



TEACHERS' READING STRATEGIES AND READING ENGAGEMENT OF HINTERLAND PUPILS: BASIS FOR STRENGTHENING "PROJECT PAGBASA"

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated teachers' utilization of reading strategies and its correlation with reading engagement among pupils in the hinterland schools of Santa Catalina Districts 2 and 3 in Negros Oriental. Employing a descriptive-correlational design and two-stage cluster sampling, the research involved 193 pupils from Grades 5 and 6. A researcher-made questionnaire was used for data gathering, and Spearman's rank-order correlation and Mann-Whitney U test were used for data analysis. The results showed that teachers' utilization of reading strategies ranged from moderate to low, while the pupils demonstrated low cognitive, behavioral, and creative engagement but moderate emotional and social engagement. A weak but significant positive relationship was found between selected reading strategies and pupils' reading engagement, whereas parental and community involvement showed no significant relationship across all engagement domains. No significant differences were found based on sex and class standing, except for creative engagement. The findings indicate that improving pupils' reading engagement in hinterland schools requires the consistent implementation of context-responsive reading strategies through the "Project Pagbasa" Continuous Improvement (CI) Reading Program. The study provides evidence that the effectiveness of reading strategies varies with context, offering a foundation for enhancing school-based reading programs tailored to the needs of hinterland pupils.

Keywords: *reading engagement, reading strategies, hinterland schools, Project Pagbasa, school-based reading program*

INTRODUCTION

Reading engagement refers to pupils' active and sustained involvement in reading activities, characterized by attention, effort, and meaningful interaction with texts, which

can be strengthened through instructional practices such as effective reading strategies that support comprehension and motivation (Barber & Klauda, 2020). However, sustaining strong reading engagement remains a global challenge, as pupils often struggle with interest, comprehension, and active participation in reading tasks (Lee *et al.*, 2021). Teachers' reading strategies play a central role in addressing this concern by guiding how pupils interact with texts and construct meaning. While the implementation of reading strategies has been shown to improve pupils' reading engagement and motivation, the extent of their effectiveness may still depend on how consistently and meaningfully these strategies are applied in actual learning contexts (Li *et al.*, 2021). Although these strategies are widely recognized as important, Lee *et al.* (2021) emphasized that there is still limited and inconsistent understanding of how reading strategies effectively promote engagement across diverse learning contexts worldwide. In the Philippine context, particularly in hinterland schools, fostering pupils' engagement in reading remains a continuing challenge due to various instructional and environmental barriers (Librea *et al.*, 2023). Limited access to learning resources, geographic isolation, and contextual difficulties often reduce opportunities for meaningful reading experiences. Addressing these concerns, Idulog *et al.* (2023) highlight the importance of employing effective reading strategies to stimulate pupils' interest and involvement in reading. Such instructional approaches are especially crucial in hinterland schools, where teachers play a significant role in creating engaging literacy experiences despite existing resource limitations. Consistent with this, Pagute and Apas (2025) found that interactive reading activities improved pupils' reading comprehension in a remote Philippine school, while Andal and Villenes (2024) emphasized the importance of home learning support in strengthening pupils' reading development, suggesting that reading strategies should be responsive to the instructional and home contexts of geographically isolated schools. Furthermore, Mirasol and Topacio (2021) asserted that socioeconomic limitations and constrained home reading environments further affect pupils' exposure to reading support, thereby contributing to weaker engagement in reading activities.

Despite the recognized importance of reading strategies in enhancing pupils' reading engagement, limited empirical evidence exists on how these strategies function in hinterland school contexts. Most studies have been conducted in urban settings, such as Magsalin (2023), where reading engagement issues were still evident despite frequent reading activities, reflecting the need for more context-specific investigations in underserved schools. In addition, research at higher educational levels, such as the study by Caraig and Quimbo (2022), shows low reading comprehension performance and emphasizes the need for effective reading strategies. However, these findings are not fully reflective of Grade 5 and 6 pupils in hinterland settings. Although Sarabia-Cielo (2025) posited that interpretive reading strategies promote deeper engagement, limited Philippine studies have examined how teachers' reading strategies relate to the different dimensions of reading engagement among elementary pupils in geographically remote school contexts. This gap provided the basis for the present study.

In response to the identified gaps, some schools have implemented school-based Continuous Improvement (CI) initiatives to strengthen reading instruction, including the "Project Pagbasa," which aims to enhance pupils' reading engagement through effective

reading strategies. However, there remains a need for localized evidence on teachers' reading strategies, pupils' reading engagement, and the relationship between these variables in hinterland school settings. Thus, this study examines these areas to provide empirical, context-specific evidence that may inform and strengthen the implementation of "Project Pagbasa" in enhancing reading engagement among hinterland pupils. Addressing these gaps aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), particularly ensuring universal literacy and numeracy (4.6) and promoting inclusive and equitable quality education (4.5).

Research Questions

This study sought to examine teachers' reading strategies and the reading engagement of Grade 5 and 6 pupils in hinterland schools of Santa Catalina Districts 2 and 3, under the Schools Division of Negros Oriental for the School Year 2025–2026.

Specifically, this study intended to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do teachers utilize the following strategies to improve the reading engagement of pupils:
 - 1.1 reading aloud and reading circles;
 - 1.2 using local languages and culturally relevant materials;
 - 1.3 organizing peer reading and mentorship sessions;
 - 1.4 involving parents and community in reading activities; and
 - 1.5 providing school-home reading kits?
2. To what extent do pupils manifest reading engagement in terms of:
 - 2.1 cognitive engagement;
 - 2.2 emotional engagement;
 - 2.3 behavioral engagement;
 - 2.4 social engagement; and
 - 2.5 creative engagement?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the extent of teachers' implementation of reading strategies and pupils' engagement in reading?
4. Is there a significant difference between pupils' engagement in reading when grouped according to the following profile:
 - 4.1 sex; and
 - 4.2 class standing?

Statement of the Null Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between the extent of teachers' implementation of reading strategies and pupils' engagement.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between pupils' engagement in reading when grouped according to their profile.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study utilized a descriptive-correlational research design, which is appropriate for describing the extent of teachers' implementation of selected reading strategies and assessing the level of reading engagement among hinterland pupils. This design also allowed the researcher to examine the relationships between teachers' implementation of reading strategies and pupils' reading engagement without manipulating any conditions. In addition, a comparative component was included to determine whether pupils' engagement differed significantly based on their sex and class standing. Overall, this design provided a basis for analyzing both the patterns and associations among the key variables in their natural setting.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in selected hinterland public elementary schools in Santa Catalina Districts 2 and 3, Schools Division of Negros Oriental, Negros Island Region. These schools are located in remote and geographically isolated communities, approximately 20 to 40 kilometers from the municipal center of Santa Catalina.

The schools are generally small, with limited teaching personnel. Some operate multi-grade classes, while others have one or two sections per grade, each often handled by a single teacher. Despite constraints in staffing and facilities, these schools remain committed to delivering basic education to pupils in underserved areas.

Most of the schools do not have dedicated libraries. While some are equipped with basic instructional tools such as Smart TVs, their use is often limited due to frequent power interruptions and unstable internet connectivity, making it difficult to integrate digital resources into reading instruction.

Situated in mountainous and forested areas, the schools are also exposed to natural hazards such as landslides, flooding, and heavy rainfall, which can disrupt school access and affect school attendance. The majority of pupils come from farming households, and many travel long distances on foot to attend school.

These conditions highlight the challenges faced by pupils in hinterland communities, making these schools a relevant setting for examining reading habits and identifying strategies to improve reading engagement among Grade 5 and 6 pupils.

Research Respondents

The study involved Grade 5 and Grade 6 pupils from the hinterland schools of Santa Catalina Districts 2 and 3, Negros Oriental, during the School Year 2025–2026. A total of 193 pupils were selected through a two-stage cluster sampling technique to participate in the study. These pupils were included to determine teachers' utilization of reading

strategies and assess pupils' reading engagement across the cognitive, emotional, behavioral, social, and creative domains.

Statistical Tools

The tools that were used by the researcher in analyzing the data are the following:

Mean. The mean was calculated to determine the average responses of students for each variable, providing an overview of their engagement levels and their experiences with the reading strategies implemented.

Shapiro–Wilk Test of Normality. The Shapiro–Wilk test assessed whether the data followed a normal distribution. Since the results yielded p -values less than 0.05, the data were deemed non-normally distributed, justifying the use of non-parametric statistical methods.

Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation. Spearman's rho was employed to examine the relationships between variables, such as the relationship between reading strategies and the different types of student engagement, as it is suitable for ordinal data and non-normally distributed datasets.

Mann–Whitney U Test. This test was used to compare differences in student engagement between male and female students. This non-parametric test is appropriate for ordinal data and non-normally distributed scores.

The researcher used the following classifications to interpret the extent of utilization of reading strategies as perceived by the pupils:

Score	Scale	Extent of Utilization	Explanation
5	4.21 5.00	– Very High	Teachers consistently apply the reading strategies extensively and effectively in their teaching.
4	3.41 4.20	– High	Teachers frequently use the reading strategies, positively impacting pupils' reading habits.
3	2.61 3.40	– Moderate	Teachers occasionally implement the strategies but with inconsistent application.
2	1.81 2.60	– Low	Teachers rarely use the reading strategies, limiting their potential benefits to pupils.
1	1.00 1.80	– Very Low	Teachers show minimal to no use of the reading strategies in their instructional practices.

