

Original Article

Stories Beyond Bookshelves: Involvement of Library Teacher-In-Charge in Promoting Love for Reading among Public Elementary Students

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Abstract

This study explored the lived involvement of library teachers-in-charge in promoting love for reading among public elementary students in Baganga North District, Division of Davao Oriental. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, the study examined their roles, challenges, coping practices, and professional insights through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically to identify significant statements and shared meanings. Findings showed that library teachers-in-charge faced challenges related to lack of specialized preparation, heavy responsibility for literacy promotion, and outdated or limited reading materials. They coped by seeking learning opportunities, engaging the community, and creatively curating available resources. Their insights emphasized the need to adapt to learners' realities, provide reading choices that encourage genuine interest, and value student growth as the most meaningful reward. The study concludes that effective reading promotion requires teacher commitment, institutional support, professional development, community partnerships, and access to relevant reading materials.

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1. Introduction

Reading is a foundational competence and a social practice that shapes academic progress, language development, imagination, and participation in school life. International assessment evidence continues to show why early and sustained reading support matters. The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement reported that PIRLS 2021 drew reading data from nearly 60 countries and from approximately 400,000 students, 380,000 parents, 20,000 teachers, and 13,000 schools, which demonstrates the global relevance of fourth-grade reading achievement and the school conditions that surround it (Mullis et al., 2023). In the Philippine context, the urgency is also visible in PISA 2022, where only 24% of students attained at least Level 2 proficiency in reading, compared with the OECD average of 74% (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023). Such results make reading promotion more than a classroom concern; it becomes a whole-school responsibility that includes the library, teachers, families, and community systems.

Policy directions in basic education increasingly frame literacy as a shared institutional priority. The Department of Education (2024), through Catch-up Fridays and the National Reading Program, emphasized regular school time for reading, values education, health education, and peace education. This policy direction recognizes that reading recovery and reading motivation require consistent exposure to texts and guided opportunities to read. However, national initiatives reach learners through local school structures, and the capacity of these structures varies widely. In schools with limited library resources, the daily translation of policy into practice often depends on teachers who assume library duties in addition to their classroom and administrative roles.

School libraries have a distinctive contribution to reading because they provide access, choice, guidance, and a setting where students may encounter texts beyond graded requirements. The International Literacy Association (2022) describes school librarians as collaborators, advocates for literacy equity, and providers of access, while the IFLA school library guidelines identify qualified library personnel and effective school library programs as essential elements of student access (Schultz-Jones & Oberg, 2015). Recent research similarly shows that school library professionals foster reading engagement through environments, resources, and guidance that help students view reading as voluntary, meaningful, and pleasurable (Merga & Mat Roni, 2025). This is important because reading for pleasure does not develop from exposure alone; it also needs relevance, personal choice, social encouragement, and material access (Vogrinčič Čepič et al., 2024).

In many public elementary schools, however, the school library is not staffed by a professional librarian. Instead, a teacher is designated as library teacher-in-charge and is expected to manage collections, conduct book lending, organize storytelling sessions, encourage reluctant readers, and assist literacy activities. This arrangement positions the teacher-in-charge as a literacy mediator, but it also creates role strain

when the designation comes without formal training, clear workload recognition, or adequate materials. Merga and Mat Roni (2026) noted that school library work is affected by challenges related to funding, resourcing, training, policy, role clarity, and professional value. In under-resourced basic education settings, these challenges can be more pronounced because library responsibilities may be treated as ancillary even when they carry direct consequences for reading engagement.

The problem is particularly relevant in geographically dispersed districts where access to updated books, stable infrastructure, and professional development may be limited. Public elementary schools in such contexts serve children whose reading opportunities at home may vary because of household responsibilities, language backgrounds, limited materials, and uneven parental support. The library teacher-in-charge therefore becomes a frontline reading advocate who must adapt to learners' realities while sustaining interest in books. The role requires not only technical library management but also emotional labor, creativity, community coordination, and persistence. Yet the voices of these teachers are often absent from research that focuses on general literacy interventions or classroom instruction.

