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly upheld to protect participants' identities and personal viewpoints. All interview responses were coded, stored securely, and reported in a manner that prevented individual teachers, grade levels, or specific situations from being identifiable. Data was used solely for academic purposes and was handled with honesty and fairness to maintain trust between the researchers and the Key Informants. The study also ensured credibility and trustworthiness by faithfully representing the teachers' narratives without distortion or bias. By adhering to these ethical practices, the research-maintained integrity and ensured that the lived experiences shared by the teachers contributed meaningfully to the discussion on inclusive literacy and the support of struggling readers.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis, following the six-phase framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), to identify patterns, themes, and insights regarding teachers' experiences, challenges, and strategies in supporting struggling readers. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and the researchers carefully reviewed the transcripts to ensure accuracy and completeness, noting initial impressions and potential codes.

In the first phase, the researchers familiarized with the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts. In the second phase, significant statements and recurring ideas were systematically coded to highlight important concepts. The third phase involved organizing these codes into preliminary themes that captured key patterns across participants' responses. During the fourth phase, themes were reviewed and refined to ensure accuracy, relevance, and alignment with the essence of teachers' experiences. In the fifth phase, each theme was clearly defined and named to represent distinct aspects of the data. Finally, in the sixth phase, the findings were synthesized into a coherent narrative, linking the themes to the study's research questions, objectives, and relevant literature.

This method allowed the researchers to capture the essence of teachers lived experiences, interpreted the underlying meanings of their responses, and presented a structured, credible understanding of the practical and pedagogical strategies they use, as well as the challenges they encounter in fostering reading proficiency among learners.

Results and Discussion

This study, *The Imperative of Inclusive Literacy: Teachers' Lived Experiences Fostering Struggling Readers in the Context of No Child Left Behind*, focuses on how teachers support struggling readers within inclusive classroom settings. It utilized Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to gather teachers lived experiences and understand how literacy instruction is carried out in real classroom conditions. The responses were analyzed to identify common patterns in challenges, teaching strategies, and efforts to support reading development among learners with difficulties. Findings show that inclusive literacy is shaped by teachers' instructional practices, available support systems, and the diverse needs of learners. Overall, the study highlights that effective support for struggling readers depends on consistent intervention, collaboration, and responsive teaching within the No Child Left Behind.

Challenges of Teachers in Handling Struggling Readers

MAJOR THEMES	SUB-THEMES	CODES / Evidence from Responses
1. Instructional and Classroom Limitations	Material and Resource Constraints	• Insufficient reading materials, teaching aids, and funding (G2, G4) • Lack of books or supplementary resources for practice (G1, G3, G5)
	Adapting Lessons for Learners	• Continuous modification of activities to suit different learning needs (G4, G6) • Scaffolding lessons and providing extra explanations (G4) • Implementing differentiated strategies to maintain engagement (G3)
2. Home and Environmental Barriers	Parental Involvement	• Limited guidance or support from parents at home (G2, G5, G6)
	Home Learning Conditions	• Lack of access to books or quiet spaces at home (G1, G3, G5, G6) • Household chores and responsibilities interfere with study time (G2, G5) • Irregular attendance due to home obligations (G5)
3. Systemic and Policy-Related Challenges	Health and Physical Readiness	• Poor nutrition affecting learners' focus and participation (G2, G6)
	Class Size and Teacher Workload	• Large classes reduce opportunities for one-on-one support (G3) • Teachers must manage multiple learners with varying abilities simultaneously (G4)
	Continuity and Progress Monitoring	• Inconsistent attendance disrupts learners' progression (G5)

4. Teacher-Focused Challenges	Emotional and Professional Strain	• Tracking incremental progress is challenging without support (implied in G1, G2, G4) • Pressure to meet curriculum goals while supporting struggling readers (G4) • Emotional labor of encouraging learners daily (G1, G5, G6) • Stress from slow learner progress despite repeated efforts (G6)
	Collaboration and Support	• Coordinating with parents, co-teachers, and stakeholders requires extra effort (G5) • Limited external support hinders effective implementation of reading interventions (G1–G6)

Table 1. Challenges of Teachers in Handling Struggling Readers

Theme 1: Instructional and Classroom Limitations Material and Resource Constraints

In addition, the findings indicate that limited access to appropriate reading materials and instructional resources restrict teachers' ability to provide engaging and level-appropriate instruction for struggling readers. Participants explained that inadequate materials, lack of funds, and insufficient support systems make it difficult to design individualized learning activities that address diverse learner needs.

