

# Exploring What it Means to Teach Reading Underachievers in Elementary School

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## I. Introduction

The motivation of this study was to understand and interpret how elementary school teachers define the meaning of teaching reading underachievers. In order to discuss practical and effective teaching plans for reading underachievers, it is necessary to investigate the perceptions and experiences of teachers in the education field. Examining the difficulties encountered and overcome by teachers in the process of teaching reading is as important to the development of teachers' professionalism as it is to identifying learners' reading processes. In other words, the study aimed to identify how the professional teaching of Basic Korean Literacy begins and develops by analyzing the experiences and perceptions embedded in the narratives of teachers as educational agents.

In order to achieve the purpose of the study, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with 10 elementary school teachers who were tutoring "reading underachievers" after school in North Jeolla Province. Participants in the study were in-service teachers who were tutoring reading underachievers at the time of the survey or those who had been doing so for many years. The participants actively talked about their hands-on experience in teaching reading under-

achievers, including the status of support for these learners at their schools. Their narratives, obtained from two-month interviews with the researcher, are the most important sources of this study. These data were analyzed by the thematic analysis and the causal chain analysis. The main research questions are as follows:

- 1) How did the elementary school teachers begin to tutor reading underachievers and what is the driving force behind it?
- 2) What difficulties do they face in the course of tutoring reading underachievers?
- 3) What does tutoring reading underachievers mean to the elementary school teachers?

## II. Literature Review

### 1. The concept and characteristics of reading underachievers in Korea

In elementary school, reading underachievers refer to learners whose current level of reading is significantly behind their peers. Underachievers' poor reading skills have recently drawn keen attention not only from the educational community but also from society for possibly causing great trouble in learning other subjects, raising concerns that they could lead to widening the education gap. It should be emphasized, however, that reading underachievers are *slow learners* who do not have innate impairments in learning reading and therefore have the potential to improve through the process of reading instruction and learning. In the education field of Korean elementary school, underachievement has been mainly categorized into underachievement of math and that of Korean language learning. Among them, underachievement of Korean language is often regarded as a case where a learner does not have the ability to read and write Ko-

rean to actively participate in the teaching-learning process occurring in the school classroom. In other words, the definition of reading underachievers varies from researcher to researcher without a clear agreement yet, but Lee (2001) defined them as “learners who have the potential to read but do not reach the average level of the grade.” In general, reading underachievement, among various types of reading disorders, is considered a representative type of slow learning in elementary school, which is likely to improve when teaching and tutoring the children in ordinary classes without having to hold separate exclusive classes.

According to a study by Chun (1999a) on early reading development, elementary school students in grades 1 and 2 are in *the early stage of reading*, a period of transitioning from phonetic language to written language. The learners of this period recognize the relationship between letters and sounds, realizing that communication is possible by writing as well as speaking. That is, the lower grade years in elementary school is a period when they can read words aloud, and thus the activity of reading is important. Only after engaging in substantial reading activities, learners can move to distinguishing the picture from the letter, learning the facts that the letter is an abstract entity rather than the picture and that the words have a constant relationship with the sound. They also learn about the pronunciation and reading of the basic vocabulary and chunking words, phrases, and sentences while reading by the time they reach the next level of learning to read. In this level, learning reading is important because it later serves the basis for learning other subjects.

In the discussion of learning underachievement among elementary school students, researchers universally suggest that it is urgent to teach children who underachieve in Korean language, above all, with appropriate measures (Eo, 2012; Koo, 2007). In other words, the Korean language subject has special characteristics of being a fundamental to other subjects; therefore, if basic education in the Korean language lacks, it will have a domino effect on studying other subjects

(Lee, Kim, Choi, & Ha, 2011, p. 15). The notion of underachievement in Korean language can be largely divided into poor basic functional literacy and poor performance in the minimum academic achievement level of the Korean language and curriculum. In this regard, Chun (1999b) notes that although there is no objective criterion to what extent one's reading ability should be poor or slow, one can be classified as a reading underachiever if lag behind more than a year in the lower grades, two years in the middle school and three years in secondary schools. In addition, he stresses that reading underachievers' reading development does not reach the minimum acceptable level compared to that of their same age group, not because of primarily innate or internal causes but because of environmental reasons, such as a failed teaching-learning cycle. Recently, Um (2017) proposed *research-based balanced literacy* in school education as one of the practical tutorance measures for basic literacy in the Korean alphabet. The proposal highlights the importance of making a methodological transition to providing research-based feedback on comprehensive and balanced teaching practices, which most importantly, depends on in-service teacher-researchers observing and teaching primary school learners of reading.