The present study responds to this gap by examining the lived involvement of library teachers-in-charge in promoting a love for reading among public elementary students in Baganga North District, Division of Davao Oriental. The inquiry focused on three questions: What challenges do library teachers-in-charge face in promoting a love for reading? How do they cope with these challenges? What insights do they gain from their involvement? By situating reading promotion within the experiences of teachers assigned to library roles, the study offers a localized account of how school-based reading advocacy occurs when passion and creativity must often compensate for limited training and resources.

2. Methodology

The study used a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived involvement of library teachers-in-charge in promoting a love for reading among public elementary students. Phenomenology was appropriate because the inquiry sought to describe the shared meaning of a role as experienced by the participants rather than to measure variables or test a predetermined model (Moustakas, 1994; Pregoner, 2024). Qualitative inquiry was also suitable because it allowed the researcher to examine participants' perspectives, meanings, and accounts within the natural school context in which reading promotion occurred (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The phenomenon under investigation was the daily work of teachers who managed school library functions and facilitated reading-related activities in public elementary schools.

The participants were ten public elementary school teachers from Baganga North District, Division of Davao Oriental, who were formally designated as library teachers-in-charge. Purposive sampling was used because the study required participants who possessed direct, information-rich experience with the phenomenon,

a logic consistent with purposive selection in qualitative research (Campbell et al., 2020). Inclusion required current employment as a public school teacher, formal assignment to manage the school library, at least one year of experience in the role, and active implementation of reading promotion activities such as book lending, reading campaigns, storytelling sessions, or reading remediation during the past academic year. Teachers who were not assigned to library functions, had minimal involvement in reading promotion, were on extended leave, or served in non-instructional administrative functions unrelated to the library were excluded.

Data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews guided by a researcher-made interview protocol. The questions invited participants to describe the challenges they encountered, the strategies they used, and the insights they gained in their work as library teachers-in-charge. The open-ended format allowed follow-up questions when clarification or elaboration was necessary, while still maintaining alignment with the research questions. The interview guide underwent content validation by research experts to check the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the questions. Interviews were conducted in private and quiet locations within schools or in alternative venues selected by the participants. With participant consent, interviews were audio-recorded to protect the completeness of the data, then transcribed for analysis.

Ethical procedures were observed before and during data collection. Approval was secured from the relevant academic and ethics review authorities, and permission was obtained from the education offices and school heads before participant recruitment. Each participant received an informed consent form that explained the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the right to decline questions, and the right to withdraw without penalty. The transcripts were anonymized through participant codes, and audio files and transcripts were stored in password-protected devices. Only data necessary for the research objectives were retained for analysis, and the reporting of quotations avoided information that could identify a specific school or participant.

Data analysis followed a phenomenological and thematic procedure. The researcher first engaged in bracketing to identify and set aside personal assumptions about school libraries, reading promotion, and teacher roles. The transcripts were read several times to build familiarity with the participants' accounts. Significant statements were extracted, coded, compared, and clustered into shared meanings. The analysis followed the logic of thematic analysis, which provides a systematic yet flexible way to identify patterned meanings across qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Codes were organized into themes aligned with the three research aims: challenges, coping strategies, and insights. Themes were refined by returning to the transcripts and checking whether the selected statements reflected the scope of each theme.

Trustworthiness was strengthened through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was supported by careful transcription, close engagement with the data, participant-grounded quotation, and triangulation through interview accounts, relevant school documents, and field notes where

available. Transferability was supported through detailed description of the research context, participant selection, and library role conditions. Dependability was addressed through documentation of the research process, from recruitment to coding decisions. Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive notes and an audit trail that connected themes to participant statements. These procedures reflect current expectations for trustworthiness in qualitative research, where rigor is shown through transparent evidence and systematic analytic decisions (Ahmed, 2024).