The following scale was used to interpret the level of pupils' engagement in reading activities:

Score	Scale	Extent of Engagement	Explanation
5	4.21 5.00	– Very High	The pupil consistently shows strong interest, participation, and involvement in reading activities.
4	3.41 4.20	– High	The pupil often shows interest and participates actively in reading activities.
3	2.61 3.40	– Moderate	The pupil sometimes engages in reading activities but not consistently.
2	1.81 2.60	– Low	The pupil rarely shows interest or involvement in reading activities.
1	1.00 1.80	– Very Low	The pupil shows minimal to no interest or participation in reading activities.

To identify the degree of relationship between the extent of teachers' implementation of reading strategies and pupils' engagement in reading, the researcher applied the following interpretations based on correlation coefficients (Statistical Correlation, 2009):

Value of r	Strength of Relationship
± 0.50 to ± 1.00	$\pm$ Strong relationship
± 0.30 to ± 0.49	$\pm$ Moderate relationship
± 0.10 to ± 0.29	$\pm$ Weak relationship
± 0.01 to ± 0.09	$\pm$ Very weak relationship
0	No relationship

In addition, pupils' class standing in English, as one of the variables considered in this study, was interpreted using the following proficiency level scale based on DepEd Order No. 8, s. 2015:

Rating	Verbal Equivalent	*Explanations
90% and above	Outstanding	The student at this level exceeds the core requirements in terms of knowledge, skills and understanding, and can transfer them automatically and flexibly through authentic performance tasks.
85% - 89%	Very Satisfactory	The student at this level has developed the fundamental knowledge and skills and core understandings, and can transfer them independently through authentic performance tasks.

80% - 84%	Satisfactory	The student at this level has developed the fundamental knowledge and skills and core understandings, and with little guidance from the teacher and/or with some assistance from peers, and can transfer these understandings through authentic performance tasks.
75% - 79%	Fairly Satisfactory	The student at this level possesses the minimum knowledge and skills and core understandings, but needs help throughout the performance of authentic tasks.
74% down	Did Not Meet Expectations	The student at this level struggles with his/her understanding; prerequisite and fundamental knowledge and/or skills have not been acquired or developed adequately to aid understanding.

Research Instruments

The study utilized a researcher-made questionnaire to gather data on teachers' utilization of reading strategies and pupils' reading engagement. The instrument consisted of four parts. Part I contained the disclosure statement and informed consent. Part II obtained the respondents' profile, including sex and class standing. Part III measured teachers' utilization of reading strategies, including reading aloud and reading circles, local languages and culturally relevant materials, peer reading and mentorship, parents and community involvement, and school-home reading kits. Part IV measured pupils' reading engagement across the cognitive, emotional, behavioral, social, and creative domains.

To establish the validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was submitted to three experts in education and research for content validation. Their comments and recommendations were incorporated to improve the clarity, relevance, and alignment of the items with the objectives of the study.

To ensure the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was conducted among Grade 5 and Grade 6 pupils from schools outside the study area who possessed characteristics similar to the target respondents. The pilot data were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded reliability coefficients indicating acceptable to excellent internal consistency for the questionnaire. Based on the results and recommendations, necessary revisions were made before the final administration of the instrument.

Following the validation and reliability procedures, the finalized questionnaire was administered to the 193 Grade 5 and Grade 6 pupils selected through a two-stage cluster sampling technique from the hinterland schools of Santa Catalina Districts 2 and 3, Negros Oriental. The responses gathered were used to determine the extent of teachers' utilization of reading strategies, assess pupils' reading engagement, examine the relationship between the two variables, and determine the differences in reading engagement when grouped according to the respondents' profile variables.

Data Gathering Procedures and Analysis

The study focused on teachers' utilization of reading strategies and pupils' reading engagement in the hinterland schools of Santa Catalina Districts 2 and 3, Negros Oriental. A total of 193 Grade 5 and Grade 6 pupils were selected through a two-stage cluster sampling technique during the School Year 2025–2026. A researcher-made questionnaire consisting of four parts was developed to gather the necessary data. Part I contained the disclosure statement and informed consent, Part II obtained the respondents' profile, Part III measured teachers' utilization of selected reading strategies, and Part IV assessed pupils' reading engagement across the cognitive, emotional, behavioral, social, and creative domains. The questionnaire was validated by three experts specializing in reading instruction, early grade education, and educational research, and revisions were made based on their comments and recommendations. A pilot test was conducted among Grade 5 and Grade 6 pupils from a non-participating hinterland school to determine the clarity and reliability of the instrument. Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis yielded acceptable to excellent coefficients for all constructs, confirming that the questionnaire was appropriate for final administration. After securing the necessary approvals from the Schools Division Office of Negros Oriental and the school heads of the selected schools, the validated questionnaire was administered to the respondents with the assistance of the Grade 5 and Grade 6 advisers. The accomplished questionnaires were retrieved immediately after completion, encoded using Microsoft Excel, and analyzed. The data were subjected to the Shapiro–Wilk test, which revealed a non-normal distribution. Consequently, the mean, Spearman's rank-order correlation, and Mann–Whitney U test were employed to analyze the data and answer the research questions.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study examined teachers' utilization of reading strategies and the reading engagement of Grade 5 and Grade 6 pupils in the hinterland schools of Santa Catalina Districts 2 and 3, Schools Division of Negros Oriental, during the School Year 2025–2026. Specifically, the study determined the extent of teachers' utilization of selected reading strategies, assessed pupils' reading engagement across the cognitive, emotional, behavioral, social, and creative domains, examined the relationship between the two variables, and determined the differences in pupils' reading engagement when grouped according to sex and class standing. Several limitations were recognized in the conduct of the study. First, the study was limited to Grade 5 and Grade 6 pupils from selected hinterland public elementary schools, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other grade levels and educational settings. Second, while the study examined teachers' utilization of reading strategies, it did not consider variations in teacher competence, instructional quality, and classroom practices that may have influenced pupils' reading engagement. Third, factors such as pupils' home environment, parental involvement, socioeconomic conditions, and access to learning resources were not extensively investigated, although these may have affected reading engagement. Lastly, individual differences among pupils, including their interests, motivation, and learning

characteristics, may have influenced their responses and engagement in reading activities.

RESULTS

Table 1.1 Extent of Utilization of Reading Aloud and Reading Circles to Improve Pupils' Reading Engagement

Indicators	$\bar{x}$	EoU	SD
1. Our teacher helps me understand the stories read aloud in class.	3.23	M	1.11
2. Our teacher makes reading aloud fun and interesting.	3.10	M	1.07
3. Our teacher always reads stories aloud to the class.			
4. Our teacher asks questions from time-to-time while reading stories aloud.	2.84	M	1.17
5. Our teacher divides us into groups and assigns us to read stories.	2.65	M	1.08
Composite	2.95	M	1.08

Note: Extent of Utilization (EoU); 4.21-5.00, Very High (VH); 3.41-4.20, High (H); 2.61-3.40, Moderate (M); 1.81-2.60, Low (L); 1.00-1.80, Very Low (VL); n = 193

Table 1.1 presents the extent of teachers' utilization of reading aloud and reading circles to improve pupils' reading engagement. The composite mean of 2.95 indicates a moderate extent of utilization. Moderate utilization was observed in helping pupils understand the stories read aloud in class (3.23), making reading aloud fun and interesting (3.10), asking questions from time to time while reading stories aloud (2.84), and dividing pupils into groups and assigning them to read stories (2.65). Overall, the findings indicate that teachers moderately utilize reading aloud and reading circles to enhance pupils' reading engagement.

Table 1.2 Extent of Utilization of Local Languages and Culturally Relevant Materials to Improve Pupils' Reading Engagement

Indicators	$\bar{x}$	EoU	SD
1. Our teacher connects the stories to our daily lives in the barangay.	2.67	M	1.02
2. Our teacher relates lessons to our local culture and experiences.	2.64	M	1.11
3. Our teacher gives us books or reading materials which are about how we live in our rural community.	2.58	L	1.01
4. Our teacher gives us stories about people or leaders in our barangay.	2.48	L	1.07
Composite	2.59	L	1.05

Note: Extent of Utilization (EoU); 4.21-5.00, Very High (VH); 3.41-4.20, High (H); 2.61-3.40, Moderate (M); 1.81-2.60, Low (L); 1.00-1.80, Very Low (VL); n = 193

Table 1.2 presents the extent of teachers' utilization of local languages and culturally relevant materials to improve pupils' reading engagement. The composite mean of 2.59 indicates a low extent of utilization. Moderate utilization was observed in connecting stories to pupils' daily lives in the barangay (2.67) and relating lessons to the local culture and experiences (2.64). Meanwhile, low utilization was noted in providing books or reading materials about the rural community (2.58) and stories about people or leaders in the barangay (2.48).

