

ASSESSING THE PHONETICS LEARNING NEEDS OF ELEMENTARY PUPILS: BASIS FOR CURRICULUM ENHANCEMENT

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Abstract

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of elementary teachers in teaching phonetics within the current language curriculum and examined how they interpreted the meaning and significance of phonetics learning for literacy proficiency. The study also sought to generate policy-relevant insights to address identified phonetics learning needs. Guided by Colaizzi's phenomenological approach, data were gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with purposively selected elementary teachers who had direct experience teaching phonetics. The analysis focused on capturing teachers' instructional realities, interpretations, and perspectives within diverse classroom and curricular contexts. Findings revealed that teachers experienced phonetics instruction as a complex and demanding practice shaped by learner diversity, linguistic backgrounds, class size, time constraints, and curriculum pacing. Teachers consistently interpreted phonetics as the foundational gateway to reading and writing, emphasizing its critical role in decoding, spelling, vocabulary development, reading fluency, learner confidence, and long-term academic success. Despite strong pedagogical commitment and adaptive instructional strategies, teachers identified systemic and curricular gaps that limited sustained and effective phonetics instruction. These included inconsistent integration of phonetics across grade levels, insufficient instructional time, limited professional training, inadequate resources, and weak assessment alignment. Based on their lived experiences, teachers underscored the need for policy actions that support curriculum continuity, sustained professional development, adequate resource provision, targeted learner interventions, and stronger institutional support. The study contributes context grounded evidence to inform curriculum enhancement, instructional improvement, and literacy policy development. By foregrounding teachers lived experiences, the research highlights the importance of aligning phonetics instruction with classroom realities to strengthen foundational literacy and promote equitable learning outcomes in elementary education.

Keywords: *phonetics instruction, phonological awareness, early literacy, teachers' lived experiences, curriculum enhancement, qualitative phenomenology, Cotabato Division*

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The development of foundational literacy in the early years relies heavily on pupils' acquisition of phonetics-related competencies such as phonological awareness, phonemic discrimination, and letter-sound correspondence. These skills serve as the bedrock of reading readiness and are essential in preventing early reading failure (Clemens et al., 2021; Alsultan, 2022). In the Philippine basic education context, concerns about learners' mastery of early literacy competencies continue to emerge, particularly in public elementary schools where classroom diversity and linguistic complexity influence children's reading development. Recent studies have noted recurring gaps in pupils' ability to identify, manipulate, and blend sounds, which directly hinder their transition to reading fluency (Abdon & Barrios, 2022; Badillo, 2025). These persistent difficulties highlight the need to carefully assess the phonetics learning needs of elementary pupils and align these needs with curriculum enhancement efforts.

Multiple indicators reveal the gravity of literacy challenges in the early grades. The EDCOM II Report of the Department of Education (2023) stated that Filipino learners show critical learning deficits, with foundational reading skills significantly below grade-level expectations. In the 2023 national

assessments, more than 60% of early grade learners struggled with phonological manipulation tasks, and only 30% consistently demonstrated adequate letter–sound familiarity. Studies across various local settings support these findings. Bermudez (2025) reported that Grade 2 learners exhibited low phonics mastery despite continuous classroom exposure, while Balauag (2022) found that kindergarten pupils could name letters but struggled with matching these letters to their correct sounds. The work of Bose (2022) also indicated that even pre-service teachers experience difficulties in diagnosing phonological misconceptions among learners, which further complicates classroom instruction. These gaps suggest both systemic and instructional-level challenges that require deeper investigation.

Research Questions

Phonetics instruction plays a vital role in the development of foundational literacy among elementary pupils, particularly in the areas of sound recognition, blending, segmenting, and decoding. Teachers who handle early grade reading instruction frequently encounter varied levels of phonological preparedness among learners, often shaped by the language curriculum, instructional materials, and the linguistic backgrounds of pupils. Research has long emphasized that early exposure to structured phonics and phonological activities is necessary for building a strong foundation for reading proficiency (Clemens et al., 2021; Alsultan, 2022). However, the extent to which teachers navigate these instructional demands and the challenges they face

in teaching phonetics remain underexplored, especially within the Philippine basic education context.

Teachers' lived experiences offer valuable insight into how phonetics instruction unfolds in actual classroom environments. Their observations reveal the nature of pupils' phonological difficulties, the adequacy of available teaching resources, and the influence of the language curriculum on instructional decisions. Local studies highlight recurring challenges such as inconsistent mastery of letter-sound association, limited oral language development, and gaps in phonemic awareness despite ongoing phonics interventions (Badillo, 2025; Bermudez, 2025). International research likewise identifies similar issues, emphasizing that phonological competence must be strengthened for learners to achieve reading fluency and comprehension (Hu & Du, 2023; Schwob, 2024). This context positions teachers' perspectives as a crucial source of understanding in identifying what works, what does not, and what must be improved in phonetics instruction.

Given this context, the following qualitative research questions guide the study:

1. What are the lived experiences of teachers in teaching phonetics to elementary pupils within their current language curriculum?
2. How do the teachers interpret the meaning and significance of phonetics learning for proficiency?

3. What policy actions can be recommended to address the identified phonetics learning needs based on the lived experiences of teachers?

Significance of the Study

A strong understanding of phonetics learning needs is essential in strengthening early literacy development in elementary schools. This qualitative study contributes meaningful insights into how phonetics instruction is experienced, delivered, and valued within the current language curriculum. By foregrounding teachers' lived experiences, the study offers a nuanced description of the instructional realities that shape pupils' foundational reading competencies. The significance of this research lies in its ability to inform policy, instructional decisions, and home–school partnerships through a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities involved in teaching phonetics to young learners.

For **Supervisors**, the study provides valuable information that can guide monitoring, instructional supervision, and capacity-building initiatives. With insight into the challenges teachers face, supervisors can design more responsive technical assistance that supports phonics instruction and strengthens literacy interventions.

For **School Heads**, the findings can inform decisions regarding budgeting, classroom resources, program implementation, and professional

development priorities. School leaders will gain a clearer understanding of the support systems needed to enhance phonetics instruction and address learning gaps in reading.

For **Teachers**, the study highlights shared experiences, effective strategies, and instructional challenges encountered in teaching phonetics. These insights can enrich professional practice, reinforce reflective teaching, and encourage innovation in literacy instruction based on authentic classroom realities.

For **Learners**, the study indirectly benefits them by informing improvements in teaching practices, learning materials, and instructional support. Identifying their phonetics learning needs ensures that classroom instruction becomes more responsive, enabling them to acquire stronger foundational reading skills.

Theoretical Lens

The teaching of phonetics and the assessment of pupils' learning needs are grounded in theories that explain how children acquire language, process sounds, and translate these into meaningful reading skills. This qualitative inquiry draws from theoretical perspectives that illuminate the nature of phonological development, the role of cognitive processing in reading, and the influence of instructional experience on learning. These theories offer a structured lens for interpreting teachers' lived experiences and understanding

the deeper meaning they assign to phonetics learning within the elementary curriculum.

The first theoretical anchor of this study is **Constructivist Learning Theory** by Jean Piaget, introduced in 1952. Piaget argued that learners build knowledge actively through experiences, interactions, and cognitive engagement. In this study, phonetics learning is shaped by how pupils mentally organize and interpret sounds within meaningful classroom experiences. Teachers' accounts of pupils struggling with sound discrimination or blending reflect constructivist processes where learners attempt to make sense of auditory input and connect it to written symbols. For instance, difficulties observed by teachers align with Piaget's concept of disequilibrium, where learners face challenges that require cognitive accommodation and restructuring. This theory helps explain why experiential, explicit, and scaffolded phonics instruction becomes essential in shaping pupils' sound awareness. Studies emphasizing the need for structured phonemic instruction (Alsultan, 2022; Clemens et al., 2021) reflect this constructivist foundation because they highlight learning as an active process supported by guided experiences.

The second theoretical lens is **Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory**, proposed by Lev Vygotsky in 1978. Vygotsky emphasized that learning is socially mediated and that language development is influenced by interaction, scaffolding, and the Zone of Proximal Development. Teachers' lived experiences in phonetics instruction mirror this perspective, particularly when

they describe how modeling, guided practice, and collaborative activities contribute to pupils' sound mastery. In many classrooms, pupils rely on teacher prompts, group reading, and oral language support to develop phonological awareness. This aligns with Vygotsky's view that cognitive growth emerges through social interaction with more knowledgeable individuals. The emphasis on oral language in literacy instruction, found in the work of the Research and Development Directorate (2023), supports this sociocultural orientation by highlighting the importance of conversational exposure and guided phonological tasks. Through this lens, the study interprets teaching phonetics not merely as skill transmission but as a socially enriched process shaped by teacher–pupil interaction.