3. Results

3.1 Challenges Faced by Library Teachers-in-Charge

Theme 1: Assigned without expertise

Participants described that they were assigned to library roles without formal preparation in library management, collection use, or reading program design. Their accounts showed uneven confidence and a need for professional learning that could help them plan more effective reading activities.

"I sometimes feel unprepared to organize reading programs effectively because I haven't received proper training." (P1)

"Workshops on library management would help us improve our reading initiatives." (P3)

"We lack training in managing the library and implementing reading programs." (P5)

"We find it very hard to plan reading activities because of our limited knowledge." (P8)

Theme 2: Sole bearer of literacy

Participants reported that reading promotion was difficult to sustain when families and community members had limited participation in students' reading habits. Their statements described the library teacher-in-charge as carrying much of the responsibility for reading encouragement within and beyond school.

"Some parents don't encourage their children to read at home, which affects their interest." (P2)

"Community involvement is low, so it's hard to organize reading events outside school." (P4)

"Parents have limited involvement in helping their children read." (P6)

"The community participates only minimally in library reading activities." (P9)

Theme 3: Constrained by obsolescence

Participants identified insufficient books, limited instructional materials, and outdated or inadequate resources as barriers to consistent reading activities. Their accounts showed that planned sessions were often shortened, modified, or simplified because available materials could not support the full range of learners' needs.

"There are not enough books for the students, so reading activities are limited." (P1)

"We have few instructional materials, making it difficult to conduct creative reading programs." (P3)

"The limited number of books in the library makes it difficult to implement reading activities." (P5)

"Most reading sessions must be modified because only a few materials are available." (P7)

3.2 Coping Strategies of Library Teachers-in-Charge

Theme 1: Bridging training gaps

Participants coped with insufficient formal preparation by seeking webinars, reading guides, consulting experienced colleagues, and pursuing self-directed learning. Their statements showed that professional growth was often initiated by the teachers themselves in response to the practical demands of library work.

"I attend webinars and workshops whenever possible to learn new reading strategies." (P2)

"I read online articles and library management guides to improve my teaching methods." (P4)

"I seek advice from colleagues with experience so I can learn good reading programs." (P5)

"I read books and guides to improve my skills in managing the library." (P7)

Theme 2: Cultivating community involvement

Participants described efforts to involve parents, volunteers, and community stakeholders in reading sessions and library events. Their accounts showed that teachers attempted to extend reading promotion beyond the school by inviting participation and coordinating local support.

"I organize parent workshops and reading sessions to encourage involvement at home." (P1)

"Community volunteers help us during reading events to make them more interactive and fun." (P3)

"I encouraged parents to join storytelling and reading activities in the library." (P6)

"I coordinate with the barangay for reading events so the community can participate." (P9)

Theme 3: Curating with creativity

Participants used book rotation, reading corners, improvised teaching aids, scheduled access, and locally made materials to maximize scarce resources. Their accounts showed that creativity helped maintain reading activities even when library collections and facilities were limited.

"I rotate books and create reading corners to make limited resources more accessible." (P2)

"I use creative teaching aids like charts and homemade flashcards to supplement the few books we have." (P4)

"I designed the reading schedule so everyone can access the few books available." (P5)

"I make DIY materials to add learning resources in the library." (P8)

3.3 Insights of Library Teachers-in-Charge

Theme 1: Adapting to students' realities

Participants recognized that some students had limited time or space for reading at home because of family responsibilities and household conditions. Their accounts described the library as an alternative reading space where students could access books, enjoy reading, and receive support during the school day.

"Some students don't have time to read at home because they need to take care of their younger siblings." (P1)

"I try to provide extra reading sessions so students can enjoy books despite their home responsibilities." (P3)

"Many children do not have time to read at home because they take care of their siblings." (P8)

"I give them the chance to read in the library so they can learn and enjoy." (P10)

Theme 2: Choice fuels genuine interest

Participants observed that students showed more interest when they could explore books and choose texts that matched their preferences. Their statements described reading as more enjoyable when learners were not forced into a single text or activity.