Table 1.3 Extent of Utilization of Peer Reading and Mentorship Sessions to Improve Pupils' Reading Engagement

Indicators	$\bar{x}$	EoU	SD
1. Our teacher tells us to correct each other kindly when we make mistakes in reading.	3.08	M	1.09
2. Our teacher allows us to read with a classmate or buddy.	2.90	M	0.96
3. Our teacher gives us time to talk about the story within our group.	2.78	M	1.05
4. Our teacher organizes reading time where older pupils guide us in reading.	2.66	M	1.06
5. Our teacher gives us activities where we read and answer questions as a group.	2.62	M	0.98
Composite	2.81	M	1.03

Note: Extent of Utilization (EoU); 4.21-5.00, Very High (VH); 3.41-4.20, High (H); 2.61-3.40, Moderate (M); 1.81-2.60, Low (L); 1.00-1.80, Very Low (VL); n = 193

Table 1.3 presents the extent of teachers' utilization of peer reading and mentorship sessions to improve pupils' reading engagement. The composite mean of 2.81 indicates a moderate extent of utilization. Moderate utilization was observed in encouraging pupils to correct each other kindly when mistakes are made in reading (3.08), allowing pupils to read with a classmate or buddy (2.90), giving pupils time to discuss stories within their groups (2.78), organizing reading sessions where older pupils guide younger readers (2.66), and providing group reading activities with comprehension questions (2.62). Overall, the findings indicate that teachers moderately utilize peer reading and mentorship sessions to enhance pupils' reading engagement.

Table 1.4 Extent of Utilization of Parents and Community in Reading Activities to Improve Pupils' Reading Engagement

Indicators	$\bar{x}$	EoU	SD
1. Our teacher recognizes our parents who help us read at home.	2.65	M	1.05
2. Our teacher invites parents to join reading activities.	2.62	M	1.01
3. Our teacher encourages us to ask our parents questions about the stories.	2.53	L	1.03
4. Our teacher involves community members to read or share life stories with us.	2.45	L	0.93

5. Our teacher talks to parents about how they can help us read better.	2.17	L	0.93
Composite	2.48	L	0.99

Note: Extent of Utilization (EoU); 4.21-5.00, Very High (VH); 3.41-4.20, High (H); 2.61-3.40, Moderate (M); 1.81-2.60, Low (L); 1.00-1.80, Very Low (VL); n = 193

Table 1.4 presents the extent of teachers' utilization of parents and the community in reading activities to improve pupils' reading engagement. The composite mean of 2.48 indicates a low extent of utilization. Moderate utilization was observed in recognizing parents who help their children read at home (2.65) and inviting parents to participate in reading activities (2.62). Meanwhile, low utilization was noted in encouraging pupils to ask their parents questions about the stories (2.53), involving community members to read or share life stories with pupils (2.45), and communicating with parents about ways to support their children's reading development (2.17). Overall, the findings indicate that teachers demonstrate a low extent of utilizing parents and the community in reading activities to enhance pupils' reading engagement.

Table 1.5 Extent of Utilization of School-Home Reading Kits to Improve Pupils' Reading Engagement

Indicators	$\bar{x}$	EoU	SD
1. Our teacher includes reading tasks for us to do with our families.	2.77	M	1.02
2. Our teacher gives us interesting stories in the home reading kits.	2.66	M	1.06
3. Our teacher checks if we've read the books from the reading kit.	2.61	M	1.08
4. Our teacher gives us books to take home and read.	2.08	L	0.92
5. Our teacher tells us to share what we read at home with the class.	1.97	L	0.84
Composite	2.42	L	0.98

Note: Extent of Utilization (EoU); 4.21-5.00, Very High (VH); 3.41-4.20, High (H); 2.61-3.40, Moderate (M); 1.81-2.60, Low (L); 1.00-1.80, Very Low (VL); n = 193

Table 1.5 presents the extent of teachers' utilization of school-home reading kits to improve pupils' reading engagement. The composite mean of 2.42 indicates a low extent of utilization. Moderate utilization was observed in including reading tasks for pupils to accomplish with their families (2.77), providing interesting stories in the home reading kits (2.66), and checking whether pupils had read the books from the reading kits (2.61). Meanwhile, low utilization was noted in providing books for pupils to take home and read (2.08) and encouraging pupils to share with the class what they had read at home (1.97). Overall, the findings indicate that teachers demonstrate a low extent of utilizing school-home reading kits to enhance pupils' reading engagement.

Table 2.1 Extent of Pupils' Manifestations of Cognitive Engagement in Reading

Indicators	$\bar{x}$	EoM	SD
1. I ask myself questions while reading to understand better.	2.76	M	0.90
2. I understand the story I read.	2.62	M	0.92

3. I figure out what the characters feel or think.	2.51	L	0.93
4. I use clues in the text to predict what will happen next in the story.	2.48	L	0.91
5. I connect what I read to my own experiences.	2.39	L	0.96
Composite	2.55	L	0.92

Note: Extent of Manifestation (EoM); 4.21-5.00, Very High (VH); 3.41-4.20, High (H); 2.61-3.40, Moderate (M); 1.81-2.60, Low (L); 1.00-1.80, Very Low (VL); n = 193

Table 2.1 presents the extent of pupils' manifestations of cognitive engagement in reading. The composite mean of 2.55 indicates a low extent of manifestation. Moderate manifestation was observed in asking themselves questions while reading to understand better (2.76) and understanding the story they read (2.62). Meanwhile, low manifestation was noted in figuring out what the characters feel or think (2.51), using clues in the text to predict what will happen next in the story (2.48), and connecting what they read to their own experiences (2.39). Overall, the findings indicate that pupils demonstrate a low extent of cognitive engagement in reading.

Table 2.2 Extent of Pupils' Manifestations of Emotional Engagement in Reading

Indicators	$\bar{x}$	EoM	SD
1. I feel proud when I finish reading a book.	3.05	M	1.03
2. I feel happy when I read a book.	2.99	M	0.94
3. I get inspired by characters in the stories I read.	2.90	M	1.03
4. I like the feelings I get from reading stories.	2.82	M	0.98
5. I look forward to reading time in class or at home.	2.58	L	0.95
Composite	2.87	M	0.99

Note: Extent of Manifestation (EoM); 4.21-5.00, Very High (VH); 3.41-4.20, High (H); 2.61-3.40, Moderate (M); 1.81-2.60, Low (L); 1.00-1.80, Very Low (VL); n = 193

Table 2.2 presents the extent of pupils' manifestations of emotional engagement in reading. The composite mean of 2.87 indicates a moderate extent of manifestation. Moderate manifestation was observed in feeling proud after finishing a book (3.05), feeling happy when reading a book (2.99), getting inspired by characters in the stories they read (2.90), and liking the feelings they get from reading stories (2.82). Meanwhile, low manifestation was noted in looking forward to reading time in class or at home (2.58). Overall, the findings indicate that pupils demonstrate a moderate extent of emotional engagement in reading.

Table 2.3 Extent of Pupils' Manifestations of Behavioral Engagement in Reading

Indicators	$\bar{x}$	EoM	SD
1. I join reading games or activities in class.	2.78	M	0.98
2. I finish reading tasks given by my teacher.	2.59	L	0.98
3. I choose different types of reading materials (storybooks, comics, or digital texts).	2.26	L	0.93
4. I read books, stories, or other materials every day or almost every day.	2.23	L	0.85

5. I spend extra time reading outside of class.	2.03	L	0.85
Composite	2.38	L	0.92

Note: Extent of Manifestation (EoM); 4.21-5.00, Very High (VH); 3.41-4.20, High (H); 2.61-3.40, Moderate (M); 1.81-2.60, Low (L); 1.00-1.80, Very Low (VL); n = 193

Table 2.3 presents the extent of pupils' manifestations of behavioral engagement in reading. The composite mean of 2.38 indicates a low extent of manifestation. Moderate manifestation was observed in participating in reading games or activities in class (2.78). Meanwhile, low manifestation was noted in finishing reading tasks given by the teacher (2.59), choosing different types of reading materials such as storybooks, comics, or digital texts (2.26), reading books or other materials every day or almost every day (2.23), and spending extra time reading outside of class (2.03). Overall, the findings indicate that pupils demonstrate a low extent of behavioral engagement in reading.

Table 2.4 Extent of Pupils' Manifestations of Social Engagement in Reading

Indicators	$\bar{x}$	EoM	SD
1. I like reading with my classmates.	3.10	M	1.02
2. I enjoy joining group reading games or competitions.	3.04	M	1.04
3. I talk about stories with my friends.	2.52	L	1.00
4. I share my favorite books with others.	2.32	L	0.95
5. I read to my family at home.	2.10	L	0.93
Composite	2.61	M	0.99

Note: Extent of Manifestation (EoM); 4.21-5.00, Very High (VH); 3.41-4.20, High (H); 2.61-3.40, Moderate (M); 1.81-2.60, Low (L); 1.00-1.80, Very Low (VL); n = 193

Table 2.4 presents the extent of pupils' manifestations of social engagement in reading. The composite mean of 2.61 indicates a moderate extent of manifestation. Moderate manifestation was observed in liking to read with classmates (3.10) and enjoying group reading games or competitions (3.04). Meanwhile, low manifestation was noted in talking about stories with friends (2.52), sharing favorite books with others (2.32), and reading to family members at home (2.10). Overall, the findings indicate that pupils demonstrate a moderate extent of social engagement in reading.

