

Building reading classrooms: Insights from educational service contracting schools in the Philippines

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Abstract

Reading comprehension is a foundation for lifelong learning. When not honed, this skill greatly affects the learners' ability to perform complex tasks expected of them to achieve the standards set by any curriculum. This study investigated teachers' experiences in implementing reading comprehension strategies among junior high school students in selected education service contracting schools in Baguio and Benguet in the Philippines using a descriptive research method highlighting the cross-sectional survey research design. Findings disclosed that foundational reading comprehension remains a serious issue, with low literacy levels, limited vocabulary, and varying student abilities cited as major barriers. Teachers highlighted that insufficient instructional time, lack of reading materials, and behavioral issues like disengagement and uncooperative attitudes hinder effective comprehension. The study underscores how diverse student needs, resource constraints, and limited instructional support compel teachers to invest additional time and effort, often resorting to simplified translation and repeated practice. Student attitudes toward reading, aggravated by technology and other distractions, reduce engagement and prevent the development of a robust reading culture. To address these challenges, the study recommends a comprehensive reading support program integrating differentiated instruction, expanded access to reading resources, and adaptive techniques for students with diverse abilities. The program emphasizes the need for behavioral and motivational interventions encouraging active participation and developing a more positive attitude toward reading. By prioritizing resource allocation, professional development, and targeted student engagement, this study provides a framework for improving reading comprehension outcomes and fostering a more inclusive and supportive literacy environment.

Keywords: *reading, comprehension, strategies, challenges, quality education*

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1. Introduction

In the twenty-first century, the concept of reading comprehension has undergone substantial change (Sabatini et al., 2019) further highlighting its essence in academic and professional success. The World Economic Forum (2024) presented that 50% of all employees will need reskilling by 2025, as the adoption of technology increases, with critical thinking and problem-solving topping the list of skills employers believe will grow in prominence in the next five years. Thus, in a rapidly evolving educational landscape, it is important to note that reading comprehension skills underpin critical thinking, problem-solving, and content mastery, making them foundational to lifelong learning. Threading on the same thought, Niculescu and Dragomir (2023) emphasize that critical reading is important because it empowers learners to think more critically and make informed decisions based on the information they encounter, making reading comprehension an essential skill in academia, professional, and everyday life. Similarly, Galimpin (2024) articulates that reading comprehension is crucial for enhancing learning outcomes in mathematics and science. However, reading comprehension remains a significant hurdle for many learners, impacting their performance across subjects. Such difficulty is manifested by learners in Indonesia and Arab countries facing challenges like a lack of relevant vocabulary (Lestari et al., 2020), distinguishing main ideas from supporting details, understanding texts from other cultures, and inferring meaning (Ramadhianti & Somba, 2023). Recognizing text types is also a struggle among Arab students impacting their language proficiency and academic performance (Al-Jarrah & Ismail, 2018) while Chinese-English bilingual children with Chinese comprehension difficulties perform poorly in comprehending English (Tong et al., 2017). Similarly, Filipino learners face significant challenges in reading comprehension as manifested by the country's low rank in international assessments and the learners' struggle in various aspects of reading including literal, inferential, and evaluative comprehension (Cabural & Infantado, 2023).

Filipino teachers in the Philippines continually report challenges in teaching reading comprehension due to a combination of diverse student abilities, limited instructional time, scarce resources, and varying levels of student motivation. For instance, Idulog et al. (2023) and Tomas et al. (2021) disclosed lack of resources, socio-economic issues, and non-mastery of reading elements as the main difficulties. Gunob-gunob-Mirasol (2019) found that vocabulary exposure and motivation to read affect Filipino college students' reading comprehension while Villanueva (2022) raised that problem-solving strategies and familiarity

with the Filipino language correlated significantly with the learners' reading comprehension performance. On the other hand, Urbano et al. (2021) emphasized that Filipino high school learners have great difficulty in reading comprehension particularly in recognizing text patterns, evaluating coherence, and vocabulary knowledge, as well as writing challenges like lack of background knowledge and improper citation. The same results were found by Aini (2024) where students frequently struggle with understanding vocabulary and making inferences, which are critical for comprehending complex texts. These challenges are exacerbated by the students' inability to identify the main ideas and details within the text, which Telaumbanua (2024) argued that many students lack effective metacognitive skills, which are crucial for monitoring and evaluating their understanding of texts. This deficiency can result in poor comprehension and difficulty in following instructions. If left unaddressed, these barriers can significantly hinder students' ability to succeed as they progress in their education, where advanced comprehension skills are crucial for engaging with increasingly complex material across various disciplines. Hence, Idulog et al. (2023) and Tomas et al. (2021) highlighted the need for the implementation of early literacy programs, investing in teacher training, the development of culturally relevant materials, and the creation of contextualized reading curricula.

