

Critical Analysis of Reading Comprehension Difficulty Patterns Toward a Contextualized Reading Intervention Program

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ABSTRACT

This study examined recurring reading-comprehension difficulties among Senior High School learners and used the findings to design a contextualized intervention program. An exploratory sequential mixed-methods design was conducted in six public secondary schools in Victoria District, Oriental Mindoro, during School Year 2025-2026. The qualitative phase involved 12 learners identified as struggling readers through school reading assessments. Data from a baseline comprehension test, semi-structured interviews, and a focus-group discussion were coded and organized into themes. The subsequent quantitative phase surveyed 262 Grade 11 and Grade 12 learners selected from a population of 758 through stratified random sampling. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the manifestation of the qualitative themes. Four interconnected domains

emerged: weak language and reading foundations; limited knowledge and application of reading strategies; motivation and engagement concerns; and inadequate support from home and school. The first three domains showed high manifestation, while home-school support was moderate. The overall result was high ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.09$), indicating that the difficulties were widely shared and mutually reinforcing rather than isolated. In response, the ANGAT DUNONG Program was developed as an 11-week framework combining vocabulary and sentence work, explicit comprehension-strategy instruction, guided and collaborative reading, motivational support, and home-school coordination. The findings support a holistic, sustained, and context-responsive approach to adolescent reading intervention.

Keywords: *reading comprehension, difficulty patterns, senior high school, mixed methods, contextualized intervention, ANGAT DUNONG*

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is central to academic participation because learners must construct, retain, evaluate, and apply meaning from texts in every subject area. It is not a single skill that develops automatically after word recognition. Rather, comprehension depends on the coordinated operation of vocabulary knowledge, syntactic processing, background knowledge, working memory, strategic monitoring, motivation, and opportunities to engage with meaningful texts. When one or more of these elements are weak, learners may pronounce words accurately but still fail to build a coherent understanding of what they read (Kintsch, 1998; Snow, 2002).

Language foundations are especially important for adolescent readers who encounter increasingly specialized and structurally complex materials. Limited vocabulary interrupts meaning construction at the word level, while difficulty processing clauses and connectors prevents learners from integrating ideas across sentences.

These demands also increase the burden on working memory, making details difficult to retain and retrieve. Research on lexical quality and vocabulary learning therefore emphasizes that comprehension improves when learners possess precise word knowledge and can use linguistic information efficiently during reading (Nation, 2017; Perfetti & Stafura, 2018). Explicit attention to sentence structure and conceptual vocabulary is similarly necessary when texts contain unfamiliar academic language (Cervetti et al., 2020; Fang et al., 2018).

Comprehension also requires purposeful strategy use. Effective readers identify central ideas, connect new information with prior knowledge, infer meaning, ask questions, summarize, and notice when understanding has broken down. These behaviors are metacognitive because readers plan, monitor, and adjust their approach while reading. Learners who have not received explicit strategy instruction often resort to repeated rereading, guessing, or waiting for a teacher to explain the text. Such routines may offer temporary assistance but do not necessarily develop independent regulation of comprehension (Duke & Pearson, 2016; Magno, 2010; Oakhill et al., 2019).

Affective and environmental conditions can either strengthen or weaken these cognitive processes. Reading tasks that repeatedly end in confusion can reduce confidence, increase fear of public mistakes, and encourage avoidance of long or demanding texts. Conversely, autonomy, competence, constructive feedback, and supportive relationships can sustain effort and engagement (Bandura, 1997; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Guthrie et al., 2024). Home access to reading materials, conversations about texts, guided practice, and collaborative meaning-making likewise extend the time and social support available for literacy development (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978).

These concerns are particularly significant in the Philippine secondary-school context. The country's performance in international reading assessments has drawn attention to persistent difficulty with locating information, making inferences, and evaluating texts (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2019). The Philippine Informal Reading Inventory also encourages schools to identify learners' needs and provide interventions appropriate to their reading level (Department of Education, 2018). However, a learner may experience several barriers at the same time; a program that addresses vocabulary alone may have limited effect when the learner also lacks strategy knowledge, confidence, guided practice, or support outside school.

The present study therefore treated reading-comprehension difficulty as a multidimensional and context-dependent concern. It aimed to identify the difficulty patterns experienced by Senior High School learners, organize these patterns into broader themes, determine how strongly the themes were manifested in a larger group, and develop a contextualized intervention based on the combined findings. By connecting learners' reported experiences with quantitative evidence, the study sought to provide a practical basis for an integrated reading-support program suited to local school conditions.

METHODS

Research Design

The study used an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design. The first phase was qualitative and focused on how struggling readers described their comprehension experiences. The patterns derived from this phase were converted into measurable domains for the second, quantitative phase. The sequence allowed the survey to be grounded in learners' actual experiences rather than in a predetermined list of difficulties. The integrated findings then served as the basis for the proposed contextualized intervention program.