Table 2.5 Extent of Pupils' Manifestations of Creative Engagement in Reading

Indicators	$\bar{x}$	EoM	SD
1. I imagine the characters and events in the story while reading.	2.42	L	0.94
2. I use ideas from books or stories when I make projects or assignments.	2.36	L	0.89
3. I like drawing, writing, or acting based on the stories I read.	2.30	L	0.95
4. I make my own endings or new adventures for the story.	2.18	L	0.89
5. I write my own short stories or poems inspired by what I read.	2.03	L	0.82
Composite	2.26	L	0.90

Note: Extent of Manifestation (EoM); 4.21-5.00, Very High (VH); 3.41-4.20, High (H); 2.61-3.40, Moderate (M); 1.81-2.60, Low (L); 1.00-1.80, Very Low (VL); n = 193

Table 2.5 presents the extent of pupils' manifestations of creative engagement in reading. The composite mean of 2.26 indicates a low extent of manifestation. Low manifestation was observed in imagining the characters and events in the story while reading (2.42), using ideas from books or stories in projects or assignments (2.36), drawing, writing, or acting based on the stories they read (2.30), creating their own endings or new adventures for the story (2.18), and writing short stories or poems inspired by what they read (2.03). Overall, the findings indicate that pupils demonstrate a low extent of creative engagement in reading.

Table 3 Relationship between Teachers' Extent of Implementation of Reading Strategies and Pupils' Engagement in Reading

Extent of Implementation of Reading Strategies	Pupils' Engagement in Reading				
	Cognitive Engagement	Emotional Engagement	Behavioral Engagement	Social Engagement	Creative Engagement
Reading Aloud & Reading Circles	$r_s = 0.127$ $p = 0.078$ (not significant)	$r_s = 0.106$ $p = 0.142$ (not significant)	$r_s = 0.049$ $p = 0.496$ (not significant)	$r_s = 0.122$ $p = 0.092$ (not significant)	$r_s = 0.089$ $p = 0.218$ (not significant)
Using Local Lang. & Culturally Relevant Matls.	$r_s = 0.171$ $p = 0.018$ (significant)	$r_s = 0.191$ $p = 0.008$ (significant)	$r_s = 0.187$ $p = 0.009$ (significant)	$r_s = 0.100$ $p = 0.165$ (not significant)	$r_s = 0.026$ $p = 0.724$ (not significant)
Organizing Peer Reading & Mentorship Sessions	$r_s = 0.230$ $p = 0.001$ (significant)	$r_s = 0.246$ $p < .001$ (significant)	$r_s = 0.283$ $p < .001$ (significant)	$r_s = 0.144$ $p = 0.045$ (significant)	$r_s = 0.062$ $p = 0.395$ (not significant)
Involving Parents & Com. in Reading Activities	$r_s = 0.066$ $p = 0.364$ (not significant)	$r_s = 0.137$ $p = 0.057$ (not significant)	$r_s = 0.113$ $p = 0.119$ (not significant)	$r_s = 0.246$ $p < .001$ (not significant)	$r_s = 0.122$ $p = 0.091$ (not significant)
Providing School-Home Reading Kits	$r_s = 0.238$ $p < .001$ (significant)	$r_s = 0.270$ $p < .001$ (significant)	$r_s = 0.179$ $p = 0.013$ (significant)	$r_s = 0.0305$ $p < .001$ (significant)	$r_s = 0.063$ $p = 0.386$ (not significant)
Overall Extent of Implementation	$r_s = 0.253$ $p < .001$ (significant)	$r_s = 0.289$ $p < .001$ (significant)	$r_s = 0.245$ $p < .001$ (significant)	$r_s = 0.278$ $p < .001$ (significant)	$r_s = 0.110$ $p = 0.129$ (not significant)

Note: Data are not normally distributed; Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation at $\alpha = 0.05$; Strength of Relationship: ± 0.50 to ± 1.00 , strong relationship; ± 0.30 to ± 0.49 , moderate; ± 0.10 to ± 0.29 , weak relationship; ± 0.01 to ± 0.09 , very weak relationship; $n = 193$

Table 3 presents the relationship between teachers' extent of implementation of reading strategies and pupils' engagement in reading. The findings revealed a generally weak but significant positive relationship between teachers' implementation of reading strategies and pupils' reading engagement across selected domains. Specifically, reading aloud and reading circles showed no significant relationship with any domain of reading engagement. The use of local languages and culturally relevant materials was significantly related to cognitive ($r_s = 0.171$, $p = 0.018$), emotional ($r_s = 0.191$, $p = 0.008$), and behavioral engagement ($r_s = 0.187$, $p = 0.009$), but showed no significant relationship with social and creative engagement. Peer reading and mentorship sessions were significantly related to cognitive ($r_s = 0.230$, $p = 0.001$), emotional ($r_s = 0.246$, $p < .001$), behavioral ($r_s = 0.283$, $p < .001$), and social engagement ($r_s = 0.144$, $p = 0.045$), but showed no significant relationship with creative engagement. Similarly, school-home reading kits were significantly related to cognitive ($r_s = 0.238$, $p < .001$), emotional ($r_s = 0.270$, $p < .001$), behavioral ($r_s = 0.179$, $p = 0.013$), and social engagement ($r_s = 0.305$, $p < .001$), but showed no significant relationship with creative engagement. Parental and community involvement showed no significant relationship with any domain of reading engagement. Overall, the implementation of reading strategies was significantly related to cognitive ($r_s = 0.253$, $p < .001$), emotional ($r_s = 0.289$, $p < .001$), behavioral ($r_s = 0.245$, $p < .001$), and social engagement ($r_s = 0.278$, $p < .001$), but showed no significant relationship with creative engagement.

Table 4.1 Difference between Pupils' Engagement in Reading when Grouped According to Sex

Engagement	$\bar{x}$	U	p	Remark
Cognitive				
• Male	2.60	4466	0.855	Not significant
• Female	2.60			
Emotional				
• Male	2.80	4120	0.275	Not significant
• Female	2.80			
Behavioral				
• Male	2.40	4094	0.246	Not significant
• Female	2.40			
Social				
• Male	2.60	4294	0.524	Not significant
• Female	2.60			
Creative				
• Male	2.20	4410	0.740	Not significant
• Female	2.20			

Overall

- Male 2.44 4304 0.545 Not significant
- Female 2.42

Note: Data are not normally distributed; Mann-Whitney U Test at $\alpha = 0.05$; $n_{\text{male}} = 81$; $n_{\text{female}} = 112$

Table 4.1 presents the difference in pupils' engagement in reading when grouped according to sex. The findings revealed no significant differences in cognitive engagement ($U = 4466$, $p = 0.855$), emotional engagement ($U = 4120$, $p = 0.275$), behavioral engagement ($U = 4094$, $p = 0.246$), social engagement ($U = 4294$, $p = 0.524$), and creative engagement ($U = 4410$, $p = 0.740$) between male and female pupils. Likewise, no significant difference was found in the overall engagement in reading ($U = 4304$, $p = 0.545$). These findings indicate that pupils' engagement in reading does not significantly differ according to sex.

Table 4.2 Difference between Pupils' Engagement in Reading when Grouped According to Class Standing

Variables	n	$\tilde{x}$	H	p	Remark
Cognitive					
• Fairly Satisfactory	7	2.20	5.33	0.149	Not significant
• Satisfactory	150	2.60			
• Very Satisfactory	32	2.50			
• Outstanding	4	2.40			
Emotional					
• Fairly Satisfactory	7	2.80	4.54	0.209	Not significant
• Satisfactory	150	2.80			
• Very Satisfactory	32	2.80			
• Outstanding	4	2.00			
Behavioral					
• Fairly Satisfactory	7	2.40	3.63	0.305	Not significant
• Satisfactory	150	2.40			
• Very Satisfactory	32	2.20			
• Outstanding	4	2.20			
Social					
• Fairly Satisfactory	7	2.40	4.80	0.187	Not significant
• Satisfactory	150	2.60			

• Very Satisfactory	32	2.50			
• Outstanding	4	2.50			
Creative			8.81	0.032	Significant
• Fairly Satisfactory	7	2.00			
• Satisfactory	150	2.20			
• Very Satisfactory	32	2.40			
• Outstanding	4	3.00			
•			Post-Hoc Analysis (DSCF Pairwise Comparison) F vs. S: $p = 0.837$ (not significant) F vs. VS: $p = 0.693$ (not significant) F vs. O: $p = 0.037$ (significant) S vs. VS: $p = 0.889$ (not significant) S vs. O: $p = 0.029$ (significant) VS vs. O: $p = 0.102$ (not significant)		

Note: Data are not normally distributed; Kruskal-Wallis (H) Test at $\alpha = 0.05$; $df = 3$; $n = 193$

Table 4.2 presents the difference in pupils' engagement in reading when grouped according to class standing. The findings revealed no significant differences in cognitive engagement ($H = 5.33$, $p = 0.149$), emotional engagement ($H = 4.54$, $p = 0.209$), behavioral engagement ($H = 3.63$, $p = 0.305$), and social engagement ($H = 4.80$, $p = 0.187$) across class standing. However, a significant difference was found in creative engagement ($H = 8.81$, $p = 0.032$). Post hoc analysis using the DSCF pairwise comparison revealed significant differences between pupils with Fairly Satisfactory and Outstanding class standing ($p = 0.037$), and between those with Satisfactory and Outstanding class standing ($p = 0.029$). No significant differences were observed between the remaining pairs. These findings indicate that pupils' creative engagement in reading differs according to class standing, while the other dimensions of reading engagement do not.

