Beyond the Letters: Unveiling the Worldviews of Non-Readers in English

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ABSTRACT

Despite of the different interventions implemented by the Department of Education to eradicate illiteracy, there are still some students reach high school without mastering one of the essential literacy skills such as reading in their previous years of schooling. This transcendental phenomenological research aimed to explore the worldviews and its contexts of non-reader in English of Grade 7 students of Lambayong National High School, School Year 2024-2025. Eight non-readers served as the participants of the study. Panels of experts validated the semi-structured interview questionnaire to gather enriching data from the participants. A pilot testing was held to ensure the credibility and reliability of the results. An orientation to the parents and an informed consent were given since the respondents of the study belongs to the minor age group. Using thematic analysis of data, the results revealed that non-readers in English have internalized negative self-image accompanied by emotional distress, traumatic and punitive experiences with English reading, low reading proficiency and deliberate efforts to improve, and informal reading practices. Moreover, some participants lacking parental support while others experience negative reinforcement at home. Additionally, findings also reveal unsupportive classroom environments which further hinder literacy development of non-readers. Furthermore, reading capability of students are influenced by their peers which leads to social isolation and interaction barriers. However, these experiences motivated non-readers and be determined to strive harder to learn reading to achieve their future aspirations. These findings emphasize the need for more inclusive, compassionate, and supportive educational strategies. Addressing the emotional and psychological barriers faced by non-readers is just as important as providing structured literacy interventions.

Keywords – Future Aspirations, Non-Readers, Transcendental Phenomenology, Worldviews

INTRODUCTION

As a teacher at Lambayong National High School, it was observed that a persistent issue exists where students progress to high school despite lacking foundational literacy skills that should have been addressed during their elementary years. The problem is that many students enter high school with significant reading difficulties, hindering their academic performance and overall success. Based on the Learner Information System (LIS) coordinator of Lambayong National High School, the Non-Readers report shows that 14 students out of 565 (2.48% of the total Grade 7 population) are non-readers for the SY 2024-2025. Additionally, the mean average grade of the Junior High School in English subject is 83 as reported by the English Department Head, third quarter of the current school year. Interventions such as Brigada Pagbasa and Catch-Up Friday have been implemented to bridge these gaps, yet challenges remain in effectively reaching and sustaining the progress of non-readers. This situation underscores the urgent need to explore more comprehensive strategies and interventions to ensure every student achieves the literacy skills required for high school success.

Globally, the advancement of students to high school without foundational literacy skills remains a critical issue. The 2018 PISA results ranked the Philippines lowest in reading comprehension among 79 countries, with an average score of 340 compared to the OECD average of 487 (Flores, 2024). In the USA, studies highlight similar challenges, particularly in rural areas. Bursuck et al. (2020) found that socio-economic factors hinder reading proficiency among high school students, while Neri and Mamonong (2024) revealed mixed outcomes in

intervention programs for non-readers in Texas. English learners also face higher dropout rates and reading difficulties, emphasizing the need for tailored support (Frenzel et al., 2018). A UNICEF (2021) study in Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, showed that many children struggle with basic literacy despite years of education, with disparities linked to socio-economic status.

Within the ASEAN region, the Philippines ranks among the lowest in reading literacy, mathematics, and science (Farolan, 2019). Locally, studies reveal significant challenges for junior high school non-readers despite intervention programs. Neri & Mamonong (2024) highlights struggles with comprehension and content knowledge, emphasizing the need for tailored strategies, quality reading materials, and better teacher training (Albano, 2021). Project AKAY, targeting Grade 4 students with cognitive challenges, demonstrated success through structured, focused instruction (Pelatero, 2024).

Programs like the Care for Non-Readers (CNR) have shown positive impacts on reading proficiency (Mangila & Adapon, 2020), but gaps remain in understanding the influence of school, home environments, and socio-economic factors on non-readers (Sison & Tecson, 2019). Nationally, DepEd initiatives like Brigada Pagbasa aim to address literacy gaps, yet reports of non-readers in higher grades persist (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2021).