Research Locale and Participants

The research was conducted in six public secondary schools in Victoria District, Division of Oriental Mindoro, during School Year 2025-2026. For the qualitative phase, 12 Senior High School learners identified as struggling readers through school reading-assessment records were selected. For the quantitative phase, 262 Grade 11 and Grade 12 learners were drawn from a population of 758. Participants were enrolled primarily in the

Humanities and Social Sciences and Technical-Vocational-Livelihood strands, where sustained reading is required across subject areas.

Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was applied in the qualitative phase because the inquiry required participants who had documented comprehension difficulties and could describe those experiences. The quantitative sample size was determined from the population using Slovin's formula, after which proportional stratification was applied across the six schools. Individual respondents were selected through a draw-lot procedure within the identified groups.

Table 1. *Distribution of Quantitative Respondents by School*

School	Population	Sample
School A	47	16
School B	409	141
School C	32	11
School D	57	20
School E	173	60
School F	40	14
Total	758	262

Note. School labels were anonymized in the manuscript. The sample was proportionally allocated from the total Senior High School population of 758 learners.

Research Instruments and Quality Assurance

Four complementary instruments were used: a contextualized reading-comprehension assessment, a semi-structured interview guide, a focus-group discussion protocol, and a descriptive survey questionnaire. The assessment contained literary and informational texts relevant to Senior High School learners, with questions drawn from English, science, and mathematics contexts. Its results provided baseline information and helped shape the qualitative questions. The interview and discussion guides explored reading habits, language-related barriers, strategy use, motivation, instructional experiences, and support conditions. The survey translated the emergent themes into Likert-type items for the larger sample.

Three English-language educators with graduate-level preparation reviewed the instruments for clarity, relevance, appropriateness, and alignment with the objectives. Revisions were made after expert review and pilot use. The quantitative instrument was administered to 10 nonparticipants with characteristics similar to those of the main sample. Internal-consistency coefficients were high across the four domains: language and reading skills ($\alpha = .89$), reading strategies ($\alpha = .91$), motivation and engagement ($\alpha = .91$), and home-school support ($\alpha = .90$).

Data Collection and Analysis

Formal permission was secured from the appropriate education authorities and school heads. The 12 qualitative participants first completed the reading assessment. Interviews and a focus-group discussion were then conducted in a supportive setting; the group session lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent. Recordings were transcribed, coded, compared, and grouped into categories and higher-order themes. Field notes were used to clarify the context of participants' responses.

After the qualitative analysis, the survey was administered to the 262 respondents with standardized instructions and assistance from class advisers. Weighted means and standard deviations described each domain. The interpretation scale was 4.50-5.00, very high manifestation; 3.50-4.49, high; 2.50-3.49, moderate; 1.50-2.49, low; and 1.00-1.49, very low. Qualitative and quantitative results were compared during interpretation and program development.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary and based on written consent or assent, with the right to withdraw without penalty. Learner identities and school-specific information were protected through codes and pseudonyms. Digital and printed records were secured and used only for the stated educational purpose. Before the focus-group discussion, participants were reminded that the researcher would protect records but could not absolutely control what other group members might repeat; all members were therefore asked to respect the confidentiality of the discussion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reading-Comprehension Difficulty Patterns and Emerging Themes

The qualitative phase showed that learners' difficulties were distributed across language, cognition, strategy use, emotion, and learning environment. Problems rarely appeared alone. Limited vocabulary made complex sentences harder to process; fragmented processing reduced retention; poor retention made it difficult to identify the central idea; and repeated failure weakened confidence and interest. Learners then depended more heavily on teacher explanations, yet opportunities for guided or collaborative reading were not always available. This sequence illustrates why comprehension difficulty should be understood as an interacting system rather than as a single deficit.

Table 2. *Emerging Themes and Constituent Difficulty Patterns*

Emerging Theme	Difficulty Patterns
Weak Language and Reading Foundations	Limited English vocabulary; difficulty understanding complex sentences; poor retention of text details
Lack of Knowledge of Reading Strategies	Difficulty identifying main ideas; inability to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words from context
Low Motivation and Engagement in Reading	Low interest in reading; fear of reading aloud; low self-confidence
Limited Support from Home and School	Lack of home reading support; limited collaborative reading activities; lack of guided reading intervention

Note. The categories were developed from the coding and thematic organization of learners' assessment results, interviews, and focus-group responses.