## 2. Expertise of elementary teachers in Korean language classes

To date, the assessment and reflection of educational reform in and out of Korea have formed a consensus that education reform can succeed only when it is carried out in a sustainable and voluntary manner—not a superficial, temporary, and imposed change—by teachers, in particular, as agents of reform (Seo, 2005). This shift of perception has led to the recognition of the value of teacher professional development as an important task of educational reform, beyond the individual development of teachers. According to Noh (1999, pp. 79-80), the concept of professionalism of Korean language teachers has undergone three major changes. The first change was

the recognition of teacher expertise with a focus on traditional craft. Professionalism of Korean language teachers was regarded as being equipped with a high degree of professional knowledge and skills, which they use to teach students. The second change highlighted capability-based professionalism. According to this view, it is important for Korean language teachers to move one step further from repeatedly teaching detailed functions to qualifying for meeting the unique needs of the educational situation by cultivating their human, moral, emotional and perceptual abilities. The third view defined inquiry-oriented expertise of Korean language teachers. That is, Korean language teachers should be able to apply their internalized knowledge and relevant functions in new and different environments. This view regarded teacher training of Korean language teachers as a process of solving problems or using strategies.

Recently, researchers in the teacher training field has been increasingly showing interest in developing a variety of ways to promote teacher characteristics and voluntary learning as adult learners, and the learning organization required by teachers is being conceptualized as a learning community that emphasizes spontaneity, contextuality, co-operation, solidarity and sustainability (Gu, W. H., Na, G. S., Hoang, Y. J., Park, Y. H., & Ha, J. M, 2010, pp. 579-580). Another important concept in the discussion of teacher professionalism is self-directed teaching competence. In other words, self-directing of teachers is very important to increase teacher expertise and improve classroom culture because when teachers are aware of problems in their own classroom practice and have self-directed ability to constantly grow as teachers by improving them, they can address the extant problems of classroom practices (Gu et al., 2010, p. 581).

According to Kim (2010), elementary school teachers in general tend to give a top priority to understanding learner developmental characteristics in terms of professionalism, undermining the understanding of subject knowledge in individual classes. For this reason, the most important criterion to denote expertise of Korean language

teachers in middle and high schools is likely to be different from that of elementary school teachers. In addition, due to the nature of elementary school teachers, who are responsible for teaching most of the classes except for some specialized subjects, it is difficult to have expertise on a particular subject unless individual teachers are interested in a particular subject and willing to enhance their expertise (Kim, 2010, p. 98).

The term expertise in specialized subjects, as in the case of secondary school teachers, denotes a view that has already failed to reflect the special nature of elementary school teachers. In other words, expertise of elementary school teachers in Korean classes focuses on the enhancement of students' Korean proficiency (the course of implementation and results) rather than on the Korean language curriculum (knowledge and content of Korean language). Thus, expertise of elementary teachers in Korean classes should be discussed at a different level from the knowledge of the content of Korean language which is thought to be narrowed down to Korean language subject. That is, expertise of elementary school teachers in Korean language classes should reflect what it is that elementary school learners should achieve as concrete ability to use Korean language and how the ability can be cultivated, which are the foci of the domain special character mirroring the phenomenon of elementary language education.<sup>1</sup>

For example, unique lessons observed in primary Korean language education phenomena regarding basic literacy are reading aloud, writing words or sentences according to the correct spelling, reading in proper semantic units and teaching letters through children poems or fairy-tale. The methods of Korean language classes

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1 In this regard, Shin et al. (2015) clarified in the preface of <Understanding Practices of Elementary Korean Language Classes> that "elementary Korean classes cannot be the same as math, science, social studies and other subjects in terms of teaching content and how language is dealt. Also, they cannot be the same as Korean language classes in secondary school due to differences in language experiences or language-related knowledge of the target children."



dealing with this content are also distinct from those of Korean language classes conducted in early or secondary education. The study of expertise of elementary school teachers in Korean language classes can be initiated based on an understanding of this elementary-level Korean language phenomenon.