However, some Non-Readers (NRs) in schools has a significant emotional and social challenge where some students, who have been promoted to higher grade levels, may have been advanced due to the teachers' religious compassion or perception of their industriousness. This situation leads to issues such as a lack of genuine academic progress and potential social isolation. These students may struggle with building confidence in their academic abilities, experience anxiety about their performance, and face difficulties in forming positive relationships with peers. The emotional impact of being promoted despite insufficient reading skills can create feelings of inadequacy and lead to further disengagement from school activities. Socially, they might find it hard to interact or relate to their peers, exacerbating their isolation and contributing to a negative self-concept.

There is limited research on the loved experiences and worldviews of non-readers, particularly in Lambayong National High School and Sultan Kudarat Division. Most studies focused on literacy rates, socio-economic factors and intrventions, but little is known about how non-readers view their environment, education and future. Therefore, conducting this study essential to understand the views of Grade 7 non-readers in English regarding their environment, educational experiences, and future aspirations in order to inform more relevant and effective literacy interventions.

Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative research design, particularly Transcendental Phenomenology. Qualitative research is a system of inquiry that seeks to build a holistic, largely narrative description to enhance the researcher's understanding of a social or cultural phenomenon (Creswell, 2023). This approach, as noted by Creswell (2024), occurs in natural settings and employs a combination of observations, interviews, and document reviews. It is an open-ended technique that can be updated as the research progresses, improving the quality of the data and perspectives produced (Talbot, 2015).

In this context, a phenomenological study aims to define the common meanings of individuals' lived experiences regarding a particular concept or phenomenon, emphasizing the shared nature of those experiences. The basic purpose of phenomenology is to distill individual experiences into a description of their universal essence (Yuksel et al., 2015). The researcher will explore the underlying factors contributing to reading difficulties among non-readers at Lambayong National High School and identify effective intervention strategies to enhance their literacy skills.

Specifically, this qualitative inquiry employed the Transcendental Phenomenological Method (Neubeaur et al., 2019), which delved into the significance of people's experiences and how they perceive those experiences. The study investigated the various feedback experiences of junior high school students at Lambayong National High School. A structured interview-based method was utilized to narrate the direct experiences of students in feedbacking within the classroom. The researcher aimed to gain awareness of the participants' viewpoints, creating a shared narrative that reflects the experiences and feelings of the students. Ultimately, the goal was to

extract common themes from these experiences, translated them into a cohesive description, and elucidated the participants' lived experiences related to the phenomenon of reading difficulties.

Locale of the Study

The selection of Lambayong National High School in the Division of Sultan Kudarat as the locale for this study was scientifically justified by its significant role within the local educational landscape. The school served a large and diverse student population of 3,086 learners, which provided a comprehensive sample to examine the lived experiences and challenges of non-readers. The diversity in the student body, coupled with the school's central location in Poblacion, Lambayong, makes it an ideal setting for this study, as it reflected the broader educational realities of the region. The research aimed to uncover the unique obstacles non-readers faced in such a structured environment, offering insights that may be applicable to other similar settings. Furthermore, the presence of 82 Junior High School teachers and 38 Senior High School teachers presented an opportunity to explore a variety of pedagogical strategies that were currently being utilized to address literacy challenges. This rich context allowed for the identification of effective intervention techniques, providing evidence-based recommendations that could improve literacy outcomes not only for students at Lambayong National High School but also for similar schools in the region and beyond. Conducting the study here ensured that the findings were grounded in a real-world educational context, making the results more relevant and impactful.

Participants of the Study

The study included 8(eight) Grade 7 students from Lambayong National High School who were identified as non-readers based on teacher assessments and school literacy programs. Fourteen (14) students were initially listed in the school's tracking form, as reported by the Reading Coordinator. Participants needed to be willing to share their experiences through interviews, with parental consent required for those under 18. Students who were proficient readers, not enrolled in the school, or unable to participate due to conflicts or lack of consent were excluded.