DISCUSSION

Teachers' Extent of Utilization of Reading Aloud and Reading Circles

The moderate extent of teachers' utilization of reading aloud and reading circles, reflected in the composite mean of 2.95, indicates that these instructional strategies are moderately practiced to improve pupils' reading engagement. Teachers moderately help pupils understand the stories read aloud ($\bar{x} = 3.23$) and make reading activities enjoyable and interesting ($\bar{x} = 3.10$), suggesting that guided reading experiences are incorporated into classroom instruction. Likewise, teachers moderately ask questions during reading aloud ($\bar{x} = 2.84$) and organize pupils into reading groups ($\bar{x} = 2.65$), indicating that opportunities

for interaction and collaborative learning are provided, although these practices may not yet be consistently implemented.

The moderate level of utilization may be attributed to the instructional realities of hinterland schools, where teachers often manage multi-grade classes, limited instructional materials, and pupils with diverse reading abilities. These conditions may affect the regular implementation of reading aloud and reading circle activities, reducing opportunities for pupils to actively discuss texts, share ideas, and engage more deeply in reading. Strengthening these strategies through structured classroom routines and "Project Pagbasa" may further enhance pupils' participation and sustained engagement in reading.

The findings are consistent with Ceyhan and Yıldız (2021), who reported that reading aloud improves pupils' comprehension, fluency, and motivation by providing guided reading experiences. Similarly, Alme (2020) emphasized that regular read-aloud activities increase pupils' interest and understanding of texts, while Serin and Turan (2022) found that reading circles promote collaboration and deeper comprehension through peer interaction. However, unlike previous studies that reported high levels of implementation, the present study revealed only a moderate extent of utilization, suggesting that the contextual challenges experienced by teachers in hinterland schools may influence the consistent application of these reading strategies.

Teachers' Extent of Utilization of Local Languages and Culturally Relevant Materials

The low extent of teachers' utilization of local languages and culturally relevant materials, as reflected in the composite mean of 2.59, indicates that contextualized reading practices are not consistently integrated into reading instruction. Teachers moderately connect stories to pupils' daily lives ($\bar{x} = 2.67$) and relate lessons to local culture and experiences ($\bar{x} = 2.64$), suggesting that cultural connections are introduced during classroom discussions. However, providing reading materials about rural community life ($\bar{x} = 2.58$) and stories about barangay leaders or local figures ($\bar{x} = 2.48$) received low ratings, indicating that localized texts are seldom used as primary instructional materials. These findings imply that while teachers acknowledge the importance of contextualization, culturally relevant reading experiences are not yet fully embedded in classroom practice.

The limited use of localized reading materials may be attributed to the scarcity of contextualized instructional resources, teachers' reliance on commercially produced texts, and the demands of teaching in resource-constrained hinterland schools. As a result, pupils may have fewer opportunities to connect reading materials with their lived experiences, culture, and community, thereby limiting meaningful engagement with texts. Strengthening "Project Pagbasa" through the development and integration of locally produced stories, community narratives, and culturally relevant reading materials may help make reading instruction more meaningful and responsive to pupils' contexts.

These findings support Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which emphasizes that children's learning is influenced by interactions within their immediate environment. Integrating pupils' culture, language, and community experiences into reading instruction strengthens the connection between the classroom and the learners' social environment, making reading more relevant and meaningful. The low extent of utilization observed in this study suggests that these environmental connections are not yet fully established in classroom reading practices.

The findings are consistent with Azhary and Fatimah (2024) and Noge et al. (2021), who emphasized that integrating local culture into reading materials enhances pupils' engagement, comprehension, and connection to texts by making learning more meaningful and familiar. Similarly, Abad (2020) reported that culture-based and contextualized instructional materials improve pupils' motivation and reading comprehension by reflecting their identity and everyday experiences. However, unlike these studies, the present study revealed a low extent of utilization, suggesting that contextualized reading materials remain underutilized in hinterland schools. This highlights the need to strengthen the use of localized resources to promote meaningful reading experiences and improve pupils' reading engagement.

Teachers' Extent of Utilization of Peer Reading and Mentorship Sessions

The moderate extent of teachers' utilization of peer reading and mentorship sessions, as reflected in the composite mean of 2.81, indicates that collaborative reading strategies are incorporated into classroom instruction but are not consistently implemented. Teachers moderately encourage pupils to correct each other kindly during reading ($\bar{x} = 3.08$) and allow them to read with a classmate or buddy ($\bar{x} = 2.90$), suggesting that peer-assisted learning is practiced to support reading confidence and participation. Likewise, providing time for group discussions ($\bar{x} = 2.78$), organizing reading sessions where older pupils guide younger learners ($\bar{x} = 2.66$), and assigning group reading activities with comprehension questions ($\bar{x} = 2.62$) were also moderately utilized, indicating that collaborative learning opportunities are present but not yet fully institutionalized.

The moderate level of utilization may be influenced by the realities of hinterland schools, including limited instructional time, varying reading abilities among pupils, and the need for continuous teacher supervision during collaborative activities. Consequently, while pupils participate in peer-assisted reading experiences, opportunities for sustained discussion, shared interpretation, and collaborative meaning-making may not always be maximized. Strengthening "Project Pagbasa" through structured peer reading protocols, assigned reading partners, rotating peer tutors, and guided comprehension activities may further enhance pupils' confidence, participation, and engagement in reading.

These findings support Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes that learning occurs through social interaction and collaboration with more knowledgeable others. Peer reading and mentorship provide opportunities for scaffolding within the learners' Zone of Proximal Development, enabling pupils to develop reading skills through guided support. The moderate extent of utilization observed in this study suggests that these collaborative

learning opportunities are available but are not yet consistently implemented to maximize pupils' reading engagement.

The findings are consistent with Garcia (2021), who reported that peer reading and mentorship enhance pupils' comprehension, confidence, and motivation through guided interaction and collaborative learning. Similarly, Aminuyati and Queiroz (2023) found that structured peer learning experiences promote engagement and positive attitudes toward reading by encouraging shared interpretation of texts. Likewise, Merano (2025) emphasized that peer-based learning improves academic performance through cooperation, knowledge sharing, and deeper understanding. However, unlike these studies that highlighted the strong benefits of structured peer learning, the present study revealed only a moderate extent of utilization, suggesting that collaborative reading strategies in hinterland schools have yet to be implemented consistently to fully develop pupils' reading engagement.

Teachers' Extent of Utilization of Involving Parents and Community in Reading Activities

The low extent of teachers' utilization of parents and the community in reading activities, as reflected in the composite mean of 2.48, indicates that home- and community-based support is not consistently integrated into efforts to improve pupils' reading engagement. Teachers moderately recognize parents who assist their children in reading at home ($\bar{x} = 2.65$) and invite parents to participate in reading activities ($\bar{x} = 2.62$), suggesting that some parental involvement is encouraged. However, encouraging pupils to discuss stories with their parents ($\bar{x} = 2.53$), involving community members in reading or storytelling activities ($\bar{x} = 2.45$), and communicating with parents on how to support their children's reading development ($\bar{x} = 2.17$) received low ratings, indicating that meaningful home-school-community partnerships remain limited.

The low level of utilization may be influenced by the realities of hinterland communities, where parents often have limited time to participate in school-related activities because of work and livelihood responsibilities. Geographic distance, limited access to school resources, and infrequent communication between schools and families may also reduce opportunities for sustained collaboration. Consequently, pupils may have fewer opportunities to extend their reading experiences beyond the classroom and receive consistent support from their families and communities. Strengthening "Project Pagbasa" through structured home-reading activities, parent reading logs, guided take-home reading tasks, and community storytelling initiatives may help establish stronger partnerships that foster continuous reading engagement.

These findings support Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which emphasizes that children's learning is influenced by the interaction between the school, family, and community. When these environments work together, pupils are more likely to receive consistent support for their learning. Likewise, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory highlights the importance of social interaction and guided support in promoting learning. The limited involvement of parents and community members observed in this study suggests that

opportunities for reinforcing reading through meaningful social interactions outside the classroom are not fully maximized.

The findings are consistent with Aminuyati and Queiroz (2023), who emphasized that learning becomes more effective when pupils receive support through interaction and shared engagement. The present findings, however, revealed a low extent of parent and community involvement, suggesting that opportunities for collaborative support beyond the classroom remain limited in hinterland schools. This underscores the importance of strengthening home-school-community partnerships to provide pupils with richer and more sustained reading experiences.

Teachers' Extent of Utilization of School-Home Reading Kits

The low extent of teachers' utilization of school-home reading kits, as reflected in the composite mean of 2.42, indicates that structured home-based reading support is not consistently implemented to improve pupils' reading engagement. Teachers moderately include reading tasks for pupils to accomplish with their families ($\bar{x} = 2.77$), provide interesting stories in home reading kits ($\bar{x} = 2.66$), and check whether pupils have read the assigned materials ($\bar{x} = 2.61$), suggesting that some school-home reading practices are incorporated into instruction. However, providing books for pupils to take home ($\bar{x} = 2.08$) and encouraging them to share what they have read with the class ($\bar{x} = 1.97$) received low ratings, indicating that opportunities for extending reading experiences beyond the classroom remain limited.

