
Uncovering the Reading Culture of 21st Century Learners of Norberto G. Bacaro Sr. National High School: A Phenomenological Study

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Overview— This qualitative phenomenological study investigated the reading culture of 21st-century learners at Norberto G. Bacaro Sr. National High School, focusing on Grade 10 students. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the study explored the lived experiences of students, identifying critical factors that influenced their reading habits and preferences. Key themes that emerged included the role of familial and peer support, reinforcement from teachers, reading motivation, time management, and the adaptation to both traditional and digital reading environments. The research highlighted a significant shift toward digital reading platforms due to their accessibility, convenience, and cost-effectiveness. However, challenges such as reduced engagement with text, eye strain, and the impersonal nature of digital reading were also reported. The findings underscored the need for educational institutions, parents, and stakeholders to implement strategies that fostered both digital and traditional reading habits. By ensuring access to a variety of reading materials and creating supportive environments, schools and families could cultivate a sustainable reading culture. This study contributed to the growing discourse on how technological advancements were reshaping reading behaviors and provided recommendations for adapting educational practices to meet the evolving needs of 21st-century learners.

Keywords— 21st Reading culture, Grade ten students, Phenomenological study,

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, the reading culture among learners has shifted dramatically, particularly among 21st-century students. Reading, traditionally a gateway to knowledge and a vital component of personal development, is increasingly influenced by digital mediums. A reading culture can be defined as a consistent and habitual engagement with texts, where reading transcends academic necessity and becomes ingrained in the individual's daily life (Ogugua et al., 2019). Developing such a culture from an early age is crucial for fostering lifelong learning skills (Akindele, 2022).

Research suggests that foundational reading habits are often established in early childhood through family and community interactions (Kucer, 2020). Parents play a pivotal role in introducing reading as a valuable activity, with their involvement significantly impacting their children's long-term reading habits (Gayle, 2021). This early engagement forms the basis of a reading culture, which helps shape cognitive, emotional, and social development throughout a person's life

(Sagitova et al., 2019).

However, as digital technologies have become more integrated into daily life, especially among younger generations, reading habits have undergone significant changes. Chudinova (2020) discusses how the rise of media culture and internet technologies has reshaped traditional reading practices, making digital platforms the dominant medium for information consumption. Students today, often referred to as "digital natives," are more inclined to engage with texts through e-books, audiobooks, and online articles (Long Szabo, 2019). This shift has created both opportunities and challenges for educators, parents, and policymakers as they strive to maintain a robust reading culture amidst distractions brought by digital tools and entertainment platforms. In all of the technologies in the 21st century, (Balladares, 2024) emphasized that classroom structuring matched with digital technologies significantly increases performance of teachers and students.

The Philippine context reflects this global trend, with the Department of Education stressing the importance of sustaining reading programs beyond celebratory events like National Reading Month (Yabes, 2021). Although a national survey showed that many Filipinos still prefer printed books, a growing number of younger readers are turning to digital formats such as e-books and audiobooks (National Book

Development Board, 2019). Additionally, studies like those conducted by Guimba and Alico (2019) highlight the increasing prevalence of reading anxiety among students when traditional classroom methods do not align with their personal interests or when teachers impose unengaging reading tasks, hence a more collaborative type of teaching reading is suggested and has been found out by (Lupiba, 2024) to be effective and engaging at the same time .

Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory underscores the importance of social interaction in learning which was also used in the study of (Bargayo, 2024), particularly in the development of reading skills. According to Vygotsky (1978), cognitive development is deeply influenced by the social environment, and reading is no exception. This theory suggests that fostering a reading culture is not only about providing access to books but also about creating supportive social structures that encourage engagement with texts. Moreover, Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) emphasizes that learning, including the cultivation of reading habits, is a cyclical process involving concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. However, with all the mentioned strategies and studies in reading improvement, it was mentioned by (Miguel, 2024) that sustained teacher support, customized interventions, and consistent monitoring on student literacy development should be present.

Thus, understanding the changing landscape of reading habits, especially among the 21st-century learners of Norberto G. Bacaro Sr. National High School, is critical for adapting teaching strategies that effectively engage students in both traditional and digital reading formats.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design, chosen to explore and interpret the lived experiences of 21st-century learners concerning their reading culture. Phenomenology, as described by Creswell (2013), is a qualitative approach that seeks to understand how individuals perceive and make sense of their experiences, with the aim of providing a rich description of the phenomenon under investigation. This methodology is particularly appropriate for this study because it allows for an in-depth exploration of students' subjective experiences and insights into their reading habits, preferences, and challenges.