To ensure validity, four (4) teachers handling the selected students joined a focus group discussion for cross-validation. Three (3) teachers with doctor's degree reviewed the interview guide for content validity, and a data analyst verified the accuracy of key ideas and emerging themes.

Sampling Technique

The study included students from Lambayong National High School, Division of Sultan Kudarat, and employed purposive sampling. According to Creswell & Creswell (2017), purposive sampling is a non-random technique where researchers deliberately selected individuals who met specific criteria relevant to the study. This method ensured the inclusion of participants with essential qualities, experiences, or knowledge necessary for addressing the research objectives.

The goal was to select individuals who could provide rich and relevant insights into the study's focus (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). Creswell (2013) recommended that phenomenological studies include between 6 and 10 participants. However, this study included 8 (eight) participants who met specific inclusion criteria to ensure relevance to the research. By selecting participants who fit these criteria, the study aimed to provide accurate and meaningful insights into the reading difficulties of non-readers and the effectiveness of intervention strategies.

Research Instrument: The study used in-depth interviews (IDI) for student participants and focus group discussions (FGD) for teachers.

In-depth interviews allowed for detailed exploration of students' experiences, thoughts, and behaviors (Boyce et al., 2018). The researcher prepared and validated the interview questions through content validity, with feedback from an adviser and expert validators. Audio recordings of interviews were secured using a mobile phone to ensure accurate transcription and minimize bias.

FGDs were conducted with teachers to cross-validate students' responses and gain deeper insights into their

classroom experiences (Lotich, 2011). This qualitative approach helped uncover social issues by gathering data from a selected group rather than a broad statistical sample.

Additional tools, including a questionnaire validation tool, interview protocols, assent and consent forms, and a transcription guide, were used to support data collection.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before data collection, the researcher sought permission from the Dean of Graduate Schools of Sultan Kudarat State University to conduct the study. After receiving approval, the researcher sent a letter to the principal of Lambayong National High School requesting permission to interview selected junior high school students and teachers.

Participants received an orientation before the interview, where they were given the opportunity to review and signed the assent and informed consent forms (ICF). Ethical principles, including anonymity and confidentiality, were emphasized to ensure participant trust. Providing a preview of the interview helped encourage truthful responses.

The introductory meeting served as an opportunity to build trust and discuss the ethical implications of the study through the completion of consent forms. To ensure credibility and transferability, the interview guide was validated by a panel of experts.

The researcher prepared recording applications, such as a mobile phone, for data analysis and transcription. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes, depending on the participants' availability. If any participant chose to terminate the interview due to distressing experiences, the researcher respected their decision and retained the information provided.

Additionally, the researcher conducted member checking after the interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This process involved verifying the accuracy of collected data by reviewing and explaining findings to participants, ensuring validity and reliability.

Data Analysis Method

For this study, the researcher employed thematic analysis, which focused on identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns and themes within the data, organizing and describing it in detail (Moustakas, 1994). The process followed six steps. First, the researcher familiarized themselves with the data by reading and re-reading it to identify patterns and gain a comprehensive understanding. Next, initial codes were generated by categorizing and labeling data through reduction and complication to infer meaning. These codes were then grouped into overarching themes that accurately represented the data, ensuring that no key elements were overlooked. The researcher reviewed these themes to examine how they supported the data and theoretical framework, making revisions as needed. Afterward, each theme was defined and named, highlighting key aspects of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Finally, the researcher selected and compiled the most meaningful themes into a report, contributing to a deeper understanding of the study's findings.

Ethical Considerations: At all times, the researcher must maintain the welfare of the participants and protected them from needless stress (Cacciattolo, 2015).

Social Value. The findings of this research benefited secondary high school students and teachers, academic coordinators, and department heads by strengthening aspects of feedbacking. The results were disseminated via webinars, research forums, and legitimate international and national academic journals. Furthermore, the researcher expected to publish this research in an appropriate journal.