The low level of utilization may be attributed to the limited availability of take-home reading materials, resource constraints commonly experienced in hinterland schools, and challenges in monitoring pupils' reading activities outside the classroom. These conditions may hinder teachers from implementing school-home reading kits consistently and from providing pupils with regular opportunities for independent reading at home. Strengthening "Project Pagbasa" by establishing a structured take-home reading system, incorporating parent-guided comprehension activities, and using simple reading logs may help reinforce reading engagement beyond the classroom while strengthening collaboration between teachers and families.

These findings support Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which emphasizes the importance of strong home-school connections in promoting children's learning and development. Likewise, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory highlights that learning is strengthened through guided interaction and scaffolding. The limited utilization of school-home reading kits observed in this study suggests that opportunities for meaningful reading support and shared literacy experiences at home are not yet fully maximized, which may affect pupils' sustained engagement in reading.

The findings are consistent with Bencivengo (2024), who emphasized that school-home reading kits extend literacy activities beyond the classroom and encourage parental involvement, and with Atwood (2023), who reported that these resources strengthen home-school partnerships and promote regular reading practices. Similarly, Silinskas et

al. (2020) found that access to home literacy materials is essential in developing reading skills and sustaining pupils' interest through continuous reading experiences. However, unlike these studies, the present study revealed a low extent of utilization, suggesting that pupils in hinterland schools have fewer opportunities to benefit from structured home-based reading support due to contextual and resource-related challenges.

Extent of Pupils' Manifestation of Cognitive Engagement in Reading

The low extent of pupils' cognitive engagement in reading, as reflected in the composite mean of 2.55, indicates that pupils do not consistently employ higher-order thinking skills while reading. Pupils moderately ask themselves questions to improve understanding ($\bar{x} = 2.76$) and understand the stories they read ($\bar{x} = 2.62$), suggesting that they are able to apply basic comprehension strategies during reading. However, identifying characters' thoughts and feelings ($\bar{x} = 2.51$), using textual clues to predict story outcomes ($\bar{x} = 2.48$), and connecting what they read to their own experiences ($\bar{x} = 2.39$) received low ratings, indicating that deeper cognitive processes such as interpretation, inference, and reflection are less evident during reading activities.

The findings suggest that pupils' reading experiences are largely focused on understanding explicit information rather than constructing deeper meaning from texts. This pattern may be influenced by limited opportunities to engage in higher-order reading tasks, instructional practices that emphasize literal comprehension, and the contextual challenges experienced in hinterland schools. Strengthening "Project Pagbasa" through the integration of structured questioning techniques, think-aloud strategies, guided inference activities, and reflective discussions may help promote deeper cognitive engagement and improve pupils' comprehension skills.

These findings support Constructivist Learning Theory, which emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge by connecting new information with prior experiences through meaningful interaction and reflection. The low level of cognitive engagement observed in this study suggests that opportunities for pupils to actively build meaning, analyze texts, and regulate their own understanding are not yet fully developed during reading instruction.

The findings are consistent with Dadandi and Dadandi (2022) and Lee et al. (2021), who emphasized that cognitive engagement involves active thinking and strategic processing that enhance reading comprehension and self-efficacy. Similarly, Iqbal et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of cognitive engagement in rural learning contexts, where sustained teacher support and explicit instructional strategies help pupils remain focused and develop deeper comprehension. However, unlike these studies that emphasized strong cognitive engagement through strategic instruction, the present study revealed a low extent of cognitive engagement, suggesting that pupils in hinterland schools require more opportunities to develop higher-order thinking skills through purposeful and scaffolded reading activities.

Extent of Pupils' Manifestation of Emotional Engagement in Reading

The moderate extent of pupils' emotional engagement in reading, as reflected in the composite mean of 2.87, indicates that pupils generally experience positive emotions while participating in reading activities. Pupils moderately feel proud when they finish reading a book ($\bar{x} = 3.05$), feel happy while reading ($\bar{x} = 2.99$), become inspired by story characters ($\bar{x} = 2.90$), and enjoy the feelings associated with reading ($\bar{x} = 2.82$), suggesting that reading evokes positive emotional responses that encourage participation. However, looking forward to reading time in class or at home ($\bar{x} = 2.58$) received a low rating, indicating that pupils' motivation to read is not consistently sustained beyond structured classroom activities.

The findings suggest that pupils' emotional engagement is often influenced by the reading experience itself rather than by an intrinsic desire to read. While pupils enjoy reading and experience feelings of accomplishment during classroom activities, these positive emotions may not always translate into sustained interest or independent reading outside the classroom. This pattern may be influenced by limited access to engaging reading materials, teacher-directed reading routines, and fewer opportunities for pupils to choose reading materials that match their interests. Strengthening "Project Pagbasa" through interest-based book selection, motivational pre-reading activities, and reflective sharing sessions may help cultivate pupils' intrinsic motivation and foster more sustained emotional engagement in reading.

The findings are consistent with Barotas and Palma (2023) and Veater (2022), who emphasized that emotional engagement, characterized by enjoyment, interest, and motivation, plays a significant role in encouraging pupils' participation and persistence in reading activities. The present findings support these studies by showing that pupils generally experience positive emotions while reading. However, the low manifestation of looking forward to reading time suggests that these emotional responses are not yet strong enough to consistently motivate pupils to engage in reading independently. This highlights the need to create reading experiences that not only promote enjoyment during classroom activities but also develop lasting interest and motivation to read beyond the school setting.

Extent of Pupils' Manifestation of Behavioral Engagement in Reading

The low extent of pupils' behavioral engagement in reading, as reflected in the composite mean of 2.38, indicates that pupils do not consistently demonstrate active and sustained participation in reading activities. Pupils moderately participate in reading games or classroom reading activities ($\bar{x} = 2.78$), suggesting that they are willing to engage when reading tasks are teacher-directed and conducted in a structured classroom setting. However, finishing reading tasks assigned by the teacher ($\bar{x} = 2.59$), choosing different types of reading materials ($\bar{x} = 2.26$), reading every day or almost every day ($\bar{x} = 2.23$), and spending extra time reading outside the classroom ($\bar{x} = 2.03$) all received low ratings, indicating that independent and sustained reading behaviors are not yet well established.

The findings suggest that pupils' participation in reading is largely influenced by teacher guidance rather than by personal initiative. While pupils are able to engage in classroom reading activities, they are less likely to continue reading independently beyond school. This pattern may be attributed to limited access to diverse reading materials, the predominance of teacher-directed instruction, and fewer opportunities to establish regular reading habits at home, particularly in hinterland schools. Strengthening "Project Pagbasa" through scheduled independent reading periods, reading logs, monitored home reading activities, and access to varied reading materials may help develop pupils' reading habits and encourage more consistent behavioral engagement.

These findings support Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes that learning is strengthened through social interaction, guided participation, and scaffolding. Likewise, Constructivist Learning Theory explains that learners develop deeper engagement through active participation in meaningful learning experiences. The low extent of behavioral engagement observed in this study suggests that pupils continue to rely on external guidance and have not yet fully developed independent reading behaviors that sustain engagement over time.

The findings are consistent with Yamazaki and Hiver (2024), who described behavioral engagement as pupils' observable participation, effort, and persistence in reading activities. Similarly, Roberts et al. (2021) emphasized that behavioral supports within reading instruction increase pupils' engagement by improving focus, participation, and time-on-task, particularly among struggling readers. However, unlike these studies that highlighted sustained participation in reading, the present study revealed a low extent of behavioral engagement, suggesting that pupils in hinterland schools require more structured opportunities and continuous support to develop independent and consistent reading behaviors.

Extent of Pupils' Manifestation of Social Engagement in Reading

The moderate extent of pupils' social engagement in reading, as reflected in the composite mean of 2.61, indicates that pupils participate in socially interactive reading activities, particularly within the classroom. Pupils moderately like reading with their classmates ($\bar{x} = 3.10$) and enjoy group reading games or competitions ($\bar{x} = 3.04$), suggesting that collaborative reading activities encourage participation and make reading more enjoyable. However, talking about stories with friends ($\bar{x} = 2.52$), sharing favorite books with others ($\bar{x} = 2.32$), and reading to family members at home ($\bar{x} = 2.10$) received low ratings, indicating that reading-related interactions outside the classroom are less frequently practiced.

The findings suggest that pupils' social engagement is largely influenced by structured classroom activities rather than by voluntary interactions in their homes and communities. While pupils respond positively to teacher-facilitated collaborative reading experiences, they have fewer opportunities to discuss stories, share books, or engage family members in reading beyond school. This pattern may be attributed to limited access to reading materials, fewer opportunities for reading discussions outside the classroom, and the

realities of hinterland communities where parents may have limited time and resources to support literacy activities at home. Strengthening "Project Pagbasa" through guided book talks, reading buddies, story reflection circles, and simple home-based reading discussions may help extend pupils' social engagement beyond the classroom.