This research is founded on the premise that students' difficulties in reading and comprehending texts—particularly instructions in assessments and classroom activities—substantially hinder their performance in more complex tasks outlined by the curriculum. The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for curriculum development and to assess educators' pedagogical effectiveness in creating classrooms that promote reading comprehension. Ultimately, this study aims to highlight the critical role of educators in addressing the reading comprehension challenges that contribute to the low academic performance of Filipino students. Specifically, this study explores the role of teachers in fostering reading classrooms within Educational Services Contracting (ESC)-participating Junior High School classes. It seeks to understand their experiences in promoting classroom reading comprehension.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Reading Comprehension in the Philippine Schools: A Situationer

The 2023 Global Education Monitoring Report highlights the slow progress toward achieving SDG 4 (Quality Education) based on data from 2015 to 2021. On average, the yearly gain in reading proficiency after primary education was only 0.4%, underscoring that low- and middle-income nations are far from achieving universal minimum proficiency in reading. Alarming, 52% of children live in nations with insufficient data points to calculate learning trends, making progress tracking difficult (GEM Report Team, 2023). This concern is mirrored in a UNICEF report (2022), which revealed that only one-third of 10-year-olds worldwide could read and comprehend a short story. This figure worsened during the pandemic, with 64% of children unable to meet basic reading comprehension standards, compared to 52% pre-pandemic. UNICEF warned that such low learning levels today could translate into fewer opportunities tomorrow, emphasizing the urgent need to address this issue to avoid jeopardizing an entire generation's future. In the Philippines, the learning crisis is even more pronounced. The State of Philippine Education Report 2023, shared by the Philippine Business for Education, underscores the country's discouraging outcomes in international assessments such as PISA, TIMSS, and SEA-PLM. The World Bank (2022) estimated a learning poverty rate of 91%, indicating that nine out of ten Filipino children aged 10 struggle to read simple text. This staggering statistic underlines the urgency of addressing the foundational skills deficit among Filipino learners.

Beyond achieving basic literacy, Bautista and Aranas (2023) argue that Filipino learners must acquire 21st-century skills to thrive in today's world. Reading plays a pivotal role in this context, as Ayanda (2019) emphasizes its ability to enhance cognitive functions and facilitate meaningful learning. Shanahan (2019) further differentiates between reading for explicit meaning and interpreting implicit cues, both of which are essential for comprehensive understanding. Wang et al. (2019) observed a nonlinear relationship between word reading and reading comprehension, particularly for struggling readers, suggesting the need for targeted interventions at different reading proficiency levels.

The correlation between reading struggles and overall academic performance is well-documented. Abril et al. (2022) attributed low accomplishment levels in public schools to students' inadequate reading skills. Balan et al. (2019) similarly hypothesized that difficulties in reading often lead to challenges in other areas of learning, given reading's foundational role

in productive study habits. Bernardo et al. (2022) reported that Filipino fifth graders exhibited the least proficiency in mathematics, writing, and reading, underscoring the widespread nature of the problem. Compounding this issue, Caraig and Quimbo (2022) highlighted that Filipino students often lack confidence in reading, which directly impacts their comprehension abilities. They argued that building confidence in reading is as critical as improving skills, as confident readers tend to achieve higher scores. Recognizing these challenges, the Philippines' Department of Education (DepEd) implemented programs such as Every Child a Reader Program (DepEd Memorandum No. 173, 2019) and the National Learning Camp (DepEd Order No. 14, 2023) to strengthen reading skills and improve learning outcomes in the K–12 curriculum.

Data from the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) further illustrate the state of reading proficiency in the country. In SY 2018-2019, of the 53,372 Grade 4 to 6 students who took the English reading post-test, 301 were non-readers, and 9,090 were at a frustration level, while only 18,673 were independent readers. Similar patterns were observed in Filipino, with 305 non-readers and 11,521 frustration-level readers out of 39,655 tested (Blanza, 2021). These findings emphasize the urgent need for effective interventions to improve reading outcomes. At a regional level, Baguio City officials have expressed concern over the reading comprehension and English proficiency of learners. During a 2021-2022 DepEd survey, only four out of ten children aged 9 to 12 in the city could adequately read and write in English (Cabreza, 2023). Despite interventions, the persistence of non-readers in Grade 7 reveals a gap between efforts and outcomes, even in a top-performing division like Baguio City (Albano, 2021).

