



EXPERIENCES OF ENGLISH TEACHERS IN CULTIVATING READING MOTIVATION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Sustaining reading motivation among elementary learners is a complex pedagogical task. This study explored the lived experiences of upper-elementary English teachers as they cultivated learners' intrinsic motivation to read. To capture these insights, eight Grades 4 to 6 English teachers from Bangoy District, Davao City, who each had at least five years of classroom experience, participated in semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Guided by Colaizzi's seven-step qualitative analysis framework, the study reveals that teachers actively exercise professional autonomy to bypass rigid textbook constraints. Specifically, educators rely on real-time adaptive pacing, text simplification, partner-reading structures, and student-driven material selection to reduce classroom anxiety. While student engagement remains highly volatile due to persistent reading resistance, grounding these instructional adaptations in relational safety effectively counteracts student avoidance. These findings align with Self-Determination Theory while exposing the continuous experimental adjustments teachers must make to manage shifting classroom affect. School heads may leverage these insights to implement responsive, autonomy-supportive professional development programs. Future mixed-methods research is recommended to examine the direct interaction between teacher instructional readiness and student reading affect.

KEYWORDS: Reading motivation, English teachers, Self-Determination Theory, descriptive phenomenology, Davao City, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Shaping learners' reading skills is an ongoing challenge centered on cultivating their motivation to value and enjoy reading. We know that reading motivation plays a massive role in how kids develop reading habits and comprehension skills (Brandt et al., 2021). However, putting that into practice is rarely straightforward. Educators encounter constant pushback, ranging from students' lack of interest to non-submission of assignments, which severely reduces meaningful classroom engagement (McWilliams et al., 2023). Outside factors create extra challenges for these teachers. The lack of reading materials at home, poor study habits, poor family support, and limited economic means contribute to students' difficulties accessing basic reading opportunities (Pelletier et al., 2024). This creates a major gap in literacy instruction. Everyone knows that an internal desire to read is vital, yet keeping students genuinely engaged during a reading lesson remains an everyday battle, especially when teachers have to manage wildly different student backgrounds.

This drop in reading motivation is not just a local issue but rather a global one. For instance, in Indonesia, Indrayadi (2021) highlighted that while building a student's drive to read is vital for school success, a lack of reading motivation frequently causes reading failures, leaving teachers scrambling to change their daily classroom strategies. In the United States, long-term federal data compiled by the National Assessment of Educational Progress reveal

that the number of children reading for fun or personal pleasure has steadily declined over recent years (Schaeffer, 2021). This pattern proves what educators see everywhere: if students

are not motivated, their reading abilities suffer, no matter where they live.

In the Philippines, very similar issues are evident, particularly among intermediate elementary learners. Locally, reduced motivation is heavily associated with low baseline oral reading fluency (Fabella, 2023), underlying student proficiency hurdles (Guerrero, 2025) and poor overall reading comprehension performance (Lucas et al., 2021). This matters because kids who actually want to read will throw themselves into literacy activities and stick with them even when the text gets tough. On the other hand, unmotivated students give up almost immediately, making it incredibly hard for them to even build basic reading mechanics (Howard et al., 2021). This reality demonstrates that teachers need to intentionally shape their classrooms to spark students' curiosity and genuinely excite them about reading (Kheang et al., 2024). Educators who successfully nurture both technical skills and an authentic interest in reading contribute significantly to lifelong literacy (Brandt et al., 2021); however, a gap remains regarding how reading motivation can be effectively cultivated and sustained in daily classroom practice (Parsons & Erickson, 2024).

Existing studies cover teachers' experiences with struggling readers, but they mostly look at mechanics-based remediation (Nimer & Napil, 2024). There is still very little research on the actual classroom strategies used to cultivate an internal drive to read. This is exactly why it is necessary to look directly at what elementary teachers face every day. Hearing from educators in Grades 4 to 6 helps identify real, practical strategies that can turn reading into a genuine, self-driven habit rather than



just another forced school assignment. This study offers practical value for Philippine literacy by showcasing the real-world experiences of teachers who build reading motivation from the ground up. By focusing heavily on the student's inner growth, the work also aligns with Holy Cross of Davao College's mission to provide quality, faith-driven, and learner-centered education. The study also contributes to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by highlighting clear methods to improve reading engagement and student literacy. Locally, this work supports the professional growth of English educators.