These findings support Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes that learning develops through social interaction, collaboration, and shared experiences. Likewise, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory highlights the importance of interactions across the home, school, and community in shaping children's learning and development. The moderate extent of social engagement observed in this study suggests that collaborative reading opportunities are more evident within the classroom than in pupils' broader social environments, indicating a need to strengthen home-school-community partnerships that reinforce reading engagement.

The findings are consistent with McGeown and Smith (2024), who emphasized that social engagement in reading enhances motivation, enjoyment, and a sense of belonging, which contribute to sustained reading practices and positive attitudes toward reading. The present findings likewise show that pupils enjoy collaborative reading activities with their classmates. However, unlike previous studies that reported stronger social reading interactions across different settings, this study revealed that pupils' social engagement is largely confined to teacher-facilitated classroom activities, highlighting the need to provide more opportunities for meaningful reading interactions within the home and community.

Extent of Pupils' Manifestation of Creative Engagement in Reading

The low extent of pupils' creative engagement in reading, as reflected in the composite mean of 2.26, indicates that pupils have limited opportunities to express ideas creatively and extend their reading experiences beyond comprehension. Pupils demonstrate low manifestations in imagining the characters and events in stories ($\bar{x} = 2.42$), using ideas from books in projects or assignments ($\bar{x} = 2.36$), drawing, writing, or acting based on stories ($\bar{x} = 2.30$), creating alternative story endings ($\bar{x} = 2.18$), and writing their own short stories or poems inspired by reading ($\bar{x} = 2.03$). These findings suggest that imaginative thinking and creative responses to texts are not consistently integrated into pupils' reading experiences.

The findings imply that reading instruction remains largely focused on comprehension and task completion rather than encouraging pupils to interpret, personalize, and creatively respond to texts. This pattern may be attributed to limited integration of creative response activities in reading instruction, greater emphasis on comprehension accuracy, and insufficient opportunities for pupils to produce original outputs, particularly in resource-constrained hinterland schools. Strengthening "Project Pagbasa" through creative reading activities such as story dramatization, drawing scenes from stories, creating alternative endings, and writing reflective or imaginative outputs may encourage pupils to develop deeper personal connections with texts while enhancing their creativity and higher-order thinking skills.

These findings support Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes that learning develops through meaningful interaction, collaboration, and guided experiences, as well as Constructivist Learning Theory, which explains that learners actively construct knowledge by interpreting and transforming their experiences. The low extent of creative engagement observed in this study suggests that pupils have limited opportunities to engage in creative meaning-making and self-expression during reading activities.

The findings are consistent with Alimen et al. (2021) and Cremin (2022), who emphasized that creative engagement enables pupils to interact imaginatively with texts through reflection, expression, and innovation. Similarly, Talenta and Himawati (2023) noted that creative engagement is often given less emphasis than other dimensions of reading engagement despite its importance in developing higher-order thinking and expressive abilities. The present findings likewise revealed a low extent of creative engagement, suggesting that pupils require more structured opportunities to transform their reading experiences into meaningful and creative outputs that deepen both comprehension and engagement.

Relationship Between Teachers' Extent of Implementation of Reading Strategies and Pupils' Reading Engagement

The findings revealed a generally weak but significant positive relationship between teachers' implementation of reading strategies and pupils' reading engagement across selected domains. This indicates that while the implementation of reading strategies contributes to improving pupils' cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social engagement, their influence remains limited, suggesting that reading engagement is also shaped by other learner, instructional, and environmental factors. Moreover, the relationships varied across the different reading strategies, indicating that some strategies are more effective in promoting specific dimensions of reading engagement than others.

Reading aloud and reading circles showed no significant relationship with any domain of reading engagement. Although these strategies were moderately utilized, their implementation alone may not be sufficient to significantly influence pupils' cognitive, emotional, behavioral, social, or creative engagement. This suggests that the effectiveness of reading aloud and reading circles depends not only on their frequency of use but also on how teachers facilitate meaningful interaction, discussion, and reflection during reading activities. Pupils may participate during teacher-led reading sessions, but without structured questioning, collaborative discussion, and opportunities to construct meaning from texts, these strategies may have limited impact on overall engagement.

These findings differ from those of Alme (2020) and Çağ (2024), who reported that interactive read-alouds and reading circles improve pupils' comprehension, motivation, and engagement through active participation and discussion. The present findings may indicate that these strategies are implemented primarily as routine classroom activities rather than as highly interactive learning experiences. This is supported by Constructivist Learning Theory, which emphasizes that learners develop deeper understanding when

they actively construct meaning through interaction with texts and guided learning experiences.

The use of local languages and culturally relevant materials demonstrated significant relationships with cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement. This suggests that reading materials reflecting pupils' language, culture, and daily experiences make reading more meaningful, enabling pupils to better understand texts, develop positive feelings toward reading, and participate more actively in reading activities. However, the absence of significant relationships with social and creative engagement indicates that culturally relevant materials alone may not be sufficient to encourage collaborative interaction or creative responses unless accompanied by appropriate instructional activities.

These findings support Azhary and Fatimah (2024) and Abad (2020), who emphasized that contextualized and culture-based reading materials enhance pupils' comprehension, motivation, and engagement by making reading experiences more meaningful and relatable. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory further explains that learning becomes more meaningful when instruction is connected to pupils' immediate cultural and community environments, allowing classroom experiences to reflect their everyday lives.

Similarly, peer reading and mentorship sessions demonstrated significant relationships with cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social engagement. This indicates that collaborative reading experiences positively influence pupils' understanding, motivation, participation, and interaction during reading activities. Through peer support, pupils are provided with opportunities to exchange ideas, clarify understanding, and develop confidence while reading, thereby strengthening multiple dimensions of engagement. However, the absence of a significant relationship with creative engagement suggests that peer interaction alone may not promote imaginative interpretation or creative expression unless learners are provided with activities requiring creative responses to texts.

These findings agree with Garcia (2021) and Aminuyati and Queiroz (2023), who emphasized that collaborative learning and peer mentorship enhance pupils' motivation, participation, and reading enjoyment through shared learning experiences. This is further supported by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which explains that learning develops through social interaction, collaboration, and scaffolding provided by more knowledgeable peers.

Parent and community involvement showed no significant relationship with pupils' reading engagement. This suggests that the level of home and community participation observed in the study was insufficient to significantly influence pupils' engagement in reading. Although parents and community members play an important role in literacy development, the findings imply that pupils have limited opportunities to receive sustained reading support beyond the classroom, particularly within the context of hinterland communities.

This finding contrasts with Ahmad et al. (2020) and William et al. (2025), who reported that parental and community support positively influences pupils' reading engagement and achievement. The present findings may be explained by the realities of hinterland communities, where parents often have limited time, resources, and opportunities to participate in school-related reading activities. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory explains that children's learning is influenced by the interactions between home, school, and community; therefore, weak connections among these environments may reduce opportunities to reinforce pupils' reading engagement outside the classroom.

Providing school-home reading kits demonstrated significant relationships with cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social engagement. This indicates that providing pupils with reading materials beyond the classroom contributes to improved understanding, participation, emotional involvement, and social interaction related to reading. Access to reading materials at home allows pupils to continue reading outside school hours and reinforces reading habits beyond classroom instruction. However, the absence of a significant relationship with creative engagement suggests that reading kits alone may not stimulate imaginative and creative responses unless accompanied by structured creative reading activities.

These findings support Atwood (2023), Bencivengo (2024), and Escuadra et al. (2023), who emphasized that school-home reading resources promote continuity of reading experiences and strengthen home-school partnerships. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory likewise highlights the importance of connecting home and school environments to provide pupils with continuous opportunities for learning and literacy development.

Overall, the implementation of reading strategies demonstrated significant relationships with cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social engagement, but not with creative engagement. This indicates that the combined use of reading strategies contributes positively to pupils' understanding, participation, motivation, and social interaction during reading activities. However, developing creative engagement appears to require more intentional instructional approaches that encourage imagination, interpretation, and creative expression beyond routine reading instruction.

These findings are consistent with Dadandi (2022), Barber and Klauda (2020), and Yapp et al. (2023), who concluded that effective reading strategies improve pupils' engagement and participation in reading activities. Nevertheless, the generally weak correlations observed in this study suggest that reading engagement is influenced not only by instructional practices but also by broader contextual factors such as pupils' learning experiences, availability of reading materials, classroom environment, family support, and community resources.

Overall, the findings underscore the importance of strengthening "Project Pagbasa" as a coordinated continuous improvement (CI) program that integrates effective reading strategies across the cognitive, emotional, behavioral, social, and creative domains of reading engagement. The program may be enhanced by promoting more interactive read-

aloud sessions, increasing the use of localized reading materials, institutionalizing structured peer reading activities, strengthening home-school partnerships through school-home reading kits, and encouraging greater parental and community participation. Through these coordinated efforts, "Project Pagbasa" can provide more meaningful, sustained, and multidimensional reading experiences that foster stronger reading engagement among hinterland pupils.

Difference in Pupils' Reading Engagement When Grouped According to Sex

The findings revealed no significant differences in pupils' cognitive, emotional, behavioral, social, creative, and overall reading engagement when grouped according to sex. This indicates that male and female pupils demonstrate comparable levels of engagement across all dimensions of reading, suggesting that sex does not significantly influence how pupils participate in, respond to, or interact with reading activities within the context of the study.

