

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Comprehension Challenges Among Learners: Intervention and Support System of Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the perspectives of Grade 2 teachers in addressing the reading comprehension challenges of struggling learners in the Santa Maria West District, Davao Occidental Division. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive research design, data were collected through interviews to capture teachers' observations, instructional practices, and insights within their natural classroom settings. Anchored on the Simple View of Reading and Scarborough's Reading Rope, the study examined comprehension as influenced by linguistic, cognitive, instructional, and systemic factors. Findings revealed that learners experience significant difficulties in vocabulary development, word recognition, and higher-order comprehension skills such as sequencing, retelling, and inferencing. Language barriers were evident, as many learners demonstrated greater proficiency in Bisaya and Filipino than in English, often resulting in disengagement and low participation during classroom activities. To address these challenges, teachers implemented scaffolded and adaptive strategies, including guided reading, differentiated instruction, translanguaging, vocabulary enrichment, and the use of visual and interactive materials to enhance engagement. However, systemic constraints such as limited instructional time, insufficient professional training, lack of structured literacy programs, and minimal parental involvement hindered the effectiveness of these interventions. Teachers emphasized the importance of sustained institutional support through targeted professional development, adequate resource allocation, school-wide literacy initiatives, and strengthened family engagement. The study proposes a contextualized literacy support framework integrating teacher capacity building, structured instructional resources, and collaborative partnerships to improve literacy outcomes.

Keywords: reading comprehension, struggling learners, instructional strategies, translanguaging, literacy support

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context and the Global Imperatives

Reading comprehension is one of the fundamental academic skills that enables learners to understand, interpret, and critically analyze information. Beyond the ability to decode words, comprehension involves interpretation and analysis, which are essential components of critical thinking. The importance of reading comprehension is evident in its influence on learners' academic performance across various subject areas. When students fail to understand and evaluate information effectively, they often struggle academically.

Globally, literacy concerns have shifted from simply teaching learners how to read to ensuring that they can comprehend and understand texts meaningfully. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2023), many children worldwide attend school yet remain unable to attain functional literacy because they fail to comprehend what they read. Research further suggests that one of the major literacy challenges is learners' difficulty in understanding and interpreting written language (Figueroa-Macias & Andrade-Zambrano, 2022). This issue is more evident in multilingual and under-resourced schools where access to literacy materials and educational technology remains limited. Kucer (2002) emphasized that developing effective English literacy instruction in multilingual schools becomes challenging due to inadequate technological resources and insufficient instructional support.

International large-scale assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) have consistently revealed disparities in learners' reading comprehension abilities across countries. The PISA 2022 results showed that students from several developing nations continue to struggle in inferring, evaluating, and applying information from texts (PISA 2022 Results, Volume I, 2023). In the Philippines, the situation remains alarming. Findings from PISA 2022 revealed that only 24 percent of Filipino learners achieved minimum proficiency in reading, while 76 percent performed below the expected level (PISA 2022 Results, Volume I, 2023). Although many Filipino learners can decode words, comprehension remains a major concern, particularly in schools where the language of instruction differs from learners' native languages (Tomas et al., 2021). Despite the implementation of educational reforms and literacy programs such as the K to 12 Curriculum, Every Child a Reader Program (ECARP), and the 3Bs Initiative, reading comprehension difficulties continue to persist among elementary learners.

The literacy problem is also evident in Region XI, particularly in the Division of Davao Occidental. Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (2025) revealed that Davao Occidental recorded one of the lowest literacy rates in the country, with only 74.2 percent of individuals considered literate. Furthermore, the functional literacy rate among individuals aged 10 to 64 years was reported at 46.6 percent. These findings indicate persistent literacy and comprehension challenges that may be linked to inadequate funding, insufficient instructional resources, and limited teacher training (Olabiya et al., 2025).

At the local level, schools in the Santa Maria West District experience similar concerns regarding reading comprehension. While many learners can read words fluently during oral reading activities, they often struggle to make inferences, interpret meanings, and evaluate textual content. Results from the End-of-School-Year Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) for School Year 2024–2025 showed a significant gap between learners' oral reading performance and their comprehension scores, with comprehension levels remaining considerably lower. Existing interventions such as remedial reading programs and peer-assisted learning activities have been implemented; however, their effectiveness has been limited due to large class sizes and shortages in instructional resources (William et al., 2025).