By offering practical ways to build meaningful, motivating relationships with learners, the findings help teachers design more flexible lessons and feel more confident at the front of the room. To see how elementary English teachers actually use these methods in daily classroom life, this study examined their firsthand experiences in building student reading motivation. Specifically, the research set out to answer these central questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of English teachers in cultivating learners' reading motivation through their teaching practices?
2. How do English teachers experience the process of designing and adapting reading instructional strategies to address learners' needs and interests effectively?
3. How do English teachers experience developing and demonstrating confidence and readiness in teaching reading effectively?
4. How do English teachers experience building meaningful relationships that motivate learners to engage in reading?

Theoretical Lens

This research draws on Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which links intrinsic motivation to the satisfaction of three core needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. To protect the descriptive phenomenological design, the theory is not treated as a strict sorting system to force data into rigid, predetermined themes. Still, it serves strictly as a conceptual lens to orient the initial focus toward how upper-elementary English teachers experience and facilitate these needs within reading instruction. By using the concepts of professional agency, instructional self-efficacy, and meaningful classroom connections purely as a reflective backdrop, the analysis preserves a strict phenomenological perspective. This approach keeps the study centered on teachers' own voices and experiences. By staying flexible, the true essence of these experiences can surface naturally rather than being forced to fit into the theory's specific categories.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive phenomenological research design to systematically explore the lived experiences of elementary English teachers as they

cultivated learners' motivation to read. This design guided the researcher in gathering participants' lived experiences through their personal accounts. The in-depth interview (IDI) results were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) descriptive phenomenological framework to maintain a structured, systematic approach. This systematic approach helped the researcher verify the teachers' verbatim narratives against the phenomenon's fundamental structure while fully preserving their authentic classroom voices.

The investigation was conducted in identified public elementary schools in the Bangoy District of Davao City, Philippines. This is a region where English-language educators regularly work with students from diverse backgrounds and implement remedial literacy programs. Purposive sampling was employed to identify the eight intermediate elementary English teachers from Grades 4 to 6. They were selected for their subject-matter expertise and at least 5 years of active teaching experience. Primary data collection relied on individual, semi-structured in-depth interviews using an interview guide that had undergone formal content validation by a panel of three language education and qualitative methodology experts to minimize investigator bias and facilitate contextually responsive probing.

The collected verbatim interviews from participants' transcripts were processed employing Colaizzi's seven-step analysis method. This follows: immersive data familiarization, extraction of significant statements, formulation of context-grounded meanings, clustering ideas into categories, and condensation of the findings into an essential structural definition. To establish the study's scientific rigor, the Lincoln and Guba (1985) evaluation framework was strictly adhered to. This ensures credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability through transparent audit trails and formal member checking with participants after the interview to validate the data.

RESULTS

This section details the findings on the lived experiences of English teachers in cultivating learners' reading motivation. It highlights their experiences in addressing classroom challenges, responding to learners' needs, building confidence, fostering meaningful relationships, and navigating the unpredictable, shifting environments of student reading affect.

In keeping with the descriptive phenomenological design, the themes presented below emerged organically from the open, inductive clustering of raw participant transcripts using Colaizzi's protocol. While the first three thematic units capture experiential patterns that structurally parallel the concepts of autonomy, competence, and relatedness within Self-Determination Theory, they are defined and named here through the concrete, lived actions of the educators rather than a priori deductive assumptions. Theme 4 represents an unprompted, ground-up structural layer of the phenomenon that did not neatly fit into a positive theoretical checklist, serving as empirical proof that the participant voice overflowed pre-existing boundaries to reveal an independent layer of real-world classroom friction.