Participants answered:

(G2) *"Lack of motivation and difficulties in providing individualized materials that support diverse learners, because I only have limited resources and funds to address learners' needs."*

(G4) *"On top of that, limited resources and time make it difficult to provide the personalized support they need, requiring creative strategies to help each learner improve."*

(G3) *"Yes, factors such as limited access to reading materials at home."*

(G5) *"Many have limited access to books or have parents who are too busy working to guide them."*

Participants identified limited access to instructional and home-based reading materials as a significant challenge in supporting struggling readers. They explained that the scarcity of age-appropriate books, leveled texts, and other literacy resources restricted their ability to implement differentiated instruction and provide learners with meaningful opportunities to develop and reinforce their reading skills both in school and at home. This lack of accessible materials also limited learners' exposure to regular reading practice, which is essential for improving reading proficiency. These findings are consistent with Neuman et al. (2021), who emphasized that insufficient access to print and literacy resources constrains literacy development, particularly in resource-constrained educational settings. The participants' experiences highlight that the availability of adequate and high-quality reading materials is fundamental to effective literacy instruction, as it enables teachers to deliver targeted interventions, sustain learner engagement, and create supportive learning environments that foster the continuous reading development of struggling learners.

Adapting Lessons for Learners

The findings indicate that adapting reading lessons to meet diverse learner needs is a persistent instructional challenge for teachers. Participants explained that they need to constantly adjust lessons, strategies, and support to accommodate varying reading levels, which requires additional effort, patience, and instructional flexibility.

This is reflected in their responses:

(G6) *"This means I have to constantly adapt my lessons and strategies to meet their individual needs."*

(G4) *"Requiring creative strategies to help each learner improve... so keeping them motivated and confident requires extra patience and encouragement."*

(G3) *"As struggling readers require extended and repeated instruction that is difficult to provide within a fixed schedule."*

Teachers reported that struggling readers often require extended, individualized, and repeated instruction to develop their reading skills; however, limited instructional time makes it difficult to provide this level of consistent support. Consequently, teachers face challenges in maintaining learners' motivation, confidence, and engagement while simultaneously implementing differentiated instruction to address diverse reading needs. These findings are consistent with Jufrianto et al. (2023), who emphasized that although differentiated and responsive instruction can effectively support learners with varying abilities, its successful implementation depends on adequate teacher preparation, sufficient instructional resources, and manageable classroom conditions. The findings therefore suggest that adapting lessons to meet the diverse needs of struggling readers is a demanding process that requires sustained instructional flexibility, adequate time, and continuous institutional support to ensure meaningful and effective literacy instruction.

*Theme 2: Home and Environmental Barriers**Parental Involvement*

Another challenge faced by teachers is limited parental support or home reinforcement, which undermines students' reading progress as learners lack opportunities for practice and encouragement beyond the classroom. Teachers explained that many learners return to school without reinforcement of previously taught skills, making it difficult to sustain consistent progress in reading development.

This is reflected in their responses:

(G2) "Yes, home has big part in the students' progress, or it can drag them down either. Without parent support or follow up, students' interest may lead to frustration."

(G5) "Some of my learners come from homes where reading is not part of their daily routines. At home, some learners may not have access to books, parental support because their parents did not know how to read and write."

(G6) "At home, some learners may not have access to books, parental support because their parents did not know how to read and write."

Participants emphasized that many struggling readers had limited opportunities to practice reading at home because of inadequate literacy support and minimal parental involvement. They explained that the absence of regular reading routines, guidance, and encouragement outside the classroom hindered learners' ability to reinforce the reading skills introduced during instruction. This finding supports the study of Wu and Hindman (2024), who found that active parental participation in literacy-related activities positively influences children's reading achievement and motivation. Without consistent support from the home environment, learners are less likely to develop the confidence and practice needed to improve their reading abilities. These findings highlight that effective literacy development extends beyond classroom instruction and requires meaningful collaboration between schools and families to provide continuous support that strengthens the reading progress of struggling learners.