Teachers play a critical role in addressing these challenges, yet they face numerous difficulties in teaching reading comprehension. Baldevarona (2020) noted that teachers find teaching reading demanding due to the need for patience, time, and instructional management amidst other professional responsibilities. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of guided reading strategies has been demonstrated in studies like that of Domongas and Doctor (2019), where elementary learners showed significant improvements in word recognition, comprehension, and reading speed. The interplay between reading strategies and comprehension has also been explored by Sun et al. (2021), who found that all four categories of reading strategies based on Weinstein and Mayer's model significantly contribute to text comprehension. These findings align with the broader literature, which underscores the importance of equipping learners with

effective reading strategies to enhance their comprehension skills and overall academic performance.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

Sociocultural theory. Sociocultural theory emphasizes the social context of learning, highlighting how interactions and cultural tools shape cognitive development. This is crucial for understanding the challenges of implementing reading comprehension strategies (Kao & Wu, 2021). Further, this theory is relevant to this study as it highlights the significance of cultural background in reading instruction and how it can improve learners' comprehension and engagement.

Direct and inferential model of reading. The direct and inferential model of reading comprehension by Azevedo and Cromley (2007) served as the primary theoretical foundation for this study. Its purpose was to shed light on the reasons behind the reading comprehension difficulties faced by a segment of American high school learners. According to the study, word reading, inference, vocabulary, prior knowledge, and vocabulary and background information all contributed to comprehension. Furthermore, the direct and inferential model suggests that linkages between prior knowledge, decoding, techniques, vocabulary, and inferential abilities result in reading comprehension (Cubelos & Salceda, 2022).

Constructivism theory. This study is grounded on constructivism theory (University of Washington, n.d.), which asserts that learners construct new knowledge by actively integrating it with their prior experiences and existing understanding. This theory underscores the significance of meaningful interaction in learning, where students and teachers work together to build knowledge.

In this study's context, the challenges teachers encounter can provide essential insights into the struggles experienced by both educators and students. By recognizing these challenges, the study seeks to guide the development of more effective teaching strategies and interventions that can improve learning outcomes. Understanding these challenges from both standpoints can create a more comprehensive basis for addressing issues in classroom practices and improving the overall learning environment. This study was initiated because it was motivated to better understand how teachers deal with their experiences, draw solutions and inspiration from them, and maximize such information to provide quality education to all their learners.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a descriptive research method, utilizing a cross-sectional survey research design, and incorporated qualitative data to comprehensively analyze the research topic. This design was used since the data from the respondents were collected at once, and no follow-up were made after the study was conducted. Thus, the respondents' answers and assessments manifested what they were practicing and adhering to in implementing classroom reading strategies during the data gathering for this study. The study used a cross-sectional survey to generate answers to the problem.

3.2. Population and Sampling

According to DepEd Benguet, about 52 private schools offer Basic Education in Baguio and Benguet, with 57.69% (30 schools) participating in the ESC program. This subsidy helps ease the burden on public schools and provides educational opportunities in areas without public options. In the 2022-2023 school year, Private Education Assistance Committee (PEAC) supported 4,428 ESC-participating schools and about 2.2 million grantees, including senior high school students. Due to PEAC's crucial role in promoting access to quality education for disadvantaged learners, ESC-participating school teachers in Baguio and Benguet were selected for this study. The inclusion criteria include the schools to be ESC participating schools and offering primary education without higher or tertiary level programs. The selected schools must comply with the certification requirements of PEAC and also have access to in-service training provided by the PEAC, particularly in curriculum, assessment, and instruction; they are DepEd recognized, established, and in operation for five years and above thus are sustainable; and the schools are willing to accommodate the researcher and participate in the study.

Complying with the set inclusion and exclusion criteria, ten ESC participating schools were identified—seven Diocesan schools from La Trinidad, Buguias, Atok, Itogon, Bokod, and Kapangan of the province of Benguet and one diocesan school in Baguio City—along with three small schools—two from Baguio and one from La Trinidad, Benguet. Purposive sampling was used since the study focused on the teachers of selected ESC participating junior high schools in Baguio and Benguet who were employing reading comprehension strategies in their classrooms; were able to attend PEAC-sponsored training on curriculum, assessment, and

instruction; and have taught in their school for more than a year after having attended a PEAC INSET to have the opportunity to have utilized insights learned from the training in their actual classrooms. With these qualifications, the participants were deemed to be homogenous and fifteen teachers from the ten identified schools were able to fully participate in this study. The challenges imposed by location, distance, and availability of the respondents enabled the researcher to interview only one to two teachers from the selected schools. Specifically, the respondents were four teachers from La Trinidad, five teachers from Baguio, two teachers from Buguias, one teacher from Atok, one teacher from Itogon, one from Bokod, and one teacher from Kapangan.