Despite the growing concern regarding literacy and reading comprehension, only a limited number of studies have explored reading comprehension challenges from the perspectives of teachers, particularly in the early grades (Orellana et al., 2024). This gap in the literature prompted the conduct of the present study, which seeks to investigate the perspectives of Grade 2 teachers in Santa Maria West District regarding the reading comprehension challenges experienced by learners.

Motivation and scope of the project

This study was motivated by the persistent reading comprehension difficulties observed among Grade 2 learners in Santa Maria West District. Although many learners can read words fluently, a considerable number still struggle to understand, interpret, infer, and evaluate the texts they read. The results of the End-of-School-Year CRLA for School Year 2024–2025 further highlighted the gap between learners' oral reading performance and their comprehension abilities, indicating that reading fluency does not necessarily translate into understanding. Despite the implementation of interventions such as remedial reading and peer-assisted learning activities, comprehension challenges continue to persist due to factors such as limited instructional resources, large class sizes, and contextual barriers within multilingual classrooms (William et al., 2025). In addition, only a few studies have explored reading comprehension challenges from the perspectives of teachers, particularly in the early grades (Orellana et al., 2024). This gap in the literature encouraged the conduct of the present study to gain deeper insights into the experiences and observations of teachers regarding learners' comprehension difficulties.

The study specifically focuses on the perspectives of Grade 2 teachers in Santa Maria West District concerning the reading comprehension challenges experienced by learners. It examines teachers' observations regarding learners' difficulties in understanding and analyzing texts, the contributing factors to these challenges, and the strategies or interventions employed to address them. The study is limited to selected Grade 2 teachers within the district during the School Year 2025–2026 and does not include other literacy components such as writing and speaking skills or learners from other grade levels. Through this scope, the study aims to contribute relevant information that may help improve literacy instruction, intervention programs, and support mechanisms for beginning readers in resource-limited and multilingual educational settings.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT.

Reading comprehension remains a significant challenge among Grade 2 learners, particularly in understanding, interpreting, and analyzing texts. Although many learners can read words fluently, difficulties in comprehension continue to affect their academic performance. In Santa Maria West District, reading assessment results and classroom observations revealed that many struggling learners experience low comprehension skills despite the implementation of literacy interventions and remedial reading activities.

This study aimed to examine the perspectives of Grade 2 teachers regarding the comprehension challenges experienced by struggling learners. Specifically, it sought to identify the challenges observed by teachers, the interventions they employ to address these difficulties, and the institutional or school-based support systems they recommend to improve reading comprehension. Furthermore, the study aimed to develop an output that may help address comprehension challenges among Grade 2 learners and contribute to evidence-based literacy intervention practices.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What comprehension challenges do teachers observe among struggling learners?
2. What interventions do teachers employ to address the comprehension challenges of struggling learners?
3. What institutional or school-based support systems do teachers recommend to sustainably improve reading comprehension among struggling learners?
4. What output can be developed to address comprehension challenges among Grade 2 learners?

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES.

The main objective of this study was to examine the perspectives of Grade 2 teachers regarding the reading comprehension challenges experienced by struggling learners in Santa Maria West District.

Specifically, this study aimed to:

1. identify the comprehension challenges observed by teachers among struggling learners;
2. determine the interventions employed by teachers to address learners' comprehension challenges;
3. explore the institutional or school-based support systems recommended by teachers to sustainably improve reading comprehension among struggling learners; and
4. develop an output that may help address comprehension challenges among Grade 2 learners.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Comprehension Challenges in Philippine Elementary Schools

Studies revealed that reading comprehension challenges in the Philippines are influenced by linguistic, cognitive, and socio-economic factors. In Davao Occidental, learners often demonstrate weak inferential and evaluative comprehension despite being able to decode texts (Moneba & Lovitos, 2024; Deligos, 2025). These difficulties were linked to limited vocabulary, inadequate background knowledge, and insufficient language exposure, highlighting the need for learner-centered and context-responsive instructional approaches.