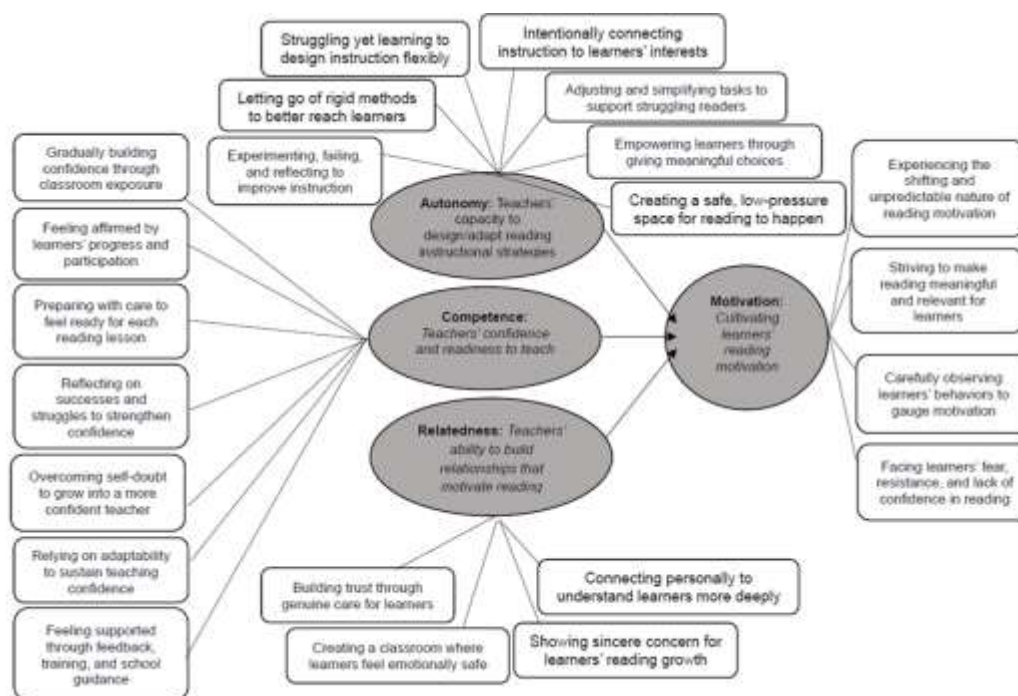


Figure 1. Emergent Themes on the Experiences of English Teachers in Cultivating Reading Motivation.

Theme 1. Experiencing Instructional Agency and Adaptation

The theme generated by instructional agency highlights the English teachers' transition from passive implementers of rigid curricula to active, adaptive instructional designers with the professional freedom and trust to make real-time decisions. Rather than strictly adhering to textbook-bound constraints or rigid methodologies, the participants used their professional autonomy to abandon traditional, high-stakes practices in favor of flexible, learner-centered approaches. Driven by continuous observation of their students' engagement levels, moods, and non-verbal cues, these educators shifted their plans mid-lesson, simplified tasks for struggling readers, and intentionally created safe, low-pressure environments. This instructional agency came alive as a continuous, reflective cycle of experimentation, failure, and adaptation, ultimately allowing teachers to move away from rigid instructional constraints and empower their students with meaningful choices that fostered something they actually wanted to do.

Sub-theme 1.1: Struggling Yet Learning to Design Instruction Flexibly

For English teachers, adapting instruction to learners' needs, interests, and engagement levels requires constant modifications and adjustments to lessons. When students struggled, teachers stepped in or modified activities. Participant 1 noted that cultivating reading motivation is a continuous process of adjustment where they must carefully observe student reactions, including body language, facial expressions, and even their silence, emphasizing that "it does not simply work automatically. I adjust, I reflect, then I try again the next day." This sentiment was supported by Participant 5, who learned that

"small, flexible adjustments make reading more engaging and accessible." Similarly, Participant 6 shared that they coordinate their lesson changes to keep up with shifts in student affect, stating, "I adjust depending on their mood and interest. Sometimes I change the activity in the middle if they're losing focus."

Sub-theme 1.2: Intentionally Connecting Instruction to Learners' Interests

Closely linked to flexibility, connecting instruction to learners' interests emerged as a way for teachers to sustain learners' engagement and motivation to read. By considering learners' preferences, interests, and experiences, teachers made reading activities more meaningful and relevant. Participant 2 explained that they have systematically "shifted to a student-centered model based on experience and feedback from the learners themselves." To realize this model, Participant 3 detailed that they provide varied text selections to promote a sense of reading independence, noting, "I provide varied texts, offer reading choices, and tailor tasks depending on learners' interests and levels. Instead of forcing everyone to read the same material, I also let them pick from stories, comics, informational texts, and digital reading resources." Participant 5 also operationalized this approach by purposefully "shifting from strict textbook teaching to letting learners choose meaningful texts, using creative and collaborative activities, and responding to their interests to make reading more enjoyable."