3.3. Instrumentation

The primary tool for this study was a researcher-made interview guide. The tool was intended to generate the teachers' challenges in implementing reading comprehension strategies in their classrooms. The Direct and Inferential Model (DIME) of reading comprehension and Constructivism Theory served as a framework for analyzing the responses. The responses were analyzed if the components of DIME such as word reading, background knowledge, inferencing, reading strategies employed by the teachers, reading fluency, and vocabulary exposure of the learners have an impact on reading comprehension of the learners. This was the framework used since it highlights that a deficiency in one area leads to struggles or difficulties in another aspect leading to learners' low comprehension level. Thus, the interview guide highlighted the teachers' experiences in implementing classroom reading comprehension strategies along with follow up questions on the learners' level of reading comprehension, the challenges they encounter in implementing classroom reading strategies, and how they addressed challenges. The interview guide prompted the respondents to enumerate all their experiences implementing reading comprehension strategies in their classes. This allowed the respondents to provide direct insights into their experiences, which formed part of the valuable data for further analysis and probing through sub-questions.

The tool was pilot-tested to establish reliability with the assistance of teachers from the University of Baguio Science High School, an ESC participating institution. These teachers responded to the interview guide through a Google form with an avenue where they can provide feedback and comments regarding the questions, while a tool validator provided

support to the researcher in addressing concerns related to the interview guide questions. validity.

3.4. Data Gathering Procedure

In collecting the pertinent data for this study, the researcher sought the approval of the University of Baguio Dean of the Graduate School for the letter to be sent to selected private junior high schools. Upon signing and being given the signal to send said letters, the researcher communicated with the school heads for their approval as regards their teachers' participation in the study. Once approved, the researcher reached out to the teachers or respondents of the study, sought their voluntary participation, and asked for permission to document any communication with them.

With all things set, the researcher began collecting data by going to the identified schools in Baguio City and the different Municipalities of Benguet, starting with La Trinidad and moving north to Kapangan, Atok, Buguias, Bokod, and finally, Itogon. The first visit was to introduce the research and its purposes and sought approval for the teachers' participation in the study. The second visit was the administration of the interview guide while the third and fourth visits were for retrieving answered interview guides. Participants were cautioned that they could continue or withdraw their participation throughout the research process. At the culmination of data gathering, the researcher analyzed, thematized, and interpreted the collected data according to the variables set for the study.

3.5. Treatment of Data

All data gathered from the researcher-made interview guide were treated as necessary for the study. The qualitative responses to teachers' experiences implementing reading comprehension strategies were categorized and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes, codes, experiences, and challenges.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

The Data Privacy Act governed the actions of the researcher in terms of collecting, storing, and interpreting information from the respondents whose participation was on a purely voluntary basis. All efforts were exerted to ensure the confidentiality of respondents' data from the start until this study was completed. All information was confined within the discussions

for this research and was not shared or brought out while the study was ongoing. To protect the identified population, the researcher declared that there was no conflict of interest in conducting this study. The participants were empowered to withdraw their participation anytime without any consequences or explanations.

Potential risks from seeking permission to conduct the study were also anticipated. Thus, the researcher ensured that all needed documents were processed and approved before conducting the study. Needed communications were sent before the actual school visit and data gathering. A copy of the completed paper was sent to the participating schools along with the respondents who signified interest to have a copy of such for their review to keep everyone updated.

4. Findings and Discussion

Table 1

Teachers' classroom experiences implementing reading comprehension strategies

Theme	Responses	Code
T1: Vocabulary and Language Barriers	"Mother tongue affects the need to translate English or Tagalog words into their own dialect."	1.1. Translation Needs
	"Need to translate the words into local language or Tagalog language."	
	"Sometimes the lesson becomes a word translation class because the teacher needs to translate even simple Filipino words in English."	
	"Students are poor in vocabulary."	1.2: Vocabulary Deficiencies
	"Limited vocabulary knowledge."	
	"Students hardly understand because they have poor vocabulary. Teachers (I, too) need to simplify the terms or explain it in other languages."	
	"Language barriers, limited exposure of the students to the language: English, Mother Tongue influence, pronunciation and grammar."	1.3: Language Exposure Issues
	"In Araling Panlipunan subject, learners have difficulty in associating words because they are more exposed to English language."	