The third major theoretical foundation is **The Psycholinguistic Grain Size Theory** developed by Usha Goswami in 2003. This theory explains how learners process phonological information at different unit sizes such as phonemes, syllables, and rimes. The theory asserts that children's reading development depends on their ability to recognize and manipulate sounds at varying levels of complexity. This lens is significant for the study because teachers frequently describe how some pupils can identify whole syllables but struggle with individual phonemes, or how learners decode simple words but fail to generalize patterns. Such observations align with the notion that reading involves multiple grain sizes that develop gradually. International studies that highlight the need for systematic phonics instruction (Hu & Du, 2023; Schwob, 2024) also support this theoretical view because they emphasize breaking

down language structures into learnable units. The theory helps deepen the understanding of teachers' lived experiences by framing pupils' difficulties as part of a developmental progression influenced by the grain size they can process.

These three theories work together to provide a comprehensive understanding of the instructional and developmental dimensions of phonetics learning. Constructivism highlights the active role of learners in constructing understanding of sounds, Sociocultural Theory emphasizes guided support and interaction, and the Psycholinguistic Grain Size Theory explains the internal cognitive mechanisms that influence sound processing. Together, they help interpret teachers' narratives about phonetics learning needs in ways that acknowledge cognitive, social, and linguistic influence.

Literature Review

The growing emphasis on foundational literacy across national and international education systems has placed phonological awareness and phonics instruction at the center of early grade learning. Across many countries, educators recognize that young learners struggle with essential sound-based skills that influence their ability to decode text, read fluently, and comprehend written material. Researchers continue to emphasize that difficulties in phonemic awareness, sound blending, segmenting, and letter-sound correspondence often persist when learners do not receive adequate support during their early years of schooling (Clemens et al., 2021). As

education systems worldwide grapple with learning recovery efforts and declining literacy scores, the renewed interest in phonetics-related research has become more pronounced. These challenges are not isolated to one geographical context, as numerous studies reveal comparable difficulties across diverse educational settings. This broad body of literature demonstrates the global relevance of understanding phonetics learning needs and the instructional practices that shape learners' early literacy development.

Within this wider landscape, the literature reveals that teachers find themselves navigating literacy instruction in environments shaped by diverse languages, varied learner backgrounds, and uneven access to instructional resources. As the complexity of early literacy programs increases, the demand for empirical studies that examine what happens inside classrooms has grown. Many researchers highlight the necessity of documenting real experiences of teachers who implement phonics instruction and who are directly confronted with the realities of learner struggles, inadequate materials, and curricular expectations. These lived realities form a rich ground for examining the gaps between curricular standards and actual learner performance. Given these concerns, the literature offers valuable insights that clarify the forces that shape the teaching of phonetics, the development of early reading skills, and the learning experiences of children in their formative years (Ibojo, 2024).

Lived Experiences in Teaching Phonetics within the Language Curriculum

Teachers across various educational systems consistently describe their experiences in teaching phonetics as shaped by the realities of curriculum design, classroom diversity, and learners' varied readiness levels. Studies reveal that many teachers feel both empowered and constrained by their language curriculum, noting that while curricular standards emphasize the need for explicit phonics and phonological awareness instruction, classroom realities often present obstacles that complicate implementation. This sentiment can be seen in findings from Jensen (2023), who noted that teachers frequently navigate mismatches between prescribed competencies and actual learner performance. Similar patterns emerge in the reports of Schwob (2024) and Chen (2024), where teachers expressed that their experiences included balancing structured phonics routines with the need to adapt lessons for struggling learners. In addition, local studies by Badillo (2025) and Bermudez (2025) showed that Filipino teachers often supplement the curriculum with improvised materials to address learners' weak sound discrimination and decoding skills. These experiences collectively highlight how teachers interpret curriculum expectations through the lens of daily classroom challenges.

A recurring theme in the literature is that teachers experience significant pressure to meet literacy benchmarks while simultaneously managing the phonetics gaps of early grade learners. Research shows that many teachers observe inconsistent levels of phonemic awareness in their classrooms, requiring them to constantly differentiate instruction to accommodate diverse

learning needs. Studies by Susanto and Nanda (2023) and Nkurunziza (2024) reveal that learners' varied sound processing abilities shape teachers' instructional decisions, often prompting them to modify lessons spontaneously. Teachers describe their lived experiences as a balancing act between following the curriculum and responding to learner struggles that are not fully anticipated by curricular documents. Similar findings were reported by Abshire (2024) and Torres (2023), who documented teachers' descriptions of spending extra time reteaching basic sound-letter relationships because many pupils lacked readiness for more advanced phonics tasks. These experiences demonstrate how teachers rely on professional intuition and creativity to navigate phonetics instruction within rigid curricular timelines.

Teachers also describe how learners' attitudes towards reading affect their experiences in teaching phonetics. The literature shows that children who associate reading with anxiety, frustration, or embarrassment are more likely to resist phonics activities. Sullivan (2023) and Fisher (2025) note that learners who repeatedly fail sound tasks often develop avoidance behaviors, which then complicate instructional routines. Teachers in studies by Ibojo (2024) and Schwob (2024) reported that they spend considerable energy building learners' confidence through praise, repetition, and supportive interactions. Meanwhile, Badillo (2025) found that some learners express self-doubt when confronted with unfamiliar sounds, prompting teachers to use sensitive and patient approaches. These experiences highlight how emotional factors significantly shape phonetics instruction and teachers' daily decision-making.

Teachers' Interpretations of the Meaning and Significance of Phonetics Learning for Proficiency

Teachers' interpretations of the significance of phonetics learning have been widely documented in literature, reflecting a deeply held belief that sound mastery serves as the bedrock of literacy proficiency. Many teachers understand phonetics not simply as an isolated skill but as a gateway to reading accuracy, fluency, and confidence. This interpretation is supported by the observations of Clemens et al. (2021), who found that early mastery of phonemic awareness strongly influences later reading development. Teachers across studies, including those in the works of Schwob (2024) and Sullivan (2023), consistently emphasize that phonetics equips learners with the ability to decode unfamiliar words, giving them greater independence when encountering new texts. Local literature, such as the studies of Badillo (2025) and Bermudez (2025), reveals that Filipino teachers similarly believe that phonetics mastery determines whether learners will progress smoothly through reading milestones. As teachers make meaning of their daily experiences, they often interpret phonetics as a foundational pillar that shapes learners' long-term academic journeys.

whose findings show that learners receiving explicit phonics instruction demonstrate noticeable improvements in reading speed and accuracy. Local teachers in studies by Barcoma et al. (2025) and Ibojo (2024) similarly describe phonics as the engine that drives fluent oral reading. From these interpretations, phonetics learning becomes more than discrete skill

acquisition; it becomes a fluid process that influences learners' capacity to engage with texts meaningfully.

Teachers' interpretations also reflect an awareness that phonetics learning enhances vocabulary development, a fact they frequently observe in classroom interactions. Research by Villanueva (2022) and Wang (2022) indicates that teachers often notice how learners who can analyze sounds within words tend to acquire vocabulary more easily. Teachers in the studies of Chen (2024) and Hu and Du (2023) explained that phonetic decoding allows learners to independently figure out unfamiliar words, expanding their vocabulary without relying solely on teacher modeling. Local studies by Barcoma et al. (2025) and Abdon and Barrios (2022) confirm similar interpretations, showing that Filipino teachers often see a strong relationship between phonics mastery and learners' ability to understand new words in oral and written form. These interpretations strengthen the belief that phonetics is central to building lexical knowledge and literacy proficiency.