Informed Consent. Before commencing the IDI and FGD, the researcher submitted a letter of request to the school principal to carry out the research study. When they expressed willingness to participate in the research, the researcher sent permission letters to perform the IDI for student participants and FGD for the invited teachers that were signed by the researcher and the participants. Then, the researcher obtained verbal and written approval from the participants by having them signed the consent form. The researcher produced informed consent to

provide adequate information to a potential participant so that s/he may agree whether or not to engage in the study. The researcher also introduced herself as researcher and orient the participants to the study's stated purpose. The following information were included in the informed consent: Initially, it expressed the participants' willingness to participate and the right to withdraw, and if s/he feels uncomfortable, s/he has the right to end the interview. After, with the approval of the participants, an audio recorder, cellular phone, and other recording applications were used during the IDI and FGD.

Vulnerability of the research participants. The researcher assured the participants of their special protection and ensure that a guidance counselor is always present if they experience any discomfort throughout the interview. More importantly, the confidentiality and privacy of the research participants' identities were protected. As a result, the researcher considered the participants by offering them the option of participating or not participating in the study.

Risks, benefits, and safety. The researcher was completely aware of the risks that participants may encounter; these risks may be psychological, such as trauma, or they may be legal, such as loss of confidentiality. To ensure that the risks listed do not affect the participants in this research project, the researcher made certain that they were well-informed about the research study, its objective, and the benefits that it can provide. Participants' well-being was the researcher's top priority, and it is important to make certain that their rights were protected.

Privacy and confidentiality of information. As a way to ensure data security, information were stored on electronic storage, hard drives, and electronic mail. The notes were securely stored, and an electronic copy were generated, along with the audio recordings and photo documentation, to enhance security and enable retrieval. As stated on the National Privacy Commission's site, compliance with Republic Act No. 10173, also known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012, requires that all personal information must be collected for reasons that are specified, legitimate, and reasonable. They were assured that the collected and analyzed data were utilized solely for the purposes of this research study and were not made available to any other platforms.

Justice. This indicated that the selection process were based on individuals who meet the inclusion criteria, which require that participants for the IDI were active and officially enrolled JHS students and for the FGD were employed as JHS teachers. Additionally, the researcher guaranteed that the procedures employed to choose the research participants were fair and that they are treated without any form of prejudgment. To prevent bias and to ensure truthful responses regarding their personal experiences with the phenomenon, the researcher adhered to the guide research questions during IDI and allowed participants to respond uninterrupted by the researcher.

Transparency. To maintain transparency, the methods and procedures employed in the dissemination of findings must be clear and truthful. Therefore, the results were carefully analyzed, and relevant supporting materials were included in the appendix for the reader's convenience. Every additional document required to validate the data analysis and conclusions were incorporated.

Qualification of the researcher.

As a high school teacher handling Practical Research subjects, the researcher was knowledgeable in various research with a sound understanding of research methodologies. The researcher also upheld the principles of trustworthiness, awareness, sensitivity, and humility with regard to the participants' expectations throughout the execution of this research study.

Community Involvement. Community involvement in research is an inclusive participation process that fostered the genuine partnership of individuals connected by common situations, special interests, or geographical proximity to address challenges that impact the welfare of the focused community (Ahmed et al., 2010).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Emerging Themes on Worldviews of Non-Readers in English

The clustered themes and codes reveal the emotional and social challenges faced by non-readers. One prominent

theme is social judgment and self-deprecation, where students often feel ashamed, embarrassed, and judged for their inability to read, as reflected in codes like "can't read English," "stupid," and "useless." This leads to childhood punishment and fear during reading tasks, with students recalling experiences like being beaten or pinched, which triggers anxiety and nervousness when asked to read.

Another theme involves self-assessment of low proficiency, where students acknowledge their struggles and engage in deliberate practice or rely on informal learning sources like cousins or food wrappers. The fear of rejection due to reading difficulties emerges as a significant emotional barrier, with students expressing feelings of shyness, being made fun of, and concerns about not being accepted by peers. Finally, use of digital media plays a role in incidental reading practice, where students engage in reading through platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and signs they encounter in daily life. These themes highlight the complex emotional, social, and academic challenges non-readers face, influencing their engagement with reading and their self-esteem.