### III. Methods and Findings

#### 1. Participants and methods

This study is based on data from individual in-depth interviews with elementary school teachers to gain a deep understanding of the process, difficulties, and needs of teaching impeded readers. Table 1 shows the information of the study participants and their interviews.

**Table 1.** Information of Study Participants, Interview Dates and Venues

Date	ID no.	Venue	Workplace (North Jeolla Province)	Grade in charge	Total teaching experience (with reading underachievers)
2018.6	T1 <sup>2</sup>	T1's classroom	Namwon,	Grade 5	1 year(1 year)
2018.6	T2	T2's classroom	Namwon	Grade 3	5 years(2 years)
2018.6	T3	School counselling room	Jeonju	Grade 3	4 years(1 year)
2018.6	T4	A teacher's club room	Jeonju	Grade 2	15 years(8 years)
2018.7	T5	A teacher's club room	Gunsan	Grade 5	17 years (7 years)
2018.7	T6	A nearby café	Jeongeup	Grade 1	11 years(5 years)
2018.7	T7	Researcher's office	Jeonju	Grade 1	14 years(5 years)
2018.7	T8	Researcher's office	Imsil	Grade 2	10 years(4 years)
2018.7	T9	A lecture room	Jeonju	Grade 6 <sup>3</sup>	25 years(9 years)
2018.7	T10	T10's classroom	Gimje	Grade 2	12 years(3 years)

2 T1 means Teacher 1.

3 T9 was not in charge of a homeroom class, having been appointed to a vice principal, but was tutoring a sixth-grade reading underachiever, in particular.

The interview survey was conducted on 10 teachers with experience in tutoring reading underachievers in elementary school from late June to July in 2018. They have been acquainted with the author as well through teacher club activities such as the Institute for Elementary Korean Education; they were willing to participate in the study. All participants in the study are field teachers who have started to tutor reading underachievers as of the date of the interview survey or have been tutoring reading underachievers for many years. The study participants understood the purpose of the study and were enthusiastic in providing their own experiences for the study. During the interview, they gave a detailed account of their tutoring experience and the status of reading underachievers at the school where they work. The interviews took approximately from 1 hour and a half to 2 hours and a half for each participant and were conducted one-on-one with the interviewees. The interview questions were prepared in advance and presented as an open-ended questionnaire to the interviewees. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The first transcribed interviews were analyzed by the thematic analysis<sup>4</sup> and the analysis results were visualized using the causal chain analysis. Causal chain analysis is one of the methods in qualitative studies that can be used in conjunction with classification system analysis or component analysis to identify the cause of a particular situation (Lee & Kim, 2005, p. 152). Causal chain shapes differ only in the form of transforming the classification system analysis shape using lines and words, or in the line connecting the joints with the cause and result (cause and result), which has the advantage of adding the word “because” between the cause and the result for a more systematic and in-depth analysis (Kwon, 2016; Lee, 2010). The results were analyzed based on the discussion between the two researchers, a teacher train-

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4 Thematic analysis is a useful method to collect cases or short anecdotes from various stories and induce common topics or content. Thematic analysis is mainly used to analyze a large number of narratives and is useful for theorizing phenomena or for detailing already developed theories (Park, 2014, p. 176).

er and an in-service teacher, and the final results of the study were shared with the study participants to be verified again.

## 2. Findings

1) What are the motivation and drive of elementary school teachers to start tutoring reading underachievers?