Teachers also interpret phonetics learning as integral to learners' comprehension abilities. Although phonics and comprehension are often discussed as separate literacy components, the literature reveals that teachers see their relationship as deeply intertwined. Studies by Schwob (2024) and Fisher (2025) report that teachers regularly observe learners struggling with comprehension because they expend too much cognitive effort on decoding. In the Philippines, findings by Bermudez (2025) and Badillo (2025) show similar interpretations, highlighting that learners who cannot decode words fluently

often fail to grasp meaning even when texts are familiar. Additional insights from Sullivan (2023) and Torres (2023) reveal that teachers interpret comprehension success as dependent on whether learners have mastered phonemic segmentation, blending, and pattern recognition. These experiences lead teachers to interpret phonetics learning as an essential precursor to understanding text meaning rather than an isolated instructional requirement

Policy Actions Recommended Based on Teachers' Lived Experiences and Identified Phonetics Learning Needs

Teachers' lived experiences across various educational settings highlight clear patterns that point toward urgent policy reforms in phonetics instruction. Many teachers express that curriculum requirements for phonological awareness and phonics often do not reflect learners' actual readiness levels, which results in the misalignment between curriculum pacing and children's developmental progression. Studies by Clemens et al. (2021), Jensen (2023), and Chen (2024) show that teachers repeatedly encounter learners who struggle with segmentation, blending, and sound discrimination even before moving to more advanced reading tasks. Local research by Badillo (2025) and Bermudez (2025) similarly notes that the existing language curriculum in many Philippine schools assumes prior mastery of foundational sound skills that young learners do not always possess. These lived experiences point to a pressing need for policy revisions that adjust the pacing of phonics instruction, incorporate developmental benchmarks, and ensure that foundational

phonetics competencies are taught explicitly before advancing to more complex literacy expectations. Policymakers must consider the realities teachers face in implementing a one-size-fits-all curriculum and instead create a more responsive learning framework grounded in developmental readiness.

Another critical policy action recommended in the literature involves strengthening teacher training and professional development in phonetics instruction. Many teachers report feeling underprepared to diagnose phonological weaknesses and to apply specialized phonics strategies effectively, a concern echoed in studies by Bose (2022), Piasta and Hudson (2023), and Susanto and Nanda (2023). Teachers in the findings of Fisher (2025) and Sullivan (2023) emphasize that their confidence and proficiency increase significantly when supported by systematic training that focuses on sound production, error analysis, and targeted remediation. In the Philippines, studies by Abdon and Barrios (2022) and Barcoma et al. (2025) illustrate that teachers often learn phonics strategies informally or through peer sharing rather than formal training programs. The EDCOM II report (Department of Education, 2023) also underscores the lack of structured professional development in foundational literacy instruction. These lived experiences call for policy interventions that institutionalize comprehensive phonetics training, requiring regular workshops, certifications, and continuous coaching to ensure teachers are fully equipped to address learners' diverse phonological needs.

Teachers' experiences also highlight the necessity of developing more accessible, high-quality instructional materials to support phonetics learning,

suggesting another key area for policy intervention. Literature from Chen (2024), Wang (2022), and Schwob (2024) shows that teachers in many settings often lack adequate phonics tools such as decodable readers, sound charts, and multi-sensory learning materials. Filipino teachers in studies by Badillo (2025) and Bermudez (2025) explain that they frequently create their own flashcards, sound drills, and blending activities due to the scarcity of standardized phonetics resources in schools. Findings from Balauag (2022), Nazario-Laude (2023), and Barcoma et al. (2025) further reveal that teachers often rely on improvised materials because existing resources do not match learners' developmental levels or linguistic backgrounds. These experiences emphasize the need for policies that mandate schools to provide sufficient, culturally appropriate, and grade-level phonics materials to ensure equitable access to foundational literacy tools. Policies should also include budget allocations earmarked specifically for phonics resources to eliminate reliance on teacher-funded materials.

Synthesis of Reviewed Literature

The reviewed literature reveals that teachers' lived experiences in teaching phonetics consistently reflect a demanding instructional landscape shaped by curriculum gaps, learner diversity, limited resources, and institutional constraints. Many teachers describe daily encounters with pupils who have not yet mastered foundational sound skills expected by the curriculum, resulting in constant reteaching, modification of lessons, and extensive remediation efforts (Badillo, 2025; Bermudez, 2025; Clemens et al., 2021). Teachers across contexts

emphasize that their instructional work is intensified by discrepancies between curriculum expectations and learners' developmental readiness, which compels them to adjust pacing, supplement content, and experiment with strategies to bridge phonological gaps (Abdon & Barrios, 2022; Chen, 2024; Jensen, 2023). These lived realities depict teachers as instructional problem-solvers who adapt to varied language backgrounds, home literacy differences, and diverse skill levels in their classrooms (Hu & Du, 2023; Villanueva, 2022; Susanto & Nanda, 2023). Literature consistently shows that teachers shoulder the burden of addressing foundational literacy challenges, reflecting a recurring pattern of strong teacher effort but insufficient systemic support (Department of Education, 2023; Torres, 2023; Liang, 2024)

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the discussions on the methods being used in this study, specifically the research design, research participants, data collection, procedures, data analysis, ethical considerations, trustworthiness of the study, potential research bias, and limitations.

Research Design

The present qualitative study employed a phenomenological research design to explore teachers' lived experiences in teaching phonetics to elementary pupils within their existing language curriculum. Phenomenology is

appropriate for inquiries that seek to understand how individuals interpret, describe, and assign meaning to real-world experiences, particularly those shaped by instructional contexts and learning conditions. This approach aligns with the intent of the study, which focuses on teachers' comprehensive insights into phonetics instruction, the challenges they encounter, and the implications they perceive for learners' literacy development. Literature supports the value of phenomenology in education, especially when the goal is to highlight human experiences and uncover deeper meanings connected to teaching and learning practices (Jensen, 2023; Sullivan, 2023).

The use of phenomenology in this study was strengthened by research demonstrating that teachers' perspectives provide rich insights into foundational literacy learning and the conditions that support or hinder phonological development. Scholars note that teachers possess firsthand awareness of learner performance, classroom realities, and curriculum constraints, making their narratives highly suitable for phenomenological inquiry (Badillo, 2025; Bermudez, 2025). These insights are especially important in phonetics instruction, where learner progress depends heavily on the teacher's ability to diagnose difficulties, implement interventions, and adapt instruction according to learner needs. Teachers' reflections therefore serve as indispensable sources of qualitative evidence that deepen understanding of children's phonological readiness.

Research Participants

The participants of this qualitative study are elementary teachers in **Matalam Central District, Division of Cotabato**, who possess direct instructional experience in teaching phonetics within the current language curriculum. Literature emphasizes that teachers are the most credible sources of qualitative data on phonological instruction because they interpret, implement, and reflect on everyday phonics practices (Sullivan, 2023; Schwob, 2024). Their continuous interactions with pupils allow them to articulate the nuances of learners' sound discrimination abilities, blending skills, pronunciation patterns, and phonological challenges, making them essential contributors to understanding phonetics learning needs (Badillo, 2025; Bermudez, 2025).

Teachers were selected because their instructional work positions them at the center of phonological decision-making. Research underscores that teachers often modify lessons, create supplemental materials, and respond dynamically to learners who struggle with phonemic awareness, making their insights critical to understanding what works and what gaps persist (Chen, 2024; Fisher, 2025). As such, their participation ensures that the study captures authentic, lived realities shaped by curriculum constraints, learner readiness, and school conditions.

Inclusion Criteria

1. **Elementary teachers who currently teach language or reading subjects** where phonics and phonological awareness are formally embedded in the curriculum.
2. **Teachers with at least two years of experience** handling early-grade learners, as experience increases accuracy in identifying phonetic difficulties (Jensen, 2023; Villanueva, 2022).
3. **Teachers who have administered phonics or phonological awareness lessons** within the last academic year, ensuring updated and relevant experiences.

Exclusion Criteria

1. Teachers who do not teach reading or language subjects, as they may not have consistent engagement with phonetics instruction.
2. Teachers handling upper-grade levels exclusively, where phonics is no longer a central curricular focus (Schwob, 2024).
3. Teachers who are new to the profession and have not yet experienced phonological instruction in real classroom contexts.

This participant selection ensures that the qualitative data generated reflects deep experiential knowledge, meaningful insights, and well-informed perspectives on phonetics learning needs in the district.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure for this qualitative study followed a structured yet flexible approach to gather rich descriptions of teachers' lived experiences in phonetics instruction. Before conducting the interviews, permission was secured from the appropriate district and division authorities to ensure alignment with ethical and administrative protocols. This step is consistent with research emphasizing the importance of institutional support in literacy-related inquiries (Department of Education, 2023). After approval, participants were informed of the study's purpose and were invited to voluntarily share their experiences, consistent with the ethical expectations of qualitative research involving teachers (Sullivan, 2023; Jensen, 2023).