The similarity in reading engagement may be attributed to the shared learning experiences of pupils in hinterland schools, where both male and female learners are exposed to the same instructional strategies, classroom routines, and available reading resources. Since teachers generally implement similar reading activities and provide equal learning opportunities regardless of sex, pupils experience comparable conditions that contribute to similar levels of reading engagement. Moreover, the limited availability of reading materials and literacy resources outside the classroom may further reduce differences between male and female pupils, as school-based instruction remains their primary source of reading experiences.

The findings support Scholes et al. (2021; 2025), who argued that boys can demonstrate levels of reading engagement comparable to girls when provided with supportive learning environments and appropriate reading materials. However, the findings differ from those of Loh et al. (2020) and Tegmark et al. (2022), who reported that female pupils generally exhibit higher motivation and engagement in reading than their male counterparts. The present findings suggest that within the hinterland school context, environmental conditions and instructional practices may have a greater influence on pupils' reading engagement than sex alone.

Overall, the findings indicate that reading engagement among hinterland pupils is shaped more by shared classroom experiences, equitable instructional practices, and access to learning opportunities than by differences in sex. These findings suggest that "Project Pagbasa" should continue to implement inclusive reading interventions that address pupils' varying reading abilities and interests rather than designing separate programs for male and female pupils. Strengthening equitable access to localized reading materials, collaborative learning activities, and differentiated reading instruction may further enhance reading engagement among all pupils.

Difference in Pupils' Reading Engagement When Grouped According to Class Standing

The findings revealed no significant differences in pupils' cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social engagement when grouped according to class standing, indicating that pupils with varying academic performance demonstrate comparable levels of engagement in these domains. This suggests that class standing does not significantly influence how pupils think, feel, participate, or interact during reading activities. The similarity in engagement may be attributed to the shared learning experiences of pupils in hinterland schools, where they are exposed to the same teachers, instructional strategies, reading materials, and classroom activities. Likewise, limited access to reading resources outside the classroom may result in pupils relying primarily on school-based reading experiences, contributing to similar levels of engagement regardless of academic performance.

These findings differ from those of Tomaszewski et al. (2020), Kim et al. (2021), and Allington and McGill-Franzen (2021), who reported that higher-achieving learners generally demonstrate greater engagement in reading. The present findings suggest that within the hinterland school context, common instructional practices and shared learning environments may exert a stronger influence on pupils' reading engagement than differences in class standing.

However, a significant difference was found in creative engagement ($p = 0.032$). Post-hoc analysis showed that pupils with outstanding academic performance demonstrated significantly higher creative engagement than those with fairly satisfactory and satisfactory performance. This indicates that higher-performing pupils are more likely to engage in imaginative and expressive reading activities, such as generating original ideas, interpreting texts creatively, and producing creative outputs. The difference may be attributed to stronger reading proficiency, broader vocabulary, higher comprehension skills, and greater confidence in expressing ideas, enabling these pupils to move beyond literal understanding and engage more creatively with texts. In contrast, pupils with lower academic performance may require additional scaffolding to develop these higher-order reading skills.

The findings support Cremin (2022) and Alimen et al. (2021), who emphasized that creative engagement involves imagination, higher-order thinking, and meaningful interaction with reading materials. Pupils with stronger academic foundations are more likely to extend their reading experiences into creative expression, whereas those with lower achievement may need greater instructional support before they can engage in similar activities.

Overall, the findings indicate that while most dimensions of reading engagement remain consistent regardless of class standing, creative engagement varies according to pupils' academic performance. These findings suggest that "Project Pagbasa" should incorporate differentiated reading activities that respond to pupils' varying levels of readiness. Enrichment activities such as creative writing, story dramatization, and alternative endings may further develop the creative engagement of higher-performing

pupils, while scaffolded comprehension, vocabulary-building, and guided interpretation activities can help lower-performing pupils gradually develop the confidence and skills needed for creative responses to reading.

Conclusions

Improving pupils' reading engagement is essential in strengthening reading proficiency and fostering meaningful learning, particularly in hinterland schools where educational resources and learning opportunities are often limited. This study examined the extent to which teachers utilized various reading strategies and how these influenced the reading engagement of Grade 5 and Grade 6 pupils. The findings revealed that teachers moderately utilized reading aloud and reading circles, as well as peer reading and mentorship sessions, while the utilization of local languages and culturally relevant materials, parents and community involvement, and school-home reading kits remained low. Likewise, pupils manifested moderate emotional and social engagement but low cognitive, behavioral, and creative engagement, indicating that while pupils generally participate in reading activities, deeper and more sustained engagement has yet to be fully developed.

The study further established that teachers' implementation of reading strategies is significantly related to pupils' reading engagement in selected domains. The use of local languages and culturally relevant materials, peer reading and mentorship sessions, and school-home reading kits demonstrated significant relationships with pupils' cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social engagement, whereas reading aloud and reading circles, as well as parents and community involvement, showed no significant relationship. Moreover, pupils' reading engagement did not significantly differ when grouped according to sex, while creative engagement significantly differed according to class standing, suggesting that pupils with higher academic performance demonstrate greater creative engagement in reading.

The findings emphasize that pupils' reading engagement is shaped not only by the presence of reading strategies but also by how consistently these strategies are implemented and reinforced through meaningful connections among the school, home, and community. The study highlights that instructional practices rooted in pupils' lived experiences, such as the use of local languages, culturally relevant materials, collaborative peer learning, and school-home reading support, contribute more meaningfully to reading engagement than traditional approaches implemented without contextual reinforcement. The uneven manifestation of engagement further suggests that while emotional and social engagement develop more naturally through interactive learning experiences, cognitive, behavioral, and particularly creative engagement require more intentional instructional design and sustained opportunities for meaningful participation.

Overall, this study affirms that strengthening pupils' reading engagement requires context-responsive, culturally relevant, and collaborative instructional practices that extend beyond classroom instruction. The findings provide empirical support for

strengthening "Project Pagbasa" by reimagining reading engagement as a continuous process supported by teachers, families, and communities. In doing so, the study contributes to the growing body of knowledge by demonstrating that the effectiveness of reading strategies is selective and context-dependent, underscoring the importance of sustained, culturally grounded, and collaborative approaches in improving pupils' reading engagement in hinterland schools.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that the Department of Education continue to strengthen teacher capacity through sustained professional development programs focusing on the effective implementation of reading strategies that promote pupils' cognitive, emotional, behavioral, social, and creative engagement. The provision of contextualized and localized reading resources suitable for geographically isolated and resource-constrained schools should also be prioritized to make reading instruction more meaningful and relevant to learners' experiences. School administrators may further enhance the implementation of reading programs by conducting regular classroom observations, strengthening school-based monitoring of pupils' reading engagement, and fostering stronger partnerships among the school, home, and community to support reading beyond classroom instruction.

Teachers are encouraged to consistently integrate interactive and differentiated reading strategies that promote higher-order thinking, collaboration, and meaningful engagement. Greater emphasis should be given to strengthening reading aloud through think-aloud modeling, higher-order questioning, prediction, and reflective discussions, while maximizing the use of localized and culturally relevant reading materials that connect texts to pupils' lived experiences. Likewise, teachers may provide varied creative response activities such as storytelling, dramatization, drawing, interpretation, and reflective writing to develop pupils' creative engagement. Schools may also tap local community knowledge holders, including elders, farmers, fisherfolk, weavers, and local artisans, to enrich reading instruction by linking classroom texts with authentic community experiences, thereby strengthening pupils' comprehension, cultural appreciation, and engagement.

Parents and community stakeholders are likewise encouraged to provide consistent support for pupils' reading development by establishing regular home reading routines and actively participating in school-community reading initiatives that integrate local knowledge and cultural practices. Curriculum implementers may also review and enhance existing reading curriculum provisions to ensure that engagement-driven reading strategies are responsive to the unique realities and needs of hinterland schools.

Finally, future researchers are encouraged to replicate the study using larger samples, different geographical settings, or other educational contexts to validate the present findings. Future studies may also employ qualitative or mixed-methods approaches to gain deeper insights into the factors influencing pupils' reading engagement. Moreover, intervention studies that focus on strengthening creative engagement and sustaining

independent reading behaviors among elementary pupils are recommended to further expand the existing body of knowledge and support the continuous improvement of school-based reading programs.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This study strictly adhered to established ethical standards throughout the conduct of the research. Ethical clearance and the necessary permissions were obtained from the appropriate academic institution, the Schools Division Office, the District Supervisor, and the school heads before data collection commenced. Informed consent was secured from the parents or legal guardians of the Grade 5 and Grade 6 pupil respondents, while participation in the study was entirely voluntary. The respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without coercion, penalty, or any negative consequences.

The anonymity, confidentiality, and well-being of the respondents were safeguarded throughout the study. No personally identifiable information was disclosed, and all data collected were treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for academic and research purposes. The researcher declares that no conflict of interest existed in the conduct of the study. Academic honesty was observed by properly acknowledging all sources and strictly avoiding plagiarism. The findings were interpreted objectively, without bias, fabrication, or falsification, and the results were reported solely to contribute to educational research.

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