Weak language and reading foundations formed the first domain. Unfamiliar English words interrupted reading flow and forced learners to concentrate on decoding rather than on constructing meaning. Long or syntactically dense sentences were often processed in fragments, making relationships among ideas difficult to recognize. Once processing became fragmented, details were weakly encoded and quickly forgotten. These patterns are consistent with evidence that precise lexical knowledge and efficient sentence processing are prerequisites for coherent text representation (Nation, 2017; Perfetti & Stafura, 2018). They also support instruction that integrates vocabulary, syntax, and retention tasks instead of treating each as an unrelated exercise.

The second domain concerned limited knowledge and flexible application of reading strategies. Learners found it difficult to separate a main idea from supporting details and often relied on the location of a sentence or on guessing. When they encountered an unfamiliar word, they were more likely to skip it or ask for help than to examine nearby clues. Repeated rereading was common, but it was not always accompanied by questioning, summarizing, or monitoring. The findings indicate a difference between performing a routine and deliberately selecting a strategy to repair understanding. Explicit modeling, guided practice, and gradual transfer of responsibility are therefore important for developing independent comprehension (Duke & Pearson, 2016; Magno, 2010).

Motivation and engagement constituted the third domain. Some learners regarded reading as tiring or unrewarding, especially when texts were lengthy or unfamiliar. Fear of making mistakes during oral reading

diverted attention from meaning to performance, while low confidence encouraged silence and avoidance. These responses can create a self-reinforcing cycle: limited success reduces engagement, reduced engagement limits practice, and fewer successful experiences further weaken confidence. Motivation should consequently be treated as part of instruction rather than as a learner characteristic that teachers cannot influence. Relevant text choices, manageable challenge, constructive feedback, and visible progress can strengthen competence and persistence (Bandura, 1997; Guthrie et al., 2024; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997).

The fourth domain involved support from home and school. Learners reported limited access to reading materials and little opportunity to discuss texts outside class. Within school, teacher assistance was valued, but structured peer reading and sustained guided intervention were not consistently experienced. A weak connection between school instruction and home practice reduces the repetition and feedback needed for skill development. Collaborative discussion can also expose learners to alternative interpretations and make comprehension more socially supported (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). The qualitative results therefore point to the need for coordinated support rather than isolated remedial sessions.

Level of Manifestation of the Identified Themes

The quantitative phase generally confirmed the qualitative structure. The composite scores for language and reading foundations, reading strategies, and motivation and engagement fell within the study's high-manifestation range. Support from home and school obtained a moderate score. The overall mean was 3.58, with a standard deviation of 0.09, showing that the four domains clustered closely and were experienced with considerable consistency across respondents.

Table 3. *Summary of the Manifestation of Reading-Comprehension Difficulty Themes*

Theme	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Weak Language and Reading Foundations	3.58	High manifestation
Lack of Reading Strategies	3.63	High manifestation
Low Reading Motivation and Engagement	3.67	High manifestation
Limited Support from School and Home	3.44	Moderate manifestation
Overall	3.58	High manifestation

Note. Overall SD = 0.09, indicating very low variability. Based on the stated scale, a mean of 3.44 is interpreted as moderate manifestation, while means from 3.50 to 4.49 are high.

The foundation score ($M = 3.58$) suggests that language-processing concerns were not confined to a small subgroup. Item patterns showed particular reliance on rereading and on explanations from others, while understanding grammatically challenging sentences remained less secure. These results reinforce the qualitative finding that learners expend substantial effort on word and sentence processing. When basic processing is slow, fewer cognitive resources remain for integrating ideas and monitoring meaning.

The strategy domain obtained a mean of 3.63. Respondents reported behaviors such as rereading, slowing down, asking questions, and connecting ideas; however, the qualitative data showed that these behaviors were often mechanical or dependent on teacher direction. The combined evidence suggests that learners possess partial awareness of useful strategies but need support in deciding when, why, and how to use them. Strategy instruction should therefore include think-aloud modeling, guided application, reflection on effectiveness, and repeated independent use across different text types.

The motivation and engagement domain recorded the highest mean ($M = 3.67$), yet the item pattern was mixed. Learners generally believed that reading was important and that their skills could improve, but willingness to read longer texts was only moderate. This indicates that positive beliefs do not automatically translate into sustained behavior when linguistic and strategic demands are high. Instruction should convert willingness into successful practice through accessible starting points, locally meaningful materials, gradual increases in text complexity, and feedback that emphasizes growth.

Home-school support received the lowest mean ($M = 3.44$) and was correctly classified as moderate under the study's interpretation scale. Teacher help was the strongest source of support, while assistance and discussion at home were less evident. The result does not mean that support was absent; rather, it was uneven and insufficiently continuous. Reading development is more likely to persist when guided instruction, peer interaction, access to materials, and family encouragement reinforce one another.