"Students discover topics they are passionate about when they explore books on their own." (P2)

"The library becomes a place where learning feels fun, not forced." (P4)

"Children become motivated to read when they themselves look for books they like." (P6)

"I observe that they become more eager to learn when they are not always forced and when I let them choose what they want to read." (P10)

Theme 3: Student growth as deepest reward

Participants described personal satisfaction when students responded positively to books, showed excitement, or gained confidence through reading. Their accounts showed that visible student growth gave meaning to the effort required by the library role.

"Seeing students excited about a book I recommended makes all the effort worthwhile." (P1)

"I feel proud when a shy student gains confidence through reading." (P3)

"I am delighted when students show joy in reading the book I suggested." (P8)

"I feel that my work is worth it when children become more motivated in their learning." (P9)

4. Discussion

The findings position library teachers-in-charge as informal literacy advocates who carry reading promotion work despite limited professional preparation, weak support systems, and constrained resources. This role is important because school libraries are expected to provide access, guidance, and literacy equity, as emphasized by the International Literacy Association (2022) and the IFLA guidelines edited by Schultz-Jones and Oberg (2015). In the study context, these expectations were not fully matched by training and material support. The teachers' accounts therefore show a gap between the literacy potential of school libraries and the conditions under which designated teachers perform library work.

The theme assigned without expertise indicates that library designation alone does not create professional readiness. Participants had to plan reading programs,

manage resources, and guide students without formal preparation in library management or reading program design. This mirrors the workforce issues identified by Merga and Mat Roni (2026), who linked school library work to concerns about training, role clarity, funding, and professional value. The finding also suggests that reading promotion requires specialized competence, not simply an additional task assigned to an already loaded teacher. When the school library is treated as a supplementary duty, the teacher-in-charge may rely on personal effort rather than structured professional preparation.

The finding on sole bearer of literacy shows that library teachers-in-charge viewed limited family and community participation as a major barrier. This is consistent with Claes et al. (2024), who found that the home literacy environment, reading attitudes, and reading comprehension are interrelated. Çalışkan and Ulaş (2022) likewise showed that parent-involved reading activities can support comprehension, reading motivation, and attitudes. In this study, the absence of strong home and community reinforcement placed a heavier burden on the school library. Reading promotion became less sustainable when the teacher-in-charge had to compensate for limited home reading support, low community involvement, and the absence of shared responsibility.

The theme constrained by obsolescence confirms that reading motivation depends on access to adequate, relevant, and appealing materials. Merga and Mat Roni (2025) reported that school library professionals foster student reading engagement through resources, environments, and guidance, but that limited access can restrict engagement. Vogrinčič Čepič et al. (2024) similarly emphasized that reading for pleasure requires attention to material and social dimensions, including a broader range of reading materials. Participants in the present study described few books, limited instructional aids, and the need to modify sessions around what was available. This indicates that teacher creativity can keep programs active, but it cannot fully replace a current and diverse collection.

The coping strategy bridging training gaps reveals that teachers responded to role demands through self-directed professional development. Webinars, online guides, peer consultation, and reading of professional materials allowed participants to acquire practical skills even without systematic training. This self-initiated learning demonstrates agency, but it should not be interpreted as a substitute for institutional capacity building. Braun and Clarke (2022) noted that qualitative themes should be understood in relation to the wider meaning structure of the data. Within that structure, self-directed learning reflected both commitment and insufficiency: teachers were willing to improve, yet they had to create their own pathway for professional growth.

The strategy cultivating community involvement is important because it reframes reading promotion as a social effort rather than a library-only activity. Participants organized parent workshops, invited community volunteers, and coordinated with local stakeholders. This aligns with research that treats reading motivation as shaped by social interaction, support, and the availability of meaningful literacy practices (Torres et al., 2021; Çalışkan & Ulaş, 2022; Claes et al., 2024). The finding also fits

the Department of Education's (2024) broader effort to make reading a regular and visible school practice. However, the accounts show that community participation does not occur automatically. It requires active coordination from the teacher-in-charge, which again adds to the role burden.