Home Learning Conditions

In addition, teachers highlighted that many learners come from home environments lacking quiet study spaces, reading materials, and sufficient time for practice, which limits their engagement with reading outside the classroom. Participants explained that household responsibilities, inconsistent attendance, and lack of parental support further hinder learners' opportunities to reinforce reading skills at home, slowing their overall progress, as shown in their responses:

(G1) "Limited access to reading materials at home or lack of parental support can make it harder for struggling readers to practice and reinforce skills outside the classroom."

(G2) "Even students' responsibilities like household chores can hinder their progress, because they already struggle in physical and mental stress in their home."

(G3) "Some students do not have access to books or quiet spaces at home, which limits their practice and slows progress."

(G6) "At home, some learners may not have access to books, parental support because their parents did not know how to read and write."

(G5) "Some of my learners come from homes where reading is not part of their daily routines... Inconsistent attendance also affects their progress some learners miss several days of school due to family responsibilities or health issues."

The findings suggest that the home literacy environment is a critical factor influencing the reading development of struggling learners, as it determines the extent to which reading skills are reinforced beyond formal classroom instruction. Participants observed that many learners had limited access to books, literacy-rich experiences, and parental support, reducing opportunities for regular reading practice and skill development at home. This indicates that learners from literacy-poor home environments are at a greater disadvantage in achieving reading proficiency than those who receive consistent literacy support outside school. This finding is consistent with Johnson, Hart, and Wagner (2025), who emphasized that enriched home literacy environments characterized by access to books, established literacy routines, and active parental involvement significantly enhance children's reading achievement, whereas limited home literacy resources are associated with lower reading performance. These findings underscore the need to strengthen school-family partnerships and implement community-based literacy initiatives that can help bridge home-school literacy gaps and provide struggling readers with continuous opportunities to improve their reading skills.

Health and Physical Readiness

Teachers' narratives also highlighted how learners' physical conditions shape their readiness to participate in classroom learning. Participants observed that some learners struggle to maintain attention and engagement when they come to school hungry, tired, or physically unwell. They explained that insufficient nutrition and heavy household responsibilities contribute to physical and mental stress, which affects learners' concentration and participation in literacy activities.

(G2) "In addition to that lack of nutrition and even students' responsibilities like household chores can hinder their progress, because they already struggle in physical and mental stress in their home."

(G6) "Sometimes food is not sufficient enough to feed the whole family hence some learners go to school empty stomach, which can slow their progress despite the efforts made in class."

Learners' physical well-being is a fundamental prerequisite for meaningful engagement in reading activities, as unmet basic needs can significantly limit their capacity to participate in literacy instruction. Participants observed that hunger, fatigue, and other health-related concerns often reduced learners' attention, concentration, and persistence during reading tasks, making it difficult for struggling readers to fully benefit from classroom instruction and reading interventions. This indicates that literacy development is influenced not only by instructional practices but also by learners' physical readiness to learn. Vermeulen et al. (2020), who emphasized that adequate nutrition and good health are closely associated with cognitive functioning, learning capacity, and academic performance. The findings therefore underscore the importance of addressing learners' physical needs alongside instructional support, as promoting health and well-being creates conditions that enable struggling readers to engage more effectively in literacy activities and achieve meaningful reading progress.

Theme 3: Systemic and Policy-Related Challenges *Class Size and Teacher Workload*

In addition, large class sizes and heavy workloads significantly impede teachers' capacity to provide individualized support to struggling readers, as managing many learners at once limits opportunities for one-on-one guidance, personalized feedback, and targeted interventions.

(G3) "School policies, like strict curriculum pacing or large class sizes, can also reduce the time I have to give individualized attention, making it harder to meet each student's needs."

(G4) "Teaching reading to struggling learners is challenging because each student learns at a different pace, which makes it hard to meet everyone's needs at the same time."

Large class sizes and demanding teaching responsibilities create structural barriers that limit teachers' ability to provide individualized literacy support to struggling readers. Participants described how addressing diverse reading abilities within a single classroom requires considerable time, attention, and instructional adjustment, yet the competing demands of managing numerous learners often restrict opportunities for intensive monitoring, targeted intervention, and personalized reading instruction. Although teachers demonstrated strong commitment and willingness to support struggling readers, the realities of overcrowded classrooms and extensive workloads affected their capacity to deliver sustained and responsive literacy assistance. These narratives suggest that improving reading outcomes requires more than teacher dedication and pedagogical competence; it also necessitates supportive classroom conditions that enable teachers to allocate sufficient time and attention to learners who require additional support. Thus, effective literacy intervention is dependent on the alignment of teacher capacity, manageable learning environments, and institutional support systems that promote inclusive and differentiated instruction (Sayman, Basoc, & Ricaforte, 2025).