: “Encounters” between reading underachievers and teachers

As shown in Table 1, some participants in the study have been tutoring reading underachievers at school for more than seven years; for a shorter period of time, one novice teacher has been tutoring from the beginning of her career for a year. Teacher 2 in [Excerpt 1] has a total of five years of teaching experience, which rather belongs to the younger teacher group. Ever since she was appointed as a new teacher, she was in charge of sixth graders, not affording to pay attention to basic Korean reading, teaching any reading underachievers or recognizing the need for tutoring. It was not until 2018 when she was assigned to the third grade that she realized that there were students in class who were not able to read Korean, which is when she first thought about how to teach reading underachievers. Participants in the study commonly revealed that they first became interested in tutoring reading underachievers when they happened to find an actual student in their class who seemed to be impeded in reading. In [Excerpt 2], teacher 8 also talks about her first encounter with a reading underachiever in her fourth grade class. The study participants faced the question of how to teach reading underachievers only after encountering their reading problems.<sup>5</sup>

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5 According to the survey on the status quo of coaching reading underachievers in Seo (2019, pp.174-176), 80 percent of the surveyed teachers answered that they have reading underachievers in their classes and about 50 percent of them were actually coaching those students. 83 percent of the coaching teachers reported that they “voluntarily began coaching reading underachievers after learning about their problems with reading.”

[Excerpt 1]

T2: (teaching reading underachievers) It's just a field I'm not interested in. I was just not interested.

Researcher: Since you've been in charge of sixth graders every year.

T2 : Yeah, that's right.

[Excerpt 2]

Researcher: When and how did you start tutoring reading Korean?

T8: I was in charge of a fourth grade class in 2013, when I met a kid who couldn't even write his name properly. I thought it was too late to teach him how to read and write in fourth grade...And I thought I should take responsibility for tutoring first and second graders (to help them read Korean)...From the following year, when I volunteered to take charge of first graders, I started looking for various educational methods (for teaching Korean reading).

[Excerpt 3]

Researcher: How did you continue to tutor Korean reading underachievers , which is a challenging task?

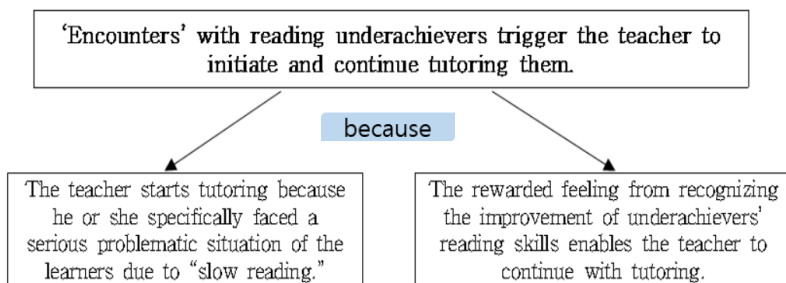
T8: The third-grader's (inadequate) behavior was modified, anyway. His finger-sucking behavior was fixed, so he's come to not suck his finger. (As for tutoring reading Korean,) He would always say that he wanted to leave, only looking at the clock. (omitted) I didn't know that learning phonology was important in third grade textbook, so I didn't teach that. Except for that book, I've taught fluency in fourth grade.

Researcher: Then, did you get to see any changes in the student such as getting along with friends better (as a result of being able to read Korean)?

T8: Of course, his relationship with friends got better and so his attitude in class did. Like more active (in participating). And that's why I can't stop doing this.

As shown in [Expert3], it is a very difficult process to teach learners with slow improvement in reading Korean, but once the learners

read correctly, ripple effects vary widely. In other words, not only does the learner efficacy soar, but also a positive *learner identity* is created, making learners feel rewarded as well as the tutoring teacher. In an ethnographic study on teacher's self-cultivation by Song (2017), the teacher described the joy of tutoring a learner to be able to read as "I was crying tears of joy. It was not just a little but incredible feeling of joy. I've tasted the greatest happiness in my whole career as a teacher" (Song, 2017, p.46). The analysis of the interview data shows that the motivation and drive of the teachers to initiate tutoring reading underachievers are their encounter with the students. Teachers begin to tutor reading underachievers when they encounter them in their homeroom classes, learn about their struggle with reading impediment, and make continuous efforts while watching their progress. The driving force of these teachers to begin, continue, and develop tutoring reading underachievers can be visualized by the cause chain analysis method as Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** The driving forces of elementary school teachers to begin and continue tutoring reading underachievers

2) What are the difficulties elementary school teachers encounter in tutoring “reading underachievers”?