Sub-theme 1.3: Letting Go of Rigid Methods to Better Reach Learners

In response to learners' disengagement, teachers moved away from approaches that no longer captured learners' attention, leading to the emergence of the *Letting Go of Rigid Methods to Better Reach Learners* approach. They replaced traditional, textbook-centered practices with more interactive, collaborative, and learner-centered activities to keep everyone actively participating. Participant 1 expressed a firm belief that teachers should have the autonomy to adjust instruction based on learners' needs, stating, "I don't insist on methods that clearly don't work. I modify my strategies and materials." Participant 2 discovered that when traditional methods like assigning classic texts, silent independent reading, or formal book reports fail, it is essential to "center content around student interests, replace formal tasks with interactive activities, and build a supportive reading class, because that is really important." Reflecting on past practices, Participant 6 shared that whereas they previously just followed the textbook, they now "observe learners more, make lessons more fun and relatable, and include group activities, discussions, and sometimes technology."

Sub-theme 1.4: Adjusting and Simplifying Tasks to Support Struggling Readers

Building on their efforts to move away from rigid methods, teachers provide various interventions on reading activities to support struggling readers, adjusting and simplifying tasks to reduce frustration and increase engagement. They simplified texts, provided guidance, and incorporated supportive activities that helped learners experience success in reading. Participant 1 illustrated this by sharing how they adjusted their baseline approach: "I adjusted my approach: shorter texts first, then private reading before reading aloud. Gradually, I saw the improvement." Participant 5 explained that when a standard read-aloud session frustrated learners, they would "break the text into smaller parts and add partner reading," and that they learned that small, flexible adjustments make reading more accessible. This process was mirrored by Participant 6, who found that when a one-time story proved too long and caused learners to lose focus, "splitting it into smaller parts, adding discussion, and partner reading made a big difference."

Sub-theme 1.5: Experimenting, Failing, and Reflecting to Improve Instruction

Teachers continuously scrutinized their own methods, fine-tuned their teaching styles, or weighed successes against failures. Participant 1 defies strict mandates by viewing procedural failures as a normal component of long-term improvement, explaining that "over time, I became more reflective and flexible. Before, I was very rigid in my teaching. Now, I see failed lessons as opportunities they teach me what to improve next time." Participant 3 described this reality by stating that "designing and adapting reading instructional strategies has always felt like a dynamic, ongoing cycle of understanding, experimenting, and reflecting." This continuous pedagogical cycle was further reinforced by Participant 7, who summarized

their daily routine as an active process of "continuously observing, experimenting, reflecting, then changing strategies. Repeat, repeat, and keep improving."

Sub-theme 1.6: Empowering Learners Through Giving Meaningful Choices

Teachers allowed learners to choose texts, topics, and activities that aligned with their interests and preferences. Participant 2 found it highly effective to "involve learners in the process by asking what activities they enjoy or what texts they want to explore, which gives them ownership and makes the strategies more effective." Participant 5 achieved this by shifting away from strict textbook teaching and moving toward "letting learners choose meaningful texts, integrating creative and collaborative activities, and making reading more enjoyable." Participant 7 emphasized that giving choices is very important, explaining that "before, I just followed the textbook, and students sometimes read it as if it were a forced task. When I give options, learners read more willingly and feel that reading is more meaningful."

Sub-theme 1.7: Creating a Safe, Low-Pressure Space for Reading to Happen

Continuing their efforts to make reading more learner-centered, teachers created and fostered supportive environments where learners can participate without fear of making mistakes. They reduced pressure, encouraged participation, and created opportunities for learners to develop their reading abilities. Participant 1 achieved this by avoiding practices that make reading feel like an academic penalty, stating, "I really avoid making reading feel like a chore or a punishment. I always tell them, 'It is okay to make mistakes.' When learners feel relaxed, they are more willing to participate." Participant 2 supported this by "slowing down the pacing, removing high-stakes expectations, and replacing graded comprehension checks with low-pressure activities like discussions or reflections." Participant 6 noted that their students expressed great happiness "because they could talk about themselves before reading, and then while reading, they felt less pressure."

Theme 2. Evolution of Pedagogical Readiness and Self-Efficacy

The second major theme highlighted the development of pedagogical readiness. It details teachers' dynamics to build professional self-efficacy, instructional baseline readiness, and confidence through direct classroom exposure rather than relying solely on abstract theory or formal top-down mandates.

Sub-theme 2.1: Gradually Building Confidence Through Classroom Exposure

Looking back on the teachers' journey, it is clear that their confidence steadily grew through daily classroom exposure. Facing these unexpected challenges and interacting with learners day after day eventually solidified their ability to teach reading effectively. Participant 1 shared that their confidence developed gradually, noting that "experience really helped me grow as a



reading teacher." Participant 4 expanded on this, stating that their current confidence is "rooted in experience, professional development, and student achievements," and reminding themselves that "confidence isn't static; it evolves with each teaching moment." Participant 6 candidly admitted that while they were initially unsure when they started, "as I saw learners improve and tried new strategies, I became more confident and motivated to teach."