Theme	Responses	Code	
T2: Engagement and Motivation	"Students' disinterest with Filipino-related literature."	2.1: Lack of Interest and Motivation	
	"Lack of interest from the students."		
	"Disinterest of learners, limited vocabulary, interdependence."		
	"Uninterested students."		
	"Some learners are lazy to read. Some learners cannot really comprehend."		
	"Some learners still can't understand/comprehend; that's why repeating is needed."		
	"Students nowadays do not have the patience to read, which sometimes leads to very shallow understanding of the text regardless of what strategy the teacher implements."		2.2: Attitudinal Challenges
	"Developing their love for reading - learners sometimes simply choose not to read the text because they claim that they don't understand it anyway."		
	"Lack of student motivation and engagement. Keeping the students really engaged in reading activities is challenging, especially with technology and other competing interests."		

The experiences of the teachers suggest that they are having a hard time getting concepts across to their students in class. The concerns of the respondents surrounding the lack of basic reading and comprehension skills along with low student engagement and motivation affect the performance of the learners in accomplishing more complex tasks not only in one subject but across disciplines.

Theme one illustrates the experiences of teachers regarding vocabulary and language barriers. A respondent was quoted saying: "*language barriers, limited exposure of the students to the language: English, Mother tongue influence, pronunciation, and grammar.*" This is followed by another respondent saying "*in Araling Panlipunan subject, learners have difficulty associating words because they are more exposed to the English language.*" These problems, as observed by the teachers, can seriously affect the learners' understanding of text-based content. Furthermore, according to the teachers, vocabulary and language knowledge difficulties have a great impact on learners' reading comprehension. In general, to make their students understand the lesson, teachers have to translate terms either from English or Tagalog into the local dialect because the majority of their students use their mother tongue. One

respondent noted that: "*Mother tongue affects the need to translate English or Tagalog words into their own dialect.*" Likewise, another teacher cited that "*need to translate the words into local language or Tagalog language.*" These experiences are supported by Rajathurai (2020) depicting that students often struggle to learn effectively when taught in a language they do not fully understand, leading to high dropout rates. Likewise, Heraña and Azarias (2024) stated that using students' mother tongue enhances comprehension, as teachers often translate terms to bridge language gaps, facilitating better understanding and engagement in the learning process.

Citing another teacher, he said the lesson at times degenerates into a word translation class instead of comprehension skills development since Filipino terms even as basic as baby words need to be garbed with an English or local dialect equivalent. To quote: "*sometimes the lesson becomes a word translation class because the teacher needs to translate even simple Filipino words in English.*" This pattern was also observed by Villanueva and Bert (2023) when they found that intra-sentential code-switching is prevalent, with teachers switching between Filipino and English to clarify concepts, which can lead to a focus on vocabulary rather than deeper understanding. This disadvantage is further impacted by a very low depth of vocabulary knowledge among these students. One teacher cited: "*Students are poor in vocabulary*", and another said that they had, "*limited vocabulary knowledge*" These fuel the struggle to comprehend even modest concepts, which means educators must then simplify or translate words. This persisting requirement for translation and simplification disrupts the learning flow, hinting toward a fundamental vocabulary deficiency. This then makes learners find difficulty in performing more intricate tasks. This finding is also corroborated by teachers reporting significant difficulties in advancing students with low comprehension skills, which can impede their ability to meet academic standards (Lubaton et al., 2024). On the other hand, first-year non-specialized students face challenges like limited vocabulary, inadequate reading strategies, and low motivation, corroborating teachers' experiences. These factors hinder comprehension and engagement, impacting overall academic performance across various subjects (Lan, 2024). These challenges in vocabulary imply a need for stronger language support especially in vocabulary development in order to help students build the necessary language skills for better comprehension. Should this problem persist, lessons will continue to be interrupted by the need to translate or simplify terms and concepts affecting the efficiency and effectiveness of reading comprehension instruction.