Continuity and Progress Monitoring

Teachers also reported that irregular attendance and limited home support hinder their ability to monitor and sustain the reading progress of struggling learners. As reflected in their responses,

(G5) "Inconsistent attendance also affects their progress some learners miss several days of school due to family responsibilities or health issues. These external factors interrupt the continuity of learning and make it more challenging to sustain reading growth."

(G1) "Lack of parental support can make it harder for struggling readers to practice and reinforce skills outside the classroom."

(G2) "Without parent support or follow up, students' interest may lead to frustration."

(G4) "Some students face challenges at home, like lack of support or encouragement, which impacts their motivation and confidence in reading, ultimately affecting their overall progress."

The findings demonstrate that inconsistent learner attendance and limited home-based literacy support represent significant contextual barriers that undermine the continuity and sustainability of reading interventions for struggling readers. Participants revealed that frequent absences disrupted the instructional sequence, limiting teachers' ability to revisit foundational reading skills, provide systematic remediation, and establish consistent patterns of progress among learners. Beyond school attendance, participants also highlighted the influence of the home environment, noting that limited parental monitoring and reduced opportunities for reading practice outside the classroom weakened learners' engagement, confidence, and motivation to improve their reading abilities. These experiences suggest that literacy development is a cumulative process that requires sustained exposure to instruction, continuous practice, and reinforcement across multiple learning contexts. Anderson et al. (2020) emphasized that effective progress monitoring provides teachers with reliable evidence of learners' literacy growth, enabling timely instructional decisions and targeted interventions. In this regard, the findings highlight that addressing reading difficulties among struggling learners requires

not only effective classroom strategies but also strengthened mechanisms for attendance support, family engagement, and continuous monitoring to ensure meaningful and sustained literacy development.

Theme 4: Teacher-Focused Challenges Emotional and Professional Strain

Another problem encountered by the respondents as stated in their responses:

(G4) *“Teaching reading to struggling learners is challenging because each student learns at a different pace, which makes it hard to meet everyone’s needs at the same time. On top of that, limited resources and time make it difficult to provide the personalized support they need, requiring creative strategies to help each learner improve.”*

(G6) *“Some have difficulty recognizing letters and sounds, others struggle with comprehension, and some have trouble staying focused or motivated. This means I have to constantly adapt my lessons and strategies to meet their individual needs.”*

(G1) *“Keeping struggling readers motivated and confident can be difficult, especially when they become frustrated or discouraged by their slow progress.”*

(G5) *“Some of my learners also have very low confidence because they have repeatedly failed in the past.”*

Many classrooms lack adequate instructional resources, requiring teachers to compensate by creating and sometimes funding learning materials. They explained that this situation is largely driven by the need to support diverse learners who require differentiated, hands-on, and individualized instructional activities. In addition, limited institutional provision of materials forces teachers to shoulder the responsibility of preparing learning resources, which increases workload and may also lead to financial strain. UNESCO (2021) states that insufficient teaching and learning resources in under-resourced settings increase teacher workload and stress, which can negatively affect both teaching quality and teacher well-being. Overall, the findings suggest that limited instructional resources hinder effective literacy instruction and place additional burden on teachers supporting struggling learners.

Collaboration and Support

Participants highlighted that one of the major challenges faced by teachers is the difficulty of engaging parents, co-teachers, and other stakeholders in supporting learners’ reading development.