Understanding the Regional and Local Context

Research in Region XI showed that reading comprehension difficulties were intensified by limited instructional resources, large class sizes, and learners' weak vocabulary and background knowledge. While interventions such as PALS improved inferential comprehension, teacher competence and access to resources remained important factors affecting literacy outcomes (Piator & Villocino, 2024; Paguyan & Taoc, 2022). These findings emphasized the need to explore teachers' perspectives regarding effective literacy practices and contextual challenges.

Teachers' Experiences in Teaching Learners with Comprehension Challenges

Studies showed that teachers encounter difficulties in teaching struggling readers due to limited instructional materials, multilingual classroom settings, and gaps in professional training (Olasehinde, 2025). Despite these challenges, teachers employed strategies such as guided reading, vocabulary instruction, and think-aloud techniques to support comprehension (Brevik, 2019). However, many teachers still lacked adequate knowledge in teaching higher-order comprehension skills such as inferencing and critical analysis (Pikulski & Chard, 2025).

Limited Vocabulary and Word Recognition

Vocabulary knowledge was identified as a key factor influencing reading comprehension. Learners with limited vocabulary often struggle to understand texts even when they can decode words correctly. The Simple View of Reading and Scarborough's Reading Rope both emphasized that comprehension depends not only on decoding but also on language comprehension skills. Studies recommended explicit vocabulary instruction, repeated reading, and contextualized language exposure to improve learners' comprehension abilities.

Language Barrier (English vs. Mother Tongue)

Research highlighted that language differences between learners' mother tongue and the language of instruction contribute significantly to comprehension difficulties. Translanguaging theories suggested that allowing learners to use their native language supports meaning-making and improves comprehension (Turner & Tour, 2024). Studies further emphasized the importance of language scaffolding, translation, and simplified instruction in multilingual classrooms.

Behavioral and Affective Difficulties

Behavioral and emotional factors such as fear, frustration, low confidence, and anxiety negatively affect learners' reading comprehension development. Research showed that struggling readers often avoid reading tasks and classroom participation due to negative reading experiences. Supportive classroom environments, teacher encouragement, and scaffolded instruction were identified as important in improving learner engagement and confidence in reading activities.

Weak Higher-Order Comprehension Skills

Struggling readers often experience difficulties in higher-order comprehension tasks such as inferencing, sequencing, evaluating, and analyzing texts. Schema Theory explained that comprehension depends on learners' ability to connect prior knowledge with new information (Meylani, 2024). Studies emphasized that learners require guided questioning, discussions, and critical thinking activities to strengthen higher-order comprehension skills.

Difficulty in Meaning Construction

Meaning construction depends on learners' ability to connect texts with prior experiences and background knowledge. Research revealed that learners with limited language exposure and insufficient background knowledge struggle to form coherent understanding of texts (Meylani, 2024). Effective comprehension instruction therefore requires contextualized learning experiences and activities that activate learners' prior knowledge before reading.

Interventions and Support Systems in Literacy Education

Studies showed that reading comprehension improves when instruction includes explicit strategy teaching, scaffolding, and continuous assessment (Pocan et al., 2022). Programs such as ECARP and the 3Bs Initiative supported literacy development, although implementation often depended heavily on teacher initiative (Olabiyi et al., 2025). Teachers also adapted instructional materials and used localized and interactive resources to support comprehension.

Guided and Interactive Reading

Guided and interactive reading strategies help learners actively engage with texts through questioning, predicting, clarifying, and discussion. Based on Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory and Reciprocal Teaching, scaffolded interaction supports learners in moving from decoding to meaningful comprehension (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). These approaches also reduce learner anxiety and promote active participation.

Differentiated and Individualized Instruction

Differentiated instruction was found effective in addressing learners' diverse comprehension needs. Studies revealed that learners perform better when instructional activities are adjusted according to their readiness, learning styles, and comprehension levels (Langelaan et al., 2024). Flexible and scaffolded instruction supports struggling readers and promotes meaningful classroom engagement.

Translanguaging and Simplification

Translanguaging and simplification strategies improve comprehension by allowing learners to use their native language while learning English texts. Research showed that these approaches reduce cognitive load and strengthen comprehension among multilingual learners (Turner & Tour, 2024). Simplified instruction and translation also help learners remain engaged in reading activities.