The phenomenological approach is grounded in the understanding that reality is constructed through the lived experiences of individuals. By focusing on the "essence" of these experiences, phenomenology allows the researcher to delve into the deeper meanings that participants ascribe to their reading activities (Moustakas, 1994). This research approach is particularly valuable when the goal is to reveal commonalities in experiences across a group of individuals, as it seeks to understand the universal elements of a particular phenomenon, in this case, reading culture.

The study was conducted at Norberto G. Bacaro Sr. National High School, where Grade 10 students were selected as the target population. The school was chosen for its accessibility and because the researcher sought to promote a deeper understanding of the reading culture within this specific educational context. The participants were purposively

selected based on specific inclusion criteria: they needed to demonstrate active engagement with reading, whether for academic purposes, personal interest, or leisure. This sampling method was employed to ensure that the participants were able to provide relevant, rich data that would contribute meaningfully to the study's objectives.

Purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method, was used to deliberately select participants who were well-positioned to provide detailed insights into the research questions. As Black (2020) suggests, purposive sampling is appropriate when the researcher seeks to obtain a representative sample that will generate the most relevant information for the study's aims. The selected participants included students who were members of reading clubs, as well as those who reported strong reading habits, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of various perspectives on reading culture.

Data were collected using in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). These methods were chosen for their capacity to yield detailed, personal accounts of the participants' experiences. Interviews allow for a nuanced exploration of individual perspectives, while FGDs offer a platform for participants to engage in dialogue and potentially reveal shared experiences or contrasting viewpoints. According to Patton (2020), qualitative interviews provide a way to uncover not only factual information but also the values, perceptions, and emotions that shape participants' engagement with the phenomenon under study.

The interview questions were semi-structured, enabling the researcher to explore key themes while allowing participants the freedom to express their thoughts and reflections openly. Semi-structured interviews are particularly valuable in phenomenological research, as they facilitate the discovery of both anticipated and emergent themes, enhancing the depth and breadth of the analysis (DeFranzo, 2021). The interviews were conducted in a setting conducive to participant comfort, free from external distractions, which encouraged open and honest dialogue.

The interviews and FGDs were recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the data. Transcriptions were then reviewed by the participants for member checking, a technique used to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research (Lincoln Guba, 2019). This process allowed participants to confirm that their statements were accurately represented and provided an opportunity to clarify any misunderstandings.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data collected from interviews and FGDs. Thematic analysis is a widely used method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data (Braun Clarke, 2021). It involves systematically coding the data, identifying recurring themes, and interpreting the significance of these themes in relation to the research questions.

The analysis followed the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) familiarizing oneself with the data through repeated reading of transcripts, (2) generating initial codes to identify relevant data features, (3) searching for themes by collating codes into potential themes, (4) reviewing themes to refine them and ensure they accurately represent the data, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report.

To ensure rigor, the researcher engaged in reflexivity, critically reflecting on their own biases and assumptions throughout the research process. This practice aligns with Morrow's (2020) recommendations for maintaining the credibility and validity of qualitative research. Triangulation was also employed by cross-referencing findings from interviews and focus groups with relevant literature and existing research on reading culture. This process helped to validate the study's conclusions by ensuring consistency and coherence across multiple data sources.

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2018). To enhance credibility, prolonged engagement with the participants was maintained through multiple interviews and follow-up discussions, allowing for a deeper understanding of their reading habits. Transferability was addressed by providing detailed descriptions of the participants' context and experiences, enabling other researchers to assess the applicability of the findings in similar settings. Dependability was ensured through a transparent and systematic data collection and analysis process, documented in detail to allow for potential replication. Finally, confirmability was achieved through member checking and maintaining an audit trail of decisions made during the research process.

Ethical considerations were carefully adhered to throughout the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing their identities. All data, including interview recordings and transcripts, were securely stored, ensuring that participants' privacy was protected at all stages of the research.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study revealed several significant findings regarding the reading habits and preferences of 21st-century learners at Norberto G. Bacaro Sr. National High School. One of the most prominent themes identified through the interviews and focus group discussions was the growing reliance on digital formats for reading. Students frequently expressed that they find e-books and online resources more accessible and practical compared to traditional print books. This transition to digital reading is driven primarily by convenience, affordability, and the wide availability of materials online. For many students, digital reading fits seamlessly into their technology-centric lifestyles, where smartphones and tablets serve as their primary tools for both academic and leisure activities.