Sub-theme 2.2: Feeling Affirmed by Learners' Progress and Participation

Closely linked to this growth, teachers gained confidence from observing learners' development and engagement. Learners' improvements served as evidence that their instructional efforts were making a difference. Participant 1 explained that "seeing learners improve gives me confidence. Their progress validates my teaching practices." Participant 4 felt a strong sense of validation and confidence because "the learners find joy in our sessions, which has made them consistently attend every reading session, and has also made me feel confident." This positive experiential cycle was echoed by Participant 8, who shared, "when learners who normally avoid reading start volunteering answers or sharing their thoughts about a text, I feel confident."

Sub-theme 2.3: Preparing with Care to Feel Ready for Each Reading Lesson

Building on their growing confidence, teachers intentionally planned, anticipated challenges, and adopted a flexible mindset before instruction. Preparation helped them feel more confident and ready to respond to learners' needs. Participant 1 explained that they make a conscious effort to prepare themselves mentally and emotionally, stating, "I prepare myself mentally and emotionally. That preparation helps feel ready before entering the classroom." Participant 3 observed that developing confidence and readiness is a gradual process that "comes from preparation, reflection, and real classroom experience." Participant 7 managed their lesson readiness by carefully planning, "anticipating problems, being patient and flexible, and maintaining a mindset that is open to letting the learners help guide the lesson."

Sub-theme 2.4: Reflecting on Successes and Struggles to Strengthen Confidence

Complementing their preparation, teachers continuously evaluated and improved their instructional practices. Reflection enabled them to adjust strategies and respond more effectively to learners' needs. Participant 1 reinforced that reading instruction requires constant self-assessment, reminding themselves that "it is truly not a one-size-fits-all strategy. I adjust, I reflect, then I try again the next day." Participant 2 learned to maintain their confidence during difficult periods by learning "to focus on what I can control—adapting lessons, trying different strategies, and staying flexible, which slowly rebuilds my confidence." Participant 8 managed fluctuations in their instructional

confidence by "simplifying tasks, prioritizing understanding, and accepting that not everything has to be finished in one lesson."

Sub-theme 2.5: Overcoming Self-Doubt to Grow into a More Confident Teacher

Amid these experiences, teachers learned to view challenges as opportunities for growth. Through these reflections and adjustments, they gradually developed greater confidence in their teaching. Participant 1 noted that after deep reflection, they "realized that the learner lacked confidence, not interest, so I adjusted my approach." Participant 3 shared that "through reflection and experience, I learned that these challenges are part of teaching, and facing them slowly strengthened my confidence." Participant 7 recalled their transformation as a gradual path that moved from being "first unsure, now reflective and more confident by adjusting strategies and seeing learners respond."

Sub-theme 2.6: Relying on Adaptability to Sustain Teaching Confidence

Alongside their efforts to build confidence, teachers adjusted their instruction to address learners' diverse needs and challenges. Their ability to adapt enabled them to remain effective despite uncertainties in the classroom. Participant 1 learned to accept instructional friction as a normal component of teaching, finding that "adjusting strategies, preparing better, and staying patient really help regain confidence." Participant 4 similarly noted that learning to "adjust, stay patient, and work closely with parents helped me regain my confidence." Participant 6 acknowledged that even when they prepare meticulously, students occasionally still refuse to read, which can cause self-doubt, sharing that "sometimes even if I prepare well, they still refuse, and it makes me feel unsure. But slowly, I learn that it's part of teaching."

Sub-theme 2.7: Feeling Supported Through Feedback, Training, and School Guidance

Extending from these experiences, teachers drew confidence from professional development and institutional support. Feedback, training, and guidance helped them refine their practices and feel more prepared in teaching reading. Participant 1 stated that "support and training really motivate me. They strengthen my confidence and help me improve my practice." Participant 3 explicitly shared that "feedback and support from the school really help me improve, making me feel more confident and ready to teach reading effectively." This was supported by Participant 8, who noted that "feedback, training, and school support reassure me and help me improve."

Theme 3. Relational Practices in Cultivating Mutual Classroom Safety

The third major theme reveals the specific relational actions teachers deploy to build deep interpersonal trust, highlighting emotional protection and safety as essential baseline requirements before a student demonstrates a willingness to read.