Vocabulary Development Practices

Studies emphasized that vocabulary instruction is essential in improving reading comprehension. Explicit teaching of unfamiliar words, repeated reading, and contextualized vocabulary activities strengthen learners' ability to interpret texts independently (Corpuz et al., 2024). Vocabulary development was identified as an important bridge between decoding and meaningful comprehension.

Use of Visual, Interactive, and Engaging Materials

Visual and interactive instructional materials support learners' comprehension by presenting information through multiple learning channels. Multimedia learning theories explained that combining visuals, audio, and interactive activities improves understanding and retention. Such materials were found especially helpful for struggling readers in early grades.

Institutional and Educational Support Systems

Research showed that institutional factors such as limited instructional time, heavy curriculum demands, lack of resources, and inadequate teacher training negatively affect comprehension instruction (Potane & Booc, 2024). Schools that provided mentoring, collaboration, and literacy support systems achieved better literacy outcomes. Effective comprehension instruction therefore requires both instructional and institutional support.

Structural and Time-Related Constraints

Studies revealed that insufficient instructional time limits teachers' ability to conduct guided discussions and reflective comprehension activities (Ahmed & Pierre, 2024). In multilingual classrooms, additional time is often needed for translation and language support. These findings emphasized the importance of allocating sufficient time for meaningful comprehension instruction.

The Challenge of Instructional Diversity and Learner Complexity

Teachers encounter difficulties in addressing diverse learner needs due to varying reading abilities, languages, and learning styles. Differentiated instruction was recommended to support struggling learners effectively, although large class sizes and limited time make individualized instruction challenging (Goyibova et al., 2025).

Gap in Specialized Comprehension Training

Research indicated that many teachers lack specialized training in teaching higher-order comprehension skills such as inferencing, analysis, and meaning-making (Sewagegn, 2019). Limited professional development opportunities contributed to inconsistent literacy instruction and reduced teacher confidence in handling struggling readers.

Institutional Resource Provision and Self-Reliance

Institutional support through instructional materials, literacy resources, and collaborative professional development was identified as essential for sustainable literacy intervention. Studies revealed that excessive reliance on teacher initiative may lead to burnout and inconsistent instruction (Tao et al., 2025). Schools therefore need structured literacy support systems.

Professional Recalibration and Peer Collaboration

Collaborative professional learning and peer support help teachers improve literacy instruction and share effective comprehension strategies. Wenger's Communities of Practice Theory emphasized that teachers develop professionally through shared experiences and collaboration (Starkov & Zamir, 2024). Such collaboration strengthens instructional consistency and teacher confidence.

Implementation of Integrated Literacy Practices

Research emphasized the importance of integrating literacy practices across school and home environments. Continuous reading support, intervention programs, and parental involvement help strengthen learners' comprehension development (Vance, 2024). Collaborative literacy practices create more opportunities for meaningful reading experiences.

Output Development for Literacy Instruction

Studies highlighted the importance of developing context-specific literacy programs and instructional materials that address learners' language backgrounds and comprehension needs (Adeoye et al., 2024). Effective literacy outputs involve systematic design, teacher collaboration, assessment, and stakeholder participation to ensure practicality and sustainability.

Targeted Training for Comprehension Strategies

Professional development focused on comprehension instruction helps teachers strengthen their pedagogical content knowledge in literacy teaching. Research showed that teachers who receive specialized training become more confident in teaching inferencing, vocabulary, and higher-order comprehension skills (Smets & Tuithof, 2024).

Peer Collaboration and Strategy Sharing

Peer collaboration enhances literacy instruction by allowing teachers to exchange experiences, teaching strategies, and intervention practices. Collaborative professional learning communities improve instructional consistency and reduce teacher isolation (Starkov & Zamir, 2024).

Reform of Time Allocation and Curriculum Demands

Studies suggested that schools should reconsider instructional time allocation and curriculum demands to provide teachers with greater flexibility in teaching comprehension meaningfully. Sufficient time allows learners to engage deeply in discussion, reflection, and higher-order thinking tasks (Scherrer et al., 2025).

Provision of Specialized Intervention Resources

Specialized literacy materials such as guided reading texts, visualization tools, and comprehension intervention programs support struggling readers effectively. Research showed that the absence of ready-made intervention materials increases teacher workload and weakens the sustainability of literacy programs.