However, while digital reading offers many advantages, some students also voiced concerns about the drawbacks, such as eye strain and a perceived lack of connection to the material when compared to physical books. This sentiment echoes findings from previous studies (Weber, 2019), which suggest that despite the convenience of digital formats, print reading still holds value for deeper cognitive engagement.

Another key factor influencing the reading habits of these learners is the support they receive from family, teachers, and peers. Many participants cited parental involvement as a critical

motivator for their early interest in reading. Consistent with Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, the presence of a supportive social environment was identified as crucial in shaping students' reading behaviors. Teachers also play a vital role, particularly in offering mentorship and guiding students towards reading materials that align with their interests and academic needs.

The study also highlighted the importance of creating conducive reading environments both at home and in school. Many students reported that having access to diverse and engaging reading materials in comfortable settings was essential for maintaining their reading habits. This finding aligns with the work of Akindele (2022), who emphasized the role of a nurturing environment in cultivating a lifelong love for reading.

In terms of motivation, students indicated that their interest in reading is often tied to the availability of materials that resonate with their personal experiences or preferences. When students are allowed to choose their reading materials, they are more likely to engage deeply with the content and develop sustained reading habits. This insight suggests that educators should adopt more flexible approaches to reading assignments, allowing for greater student autonomy in selecting texts.

The results also underscored the growing need for schools to adapt to the changing reading preferences of students by incorporating both digital and print resources. Libraries and reading facilities should be equipped not only with traditional books but also with digital resources that cater to the modern reader. Schools should also consider promoting digital literacy alongside traditional literacy, as students must develop the skills necessary to navigate, evaluate, and critically engage with digital texts.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to uncover the reading culture of 21st-century learners at Norberto G. Bacaro Sr. National High School through a phenomenological lens. The findings revealed that while traditional reading habits persist, there is a growing shift towards digital-based reading, motivated by convenience, accessibility, and the practicality of e-books. Key factors influencing students' reading habits include familial and peer support, the role of mentors and teachers, and the availability of reading materials. The research also highlighted how students' preferences are shaped by their environment, their motivation for reading, and the increasing role of technology in their everyday lives.

The study's thematic analysis revealed that while many students value reading, they lack structured reading plans. Instead, their reading habits are spontaneous and often influenced by external motivators like academic requirements or the availability of engaging content. However, the data also pointed to significant challenges, particularly in accessing sufficient and diverse reading materials, both digital and print, as well as the limitations of school libraries that may not cater to the evolving preferences of modern learners.

The findings have important implications for educators, school administrators, parents, and policymakers. First, the study underscores the necessity of fostering supportive environments at home and in schools to cultivate a strong reading