This is reflected in their responses:

(G5) *“Many have limited access to books or have parents who are too busy working to guide them.”*

(G1) *“Limited access to reading materials at home or lack of parental support can make it harder for struggling readers to practice and reinforce skills outside the classroom. Without parent support or follow up, students’ interest may lead to frustration.”*

(G2) *“Lack of nutrition and even students’ responsibilities like household chores can hinder their progress, because they already struggle in physical and mental stress in their home.”*

(G4) *“External factors significantly affect my ability to help struggling readers. Limited resources, such as not enough reading materials or teaching aids, make lessons less engaging and effective. Additionally, some students face challenges at home, like lack of support or encouragement... Inconsistent attendance also affects their progress some learners miss several days of school due to family responsibilities or health issues. These external factors interrupt the continuity of learning and make it more challenging to sustain reading growth.”*

(G6) *“At home, some learners may not have access to books, parental support because their parents did not know how to read and write... Sometimes food is not sufficient enough to feed the whole family hence some learners go to school empty stomach. Which can slow their progress despite the efforts made in class.”*

Teachers explained that limited parental involvement, lack of time, and minimal reinforcement at home make it harder to sustain learners’ reading progress, as instruction in school is not consistently supported outside the classroom. This challenge is further intensified by external factors such as limited access to learning materials at home, household responsibilities, and poor attendance, which disrupt continuity of learning and reduce opportunities for practice and reinforcement. Pennington et al. (2024) emphasize that strong communication and collaboration between parents and teachers are essential for improving student achievement; however, the lack of such collaboration presents a significant challenge in ensuring consistent literacy support. This suggest that insufficient home–school collaboration and unfavorable home conditions hinder teachers’ efforts to support sustained reading development among struggling learners.

Strategies and Practices Teachers use in Handling Struggling Learners

THEME CATEGORY	SUB-THEMES	STRATEGIES / CODES (Evidence from G1–G6)
1. Foundational and Targeted Reading Methods	Phonics and Basic Skills	• Phonics-based instruction to develop decoding skills (G1, G5, G6) • Marungko approach for beginner or “frustration” readers (G2)

2. Instructional Adaptations	Guided and Small-Group Reading	• Repeated reading to improve fluency and confidence (G5, G6) • Guided reading sessions to provide individualized attention (G1, G3, G5, G6) • Pairing struggling readers with confident peers for modeling (G1, G4, G6) • Peer-assisted reading or buddy reading activities (G2, G3, G6)
	Lesson Simplification and Scaffolding	• Modifying texts to match learners' level (G1, G4, G5) • Using visual aids, graphic organizers, charts, and pictures to clarify concepts (G2, G3, G5) • Choosing readable fonts, lower-level texts, or visually clear materials (G2)
	Adjusted Materials	• Offering one-on-one guidance or small-group support (G4, G5, G6) • Monitoring reading behavior and adapting pacing for comprehension and decoding (G5, G6)
	Hands-on Learning	• Encouraging learners, celebrating small successes, and building confidence (G1, G4, G5, G6) • Creating a safe, supportive environment for risk-taking in reading (G3, G5)
3. Engagement and Motivation Techniques	Positive Reinforcement	• Sharing strategies and reading activities for home practice (G3, G4, G6) • Providing simple materials for parents to read aloud with children (G2, G5) • Regular communication on learners' progress (G4, G6)

Table 2. Strategies and Practices Teachers use in Handling Struggling Learners

Theme 1: Foundational and Targeted Reading Methods
Phonics and Basic Skills

Foundational literacy development relies heavily on structured and systematic instruction, yet many struggling readers continue to experience gaps due to inconsistent or un-sustained teaching approaches. While interactive and varied activities can support engagement, effective reading development requires deliberate emphasis on phonics-based instruction combined with consistent and repeated practice. These structured approaches enable learners to develop essential decoding skills, improve reading fluency, and gradually build confidence through mastery. The implication is clear: strengthening early literacy outcomes requires sustained implementation of explicit phonics instruction rather than fragmented or occasional interventions.

Participants emphasized the importance of using structured phonics strategies in supporting struggling readers, as reflected in their responses:

(G1) "I use a mix of phonics-based instruction, guided reading, and interactive activities to support struggling readers. In my classroom, I usually start with phonics and decoding activities to strengthen their foundational skills." (G6) "These are some of the strategies that I used to my struggling readersphonics-based approaches to help learners decode words." (G2) "To help struggling readers improve, I used Marungko approach especially to learners' level as full refresher/frustration reader." The findings indicate that teachers regard phonics-based instruction as a fundamental strategy for supporting struggling readers. Participants consistently described using explicit phonics instruction, the Marungko approach, decoding activities, and guided reading to strengthen learners' sound-symbol correspondence, word recognition, reading fluency, and overall literacy development through systematic and repeated practice. Their experiences suggest that the effectiveness of these strategies depends on consistent implementation, as irregular instruction may hinder learners' progress toward reading proficiency. These findings are consistent with Scull (2024), who emphasized that explicit and systematic phonics instruction is essential for developing foundational literacy skills by improving learners' decoding, reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. Collectively, the findings highlight that sustained phonics-based instruction remains a critical evidence-based practice for fostering the reading development of struggling learners.