Data collection relied primarily on in-depth semi-structured interviews, which allowed teachers to describe in detail the instructional practices they use, the phonetic challenges their learners encounter, and the strategies they employ to address these difficulties. Literature supports the use of interviews to uncover complex cognitive and instructional processes that are difficult to quantify but vital for understanding foundational literacy (Fisher, 2025; Clemens et al., 2021). Follow-up questioning was used to encourage elaboration, ensure clarity, and deepen the understanding of participant responses.

Audio recordings were used, with consent, to ensure accuracy of transcription and interpretation. This procedure aligns with recommendations from literacy researchers who emphasize the need for precise data capture

when documenting instructional reflections and phonological observations (Chen, 2024; Schwob, 2024). The recordings were transcribed verbatim, allowing the researcher to preserve the authenticity of participants' narratives.

After transcription, the data underwent organization and initial coding to identify significant statements related to phonetics instruction, learner phonological needs, curricular challenges, and instructional adaptations. Meaning units were then clustered to reflect emergent themes, consistent with phenomenological data analysis techniques described in literacy and phonics research (Badillo, 2025; Abdon & Barrios, 2022). This systematic approach ensured that the themes captured the essence of teachers' instructional realities.

To ensure trustworthiness, participants were invited to validate or clarify their responses through follow-up communication. Member checking has long been recognized as essential in strengthening the accuracy and credibility of phenomenological research, particularly in studies involving instructional experiences (Villanueva, 2022; Torres, 2024). Through this process, participants confirmed that the interpretations accurately reflected their experiences.

This data collection procedure ensured that the information gathered was credible, reflective, and grounded in actual classroom practice. The resulting qualitative dataset provided a strong foundation for assessing the phonetics learning needs of elementary pupils and identifying implications for curriculum enhancement.

Procedures

Before any data collection activities are undertaken, the researcher will first secure the necessary institutional approvals. This process will begin with the submission of the full research proposal to the Dean of the Graduate School of the researcher's academic institution. Once the Dean has reviewed and endorsed the proposal, it will be forwarded to the Ethics Review Committee of the same institution for ethical clearance. The Ethics Review Committee plays a critical role in ensuring that the study adheres to accepted ethical standards for research involving human participants, specifically in terms of protecting their rights, privacy, and overall well-being. Only after the approval and ethical clearance are obtained will the researcher be allowed to proceed to the field. This stage is vital because qualitative studies involving in-depth interviews require strict adherence to protocols that safeguard participants.

Following ethics approval, the researcher will initiate coordination with the Schools Division Office and the District Office of **Matalam Central District, Division of Cotabato** to formally communicate the purpose, scope, and requirements of the study. This formal coordination includes the submission of letters addressed to the Schools Division Superintendent and District Supervisor to seek permission to enter schools and interact with teachers who meet the selection criteria. Upon approval, the researcher will contact school heads to schedule orientation meetings, clarify the study's expectations, and identify suitable participants. This procedural step is essential because school

administrators help facilitate access to teachers while ensuring that research activities do not disrupt instructional schedules.

Once administrative coordination is in place, the researcher will schedule an initial meeting with potential participants. During this meeting, the researcher will explain the purpose of the study, the nature of the interviews and focus group discussions, the time commitment expected, and the voluntary nature of participation. This step helps ensure that participants understand the research and ask questions before committing. Teachers who signify willingness to join the study will then be scheduled for individual interviews and focus group sessions. The researcher will also conduct a contextual assessment of the school environment to determine appropriate venues for data-gathering activities that ensure privacy and comfort.

The next phase involves conducting the in-depth interviews. These interviews will follow a semi-structured format to allow guided conversation while giving teachers ample flexibility to narrate their experiences. Interviews will be audio-recorded with permission to ensure data accuracy. The researcher will take reflective notes during and after each session to document non-verbal cues, environmental conditions, and contextual insights that enrich the dataset. The interviews will be scheduled at times most convenient for teachers, often before or after classes, to avoid interfering with their professional responsibilities.

After completing the individual interviews, the researcher will conduct focus group discussions. These group conversations allow teachers to collectively reflect on phonetics instruction, clarify shared challenges, and express diverse views that may not surface during individual interviews. The sessions will be recorded and carefully moderated to ensure respectful dialogue, equal participation, and freedom of expression. The researcher will use a prepared guide to maintain focus while allowing the natural flow of discussion that characterizes qualitative inquiry.

When all data have been gathered, the researcher will compile, verify, and organize all recordings and transcripts. Participants may be asked to validate their responses through short follow-up exchanges to confirm the accuracy of captured statements. This final verification ensures that the dataset is complete, accurate, and ready for systematic analysis. The entire procedure is guided by the principle of respect for persons, ensuring teacher-participants are valued partners in knowledge production.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this qualitative study will follow the phenomenological method developed by Colaizzi (1978), whose approach is widely recognized for its structured and rigorous process of extracting meaningful insights from rich qualitative descriptions. Colaizzi's method is particularly appropriate for this inquiry because the study seeks to understand teachers' lived experiences and interpretations of phonetics instruction, which

require careful examination of narrative depth. By adhering to Colaizzi's systematic steps, the researcher ensures that the resulting themes remain grounded in participants' authentic accounts while maintaining methodological coherence. Scholars note that Colaizzi's approach is especially valuable when analyzing experiences rooted in instructional practice, where meaning is revealed through reflection and detailed description (Badillo, 2025; Sullivan, 2023).

The analysis begins with **Step 1: Familiarization**, where the researcher reads all interview and focus group transcripts repeatedly. This immersion allows the researcher to gain a holistic sense of the participants' perspectives on phonetics learning needs, instructional challenges, and interpretations of proficiency. Deep engagement with the data ensures that the researcher fully appreciates the nuances embedded in teachers' descriptions, a step encouraged by both Colaizzi (1978) and contemporary literacy researchers who emphasize the importance of narrative depth in understanding phonological instruction (Chen, 2024; Jensen, 2023).

Step 2: Extraction of Significant Statements follows, during which the researcher identifies and extracts statements directly related to teachers' experiences in teaching phonetics, their observations of learner difficulties, and their interpretations of curriculum and policy demands. Colaizzi (1978) emphasizes giving equal attention to all statements that shed light on the phenomenon. This aligns with findings in foundational literacy studies that

highlight how teacher reflections reveal subtle but important aspects of phonemic awareness instruction (Clemens et al., 2021; Torres, 2024).

Next, in **Step 3: Formulation of Meanings**, the researcher interprets the significant statements to derive their underlying meanings. This involves moving from concrete descriptions to abstracted conceptual insights while remaining faithful to what participants expressed. Colaizzi (1978) describes this step as essential for transforming raw data into coherent analytical units. The interpretation process is supported by literature noting that teachers' descriptions often reveal embedded meanings related to learner readiness, instructional demands, and resource constraints (Abdon & Barrios, 2022; Bermudez, 2025).

In **Step 4: Organization of Formulated Meanings into Theme Clusters**, the researcher groups related meanings into broader thematic categories. These categories may include areas such as gaps in phonics readiness, challenges in curriculum implementation, interpretations of phonological proficiency, and perceived policy needs. Colaizzi (1978) advises validating theme clusters by referring back to the raw data, ensuring accuracy and authenticity. This approach parallels literacy studies showing that thematic clustering is crucial for understanding complex classroom phenomena (Schwob, 2024; Hu & Du, 2023).

Step 5: Development of an Exhaustive Description requires synthesizing all theme clusters into a comprehensive narrative that captures the full essence

of participants' experiences. Colaizzi (1978) stresses that this stage must involve a detailed portrayal of the phenomenon, integrating all themes into a unified and coherent description. In the context of this study, the exhaustive description will articulate how teachers experience phonetics instruction, make sense of learners' phonological needs, and navigate curriculum requirements. This aligns with scholars who argue that teacher narratives play an essential role in shaping literacy reforms (Department of Education, 2023; Fisher, 2025).

The next step, **Step 6: The Fundamental Structure**, involves reducing the exhaustive description into a concise and essential statement that reflects the core meaning of the phenomenon. This distilled structure captures the overarching insights regarding phonetics learning needs as lived and interpreted by teachers. Colaizzi (1978) notes that this allows the researcher to articulate the phenomenon's essence in a clear and focused manner.