: cluelessness, teacher exhaustion, and dilemma

The difficulties felt by study participants in tutoring reading underachievers were largely categorized by insufficient support and ex-

pertise in tutoring reading underachievers and a lack of cooperative system among schools, parents and students. In [Excerpt 4], teacher 1 expressed the frustration of not being able to apply the theory of customized teaching by level to tutoring reading underachievers, stressing how difficult and time-consuming individual tutoring is. Teacher 4 also asserted the need for support, complaining the heavy workload and a lack of time due to tutoring reading underachievers. Such practical difficulties are likely to cause teachers to stop tutoring reading underachievers and lead to *teacher burnout* possibly resulting in very negative consequences.

[Excerpt 4]

T1: You know you do that a lot when you prepare for the (teacher certificate) interview. They say it's mandatory to provide learning materials by level. You know...(omitted)... In reality though...you don't have time to make them, and it bothers me that I need to give additional materials only to the kids who perform better...I don't think it's possible to customize materials by level (when it comes to tutoring reading underachievers).

T4: I do it after school every day. It's like having another hour of class almost every day. The reason why it's hard for me to recommend other teachers to join (in tutoring reading underachievers) is... I'm having such a hard time myself...A day that I teach until the fifth period becomes a day with the sixth period. A day with the fourth period is a day with the fifth period. So things keep piling up (due to extra tutoring).

The comments in [Excerpt 5] are thought-provoking in terms of difficulties faced by teachers due to a lack of expertise in tutoring reading underachievers. In her interview, teacher 5 confesses that she did not know how to distinguish reading underachievers exactly and that she considered Korean language to be naturally acquired, which she recognizes as a misguided perception. Also, teachers 2 and 4 re-

ported that they had no proper teaching materials or information during either their pre-service or in-service years. Teacher 4 expressed sarcasm about not having an opportunity to learn about reading underachievers even in graduate school, which she decided to go to in the hope of developing expertise in teaching reading underachievers; however, no course was offered. Teacher 2 vividly detailed the frustration of tutoring reading underachievers in the reality of Korean education field. Teacher 9 describes this experience as a dilemmatic, ironic situation, saying that tutoring Korean reading made it more difficult for the learners.

[Excerpt 5]

T5: I used to believe that underachievement in reading was not being able to read aloud, and even if some learners were not fluent readers I thought that they could be just slow and would be able to catch up soon, not seeing them as reading underachievers. It turns out that I left those kids unattended, believing that it's a problem that will take care of itself (naturally) when the time comes in their later grade years...

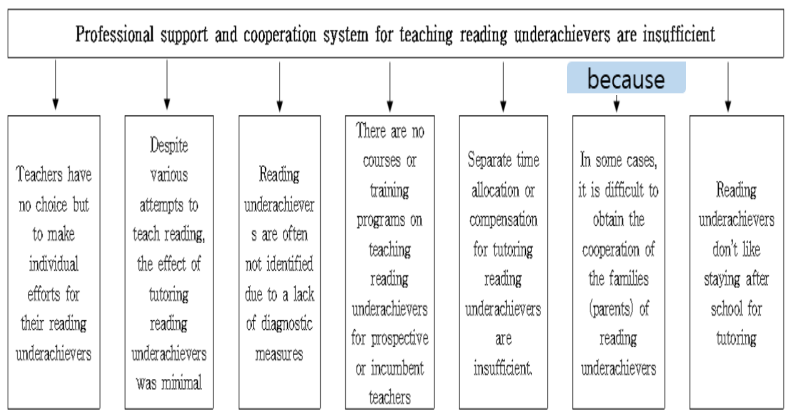
T2: But dyslexia really needs to be treated, right? And...it's the school job to attend to reading underachievers but we have no supplementary materials (for teachers). I was at a loss. Like what am I supposed to do, you know?

T4: In 2010, I met a kid who really didn't know Korean at all. Since then, I've been searching on the Internet by myself. We didn't have this kind of teacher training back then. And that's why I went to graduate school, thinking that I could find a way to teach those kids. (But) I didn't get to find any in graduate school either (laughter).

T9: ...(During my time in teachers' college,) I've never learned how to teach Korean language in a systematic way...(omitted) I tried an old method of teaching the Korean alphabet, which often made it harder for the students... I fell into a "dilemma" where the harder I taught,

the more I felt sorry for my students.