Guided and Small-Group Reading

In addition, participants highlighted that guided and small group reading strategies are key approaches used by teachers in supporting struggling readers. This is reflected in their responses:

(G1) *"I use a mix of phonics-based instruction, guided reading, and interactive activities to support struggling readers."*

(G3) *"I use strategies like guided reading, phonics practice, and interactive storytelling to help struggling readers improve."*

(G5) *"I also provide guided reading sessions in small groups, where I can closely monitor their reading behavior."*

(G6) *"For those who have trouble with comprehension, I use guided reading, ask questions before, during, and after reading. I also slow down the pace, repeat lessons as needed."*

(G2) *"We used paired reading for peer teaching, provide parents with consistent simple materials to read aloud at home and facilitate teacher-parent-student partnership through shared resources and clear communication."*

(G4) *"I use peer-assisted activities so students can learn together and build confidence, and I consult with colleagues to exchange ideas and implement effective teaching strategies tailored to each learner's needs."*

The findings indicate that guided and small-group reading serve as essential instructional approaches for addressing the diverse learning needs of struggling readers. Teachers perceived these strategies as opportunities to provide individualized attention, closely monitor learners' progress, and deliver immediate instructional support tailored to specific reading difficulties. By adjusting the pace of instruction, reinforcing foundational reading skills, and providing timely feedback, teachers were able to respond more effectively to challenges in comprehension, decoding, and fluency. At the same time, participants acknowledged that implementing these approaches requires balancing the varying needs of learners within limited instructional time, highlighting the complexity of inclusive literacy instruction in everyday classroom practice. These findings align with Zee et al. (2021), who emphasized that guided and collaborative instructional approaches foster literacy development by increasing learner engagement and providing targeted support. Collectively, the findings underscore that guided and small-group reading not only facilitate the development of reading skills but also reflect teachers' commitment to responsive, differentiated, and learner-centered instruction that promotes equitable learning opportunities for struggling readers.

Theme 2: Instructional Adaptations
Lesson Simplification and Scaffolding

Teachers reported that they apply differentiated instruction by breaking lessons into smaller steps, using clear instructions, providing scaffolding, and giving immediate feedback to support struggling readers. These strategies are used to help learners better understand reading tasks, reduce confusion, and allow them to progress at their own pace while building confidence and reading skills, as shown in their responses:

(G3) *"I adapt my teaching by breaking lessons into smaller, more manageable parts and using simple, clear instructions."*

(G4) *"To support struggling readers, I focus on breaking lessons into small, manageable steps, using visual aids, and giving immediate feedback during reading activities."*

(G5) *"To help struggling readers, I use a combination of strategies that address their diverse needs. In my classroom, I usually start with phonics and decoding activities to strengthen their foundational skills."*

(G6) *"For learners who struggle with decoding, I break words into smaller sounds, use repetition, and provide hands-on activities like letter tiles or flashcards."*

The findings highlight differentiated instruction as a fundamental pedagogical approach that enables teachers to respond effectively to the diverse reading needs of struggling learners. Participants described adapting their instructional strategies by providing gradual skill progression, individualized guidance, and structured learning experiences that matched learners' varying levels of reading proficiency. Rather than employing a uniform teaching approach, teachers intentionally adjusted instruction to ensure that learners received the appropriate level of support needed to develop reading competence and confidence. These experiences demonstrate that differentiated instruction extends beyond modifying classroom activities; it reflects teachers' commitment to creating equitable learning opportunities where every learner is given the necessary support to progress at an appropriate pace. This interpretation is consistent with Eikeland and Ohna (2022), who described differentiated instruction as the adaptation of teaching strategies, instructional content, learning processes, and support to address learners' diverse educational needs. Collectively, the findings underscore the value of differentiated instruction in fostering a responsive, inclusive, and learner-centered environment that promotes continuous improvement in the reading development of struggling learners.