Finally, **Step 7: Validation by Returning to Participants** ensures accuracy and trustworthiness. The researcher returns the fundamental structure to participants to confirm whether it accurately reflects their experiences. This member-checking step strengthens credibility and aligns with qualitative literacy scholarship that prioritizes participant validation in studies involving instructional perspectives (Villanueva, 2022; Wang, 2024).

Through Colaizzi's method, the analysis produces a systematic, rigorous, and participant-grounded interpretation of teachers' lived experiences with

phonetics instruction. This structured approach ensures that every step reflects the authentic voices of teachers while maintaining scholarly integrity and methodological transparency.

For **Parents**, the research underscores their role in supporting early literacy development at home. The findings can guide them in understanding their children's needs and in providing meaningful reinforcement of phonics and phonemic awareness skills.

For **Researchers**, the study adds to the body of knowledge on phonetics instruction and foundational literacy. It provides a basis for further research, comparative studies, and literacy program development, expanding scholarly understanding of phonological learning and early reading proficiency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presented the outcomes of the qualitative phenomenological inquiry that examined the lived experiences of elementary teachers in relation to phonetics instruction and the phonetics learning needs of elementary pupils. It focused on organizing and presenting the data obtained from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions in a systematic and coherent manner. Guided by the phenomenological approach, the chapter aimed to surface teachers' meanings and perspectives as expressed in their narratives, providing a structured foundation for the presentation of findings and subsequent discussion within the context of phonics instruction and early literacy development.

Lived Experiences of Teachers in Teaching Phonetics to Elementary Pupils within the Current Language Curriculum

Table 1 presents the thematic interpretation of teachers' lived experiences in teaching phonetics to elementary pupils within the current language curriculum. Three major themes emerged from the phenomenological analysis: *Teaching Phonetics Amid Learner Diversity and Instructional Constraints*, *Adaptive and Multimodal Instructional Strategies in Phonetics Teaching*, and *Contextual and Curricular Forces Shaping Phonetics Instruction*. Collectively, these themes highlight the complexity of phonetics instruction as experienced by teachers, revealing how learner diversity, classroom realities, and curriculum structures intersect to shape instructional practices. The table underscores that phonetics teaching is not a uniform or linear process but a dynamic instructional experience influenced by linguistic diversity, time limitations, class size, and systemic expectations.

Teaching Phonetics Amid Learner Diversity and Instructional Constraints

This theme captures teachers' experiences of teaching phonetics in classrooms characterized by heterogeneous learner profiles and structural limitations. Teachers consistently described phonetics instruction as challenging due to wide variations in pupils' phonological awareness, linguistic backgrounds, and learning paces. Learners came from diverse mother tongue backgrounds, many of which lacked phonemic structures found in English, resulting in persistent sound discrimination and pronunciation difficulties. These

challenges were compounded by large class sizes, limited instructional time, and the pressure to meet curriculum pacing requirements. As a result, teachers often struggled to provide individualized phonetic support, even when they recognized that many learners had not yet achieved mastery of foundational sound–letter relationships:

“I experience difficulty teaching phonetics because my learners come from different language backgrounds, and some sounds do not exist in their mother tongue, so I have to repeat lessons many times just to help them recognize sounds properly, but the time is not enough” (IDI1.1.5).

“I find it challenging because I have pupils who already know their sounds and others who still confuse basic phonemes, and with a large class, I cannot always give one-on-one attention” (IDI1.1.2).

“I feel pressured to move on with the lesson even if some learners have not yet mastered the sounds, because the curriculum requires us to finish certain competencies within a limited time” (IDI1.1.1).

"I notice that learners who do not practice reading at home struggle more with phonetics, but I cannot always give them extra support because of class size and workload" (FGD1.1.4).

"I struggle balancing the needs of fast and slow learners in phonetics lessons, especially when some pupils need repeated drills and others are already ready to read" (IDI1.1.3).

The findings imply that phonetics instruction in elementary schools requires flexible instructional structures that acknowledge learner diversity and classroom realities. Without addressing large class sizes, limited instructional time, and linguistic diversity, teachers will continue to face difficulties in ensuring mastery of phonetic skills among all learners. This theme suggests the need for differentiated instructional policies, smaller class ratios, and built-in remediation time within the curriculum. Failure to address these constraints risks leaving many learners with unresolved phonological gaps that can hinder long-term literacy development. The experiences of teachers also indicate that equity in phonetics instruction cannot be achieved solely through teacher effort but must be supported by systemic reforms that allow teachers to respond meaningfully to diverse learner needs.

This result gains strong support from the findings of Abdon and Barrios (2022), who reported that linguistic diversity significantly affects phonological

awareness acquisition among Filipino learners. The results corroborate with the study of Badillo (2025), which identified heterogeneous phonological abilities and class size as major barriers to effective phonics instruction. This is congruent with the findings of Bose (2022), who emphasized that even trained teachers struggle to address phonetic difficulties when instructional constraints persist. Similarly, Khan (2021) and Susanto and Nanda (2023) affirmed that inclusive phonics instruction requires structural flexibility to accommodate learner diversity.

Adaptive and Multimodal Instructional Strategies in Phonetics Teaching

This theme reflects teachers' pedagogical adaptability and creativity in responding to phonetics-related challenges. Despite instructional constraints, teachers employed explicit, differentiated, and multisensory strategies to support learners' phonetic development. These strategies included sound modeling, repetition, songs, visual aids, phonics games, peer tutoring, and pacing adjustments. Teachers integrated phonetics into reading, spelling, and daily routines to reinforce learning. This theme highlights teachers' commitment to ensuring accessibility and engagement in phonetics instruction, demonstrating that teachers actively modified their practices to meet learners' varying needs:

"I intentionally model the sounds clearly and break words into smaller units so learners can remember them, especially those who struggle

with pronunciation" (ID11.2.1).

"I use songs, pictures, and games to keep learners engaged, because phonetics can be boring if it is taught only through drills" (ID11.2.2).

"I adjust my pacing and give more repetition to slow learners while allowing fast learners to help their classmates through peer activities" (FGD1.2.3).

"I integrate phonetics into reading and spelling activities so learners can see how sounds are actually used in words and sentences" (ID11.2.4).

"I rely on multisensory strategies like visual aids and actions because they help learners remember sounds better" (ID11.2.5).

This theme emphasized the importance of supporting teachers' adaptive practices through professional development and instructional resources. While teachers demonstrate strong pedagogical flexibility, reliance on personal initiative alone may lead to inconsistent instructional quality across classrooms. Institutional support in the form of training on evidence-based phonics strategies, access to quality materials, and structured guidance can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of these adaptive practices. This

theme also implies that phonetics instruction should be explicitly designed to be multisensory and differentiated to accommodate diverse learning styles.

This interpretation is supported by the findings of Sullivan (2023), who emphasized that explicit and multisensory phonics instruction enhances learner engagement and retention. The results align with Chen (2024), who demonstrated that school-based phonics interventions using differentiated strategies significantly improved learners' reading outcomes. This is consistent with the study of Piasta and Hudson (2023), which highlighted the importance of teacher knowledge and instructional flexibility in phonological instruction. Similarly, Fisher (2025) and Jensen (2023) affirmed that adaptive phonics strategies are critical for addressing diverse learner needs.

Contextual and Curricular Forces Shaping Phonetics Instruction

This theme underscores the influence of systemic and curricular factors on teachers' experiences in teaching phonetics. Teachers described how curriculum pacing, assessment demands, limited instructional time, and resource availability shaped their instructional decisions. Many teachers expressed tension between curriculum expectations and learners' actual readiness, noting that phonetics is heavily emphasized in early grades but gradually de-emphasized in higher levels. This inconsistency disrupted continuity in phonetic skill development and limited teachers' instructional autonomy:

“I feel that the curriculum expects learners to have mastered phonics already, but many still need support, and this mismatch makes teaching difficult” (IDI1.3.1).

“Phonetics is emphasized in Grades 1 to 3, but after that, it seems to disappear, even though learners still struggle” (IDI1.3.2).

“I often create my own materials because the available resources are not enough to support phonetics instruction” (FGD1.3.3).

“The pacing guide sometimes forces us to move on even when learners are not ready” (IDI1.3.4).

“Institutional policies and assessments influence how much time and effort we can give to phonetics” (IDI1.3.5).