Meanwhile, [Excerpt 6] below illustrates the views or thoughts of students, parents and teachers about tutoring reading underachievers. Students who lag behind reading Korean are apt to have a stigma of the kid who has to stay after school for tutoring, which concerns the students and parents. Although teachers put effort into tutoring these students out of busy time, they often get blame from students who think like “why does my teacher keep me from playing with my friends?”. These ideas serve as another factor that makes tutoring reading underachievers even more difficult for teachers. A truly intact educational activity can only take place in return for the genuine effort and consensus of the teachers, students and parents. Tutoring reading underachievers can also bear fruit through the true interaction of teachers and students, which enables realization of actions. These three main agents of education, namely teachers, students and parents, will have to remember that reading underachievers are just slow learners and cooperate in creating an attentive educational support and climate where unique pace of learning and diversity of learning styles are respected.



**Figure 2.** Difficulties faced during tutoring reading underachievers



[Excerpt 6]

T10: Most of the kids in their first learning process don't understand what's causing the slow progress of reading, and they get better when they have individual tutoring for a resolution... but (as for those who are in the most serious situation) the improving pace is so slow that it's not easy to watch them over without any difficulty.

T6: I had Hope (a reading underachiever) stay after school for individual tutoring every day. I was putting my heart into teaching him, but he was unhappy. He wanted to play with his friends, but could not because of the after-school tutoring....

T7: I used to get calls from parents asking me to send their children home soon. The parent of a reading underachiever I tutored wasn't supportive of the tutoring. The parent used to call me saying, "Please send my child home soon." She seemed to have a negative view of "after-school tutoring."

The difficulties of the elementary school teachers experienced in the course of tutoring reading underachievers can be visualized as Figure 2.

### 3) What does "tutoring reading underachievers" mean to elementary school teachers?

Elementary school teachers in charge of a homeroom class teach a Korean language class almost once a day. As such, Korean language classes account for the core and largest portion of elementary school education. Teachers are especially aware of the importance of learning reading, as it has a significant impact on other learning abilities. At the same time, teachers were aware of their insufficient expertise in how to teach "reading underachievers." This is revealed in Teacher 9's words from [Excerpt 6]. That is, they realized their limitations while learning to teach Korean reading. In addition, in the words of teachers 5 and 6, it becomes clear that tutoring reading underachievers is recognized as elementary school teachers' mission and core professionalism.

[Excerpt 6]

T9: What I realized while tutoring reading underachievers is that we (teachers) don't know how to teach Korean language, you know. And the reason why these kids don't seem to read Korean is not because they don't want to read or write nor they don't want to study Korean out of laziness but because they are not able to.

T5: Because I have a lot of work to do at school. I was like...Just leave the reading underachievers up to the camp or the camp instructor. Urgh, I can't take it on now. I've got too much on my plate already. You know, realistically speaking, I used to put it aside and turn away. (omitted) Helping children in need is my calling as a teacher though. That set my mind to put it into practice and do something practical to help children... (omitted) ...And I know that it (teaching how to read Korean) is the expertise and capability that I need to have as a teacher. That's what I felt.

T6: This kid needs help now. That's why I started to be his reading tutor...because at this stage, it's a necessary foundation. If I don't help him now, he won't be able to learn and may not be able to prepare himself for the real world. So you need to prescribe it as soon as possible and teach them.