The second theme in teachers' responses about their experiences in implementing classroom reading strategies is the lack of student interest and motivation toward reading. Two teachers noted the low interest of learners to read, "*uninterested students*" and "*students' disinterest with Filipino-related literature*," while another pointed out, "*students nowadays do not have the patience to read, which sometimes leads to very shallow understanding of the text regardless of what strategy the teacher implements*." This indifference toward reading prevents students from fully engaging with their reading material and thus contributes to the learners' low comprehension levels. Motivation is crucial for literacy development, as it directly impacts students' reading habits and comprehension skills (Brandt et al., 2021). Likewise, emotional and psychological satisfaction, social values, and multi-modal learning experiences are key drivers of reading motivation among students (Reoperez, 2019). This implies another great challenge for teachers in order to get through to their learners and that is by finding ways to motivate and capture their interest first before delving into the lesson. Kheang et al. (2024) also noted that reading motivation is crucial for enhancing reading comprehension. It emphasizes that a lack of motivation can lead to poor engagement and comprehension, aligning with teachers' observations of students' disinterest and shallow understanding of texts. At the same time, uninterested students face comprehension difficulties and exhibit a sense of failure (Barotas & Palma, 2023).

Teachers even observed that students actively avoid reading: "*Developing their love for reading - learners sometimes simply choose not to read the text because they claim that they don't understand it anyway*." On the other hand, two teachers pointed out a possible factor for this disinterest by saying "*some learners are lazy to read, they cannot really comprehend*" and "*some learners still can't understand/ comprehend; that's why repeating is needed*." Substantiating these findings are studies of McGraw and Mason (2019) stating that students often disengage from reading due to perceived difficulty and lack of comprehension, leading to avoidance. Teachers noted that this disinterest may stem from laziness or inadequate understanding, necessitating repetition to reinforce learning. Daulay et al. (2023) also claim that barriers to reading comprehension include concentration issues and vocabulary understanding which may lead students to avoid reading necessitating teachers to repeatedly expose learners to the text for better understanding. Likewise, factors such as lack of interest, comprehension difficulties, and perceived laziness contribute to students' avoidance of reading (McWilliams et al., 2023).

This lack of engagement is not just about comprehension but also about fostering a mindset where reading is viewed as enjoyable and worthwhile. A good grasp of vocabulary, however, is seen as integral in order for the learners to develop such a mindset. Further, this disengagement from reading activities emphasizes the need for methods that make reading more engaging and relevant to students' lives. As noted by Khasanah and Setyowati (2024), this disinterest leads to shallow comprehension, emphasizing the need for teachers to adopt strategies that inspire and engage students in reading. In doing so, teachers may need to explore interactive and context-based reading activities that can spark interest. It has to be noted however, that without motivating students to read, even the best instructional strategies will have limited impact, as students will not be inclined to practice or improve their skills.

Table 2*The level of reading comprehension*

Theme	Responses	Code
	"Low reading and spelling of the students."	
	"Some students don't know how to read the word, different pace to read."	1.a.1: Low Reading Skills
	"Some students are struggling in reading comprehension."	
Student Behavior and Attitude Concerns	"Lexical comprehension, lack of understanding of what they read, literal comprehension."	
	"Students can read words but fail to understand the ideas of the sentence."	1.a.2: Lexical Comprehension Issues
	Retention, understanding the text; some learners don't know how to read so they can't comprehend."	
	"Some students are being a hard time reading certain words especially the terms in Mathematics."	
	"Some students have a weak prior knowledge or basic understanding/comprehension before I start my lesson."	

Reading comprehension is a foundation of learning which up to now remains a stumbling block among Filipino learners. Teachers noted that the learners' level of reading comprehension is low and weak as stipulated in the responses: "*Low reading and spelling of students*"; "*Some students are struggling in reading comprehension*"; and "*Some students have a weak prior knowledge or basic understanding.*" This implies that the inability of the learners

to manifest comprehension greatly depends on having a strong foundation of their vocabulary and basic understanding. Concepcion (2024) highlighted that junior high school teachers face challenges in teaching due to students' low reading and comprehension skills, which hinder engagement and performance across subjects. This aligns with previous research indicating high levels of reading difficulties among learners in the Philippines.

Teachers also ascertained that certain children were able to read single words, but *"could not grasp the idea or meaning of a sentence."* As one teacher stated, *"lexical comprehension, lack of understanding in what they read and literal comprehension"*. This indicates that students have trouble with more comprehension over word recognition. Furthermore, students read at different speeds, and some cannot keep up: *"Some students do not know how to read the word, different pacing for reading."* The issue intensifies in subjects that require precise comprehension skills such as Mathematics. As one respondent stated: *"Some students are having a hard time reading certain words, especially the terms in Mathematics."* This aligns with the findings that highlighted the difficulties in reading comprehension, such as understanding long sentences and lack of prior knowledge, hinder student engagement and motivation, ultimately affecting their performance across subjects, corroborating the teachers' experiences regarding challenges in conveying concepts effectively (Istiqomah et al., 2023).