Adjusted Materials

Teachers reported that they apply differentiated instruction by modifying reading materials, using easier texts and visual aids, adjusting lesson pacing, breaking lessons into smaller steps, and providing targeted support with frequent checks for understanding, as shown in their responses:

(G1) *"I modify reading materials to match each student's level, incorporate frequent checks for understanding, and offer additional practice or guided support as needed."*

(G4) *"I also adjust the materials, like using easier texts or adding pictures, to make lessons more accessible and help them build confidence gradually."*

(G5) *"Once I understand their specific needs, I adjust my instruction by slowing down the pace, breaking lessons into smaller steps, and providing more targeted support."*

The findings indicate that adjusting instructional materials is a critical strategy that enables teachers to accommodate the diverse reading abilities of struggling learners. Participants described simplifying reading texts, incorporating visual aids, slowing the pace of instruction, breaking lessons into smaller and manageable steps, and conducting frequent checks for understanding to make literacy instruction more accessible. These instructional adaptations allowed teachers to reduce learning barriers while ensuring that learners could actively engage with reading tasks according to their individual levels of readiness. The participants' experiences suggest that modifying instructional materials is not merely an instructional adjustment but a deliberate practice that promotes equitable learning opportunities and supports learners' gradual development of reading competence and confidence. This interpretation is consistent with Puzio et al. (2020), who emphasized that differentiated literacy instruction is most effective when teachers intentionally adapt instructional materials and learning experiences to align with learners' readiness and specific educational needs. The findings underscore that purposeful adjustments to instructional materials contribute to a responsive, inclusive, and learner-centered classroom environment that facilitates continuous improvement in the reading development of struggling learners.

Theme 3: Engagement and Motivation Techniques *Hands-on Learning*

Teachers also noted that struggling readers require more focused instructional support through differentiated strategies such as one-on-one assistance, peer pairing, and small-group guided reading. They emphasized that these approaches help address learners' varying reading difficulties, particularly in decoding and comprehension, by providing more individualized attention and continuous monitoring of progress.

(G4) *"I use differentiated instruction, such as pairing them with stronger readers, providing extra practice, and offering one-on-one support when needed."*

(G6) *"For those who have trouble with comprehension, I use guided reading, ask questions before, during, and after reading."*

(G5) *"I also provide guided reading sessions in small groups, where I can closely monitor their reading behavior."*

The participants described hands-on learning as an effective instructional approach for supporting struggling readers through one-on-one assistance, peer pairing, guided reading, and small-group instruction. They explained that these strategies allowed them to closely monitor learners' reading behaviors, identify individual learning needs, and provide immediate feedback to address difficulties in decoding and comprehension. Teachers also observed that learners became more engaged and gradually developed greater confidence when provided with continuous guidance and opportunities for active participation in reading activities. These lived experiences are consistent with the findings of Donegan and Wanzek (2021), who concluded that struggling readers benefit most from intensive, targeted reading interventions that provide explicit instruction, guided practice, and individualized support. The findings suggest that hands-on instructional approaches create meaningful learning experiences that strengthen reading comprehension, enhance learner confidence, and promote continuous reading development.

Positive Reinforcement

Teachers highlighted that positive reinforcement, and a supportive classroom environment play a vital role in sustaining the motivation and engagement of struggling readers. They emphasized that learners who frequently experience difficulty in reading benefit from encouragement, peer support, and enjoyable learning activities that help build confidence and reduce anxiety toward reading tasks.

(G1) *"I encourage peer support by pairing struggling readers with more confident classmates during reading activities, fostering collaboration and motivation."*

(G4) *"I use peer-assisted activities so students can learn together and build confidence."*

(G3) *"Over time, I also experiment with creative activities, like reading games or peer-assisted reading, to make learning more engaging and to reinforce skills in a fun way."*

(G6) *"Choosing books or passages that match learners' interests to motivate them and build confidence."*

Teachers observed that learners are more likely to engage in reading tasks and persist despite difficulties when they experience encouragement, collaborative activities, and meaningful classroom interactions. Such supportive conditions help reduce fear of making mistakes while gradually strengthening learners' confidence and willingness to participate.