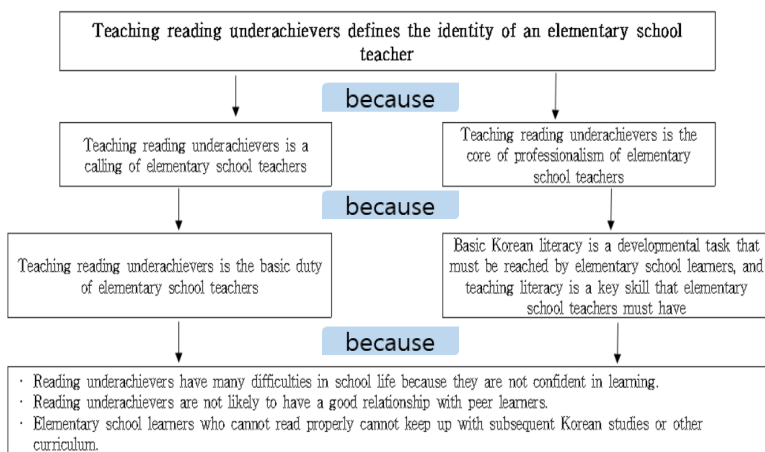


Figure 3. The meaning of teaching "Slow Readers" by elementary school teachers

Basic Korean literacy is one of the important learner developmental tasks to be accomplished in Korean elementary school. Elementary school teachers were well aware that reading underachievers were not confident in their learning, causing many difficulties throughout their school lives, and because of their poor academic performance, they may not be likely to have a good relationship with their peers. Elementary school learners who fail to read properly will not be able to keep up with subsequent Korean curricula or other subjects. Thus, the primary role of elementary school teachers is to find reading underachievers as early as possible and minimize learning deficits by finding the most appropriate teaching methods to solve their problems. Teaching reading underachievers is important enough to define one's identity as an elementary school teacher.

## IV. Conclusion

The study sought to understand the meaning of teaching reading underachievers by looking at the motivations of tutoring them and difficulties faced by elementary school teachers. This effort is to examine the expertise of elementary school teachers in certain areas of teaching reading underachievers as a unique phenomenon in primary language education, which is an attempt to find the causes and solutions of the problem from the voices of teachers as the agents at the heart of the classroom phenomenon. The following narratives from Teacher 9 convey a deep concern about education surrounding reading underachievers.

Students with various causes of poor reading are those who failed to learn reading in the traditional way, and I—a teacher responsible for what these kids learn—actually didn't know how to help them other than repeating the old way of how I learned to read. So it took me a lot of time to look around (how to teach reading) and in the meantime, the

children I had to teach passed the right time to learn how to read.

The teacher struggled to find a way to teach reading underachievers, but during her trial and error, the learners who need to read were far behind their peers. In particular, there is a phenomenon where Korean language education support lags far behind that of mathematics, as the understanding of Korean language and function of expression pursued in the Korean curriculum is difficult to be clearly put into a system or hierarchy, impeded by a strong tendency to approach issues from emotional and psychological aspects. In relation to this, Teacher 5 makes the following point.

(Underachievement in mathematics is noticeable, but that in reading is not so obvious...) after-school reading tutors focuses on math. Learning clinics focus more on emotional and psychological aspects than on the child's learning aspects. However, in the case of Korean reading underachievers, what a child needs is support in (accurate, systematic) learning rather than emotional and psychological support.

When primary school teachers meet their fateful reading underachievers and face serious reading problems of the learners, they actively begin to cultivate their “specialty in teaching elementary level reading.” It is important to provide diverse support so that elementary school teachers can accurately identify learners' reading problems and have confidence in their own ability to select and apply the most appropriate method for their learners in a timely and effective manner. We hope to model the development process of elementary school teachers' expertise in teaching reading underachievers and present type-specific characteristics in detail in an upcoming future study.

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## ABSTRACT

# Exploring What it Means to Teach Reading Underachievers in Elementary School

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This study aims to identify how the professional teaching of Basic Korean Literacy begins and develops by analyzing the experiences and perceptions embedded in the narratives of teachers as educational agents. In order to achieve the purpose of the study, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 10 elementary school teachers who were tutoring “reading underachievers” after school in North Jeolla Province. Their narratives, obtained from two-month interviews with the researchers, are the most important sources of this study. These data were analyzed by the thematic analysis and the causal chain analysis. The main research results show that these teachers began to actively cultivate their “specialty in teaching elementary level reading” after encountering their fateful reading underachievers and face serious reading problems of the learners. Also, teachers were well aware that reading underachievers were not confident in their learning, which may cause many difficulties throughout their school lives. Because of their poor academic performance, underachievers may not be likely to have a good relationship with their peers. Learners who fail to read properly will not be able to keep up with subsequent Korean curricula or other subjects. Thus, the primary role of elementary school teachers is to find reading underachievers as early as possible and minimize learning deficits by finding the most appropriate teaching methods to solve their problems. This study suggests that teaching reading underachievers is as important as defining one’s identity as an elementary school teacher.

**KEYWORDS** Teaching Reading Underachievers, Elementary School Teachers, Narratives, Causal Chain Analysis