Sub-theme 3.1: Building Trust Through Genuine Care for Learners

Beyond fostering purely instructional success, the participants emphasized that cultivating reading motivation depends heavily on the interpersonal bond between teacher and learner. This relational foundation takes shape through consistent encouragement, active listening, and a deliberate effort to make students feel individually supported. Participant 2 observed that "when learners feel seen and know I care about their interests, they become more eager to engage in reading because it feels personal and relevant to them." Participant 3 provided a window into this process by noting that "building relationships is very important for motivation. When learners feel valued and understood, they become more open to reading and participation." Participant 8 achieved this relational foundation by establishing trust through "being consistent, approachable, and supportive, recognizing their efforts, listening actively, and always following through on promises or feedback."

Sub-theme 3.2: Creating a Classroom Where Learners Feel Emotionally Safe

This interpersonal trust naturally extends into the creation of a protective emotional environment. The data shows that teachers intentionally structured their classrooms to neutralize fear and peer embarrassment, allowing students to attempt difficult texts without the threat of public ridicule. Participant 1 focused heavily on "listening to them and constantly encouraging them, because trust creates emotional safety in the classroom." Participant 4 built trust and rapport by utilizing "active listening, empathy, and consistency to create a safe space where students feel valued and respected." Participant 5 detailed their relational approach as a process of "listening to learners, showing genuine interest, offering encouragement, and creating a safe environment, which helps learners feel valued and confident about participating."

Sub-theme 3.3: Showing Sincere Concern for Learners' Reading Growth

Alongside emotional safety, participants demonstrated their investment by closely monitoring and celebrating incremental improvements. This active tracking ensures that even the smallest milestones are recognized, shifting the focus from absolute proficiency to personal progress. Participant 1 made it a priority to "always praise effort, even a little progress, because recognizing their effort really motivates them." Participant 3 demonstrated care by "monitoring their reading, giving feedback, and celebrating small achievements, so they feel motivated and noticed." Participant 8 supported this by "celebrating small achievements, giving constructive feedback, and offering help when needed, because it's important they feel their progress matters."

Sub-theme 3.4: Connecting Personally to Understand Learners More Deeply

Extending from these relational practices, teachers sought to understand learners' interests, experiences, and

backgrounds. By incorporating these into reading activities, teachers made reading more meaningful and relevant. Participant 1 illustrated this by asking questions connected directly to their students' personal life experiences, finding that "reading became meaningful for them—it was not just a mandatory school requirement." Participant 2 shared that they "always begin the school year by surveying students about their hobbies, favorite movies, social media trends, and daily lives, then curate reading materials that align with their interests." Participant 4 similarly built connections by "showing genuine interest in students' lives, sharing relatable stories, and celebrating their reading achievements."

Theme 4. Operational Friction and Fluctuating Affect

This thematic unit captures data points that point to the sheer unpredictability of real-world teaching. This theme, developed organically during the interview process, highlights the constant push-and-pull teachers experience when trying to manage their students' ever-changing emotional needs.

Sub-theme 4.1: Experiencing the Shifting and Unpredictable Nature of Reading Motivation

Extending from teachers' efforts to cultivate reading motivation, this captures a blunt reality facing these classrooms. Teachers observed that learners' motivation could change from day to day, requiring continuous observation and adjustment. Participant 1 candidly shared that "teaching reading motivation is not stable. Based on my experience, it really changes every single day." Participant 6 agreed, stating that teaching reading is "challenging, but also satisfying, because sometimes learners are excited, and sometimes they are completely checked out." Participant 7 tracked these sudden changes by watching student behavior closely, noting, "I watch their behavior. Raise hands, talk, participate means they are motivated; sit quietly, avoid eye contact means motivation is low. Sometimes fidgeting shows they lose interest entirely."

Sub-theme 4.2: Striving to Make Reading Meaningful and Relevant for Learners

In response to these fluctuations, striving to connect emerged as teachers intentionally linked reading activities to learners' interests and experiences. They selected texts and designed activities that felt meaningful to their own lives. Participant 3 achieved this by "letting my pupils read fairy tales or stories about family because they like fantasies, and they can also relate easily." Participant 6 made a concerted effort to "connect reading to their lives by asking questions, using small games, or giving examples that are related directly to their daily lives." Participant 7 demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach by choosing an alternative text type, sharing, "I used a short story about local daily life, not the rigid textbook. Learners relate to it, share experiences, and they start reading more actively."