The findings imply a need for curriculum continuity and alignment in phonetics instruction across grade levels. Without coherent sequencing and sufficient instructional time, learners risk losing foundational phonetic skills as they progress. This theme highlights the necessity of curriculum reform that integrates phonetics consistently and provides teachers with flexibility to address learner readiness. Policy-level adjustments are essential to bridge the gap between curriculum design and classroom realities.

This finding is congruent with the statement of the Department of Education (2023), which emphasized foundational skill gaps in Philippine basic education. The results corroborate with Bermudez (2025), who reported curriculum discontinuity in phonics instruction among Grade 2 learners. This is supported by Erbs (2021) and Nkurunziza (2024), who highlighted the long-term consequences of weak phonological foundations due to inconsistent instruction.

Table 1. Thematic Analysis on the Lived Experiences of Teachers in Teaching Phonetics to Elementary Pupils within the Current Language Curriculum

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Learner diversity and classroom challenges	Linguistic diversity, varied phonological levels, class size, time constraints	“Learners come from different language backgrounds which affects sound recognition.”	Teaching	Teaching phonetics was experienced as demanding due to
		“Large class sizes limit one-on-one phonetics	Phonetics	heterogeneous learner profiles, linguistic interference, and structural classroom
			Amid	
			Learner	
			Diversity and	
			Instructional	
			Constraints	

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Instructional responses and classroom practices	Explicit instruction, differentiation, multisensory strategies, pacing adjustments	instruction.” (IDI2, FGD1)	Adaptive and Multimodal Instructional Strategies in Phonetics Teaching	limitations that constrained individualized instruction. Teachers demonstrated pedagogical adaptability by employing flexible, explicit, and multisensory strategies to address varied learner needs and sustain engagement.
		“I model correct pronunciation and break words into smaller sound units.” (IDI1); “I use songs, pictures, and peer systems.” (IDI2, IDI7)		
Curriculum and institutional context	Curriculum pacing, time allocation, resource	“Phonetics is emphasized in early grades but disappears	Contextual and Curricular Forces	Teachers’ experiences were shaped by curriculum

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
	availability, institutional expectations	later." (ID11); "Limited materials force us to create our own." (ID14, ID16)	Shaping Phonetics Instruction	structure and institutional conditions that often conflicted with learners' readiness and instructional realities.

Teachers' Interpretations of the Meaning and Significance of Phonetics

Learning for Proficiency

Table 2 presents the thematic interpretation of how teachers understand, assign meaning to, and value phonetics learning in relation to learners' reading proficiency and long-term literacy development. The table reveals three dominant themes: *Phonetics as the Foundation of Early Literacy Development*, *Phonetics as a Driver of Reading, Spelling, and Vocabulary Development*, and *Long-Term Academic and Literacy Implications of Phonetics Mastery*. Together, these themes demonstrate that teachers do not view phonetics merely as a discrete instructional component but as a core

literacy mechanism that underpins reading accuracy, fluency, comprehension, and academic success across grade levels. The themes reflect a deeply internalized professional belief among teachers that phonetics learning is both foundational and transformative, influencing learners' confidence, independence, and long-term educational trajectories.

Phonetics as the Foundation of Early Literacy Development

This theme captures teachers' collective interpretation of phonetics as the fundamental gateway to literacy learning. Teachers consistently described phonetics as the starting point of reading development, emphasizing that without mastery of sound–letter correspondence, learners struggle to decode, recognize words, and progress toward fluent reading. Phonetics was understood as the bridge between oral language and written text, enabling learners to translate spoken sounds into meaningful print. Teachers articulated that early phonetics mastery builds learner confidence, supports engagement, and establishes the cognitive framework necessary for higher-order literacy skills. This theme highlights that teachers view phonetics not as an optional or supplementary skill but as an indispensable foundation upon which all subsequent reading and writing competencies are constructed:

“I believe phonetics is the starting point of reading development because if learners do not understand sound-letter relationships, they

cannot read words properly and they will always struggle in reading activities" (IDI2.1.1).

"I see phonetics as the first step in literacy because once learners can identify and pronounce sounds correctly, they gain confidence and are more willing to read aloud and participate" (IDI2.1.2).

"I experience that learners who master phonetics early are more engaged in reading because they are no longer afraid of unfamiliar words and they can try decoding on their own" (FGD2.1.3).

"I observe that phonetics helps learners connect spoken language to written text, which is very important especially in early grades where reading is still developing" (IDI2.1.4).

"I strongly feel that without phonetics, learners cannot develop proper reading skills because phonetics teaches them how letters and sounds work together" (IDI2.1.5).

This theme are significant for curriculum design, instructional prioritization, and early literacy policy. If phonetics is indeed the foundation of literacy, as teachers consistently assert, then phonetics instruction must be treated as a core curricular priority rather than a time-limited competency confined to early grades. Instructional programs must ensure that phonetics learning is explicit, systematic, and sustained, allowing learners sufficient time to achieve mastery before advancing to higher-level reading tasks. This theme also implies that assessment systems should prioritize phonetic proficiency as a key indicator of reading readiness. Neglecting phonetics instruction risks creating learners who can memorize words superficially but lack the decoding skills necessary for independent reading. Teachers' interpretations suggest that strengthening phonetics instruction at the foundational level is essential to preventing reading failure and fostering equitable literacy outcomes.

This result gains strong support from the findings of Alsultan (2022), who emphasized that phonological awareness and phonics serve as the foundation of early reading development. The results corroborate with the study of Clemens et al. (2021), which highlighted the critical role of explicit phonemic instruction in establishing reading readiness. This is congruent with the findings of Nkurunziza (2024), who reported that early phonological skills strongly predict later reading success. Similarly, Erbs (2021) and Piasta and Hudson (2023) affirmed that phonetics mastery is central to decoding and early literacy acquisition.

Phonetics as a Driver of Reading, Spelling, and Vocabulary Development

This theme reflects teachers' interpretation of phonetics as an enabling mechanism that supports multiple, interconnected literacy skills. Teachers described phonetics as essential not only for reading accuracy but also for spelling development and vocabulary growth. By understanding sound-letter relationships, learners are able to decode unfamiliar words, spell accurately, and expand their vocabulary through independent reading. Teachers emphasized that phonetics allows learners to move beyond rote memorization toward analytical reading strategies, enabling them to recognize patterns, blend sounds, and infer meaning. This theme highlights that phonetics is viewed as a dynamic driver of literacy development rather than a static skill limited to decoding:

"I notice that when learners know their phonetics, they can blend sounds to read new words and spell correctly, which helps them grow their vocabulary naturally" (IDI2.2.1).

"I observe that pupils with strong phonics skills read faster and understand stories better because they are not stuck sounding out every word" (IDI2.2.2).

"I experience that phonetics helps learners spell unfamiliar words because they rely on

sounds instead of guessing the spelling" (FGD2.2.3).

"I believe phonetics supports vocabulary development because learners can decode new words independently and remember them better" (IDI2.2.4).

"I see that phonetics strengthens reading, spelling, and vocabulary at the same time because all these skills are connected through sound-letter knowledge" (IDI2.2.5).

The implications of this theme suggest that phonetics instruction should be integrated across reading, spelling, and vocabulary instruction rather than taught in isolation. Curriculum planners and teachers should design literacy lessons that explicitly link phonetics with word recognition, spelling patterns, and vocabulary acquisition. This integrated approach can enhance learners' literacy efficiency and reduce cognitive overload. The theme also implies that interventions targeting reading difficulties should include phonetics-based strategies that address decoding and spelling simultaneously. By strengthening phonetics instruction, schools can support learners in developing transferable literacy skills that extend beyond early reading tasks.

This interpretation is supported by the findings of Abshire (2024), who demonstrated that phonemic awareness and phonics instruction significantly

improve reading and spelling outcomes among learners with reading difficulties. The results align with the study of Barcoma et al. (2025), which found that phonics instruction positively affects reading skills among Grade 1 pupils. This is congruent with the findings of Bermudez (2025), who emphasized the role of phonics in spelling accuracy and vocabulary growth. Similarly, Hu and Du (2023) and Nazario-Laude (2023) reported that phonetics instruction enhances reading fluency and vocabulary development among elementary learners.