These identified encounters emphasize the need for a reading program that goes beyond word recognition and instead focuses on understanding context and meaning. This entails continued training of teachers, coupled with the provision of much-needed resources for the implementation of diverse reading comprehension strategies that can accommodate different learner needs. Without any intervention, Filipino learners will continue to find difficulties in tackling complex text and performing tasks in various subjects.

Instructional challenges along with student behavior and attitude concerns continue to be highlighted in the responses of the teachers when asked about the difficulties they encountered in implementing reading comprehension strategies inside the classroom. This can be attributed to the wide range of student abilities and insufficient instruction time. There were repeatedly similar versions of diverse student abilities, limited instructional time, and difficulty of the lesson being taught or discussed. With the challenge of dealing with individual differences of learners and learner behaviors along with limited instructional time, both teachers and learners find difficulty in achieving comprehension in the classroom. Teachers

often resort to various strategies that entail additional preparation, time, and effort. These observations are supported by Kranz et al. (2022) that time constraints significantly impact the ability to address individual learning needs. Teachers often feel pressured to cover extensive curricula within limited periods. Likewise, teachers face challenges in large classes due to diverse student abilities, limited instructional time, and uncooperative behaviors. These factors complicate the implementation of reading comprehension strategies (Istiqomah et al., 2023). Another respondent simply mentioned a lack of resources — "*lack of reading materials, no enthusiasm maybe learners at risk*". With a limited quantity of resources, teachers need to work with what they have and adapt so that students get everything that is believed in their theory. Similarly, Merga et al. (2020) stated that insufficient resources, including reading materials, hinder teachers' ability to support struggling literacy learners effectively. It is also noted that the scarcity of authentic reading resources hampers effective teaching strategies. Thus, the need for tailored English reading materials to enhance student engagement and address the challenges faced by learners in non-formal educational settings (Pratiwi & Priyana, 2024).

Table 3

Challenges experienced by teachers in implementing reading strategies

Theme	Responses	Code
Student Behavior and Attitude Concerns	"A diverse student abilities: limited instructional time; difficulty of the lesson or topic being taught or discussed." "Time is limited." "Teaching students with special needs on how to read."	1.b.1: Diverse Abilities and Pacing
	"Some students have a weak prior knowledge or basic understanding/comprehension before I start my lesson." "Lack of reading materials, lack of enthusiasm, possible learners at risk."	1.b.2: Resource Limitations
	"Some possible challenges are diverse student skill levels, limited resources (books, internet)." Uncooperative students, finance, incomplete tools and equipment from school." "Short attention span."	
	"Some learners are lazy to read." "Lack of student motivation and engagement. Keeping the students really engaged in reading activities is challenging especially with technology and other competing interests."	1.b.3. Uncooperative Behavior

Additionally, there are unique challenges to teaching students with special needs: "*Teaching students with special needs on how to read*," which takes specialized instruction that is difficult in a time- or resource-scarce environment. Kocaoğlu et al. (2023) asserted that for migrant students with special needs, language acquisition, and cultural integration pose additional hurdles, making it difficult for them to engage with reading materials. These challenges call for better distribution of instructional materials to meet diverse learning needs. Prema and Praveen (2023) argued that teachers face challenges in teaching reading and writing due to students' learning difficulties, which hinder their academic performance. It emphasizes the need for teachers to seek knowledge on interventions to support students struggling with foundational skills. Nam (2021) suggests individualized education programs (IEPs) and specialized instruction, which can be challenging in resource-limited environments. It emphasizes the need for collaboration among educators to share knowledge and improve teaching practices. The provision of professional development that supports teachers in creating practices, habits of mind, or tools they can consider as instruments through which to navigate diversity remains a priority. Until these instructional barriers are addressed, it will be difficult to get all students the reading comprehension strategies they need.

Student behavior and attitudes toward reading also play a significant role in comprehension. Teachers noted issues such as uncooperative students, finance, incomplete tools and equipment from school, and more commonly, uninterested students. The presence of short attention spans further complicates efforts to teach reading. These behavioral issues are intensified by external factors like technology and other distractions, as one teacher observed: "*Keeping the students really engaged in reading activities is challenging especially with technology and other competing interests.*" Students' struggle to reading makes it difficult for teachers to promote a reading culture in their classrooms. Gkora and Driga (2023) found that the prevalence of technology in educational settings has been shown to distract students, making it difficult for teachers to maintain engagement during reading activities. Al-Buraiki (2022) also noted that digital literacy practices, including the influence of internet and mobile applications, affect students' motivation to read. This aligns with the observation that technology and distractions challenge teachers in fostering a reading culture among students. Dealing with student behavior and attitude does not just require a teaching strategy but also one that promotes a healthy learning environment. Hence, carefully embedding technology into reading activities, or by embedding interactive reading tasks that connect with a shared

interest of students would fit. Even the best-organized reading programs are not going to accomplish what they should if students do not change their attitudes toward reading.