Sub-theme 4.3: Carefully Observing Learners' Behaviors to Gauge Motivation

Alongside these efforts, teachers relied on learners' participation, attentiveness, and engagement as operational indicators of motivation and used these cues to guide instructional decisions. Participant 4 explained that "when they are motivated, they really want to read short and long texts and participate actively. When they are less motivated, I can feel it immediately because they become quiet or distracted." Participant 7 closely monitored baseline student behaviors, tracking whether they "raise hands, talk, participate—motivated; sit quietly, avoid—motivation is low." Participant 8 shared that "motivation shows in behaviors, participation, and engagement. If learners are asking questions, reading aloud, or sharing ideas, I know they are motivated."

Sub-theme 4.4: Facing Learners' Fear, Resistance, and Lack of Confidence in Reading

Alongside their efforts to sustain engagement, *Facing Learners' Fear, Resistance, and Lack of Confidence in Reading* emerged as a persistent challenge. Teachers encountered learners who hesitated, avoided participation, or lacked confidence, prompting them to provide continuous encouragement and supportive learning opportunities. Participant 1 recalled that student resistance happens immediately upon introducing a text: "as soon as they saw the story, they already said, 'Ma'am, it is very long.'" Participant 4 encountered situations where "sometimes they refused or avoided reading altogether, which made me question whether my strategies were effective." Participant 6 observed that this challenge peaks when "learners really don't want to read and feel shy or scared of making mistakes," which requires the teacher to counter their fear with patience, continuous encouragement, and customized real-time adjustments.

Inductive Synthesis and Macro-Theoretical Alignment

Looking closely at the lived experiences of the eight teachers, it reveals a phenomenon that channeled those internal changes into outward, relationship-driven support. Ultimately, the study reveals that the cultivation of reading motivation is not a mechanical execution of a pre-packaged curriculum, but a continuous effort to satisfy underlying human and psychological needs. While the participants' lived experiences naturally correspond to the macro-dimensions of Self-Determination Theory, uncovering distinct operational patterns of felt instructional agency (Theme 1), evolving pedagogical readiness (Theme 2), and relational safe practices (Theme 3), they also reveal a non-linear classroom reality defined by persistent student resistance and fluid motivation (Theme 4). Consequently, these inductively derived themes prove that theoretical ideals of motivation must constantly bend to the shifting, volatile boundaries of real-world public school classrooms.

DISCUSSION

Classroom Stressors, Curricular Demands, and the Enactment of Instructional Autonomy

The data show that fostering a love of reading is a never-ending negotiation with unyielding school structures rather than a straightforward walk in the park. Teachers regularly find themselves pushing back against a wave of classroom frustrations, ranging from locked-in curriculum rules and systemic challenges to low student motivation and active avoidance behaviors. This directly echoes Reeve (2009), who found that ignoring who students actually are within a rigid school system leaves teachers completely drained and overwhelmed by their workload. Similarly, the data backs up Kyriacou (2001), who showed that daily classroom headaches, especially feeling buried under too many responsibilities, only make a teacher's stress and anxiety worse.

However, there was a notable divergence from traditional compliance structures due to the active use of instructional autonomy. This finding contrasts with previous conceptual models proposed by Aelterman et al. (2019), which suggested that institutional constraints typically force educators into mechanical compliance rather than role re-engineering. Choosing flexible, interest-driven activities over strict, high-stakes testing allows public school teachers to use their agency to lessen institutional friction.

Pedagogical Competence, Professional Self-Efficacy, and Adaptive Growth

This research demonstrates that teaching competence and reading confidence are not fixed qualities but are dynamically built over time through classroom exposure, unexpected failures, and ongoing self-reflection. These insights align with assertions of Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001), who found that educators working in highly complex or rapidly changing instructional environments often experience professional self-doubt before establishing effective strategies. Additionally, these results affirm established empirical perspectives that professional self-efficacy improves significantly when teachers abandon high-stakes evaluation paradigms and transition toward supportive, process-oriented student tracking (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

However, a distinct divergence from mainstream professional development literature was noted: while standard frameworks argue that teaching confidence is heavily dependent on formal, top-down institutional training, the experiences of these public school teachers demonstrate that professional confidence is primarily built from the ground up. This localized development aligns with recent regional qualitative findings indicating that elementary teachers in Davao organically build operational readiness and pedagogical mastery through direct classroom exposure, trial-and-error remediation, and active observation of daily student participation (Caballo, 2024).