Taken together, the low dispersion of the domain means supports the conclusion that the difficulties were systemic. A learner with a weak vocabulary may struggle to use context clues; unsuccessful attempts may lower confidence; avoidance then reduces practice; and limited support leaves the cycle uncorrected. Improving only one component may produce temporary gains, but sustained progress requires simultaneous attention to foundations, strategy, motivation, and environment.

Proposed ANGAT DUNONG Contextualized Reading Intervention Program

The integrated findings informed the ANGAT DUNONG Program, or Activating and Nurturing Guided Application for Transformative Development through Utilization, Networking, Organization, Needs-Supported Intervention and Growth. The program is designed as an 11-week supplementary intervention rather than as a replacement for regular English instruction. It begins with orientation, diagnostic assessment, and grouping; develops foundational and strategic skills through contextualized texts; strengthens engagement through relevant and collaborative activities; and concludes with remediation, post-assessment, reflection, and sustainability planning.

Table 4. *Core Structure of the Proposed ANGAT DUNONG Program*

Program Component	Primary Targets	Illustrative Activities	Expected Outcome
Preparation and Diagnosis	Baseline needs and learner grouping	Orientation, pretest, review of learner profiles, preparation of localized materials	Clear starting data and organized implementation
Foundational Reading Skills	Vocabulary, sentence processing, retention	Semantic mapping, explicit word instruction, sentence deconstruction, paraphrasing, guided recall	More efficient word and sentence comprehension
Strategic Reading Skills	Main idea, context clues, inference, monitoring	Think-alouds, graphic organizers, questioning, summarizing, guided and independent practice	More deliberate and flexible strategy use
Motivation and Support	Confidence, persistence, peer and home-school support	Relevant texts, low-risk oral reading, gamified tasks, peer discussion, feedback, family reading prompts	Greater engagement and sustained participation
Integration and Evaluation	Transfer, remediation, program sustainability	Performance tasks, targeted reteaching, post-test, learner feedback, progress reporting, continuation plan	Documented gains and a basis for continued support

Contextualization is central to the program. Texts and tasks should connect with learners' community experiences, academic strands, and everyday information needs while still exposing them to varied literary and informational forms. Vocabulary should be taught within meaningful passages, sentence analysis should use authentic examples, and comprehension strategies should be practiced across subject-related texts. This approach follows the principle that comprehension is strengthened when new information can be connected with prior knowledge and applied for a clear purpose (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Kintsch, 1998).

The program also uses gradual release. Teachers first model how a proficient reader approaches a text, then guide learners through the process, facilitate peer practice, and finally require independent application. Assessment is embedded through short checks, learner explanations, written outputs, and pretest-posttest

comparison. Because the intervention was developed from diagnostic findings but was not implemented within the present study, claims about effectiveness should be reserved until a pilot evaluation is completed.

Limitations

The findings are limited to identified struggling readers in six public secondary schools within one district and should not be generalized to all Senior High School learners without further study. The quantitative phase relied on self-reported behaviors and conditions, which may be affected by memory and response tendencies. In addition, the research developed the intervention program but did not test its effect on comprehension outcomes. Future studies should use implementation data, standardized reading measures, comparison groups where feasible, and follow-up assessment to examine whether gains are sustained.

CONCLUSION

Reading-comprehension difficulties among the participating Senior High School learners were multidimensional, interconnected, and broadly shared. Weak vocabulary and sentence processing constrained retention and meaning construction; limited strategic control reduced learners' ability to repair misunderstanding; repeated difficulty affected confidence and persistence; and uneven support from home and school restricted opportunities for guided practice. The quantitative findings confirmed an overall high manifestation of the domains, with very low variability, while home-school support remained moderate.

The evidence supports an integrated response rather than a single-skill remedy. The proposed ANGAT DUNONG Program aligns foundational instruction, strategic reading, motivational support, collaboration, and contextualized materials within an 11-week sequence. Its value lies in addressing the relationships among the identified barriers. As a proposed program, however, it should be piloted, monitored, and revised using learner-performance data before wider adoption.

Recommendations

1. Schools may pilot the ANGAT DUNONG Program as supplementary support for learners identified through reading assessment, with clear baseline and post-intervention measures.
2. English and content-area teachers may integrate vocabulary development, sentence-level comprehension, main-idea instruction, context-clue use, summarizing, questioning, and comprehension monitoring into routine lessons.
3. Reading activities may use localized and strand-relevant materials, structured peer discussion, low-risk oral reading, and feedback that builds confidence while maintaining academic challenge.
4. School leaders may strengthen home-school coordination by providing accessible reading materials, simple family reading prompts, regular progress updates, and teacher development on adolescent reading intervention.
5. Future researchers may evaluate program effectiveness, implementation fidelity, learner engagement, and the durability of comprehension gains across schools and academic strands.

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