Long-Term Academic and Literacy Implications of Phonetics Mastery

This theme represents teachers' understanding of phonetics as a determinant of long-term academic success and lifelong literacy. Teachers articulated that phonetics mastery in elementary grades influences learners' ability to comprehend complex texts, perform across content areas, and transition successfully from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." Strong phonetic skills were perceived as protective factors that prevent future reading difficulties, reduce learner frustration, and foster academic confidence. Teachers emphasized that phonetics learning has enduring effects that extend beyond language subjects, influencing performance in science, mathematics, and social studies:

"I believe that learners who master phonetics early perform better in later grades because they can read and understand textbooks more easily" (IDI2.3.1).

"I observe that strong phonetics skills help learners transition smoothly to higher grades where reading is required in all subjects" (IDI2.3.2).

"I experience that learners with weak phonetics struggle not only in English but also in other subjects because they cannot understand written instructions" (FGD2.3.3).

"I feel that early phonetics mastery builds confidence and reduces frustration, which motivates learners to continue learning" (IDI2.3.4).

"I strongly believe that phonetics is not just for early grades but a foundation for lifelong learning and academic success" (IDI2.3.5).

The implications of this theme underscore the need to view phonetics instruction as a long-term investment rather than a short-term curricular requirement. Educational systems must ensure continuity and reinforcement of phonetics learning across grade levels to sustain literacy development. This theme also implies that early intervention programs targeting phonetics deficiencies can yield long-term academic benefits by preventing cumulative learning gaps. Policymakers and educators should recognize phonetics as a cross-cutting competency that supports achievement in all subject areas. Failure to establish strong phonetic foundations may result in persistent literacy

challenges that affect learners' academic trajectories and limit their educational opportunities.

This interpretation is strongly supported by the findings of Erbs (2021), who identified phonological awareness as a predictor of long-term reading and writing success. The results corroborate with the study of Tullente (2023), which showed that phonological interventions improve reading comprehension among early-grade learners. This is congruent with the findings of Schwob (2024), who emphasized the long-term academic benefits of systematic phonics instruction. Additionally, the conclusions align with the United Nations (2021) SDG 4 framework, which stresses that foundational literacy skills are essential for lifelong learning and educational equity.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis on Teachers' Interpretations of the Meaning and Significance of Phonetics Learning for Proficiency

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Conceptualization of phonetics	Foundational literacy, sound-letter correspondence, decoding	"Phonetics is the starting point of reading development." (ID11);	Phonetics as the Foundation of Early Literacy	Teachers consistently interpreted phonetics as the core gateway skill

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Contribution to literacy skills	Decoding, spelling accuracy, vocabulary growth	“Without sounds, learners cannot read words properly.” (IDI4)	Developme nt	that enables decoding, spelling, and early reading success.
		“Phonetics helps learners spell and build vocabulary.” (IDI2); “Sound knowledge helps read unfamiliar words.” (IDI6)	Phonetics as a Driver of Reading, Spelling, and Vocabulary Developme nt	Phonetics learning was understood as directly supporting interconnecte d literacy skills and facilitating independent reading and language growth.

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Long-term academic implications	Reading fluency, comprehension, cross-subject performance	“Strong phonetics affects comprehensi on in later grades.” (ID11); “It helps learners succeed across subjects.” (ID13, ID19)	Long-Term Academic and Literacy Implications of Phonetics Mastery	Teachers viewed phonetics as a long-term investment that influenced academic confidence, comprehensio n, and performance beyond elementary education.

Policy Actions Recommended to Address Identified Phonetics Learning Needs Based on Teachers’ Lived Experiences

Table 3 presents the thematic interpretation of teachers' recommended policy actions aimed at addressing the phonetics learning needs identified through their lived experiences in classroom instruction. Three major themes

emerged from the analysis: *Systemic Gaps and the Need for Policy-Level Intervention*, *Need for Sustainable Institutional and Professional Support*, and *Advocacy for Curriculum Reform and Targeted Literacy Policies*. These themes collectively reveal that teachers perceive phonetics-related challenges as deeply embedded within broader systemic and institutional structures rather than as isolated classroom-level issues. The table highlights teachers' strong awareness that meaningful improvement in phonetics instruction requires coordinated policy responses involving curriculum continuity, professional development, resource allocation, assessment alignment, and learner intervention programs. Teachers' recommendations reflect a forward-looking stance that emphasizes sustainability, equity, and long-term literacy outcomes.

Systemic Gaps and the Need for Policy-Level Intervention

This theme captures teachers' recognition of persistent systemic and institutional gaps that hinder effective phonetics instruction and necessitate policy-level intervention. Teachers consistently described phonetics instruction as fragmented and inconsistently implemented across grade levels, with strong emphasis in early grades followed by gradual de-emphasis in later elementary years. They identified limited instructional time, rigid curriculum pacing, inadequate assessment alignment, and lack of standardized phonetics sequencing as structural barriers that cannot be resolved through individual teacher effort alone. Teachers emphasized that these gaps are not the result of poor teaching but rather of systemic weaknesses that undermine continuity and equity in phonetics learning. This theme reflects teachers' understanding

that without clear, coherent, and enforceable policies, phonetics instruction remains vulnerable to inconsistency and neglect:

“I experience that phonetics is strongly emphasized only in the early grades, but after that, it disappears from the curriculum even though many learners are still struggling with basic sounds” (IDI3.1.1).

“I notice that there is no clear progression of phonetics skills across grade levels, so learners sometimes repeat the same lessons or miss important skills altogether” (IDI3.1.2).

“I feel that we lack clear policies that tell us how much time should really be given to phonetics, so it often gets sacrificed when schedules are tight” (FGD3.1.3).

“I believe that without policy support, phonetics instruction depends too much on individual teachers, which results in uneven learning experiences for pupils” (IDI3.1.4).

“I observe that assessment systems do not always reflect learners’ phonetics difficulties, so these

problems remain hidden until they affect reading comprehension later on" (IDI3.1.5).

This theme point to the urgent need for systemic reforms that institutionalize phonetics instruction as a sustained and continuous component of the elementary curriculum. Policymakers must recognize that fragmented phonetics instruction contributes to persistent literacy gaps and inequitable learning outcomes. Clear policies are needed to ensure consistent phonetics integration across grade levels, alignment between curriculum and assessment, and sufficient instructional time for mastery. This theme also implies that accountability mechanisms should be established to monitor phonetics implementation and learner progress. Without such policy-level interventions, phonetics instruction will remain dependent on individual teacher initiative, leaving many learners without adequate foundational support.

This result gains support from the findings of the Department of Education (2023), which emphasized systemic gaps in foundational skills as a major contributor to national learning deficits. The results corroborate with the study of Bermudez (2025), which identified curriculum discontinuity as a barrier to sustained phonics mastery. This is congruent with the findings of Erbs (2021) and Schwob (2024), who reported that inconsistent phonological instruction leads to long-term reading difficulties. Similarly, Nkurunziza (2024) highlighted the need for coherent instructional frameworks to support early literacy development.

Need for Sustainable Institutional and Professional Support

This theme reflects teachers' strong emphasis on the need for sustained institutional and professional support to strengthen phonetics instruction. Teachers identified gaps in specialized training, instructional materials, assessment tools, and human resources as major obstacles to effective phonetics teaching. They expressed the need for continuous professional development focused on evidence-based phonics strategies, access to culturally responsive materials, and institutional backing that allows flexibility in instructional pacing. Teachers viewed professional support not as a one-time intervention but as an ongoing process that evolves with learner needs and instructional demands. This theme highlights the belief that effective phonetics instruction depends on empowered teachers who are adequately trained and resourced:

"I need more training on phonetics because what we learned before is not always enough to address the diverse needs of my learners" (IDI3.2.1).

"I experience difficulty because we lack updated and appropriate materials, so I often have to create my own resources just to teach phonetics effectively" (IDI3.2.2).

"I believe that continuous professional development is necessary because phonetics teaching requires specialized knowledge and skills" (FGD3.2.3).

"I feel that having access to assessment tools would help me identify learners who need early intervention in phonetics" (IDI3.2.4).

"I observe that when teachers are supported through training and resources, phonetics instruction becomes more effective and consistent" (IDI3.2.5).

The theme underscores the importance of investing in teacher capacity building and institutional support systems. Educational authorities must prioritize sustained professional development programs that equip teachers with practical, evidence-based phonics strategies. Provision of instructional materials, assessment tools, and support personnel such as reading specialists can enhance instructional quality and learner outcomes. This theme also implies that institutional support fosters teacher confidence and instructional consistency, reducing reliance on personal improvisation. Without sustained support, teachers may experience burnout and instructional limitations that compromise phonetics learning.