Relational Scaffolding, Emotional Safety, and Addressing Learner Resistance

Similarly, these findings support Caballo (2024), who showed that young learners experiencing low baseline skills



exhibit greater persistence when instructors replace high-stakes evaluation paradigms with supportive, process-oriented student tracking."

This third core dimension highlights that establishing deep relational connections is an essential baseline for reading engagement. The sub-themes of trust-building, emotional safety, and personal connection align with modern educational research, which emphasizes that intermediate elementary learners require deep interpersonal validation and tailored, supportive spaces to comfortably engage with challenging academic tasks. Ultimately, young learners experiencing low baseline reading performance exhibit significantly greater resilience and persistence when their instructors replace high-stakes evaluation paradigms with low-pressure, supportive interactions (Caballo, 2024).

This study, however, challenges older perspectives presented by Kelada et al. (2021), which suggested that technical mechanics should take priority over relational development. Instead, data from local classrooms demonstrate that without active relational scaffolding and emotional safety, technical literacy interventions fail because students quickly disengage for fear of public embarrassment and peer ridicule.

Intrinsic Motivation, Self-Determination Theory, and Classroom Affect

Finally, analyzing these experiences through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) shows that fulfilling the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness directly counteracts students' reading resistance. These dynamics are consistent with localized data indicating that student motivation to learn serves as a critical, direct predictor of reading success in contemporary Philippine public elementary schools (Moneba & Lovitos, 2024).

This continuous negotiation with the student introduces a critical nuance to standard Self-Determination Theory. While traditional SDT literature focuses almost exclusively on the learner's psychological needs, these findings demonstrate that autonomy-supportive teaching is fundamentally reciprocal. A teacher cannot effectively cultivate autonomy or competence in their students if they are themselves constrained by rigid administrative mandates, inflexible academic pacing, and low institutional trust. Therefore, the data suggest that teacher instructional agency is a structural prerequisite for student intrinsic motivation; systemic educational frameworks must first meet educators' professional needs before expecting sustained motivational growth in learners.

Nevertheless, a critical contextual divergence emerged regarding the nature of motivation: while classical SDT models frame intrinsic motivation as a stable, linear internal state, the experiences of these intermediate English teachers reveal that reading motivation is highly unstable and unpredictable, fluctuating rapidly in response to daily classroom conditions. This unstable reality imposes a high biological and psychological cost on the teacher. As noted by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017), maintaining high energy to constantly counteract student resistance and navigate a fluid classroom often leads to emotional exhaustion. This hidden cost challenges traditional definitions of

smooth classroom management, showing that successful literacy cultivation requires continuous, energy-intensive adaptation from teachers.

CONCLUSION

This research proves that when students are forced to follow a deterministic curriculum, reading motivation disappears. Educators need to be flexible and given professional freedom to ditch strict textbook mandates. With that autonomy, they can build low-stress, interest-driven classrooms that give students a real sense of choice and competence. Furthermore, the instructional competence of educators grows over time with real-world teaching experience, deliberate reflection, and evidence of student improvement. The establishment of a supportive teacher-student relationship provides a critical baseline for learning. This dynamic shifts reading from a forced task into a low-pressure habit, reducing classroom stress for both educators and students.

To put these findings into practice, school administrators and policymakers may update existing literacy frameworks to formally support teacher autonomy. This would allow for flexible academic pacing, reducing the number of high-stakes graded reading assignments, and giving teachers practical freedom to choose reading materials that match their students' interests and local contexts. Additionally, school systems can build collaborative professional development networks focused on emotional support and relational safety. For subsequent studies, researchers can adopt quantitative designs and apply multiple linear regression to analyze instructional flexibility, relational support, and institutional backing as predictors of student motivation.

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Ethical Considerations

All eight educators chose to join after a clear briefing on the study's focus and risks, and on their freedom to withdraw at any time. The researcher kept their identities secure by assigning



alphanumeric codes and scrubbing transcriptions of any personal or institutional details that might reveal their identities. I also maintained a meticulous audit trail throughout the research process to document all data management and analytical decisions, ensuring total transparency and integrity. In line with the Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2012, all audio recordings, transcripts, and field notes are kept strictly confidential and securely stored with sole access by me.

Conflict of Interest

I declare that there are no financial, personal, or professional conflicts of interest related to this study. The research was conducted with absolute honesty, fairness, and neutrality, ensuring that the findings and structural themes rely entirely on the raw data collected from the field. This declaration reflects my full commitment to ethical research standards and the absolute trustworthiness of the study's results.

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