Through consistent positive reinforcement and structured peer engagement, learners develop a stronger sense of security and motivation in reading activities. Pelletier et al. (2022) explained that teacher, peer, and parent support play a significant role in enhancing reading motivation by satisfying learners' psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. The review further emphasized that supportive classroom relationships and positive social interactions encourage learners to become more engaged and persistent in reading activities. These findings indicate that a nurturing classroom environment plays a significant role in helping struggling readers build confidence, maintain engagement, and improve their reading abilities over time.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that teachers' experiences in fostering struggling readers are shaped by the complex interaction of instructional, contextual, and systemic challenges. While reading difficulties originate from learners' diverse literacy needs, teachers consistently emphasized that these challenges are intensified by inadequate instructional resources, limited opportunities for individualized instruction, large class sizes, inconsistent learner attendance, insufficient parental involvement, and unfavorable home learning conditions. These realities indicate that supporting struggling readers extends beyond pedagogical competence alone and requires educational environments that address structural constraints while recognizing the influence of learners' social and family contexts on literacy development. Consequently, effective inclusive literacy cannot be achieved solely through classroom instruction but depends on a broader ecosystem of institutional and community support.

Despite these challenges, the findings reveal that teachers adopt responsive and adaptive instructional practices that reflect the principles of inclusive literacy. Rather than relying on a single intervention, teachers integrate explicit phonics instruction, the Marungko approach, guided and small-group reading, differentiated instruction, scaffolding, modified instructional materials, repeated practice, peer-assisted learning, and positive reinforcement to address learners' diverse reading needs. These practices illustrate that effective literacy instruction is dynamic, learner-centered, and continuously adjusted according to learners' progress and individual differences. Equally important, teachers recognize that meaningful reading development is strengthened through collaboration with parents, colleagues, and other stakeholders, reinforcing the shared responsibility of supporting struggling readers both inside and outside the classroom.

Overall, this study concludes that fostering struggling readers through the lens of No Child Left Behind is a multidimensional and relational process that extends beyond improving reading skills. Teachers lived experiences demonstrate that inclusive literacy is sustained through the integration of evidence-based instructional practices, emotional encouragement, differentiated support, and collaborative partnerships that collectively create equitable learning opportunities for all learners. The study therefore affirms that teachers play a pivotal role in translating inclusive education into meaningful classroom practice; however, the success of these efforts depends equally on supportive educational policies, adequate instructional resources, and active family and community engagement. These findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on inclusive literacy by providing an evidence-based understanding of how teachers navigate the complexities of supporting struggling readers while striving to ensure that no learner is left behind.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed.

For Teachers. Teachers may continue implementing differentiated and responsive literacy instruction that addresses both the academic and emotional needs of struggling readers. Explicit phonics instruction, guided reading, scaffolding, repeated practice, and formative assessment may be consistently integrated into daily classroom instruction. Equally important is the creation of emotionally supportive learning environments where learners are encouraged to participate without fear of failure. Continuous observation of learners' progress should guide instructional decisions and enable timely interventions tailored to individual reading needs.

For School Administrators. School head are encouraged to strengthen school-based reading intervention programs by allocating protected instructional time for literacy support, ensuring the availability of developmentally appropriate reading materials, and providing teachers with adequate instructional resources. Professional development activities should focus on differentiated instruction, reading intervention, formative assessment, and strategies for addressing learners' emotional and motivational needs. School Learning Action Cell (SLAC) sessions may also be strengthened to encourage collaborative planning, sharing of best practices, and collective problem-solving among teachers.

For the Educational Leaders. Educational leaders may continue enhancing literacy intervention programs by providing sustained technical assistance, monitoring implementation, and ensuring that schools receive sufficient instructional resources. Capacity-building programs should extend beyond intervention techniques to include classroom-based

assessment, differentiated instruction, inclusive literacy practices, and learner motivation. Policies supporting literacy development should provide teachers with greater flexibility in implementing interventions while balancing curriculum expectations with learners' developmental needs.

For Parents and the School Community. Parents and stakeholders are encouraged to establish consistent home reading routines and actively participate in reinforcing literacy skills through shared reading activities and regular communication with teachers. Schools may strengthen home-school partnerships by providing simple reading materials, practical guidance, and continuous feedback that enables parents to support literacy development effectively. Community stakeholders may also contribute by supporting school literacy programs and expanding learners' access to reading resources.

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Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study; all data used were obtained from previously published sources as cited in the reference list.

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Appendices

No appendices are attached to this study.