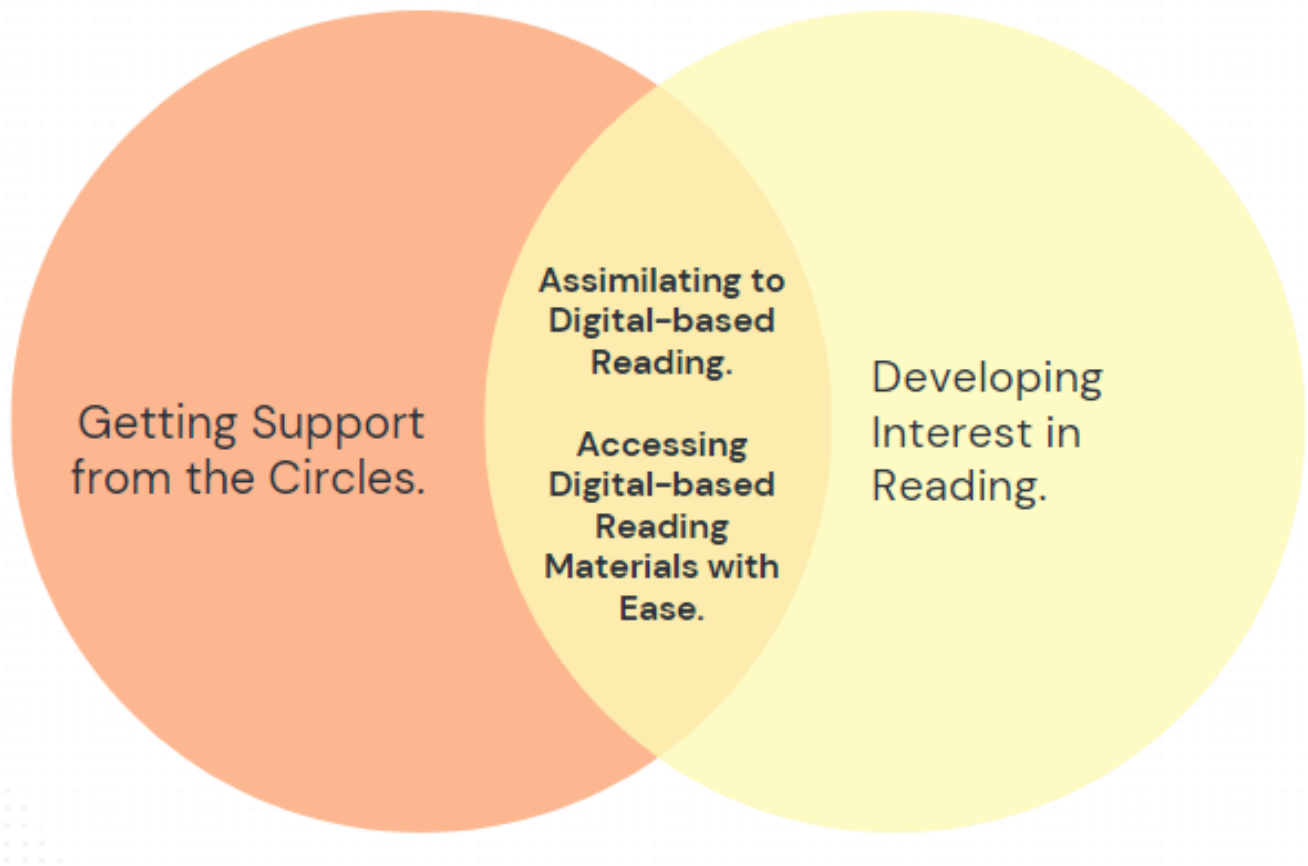


Fig. 1: Major Themes

culture. Parents should encourage reading as part of daily activities, not just during academic periods. Teachers must also take an active role in motivating students by offering a diverse range of reading materials, incorporating both print and digital resources, to cater to varied interests and learning styles. They should model good reading habits themselves and provide students with opportunities to choose texts that resonate with their personal experiences and interests.

Second, there is a pressing need for educational institutions to adapt to the digital realities of 21st-century learners. This includes investing in digital infrastructure such as e-libraries and ensuring that students are digitally literate. Schools should consider introducing programs that integrate digital reading into the curriculum, such as encouraging students to use reputable online platforms (e.g., Google Scholar, JSTOR) for academic research. Such programs can help balance the use of traditional and modern reading materials while fostering critical digital literacy skills.

Third, school libraries must evolve to remain relevant in this digital age. Libraries should be well-equipped with both print and digital resources that align with students' academic and leisure reading preferences. In addition, creating more inviting and flexible library spaces that allow students to engage with reading materials in a relaxed and comfortable environment can boost interest in reading.

This study provides a foundation for further exploration into the reading culture of 21st-century learners, yet several areas remain for future research. First, broader studies encompassing multiple schools or regions could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how reading habits vary across different contexts, especially in rural versus ur-

ban settings. This would help determine whether the challenges and preferences identified in this study are widespread or context-specific.

Second, future research could focus on the long-term impacts of digital reading on comprehension and cognitive engagement. While digital reading is convenient, there are concerns regarding the depth of engagement it fosters compared to traditional print reading. Understanding how digital versus print mediums affect students' reading comprehension, critical thinking, and retention over time would provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers.

Third, it is also recommended that future research explore the role of reading plans or structured reading activities and their impact on students' academic performance and personal development. Encouraging students to develop regular reading schedules or personal reading goals may help in fostering a more sustained reading culture.

Future studies should investigate digital inequalities, particularly in terms of access to technology and e-resources. This research could shed light on how socioeconomic factors influence the ability of students to access diverse reading materials, thereby shaping their reading habits and overall academic success. Addressing these inequalities will be crucial in ensuring that all students, regardless of background, have equal opportunities to develop strong and enduring reading habits.

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