5. Conclusion

The study highlights two issues that teachers are combating while continuing to teach reading comprehension strategies; language barriers and lack of student motivation. Teachers often battle with limited vocabulary and the need to translate, making comprehension lessons grind to a halt and turn into vocabulary drills. The learners' reluctance to read, which stems from the obligatory and or difficult nature of academic reading material, is perpetuated by their assumption that they are incapable of text comprehension and so many learners either do not attempt even just to start reading or they simply rush through the content without allowing for patience or motivation required to relate fully on any meaningful level. To solve these problems, an integrated approach combining the enhancement of foundation language skills with a reading-friendly, supportive, and engaging environment is very much essential. It follows also that reading comprehension strategies that address either language or motivation, but not both, will have a limited effect since students who are unmotivated to read will improve little regardless of the pedagogical approach. This analysis underscores the importance of approaches that develop language skills making reading more meaningful resulting in the attainment of the expected level of comprehension.

This study also underscores the low level of reading comprehension of learners serving as a fundamental barrier to achieving academic success. Learners recognize words but have difficulty understanding the meaning of sentences and text in its entirety. This difficulty was greatly noted in subjects that require precise comprehension such as Mathematics. Added to this concern is the diversity of learner needs, pacing in reading, and vocabulary gaps impeding learners' ability to understand content and meaningfully engage with their reading materials. These findings highlight the importance of a holistic and contextualized reading program that goes beyond understanding words to comprehend context and process ideas. Continuing teacher training is a must together with the provision of necessary resources to them for the implementation of diverse reading strategies aimed at specific learners. In the absence of these types of interventions, students will likely continue to struggle with reading comprehension, affecting their overall academic performance and participation.

Teachers face significant challenges in implementing reading comprehension strategies due to a combination of diverse student abilities, limited instructional time, and behavioral and attitudinal issues among learners. The lack of instructional resources further complicates efforts, especially for students with special needs, who require specialized support. Student disengagement, short attention spans, and competing interests like technology also hinder the development of a reading culture in classrooms. Addressing these obstacles will require targeted professional development for teachers, increased access to instructional materials, and strategies that foster positive reading attitudes. Without such interventions, achieving comprehensive reading comprehension in classrooms will remain difficult.

Gleaning from the findings, this study recommends the following for schools, teachers, and administrators to look into for improving the learners' reading comprehension:

Enhancement of learner vocabulary and language skills. Implement targeted vocabulary-building programs, especially for students with little exposure to English or Filipino. Each subject must incorporate regular language drills that need to be part of student schedules, so students can draw on drill skills in class and move away from depending on translation. This may transition learners from recognizing single words to grasping the meaning of an entire sentence or text.

Provision of targeted professional development for teachers. Establish training that assists teachers in using strategies based on either second language acquisition or engagement, such as scaffolding, differentiation, and motivation-focused approaches. Enhance teachers' abilities to use strategies oriented toward addressing the language utilization challenges such as accurately determining culturally responsive reading materials that can establish a connection between the material and the learners. Equip teachers with skills on utilizing technology for better learner connection and engagement.

Implementation of a holistic contextualized reading program. Schools must create a holistic reading support strategy or a reading program by combining language, culturally relevant and interesting material, and engagement of students. The program must target at the same time the dual contextual problems of language barriers and low student motivation that typically hinder comprehension skills. With these components joined to form a comprehensive reading support program together with much-needed facilities and materials, schools can provide an orderly and encouraging environment conducive to developing reading skills while cultivating the students' motivation to learn. This type of program would allow students to

build their reading comprehension skills over time allowing them to become better readers in every class they take and at every single point in their lives.

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This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines set by the University of Baguio. The conduct of this study has been approved and given relative clearance(s) by the University of Baguio Research Ethics Committee.

Declaration

The author declares the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in writing this paper. In particular, the author used SciSpace and Elicit for relevant related literature to corroborate the study; Quillbot in paraphrasing ideas; and Scribbr in generating citations. The author takes full responsibility for ensuring proper review and editing of content generated using AI.

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