Theme 1: Negative Self-Image and Emotional Distress

Participants often felt shame, embarrassment, and uselessness, which affected their self-esteem and motivation which results to internalize negative self-perceptions, leading to emotional distress with English reading. These were also evident dring the focus group discussion.

According to Adler (as cited in Verywell Health, 2024), an inferiority complex can make individuals feel inadequate and socially alienated. Higgins (1987) explained that when people see a gap between their actual abilities and societal expectations, they experience shame and low self-worth. Jordan, Whitfield, and Zeigler-Hill (2007) noted that low implicit self-esteem can cause individuals to mask their insecurities with defensive behaviors, making them more sensitive to judgment.

Treynor (2009) highlighted that fear of social rejection due to illiteracy can lead to depression and withdrawal from learning opportunities. Additionally, GQ (2024) stated that negative self-talk worsens anxiety and self-doubt, making it harder to improve literacy skills.

Theme 2: Traumatic Experiences with English Reading

Many non-readers associated English reading with traumatic and punitive experiences from childhood. They recalled being punished or humiliated by teachers or family members, including physical punishments like being beaten or pinched. The FGD also reveled that these painful memories created lasting fear and anxiety around reading tasks.

According to Bandura (1986), negative reinforcement in learning environments can lead to avoidance behaviors, where individuals develop fear and anxiety toward certain tasks, such as reading. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that learning should be a supportive process, and punitive measures hinder cognitive and emotional development. Skinner (1953) also noted that punishment often leads to emotional distress rather than motivation for improvement.

Research by Perry (2009) highlighted that early childhood trauma can have long-term effects on cognitive and emotional well-being, making it harder for individuals to engage in reading. Additionally, Brewster and Railsback (2003) found that supportive teaching methods, rather than punitive ones, are essential in helping struggling readers build confidence.

Theme 3: Low Reading Proficiency and Deliberate Efforts to Improve

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Theme 4: Social Isolation and Interaction Barriers

Many non-readers felt shy and avoided social interactions because they fear being mocked or rejected by their classmates. These were also confirmed by the key participants in the focus group discussion. Yildirim (2022) explained that students with reading difficulties often develop avoidance behaviors, such as staying silent in class or withdrawing from peer activities, which led to social isolation. Similarly, Fisher and Frey (2023) emphasized that literacy challenges can hinder social-emotional development, making it harder for struggling readers to build relationships and communicate confidently.

However, Fisher and Frey (2023) suggested that integrating social-emotional learning with literacy instruction helped non-readers developed confidence and improved their interactions with peers. By creating supportive and inclusive learning environments, educators encouraged struggling readers to participate more actively in both academic and social settings.

Theme 5: Informal Reading Practices for Skill Development

Many non-readers found ways to practice reading through digital and informal methods. Yildirim (2022) highlighted that struggling readers often engage with everyday texts, such as social media captions, messages, and advertisements, to build familiarity with words. Fisher and Frey (2023) emphasized that digital platforms like TikTok and mobile apps provided an engaging way for learners to develop literacy skills in a low-pressure environment.
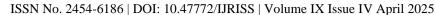
Furthermore, Benson and Chik (2023) explained that informal reading experiences, such as browsing online content or reading text messages, contributed to vocabulary growth and comprehension. These digital interactions, although unstructured, helped non-readers gained exposure to words and phrases, fostering gradual improvement in their reading abilities. Encouraging the use of technology for literacy development created accessible and enjoyable learning experiences.

Emerging Themes on the Contexts of Worldviews of Non-Readers in English

The clustered themes and codes highlight the various emotional, social, and environmental factors affecting non-readers. Negative family interactions and forced self-reliance are key themes, where students often experience verbal abuse, such as being scolded or called "stupid," and are forced to rely on themselves due to family separation or parents working abroad. This lack of family support can contribute to feelings of isolation.