Institutionalized Parental Involvement

Parental involvement was found to positively influence learners' reading comprehension development. Home-school collaboration supports vocabulary growth, reading habits, and learner motivation (Vance, 2024). Studies recommended institutionalizing parent participation through literacy programs and home reading activities.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the perspectives of Grade 2 teachers regarding reading comprehension challenges among struggling learners. The design enabled the researcher to gather rich descriptions of teachers' experiences, observations, and interventions in their natural setting without manipulating variables (Tenny et al., 2022). Qualitative descriptive research focuses on presenting participants' experiences clearly and directly, making it appropriate for describing teachers' views, instructional practices, and suggested outputs related to comprehension difficulties (Doyle et al., 2020).

The participants of the study were twelve (12) Grade 2 public school teachers from selected schools in Santa Maria West District, Division of Davao Occidental. Purposive sampling was used to select teachers who had at least two years of teaching experience in Grade 2 and handled classes with at least 50% struggling readers based on CRLA results and teacher records (Bisht, 2024). Six teachers participated in the in-depth interviews (IDI), while another six participated in the focus group discussion (FGD). Participants from the two groups did not overlap to avoid duplication of responses.

Research instruments included researcher-made In-Depth Interview (IDI) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guides developed based on the study objectives, research questions, and related literature. The guides contained open-ended and probing questions focusing on comprehension challenges, teacher interventions, institutional support, and possible literacy outputs. Prior to the actual data gathering, the instruments were reviewed, revised, and pilot tested to ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriateness.

Data gathering followed systematic and ethical procedures. Permission was secured from the Schools Division Office, district supervisor, and school principals before recruiting participants through informed consent procedures. The study began with non-participant classroom observations to examine reading comprehension instruction and classroom context. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were then conducted with six teachers, while another six teachers participated in a focus group discussion. Participants were allowed to use their preferred language to encourage open communication. All interviews and discussions were audio-recorded with permission, and field notes were taken to support the gathered information.

After data collection, all recordings were transcribed verbatim, translated into English when necessary, and validated by the participants to ensure accuracy. The collected data were then organized, coded, and categorized according to the research questions. Confidentiality and data security were strictly observed throughout the study.

4.0 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The findings of the study revealed that struggling Grade 2 learners experience reading comprehension difficulties due to interconnected linguistic, cognitive, instructional, and systemic factors. Teachers observed that many learners possess basic decoding skills but still fail to understand the meaning of what they read because of limited vocabulary, unfamiliar words, weak background knowledge, and language barriers, particularly in English instruction. Learners also struggle with higher-order comprehension skills such as sequencing events, retelling stories, analyzing ideas, and predicting outcomes. These comprehension difficulties further affect learners emotionally and behaviorally, causing passiveness, hesitation, disengagement, and lack of confidence during reading activities.

To address these challenges, teachers employ scaffolded and differentiated instructional strategies that support learners' comprehension development. Guided and interactive reading, one-on-one assistance, translanguaging, vocabulary instruction, repeated reading, and the use of visual and multimedia materials help learners gradually construct meaning from texts. Teachers emphasized that learners comprehend lessons better when instruction is simplified, translated when necessary, and supported with engaging materials that sustain attention and participation. These interventions demonstrate the importance of adaptive and learner-centered teaching practices in helping struggling readers improve comprehension skills.

However, the findings also showed that teachers' efforts are constrained by systemic and institutional limitations. Limited instructional time, curriculum demands, diverse learner needs, lack of comprehension-focused training, and insufficient intervention resources make it difficult for teachers to provide sustained and effective literacy instruction. Teachers often rely on self-made materials and personal initiatives because structured support systems and professional development opportunities remain limited. As a result, teachers recommended the implementation of targeted comprehension trainings, collaborative teacher learning sessions, improved time allocation, specialized intervention materials, and stronger parental involvement to sustain literacy improvement.

Overall, the study highlights that improving reading comprehension among struggling Grade 2 learners requires a comprehensive and collaborative support system involving teachers, schools, parents, and educational institutions. Reading comprehension development is not only dependent on decoding and language skills but also on effective instructional support, teacher preparedness, institutional resources, and active home-school partnerships that work together to strengthen learners' literacy development.

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