This is supported by the findings of Sullivan (2023), who emphasized the role of professional development in improving phonics instruction. The results align with Chen (2024), which demonstrated that teacher training significantly

enhances phonetics instructional effectiveness. This is congruent with the study of Fisher (2025), who highlighted the importance of explicit instruction supported by adequate resources. Similarly, Piasta and Hudson (2023) and Vikan (2023) affirmed that teacher knowledge and institutional support are critical to successful phonological instruction.

Advocacy for Curriculum Reform and Targeted Literacy Policies

This theme captures teachers' advocacy for comprehensive curriculum reform and targeted literacy policies that prioritize phonetics instruction as a core foundation of early literacy. Teachers recommended explicit and systematic phonetics integration across all elementary grades, clear learning standards, targeted learner intervention programs, and stronger home–school partnerships. They emphasized that curriculum reform should be evidence-based, culturally responsive, and aligned with learners' actual phonological needs. Teachers viewed policy reform as a pathway to equity, ensuring that all learners, especially those at risk of reading difficulties, receive timely and effective phonetics instruction:

“I recommend that phonetics be integrated consistently across all elementary grades, not just in the early years, so learners do not lose their foundational skills” (IDI3.3.1).

"I believe that policies should mandate regular training for teachers so we can keep improving our phonetics teaching practices" (IDI3.3.2).

"I feel that learner support programs like small-group tutoring and remedial classes should be institutionalized to help struggling readers" (FGD3.3.3).

"I suggest that schools provide materials that are responsive to learners' language backgrounds to make phonetics instruction more effective" (IDI3.3.4).

"I strongly advocate for policies that involve parents in phonetics learning because support at home greatly affects learners' reading progress" (IDI3.3.5).

This theme highlights the transformative potential of comprehensive literacy policies that place phonetics at the center of early education reform. Curriculum reform should ensure continuity, coherence, and progression in phonetics instruction, supported by assessment systems that identify and address learner needs early. Targeted intervention programs can prevent the accumulation of literacy gaps, while parental engagement initiatives can reinforce learning beyond the classroom. This theme suggests that effective phonetics instruction requires a multi-level policy approach that integrates

curriculum design, teacher development, learner support, and community involvement.

This is strongly supported by the findings of Abshire (2024), who emphasized the effectiveness of systematic phonics instruction in improving reading outcomes. The results corroborate with the study of Barcoma et al. (2025), which highlighted the positive impact of structured phonics programs on early reading skills. This is congruent with the findings of Nazario-Laude (2023) and Tullente (2023), who advocated for targeted phonological interventions to strengthen literacy. Additionally, the recommendations align with the United Nations (2021) SDG 4 framework, which underscores the importance of foundational literacy in achieving quality education for all.

Table 3. Policy Actions Recommended to Address Identified Phonetics

Learning Needs Based on Teachers' Lived Experiences

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Systemic and curriculum gaps	Curriculum discontinuity, limited time, weak assessment alignment	"Phonics disappears after Grade 3." (ID11); "Lessons are inconsistent	Systemic Gaps and the Need for Policy-Level Intervention	Teachers identified persistent structural weaknesses that limited sustained phonetics learning

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Needed institutional support	Teacher training, materials, assessment tools, class size	across grades.” (IDI2, IDI7)		and required system-wide reform.
		“Teachers need training, materials, and policy-level support.” (IDI1); “We need updated books and tools.” (IDI8)	Need for Sustainable Institutional and Professional Support	Effective phonetics instruction was seen as dependent on coordinated institutional support beyond individual classroom effort.
Proposed policy directions	Curriculum continuity, capacity building, learner intervention	“Phonetics should be integrated across all grades.” (IDI1); “There should be targeted	Advocacy for Curriculum Reform and Targeted Literacy Policies	Teachers recommended evidence-based, continuous, and inclusive policy actions to ensure equitable and

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
		interventions."		sustained
		(IDI3, IDI11)		phonetics
				instruction.

Overall Synthesis of the Results

The synthesis of the results from Tables 1 to 3 provides an integrated understanding of teachers' lived experiences in teaching phonetics, their interpretations of its meaning and significance for literacy proficiency, and the policy actions they identified as necessary to address phonetics learning needs. Across the three tables, the findings consistently revealed that phonetics instruction in elementary education was a complex, context-dependent practice shaped by learner diversity, instructional constraints, curriculum structures, and systemic conditions. Teachers' narratives demonstrated that phonetics teaching extended beyond classroom techniques and was deeply influenced by institutional expectations, curriculum continuity, and available support mechanisms. These results align with literature emphasizing that effective phonics and phonological awareness instruction is embedded within broader instructional, curricular, and policy environments rather than isolated teaching acts (Alsultan, 2022; Clemens et al., 2021; Department of Education, 2023).

Findings from Table 1 underscored that teachers' lived experiences of teaching phonetics were marked by significant challenges arising from heterogeneous learner profiles, linguistic diversity, large class sizes, and limited instructional time. Teachers consistently reported wide variations in pupils' phonological readiness, often influenced by mother tongue interference, unequal exposure to print, and differences in home literacy support. These realities created tensions between curriculum pacing requirements and learners' actual mastery of sound–letter relationships, forcing teachers to make difficult instructional decisions. Despite these constraints, teachers demonstrated pedagogical adaptability through explicit instruction, differentiation, and multimodal strategies. This pattern reflects existing research indicating that teachers often compensate for systemic limitations through instructional flexibility, although such efforts may not fully offset structural barriers (Badillo, 2025; Bermudez, 2025; Bose, 2022). Similar findings in phonics research emphasize that learner diversity and classroom constraints significantly shape phonological instruction, particularly in multilingual and resource-limited contexts (Abdon & Barrios, 2022; Khan, 2021).

Table 2 expanded the analysis by revealing how teachers interpreted the meaning and significance of phonetics learning for literacy proficiency. Across participants, phonetics was consistently conceptualized as the foundation of early literacy, essential for decoding, spelling, vocabulary development, and reading fluency. Teachers viewed phonetics as the bridge between oral language and written text, enabling learners to transition from

sound recognition to independent reading. Moreover, teachers emphasized that phonetics mastery influenced learners' confidence, engagement, and long-term academic performance across subject areas. These interpretations are strongly supported by research demonstrating that phonological awareness and phonics instruction are critical predictors of reading success and later academic achievement (Erbs, 2021; Nkurunziza, 2024; Piasta & Hudson, 2023). Studies further corroborate that learners with strong phonetic foundations are better equipped to comprehend complex texts and perform effectively across disciplines, reinforcing teachers' belief that phonetics learning has enduring educational implications (Abshire, 2024; Schwob, 2024; Tullente, 2023).

Table 3 synthesized teachers' perspectives on policy actions needed to address the phonetics learning needs identified in their experiences. Teachers consistently framed phonetics-related challenges as systemic rather than individual, pointing to curriculum discontinuity, insufficient instructional time, inadequate training, limited resources, and weak assessment alignment. They advocated for policy-level interventions that institutionalize phonetics instruction across grade levels, strengthen teacher capacity through sustained professional development, and provide targeted learner support programs. Teachers emphasized that without coherent policies and institutional backing, phonetics instruction remains uneven and dependent on individual initiative. These findings resonate with national and international literature highlighting the necessity of system-wide reforms to address foundational literacy gaps

(Department of Education, 2023; United Nations, 2021; Vikan, 2023). Research similarly underscores that effective phonics instruction requires coordinated efforts in curriculum design, teacher training, and resource allocation to ensure equity and sustainability (Chen, 2024; Fisher, 2025; Sullivan, 2023).

Finally, the synthesis of Tables 1 to 3 illustrates a coherent narrative in which teachers' lived experiences, professional interpretations, and policy recommendations converge. Teachers recognized phonetics as a foundational and transformative component of literacy development, yet their ability to deliver effective instruction was constrained by systemic and curricular factors beyond their control. While teachers demonstrated resilience and adaptability in addressing learner needs, the findings collectively emphasize that meaningful improvement in phonetics learning outcomes depends on sustained institutional support and evidence-based policy reform. This synthesis reinforces the argument that strengthening phonetics instruction is central to addressing early literacy challenges and advancing equitable educational outcomes, particularly within contexts characterized by linguistic diversity and resource constraints (Abdon & Barrios, 2022; Badillo, 2025; Nazario-Laude, 2023).

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