The absence of reading materials and environmental discomfort further hinder learning, with students reporting a lack of posters, books, and uncomfortable environments (e.g., hot, poorly ventilated classrooms, or locked cabinets). These conditions make it harder for students to engage with reading materials, impacting their progress. Peer mockery and occasional support reveal the social challenges non-readers face, as they are often laughed at or made fun of by their peers, although there are instances of peers attempting to help them. However, the inconsistent assistance leads to frustration and lack of steady progress.

Finally, bullying and emotional challenges contribute to self-consciousness, where students feel ashamed, shy, and hurt by others' words. Despite this, they often have a motivation to improve, driven by the desire to overcome their reading struggles and avoid further embarrassment. These themes underscore the emotional and social barriers non-readers face and the inconsistent support systems in their lives.

Theme 1: Family Environment Influences Reading Experience

Family environment significantly influenced a child's reading development. Negative interactions at home, such as scolding or lack of support, hindered literacy progress. These evidences were also observed by the FGD group that family involvement and environment was a crucial issue that influences the reading capability of the students. Conversely, positive practices like reading aloud to children from an early age enhanced vocabulary and interest in reading, as highlighted by Galea (2024). Parental involvement, including modeling reading behavior and creating a literacy-rich environment, was crucial for developing reading skills, as discussed by Kindred Squared (2024). Socioeconomic factors also played a role, as families with higher socioeconomic status often provided more resources and support for literacy development.

Theme 2: Unsupportive Classroom Environments

Many non-readers described their classrooms as lacking supportive learning environments, often missing essential reading materials like posters and books. The FGD aslo revealed that the presence of readable posters and other materials in the classroom would somehow help them find anything to practice to read. Fraser (2024) highlighted that well-disciplined environments and sufficient resources in schools were crucial for developing strong literacy and numeracy skills. Additionally, uncomfortable conditions such as excessive heat or poor ventilation further hindered students' ability to focus on reading tasks. Baker (2024) emphasized that structured and resource-rich classrooms significantly contribute to student success, as seen in Canley Vale High School, where explicit teaching methods have helped students from non-English-speaking backgrounds excel in literacy. Therefore, ensuring that classrooms are well-equipped and comfortable is essential for supporting non-readers in their literacy development.

Theme 3: Peer Influence: Mixed Support and Mockery

Peers significantly influenced students' attitudes toward reading. The FGD key informants revealed that there was mixed support and was a significant issue for non-readrs inside their classes. Fuchs et al. (1997) found that Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) helped students developed reading fluency and comprehension through structured peer support. Similarly, Palincsar and Brown (1986) emphasized that reciprocal teaching, where students took turns summarizing and questioning text content, enhanced reading comprehension by promoting active engagement. However, not all peer interactions were positive. Juvonen, Wang, and Espinoza (2011) highlighted that bullying and social exclusion lowered students' confidence and hindered their willingness to engage in reading activities. Wentzel and Watkins (2002) further noted that supportive peer relationships encouraged academic success, while negative peer influences contributed to avoidance behaviors. Likewise, Ryan (2001) found that peer dynamics played a crucial role in shaping students' motivation and academic achievement, affecting their approach to reading. This mixed peer influence created an environment where some students feel supported in their reading efforts, while others withdrew due to negative interactions.

Theme 4: Coping Strategies in School Reading Environments

Many non-readers faced bullying and hurtful comments when they struggled with reading, which increased their stress and self-consciousness. The teacher informants observed that these challenges hindered the non-readers being motivated to read. As highlighted by Altimari (2024), a student in Hartford endured bullying and inadequate support for her learning disabilities, leading to significant emotional distress. These negative experiences worsen feelings of isolation and hindered academic progress.

Despite these difficulties, some students developed coping strategies to improve their reading skills. According to Cowburn (2024), engaging in social activities such as book clubs and selecting reading materials based on students' interests encouraged reading. Additionally, Bita (2024) noted that structured instructional approaches like explicit teaching have proven effective in improving literacy, particularly among struggling and disadvantaged students. Schools that implement direct instruction methods have observed significant progress in literacy and numeracy.