The strategy curating with creativity demonstrates how teachers transformed scarcity into workable reading opportunities. Book rotation, improvised teaching aids, reading corners, and scheduled access helped broaden student exposure despite limited library materials. Merga and Mat Roni (2025) argued that access to the library and its resources matters for reading engagement, and this study shows how teachers attempted to protect such access even when materials were few. Yet the finding also cautions against romanticizing resourcefulness. Creativity can sustain interest in the short term, but a reading culture requires reliable collections, adequate spaces, and administrative support.

The insight adapting to students' realities highlights the school library as a protective reading space for children whose home conditions limit reading time. Participants recognized that some students had caregiving duties and limited opportunities to read after school. Loh and Binny (2025) showed that students can value school libraries as peaceful, welcoming spaces that support wellbeing, while Merga (2022) linked school libraries with both literacy and wellbeing. The present findings extend this idea to a rural public elementary context where the library offers more than access to books. It becomes a space where learners can pause, choose, read, and receive encouragement during the school day.

The theme choice fuels genuine interest is strongly aligned with self-determination theory. Ryan and Deci (2020) explained that autonomy, competence, and relatedness support intrinsic motivation in educational settings. Participants observed that students became more eager when allowed to browse, select books, and read without feeling forced. Van der Sande et al. (2023) found that interventions designed to foster reading motivation can benefit both motivation and comprehension. In the present study, choice functioned as a simple but powerful form of autonomy support. It allowed students to connect reading with curiosity and enjoyment rather than compliance.

The theme student growth as deepest reward shows the emotional dimension of literacy work. Participants described excitement, confidence, and visible learner motivation as the most meaningful rewards of their role. This finding resonates with the view that school library professionals do more than manage collections; they shape relationships that invite learners into reading (International Literacy Association, 2022; Merga; Mat Roni, 2025). Such affective rewards may sustain teachers despite role strain, but they also reveal the vulnerability of the system. A role that depends mainly on personal fulfillment risks burnout when recognition, resources, and training remain inadequate.

Taken together, the findings have implications for school leadership and policy. First, library teachers-in-charge need structured professional development in library management, reading motivation, book selection, storytelling, inclusive materials, and

basic monitoring of reading engagement. Second, schools need clearer workload recognition so that library responsibilities do not remain invisible. Third, school heads and education offices should align reading initiatives with the National Reading Program and ensure that library activities are integrated with classroom instruction rather than treated as isolated events (Department of Education, 2024). Fourth, reading promotion must include home and community participation because international and local evidence shows that literacy outcomes are shaped by school, family, and access conditions (Claes et al., 2024; OECD, 2023).

The interpretation of the findings should be read within the boundaries of the study design. The study captured the experiences of ten library teachers-in-charge in one district, so the findings are not intended for statistical generalization. The value of the inquiry lies in the depth of the participants' accounts and in the way these accounts clarify how reading promotion is enacted under specific public elementary school conditions. The themes may be transferable to similar under-resourced settings, particularly where teachers without professional library training are expected to lead school-based reading activities.

5. Conclusion

This study showed that library teachers-in-charge in public elementary schools perform a crucial literacy role that extends beyond the management of books. They promote reading while facing three central challenges: assignment to library work without adequate expertise, the burden of carrying literacy efforts with limited home and community support, and the constraints caused by insufficient or outdated resources. In response, they bridge training gaps through self-directed learning, cultivate community involvement, and curate available materials with creativity.

The teachers' insights point to a reading culture grounded in responsiveness to students' realities, respect for student choice, and recognition of student growth as a meaningful professional reward. These findings affirm the value of the library teacher-in-charge as a school-based literacy advocate, but they also show that commitment alone is not enough. Sustainable reading promotion requires formal training, clearer role recognition, updated and culturally relevant reading materials, stronger collaboration with classroom teachers, and active participation from families and communities. Strengthening these areas can help public elementary schools transform libraries into more equitable, engaging, and supportive spaces for lifelong reading.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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