Furthermore, as Mellon (2024) reports, the identification and support for learning disabilities such as dyslexia

have significantly improved, offering students better resources to overcome their challenges. In Texas, the number of students identified with dyslexia has more than doubled in the past decade, allowing them to access targeted interventions and receive necessary support.

Emerging Themes on Views of Non-Readers in English About Their Future

The clustered themes and codes highlight the aspirations and challenges faced by non-readers. Expressing dreams, goals, and career aspirations reveals a strong desire among students to succeed despite their reading difficulties. They express ambitions to become professionals like teachers, doctors, police officers, or to finish college, driven by the hope to "achieve my dream" and work hard to "try my best."

At the same time, students face significant social, emotional, and personal barriers. Many struggles with learning to read, experience bullying, and cope with personal challenges like coming from broken families. Despite these hardships, they express a determination to overcome their shyness and use these challenges as motivation to improve, drawing inspiration from the desire to fulfill their goals and dreams. These themes show the resilience and aspirations of non-readers, as they strive to overcome obstacles in their learning journey.

Theme 1: Future Aspirations for Educational and Career Achievement

Participants expressed strong aspirations for their future careers, such as becoming teachers, doctors, or joining the army. The FGD observed that having dreams and goals were relevant to the non-readers to strive to learn reading. According to Altimari (2024), students recognized that literacy is essential for achieving their goals and breaking the cycle of academic struggles. Many acknowledged that learning to read English is a crucial step toward their dreams and are determined to study harder to secure a better future.

As noted by Cowburn (2024), young learners who set clear career aspirations were more motivated to improve their literacy skills, especially when they saw education as a pathway to success. Similarly, Bita (2024) highlighted that students exposed to structured and explicit teaching methods tend to develop greater confidence in their academic abilities, reinforcing their motivation to pursue higher education and career opportunities. Mellon (2024) also pointed out that increased awareness and support for students with reading challenges enabled them to overcome obstacles and strived for their professional goals.

Theme 2: Determination to Overcome Barriers

Despite facing challenges such as bullying, shyness, and unsupportive family environments, non-readers showed a strong determination to improve their reading skills. According to Altimari (2024), students who struggle with literacy often developed resilience and a deeper motivation to succeed when they recognized the role of reading in achieving their goals. Many participants believed that overcoming these obstacles is essential to reaching their dreams and securing a better future as was also observed by the teacher particants in the FGD.

As noted by Bita (2024), structured support and explicit teaching methods significantly helped struggling readers build confidence and persistence. Similarly, Cowburn (2024) highlighted that students who receive encouragement, even from small successes in reading, developed a stronger desire to continue learning. Mellon (2024) emphasized that awareness and proper intervention for literacy challenges empowered students to push through difficulties and achieved personal and academic success.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlighted the complex and deeply personal struggles faced by non-readers in English. Participants revealed an internalized negative self-image, often accompanied by emotional distress, which stems from the stigma of illiteracy and social judgment. Many of them have experienced traumatic and punitive responses to their reading difficulties, further reinforcing their anxiety and fear of learning. Despite these challenges, there is evidence of resilience, as some non-readers actively seek to improve their skills through informal reading practices and digital platforms.

Social isolation also emerged as a significant issue, as the fear of ridicule discouraged interaction and

participation. Moreover, family dynamics played a crucial role in shaping reading experiences, with some participants lacking parental support while others experienced negative reinforcement at home. Additionally, unsupportive classroom environments, characterized by inadequate learning materials and uncomfortable conditions, further hindered literacy development.

These findings emphasized the need for more inclusive, compassionate, and supportive educational strategies. Addressing the emotional and psychological barriers faced by non-readers was just as important as providing structured literacy interventions. By fostering a nurturing and resource-rich learning environment, educators and policymakers empowered non-readers to build confidence, developed literacy skills, and ultimately, transformed their academic and social experiences.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declared no conflict of interest in the conduct of the study.

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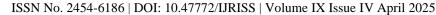
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