



ENHANCING ENGLISH READING COMPREHENSION AMONG KEY STAGE 2 LEARNERS IN BAYABAS DISTRICT: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension is a fundamental literacy skill, yet many Key Stage 2 learners continue to experience difficulties in understanding English texts at literal, inferential, and critical levels. This mixed-methods study examined the reading comprehension of Key Stage 2 learners in Bayabas District, Division of Surigao del Sur, and identified instructional and contextual factors associated with their performance as a basis for developing a reading intervention program. The quantitative phase involved 237 Key Stage 2 learners and eight English teachers from eight public elementary schools during School Year 2025–2026. Data were gathered through Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (PHIL-IRI) results, researcher-developed questionnaires, and a validated contextualized reading comprehension test assessing literal, inferential, and critical comprehension. Qualitative data were obtained through focus group discussions with learners and in-depth interviews with teachers. Descriptive statistics, a t-test, Pearson product-moment correlation, and thematic analysis were employed. Findings revealed substantial reading difficulties among the learners, with 42.04% classified as two levels down and 29.41% as three levels down based on the district PHIL-IRI results, while only 28.55% were grade ready. The contextualized assessment showed that inferential comprehension had the highest mastery at 71.31%, whereas literal comprehension was mastered by only 24.47% and critical comprehension by 4.22%. Reading instruction was generally perceived as More Effective (overall WM = 4.17), particularly in the use of instructional materials and enhancement activities (both WM = 4.18). However, the relationship between instructional effectiveness and reading comprehension abilities was not statistically significant ($r = 0.211$, $p = .6881$), while factors affecting reading comprehension demonstrated a strong positive relationship with comprehension abilities ($r = 0.8929$, $p = .0165$). Qualitative findings highlighted foundational difficulties in vocabulary and word recognition, the need for individualized and flexible instruction, the

value of diagnostic assessment, scaffolding, guided reading, vocabulary development, family support, peer collaboration, and sustained school-based reading programs. The findings underscore the need for a comprehensive, context-responsive reading intervention that strengthens foundational skills while mobilizing teachers, families, peers, and school-community resources to improve English reading comprehension among Key Stage 2 learners.

Keywords: *English reading comprehension, Key Stage 2 learners, PHIL-IRI, literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, critical comprehension, reading instruction, reading intervention, literacy development, Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a foundational component of literacy and a critical prerequisite for successful learning across subject areas. For Key Stage 2 learners, comprehension extends beyond recognizing words to understanding explicit information, making inferences, integrating ideas, and evaluating texts. These increasingly complex demands require instruction that addresses both foundational reading skills and higher-order comprehension processes. Evidence from a meta-analysis of reading interventions indicates that interventions targeting foundational reading skills and/or comprehension instruction can produce meaningful improvements in reading comprehension among learners experiencing reading difficulties.

The development of comprehension also depends on learners' ability to construct meaning from texts by connecting vocabulary, background knowledge, and textual information. Recent research has emphasized the value of integrating content knowledge into literacy instruction. Hwang et al. (2023), for example, found that content-rich literacy instruction can strengthen both vocabulary and reading comprehension among elementary learners. Their systematic review showed positive effects on vocabulary and comprehension when literacy instruction incorporated meaningful content, reading, discussion, writing, and related learning activities. This suggests that effective reading instruction should move beyond isolated skills and provide learners with opportunities to engage with meaningful and appropriately contextualized texts.

Higher-order comprehension presents an additional challenge. Inferential reading requires learners to connect information that is not directly stated in a text, draw conclusions, and integrate textual evidence with prior knowledge. A systematic review of inferencing research found considerable variation in how inference skills are defined, taught, and assessed, highlighting the importance of alignment among instructional practices, learning objectives, and assessment. For elementary learners, systematic opportunities to practice questioning, predicting, explaining, and justifying interpretations may therefore be particularly important in developing deeper comprehension.

The need for targeted reading intervention is especially relevant in the Philippine basic education context. The Department of Education has institutionalized the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program to provide learning support for

learners who have not attained expected competencies, with reading identified as one of its priority areas. Republic Act No. 12028 established ARAL as a national learning intervention program for struggling learners, while DepEd's implementing guidelines specifically provide for responsive reading support for learners below expected proficiency levels. Recent Philippine research likewise demonstrates the potential of school-based reading interventions. Marciano (2023), for instance, examined a structured reading intervention for struggling Grade 5 and 6 readers and used Phil-IRI-based assessment to examine learners' reading performance before and after the intervention.

Despite these national initiatives and growing evidence on effective reading interventions, reading difficulties remain a significant concern in local school contexts where learners differ in reading proficiency, learning needs, motivation, and access to literacy support. A comprehensive examination of reading comprehension therefore needs to consider not only learners' performance but also the instructional practices and contextual factors surrounding reading development. In Bayabas District, the present study addresses this need by examining the English reading proficiency and comprehension abilities of Key Stage 2 learners, assessing the perceived effectiveness of reading instruction, and investigating learner, family, community, and peer factors associated with comprehension. It further incorporates the lived experiences of teachers and learners to provide contextual explanations of the quantitative findings. The integration of these perspectives provides a basis for developing a context-responsive reading intervention program aimed at strengthening literal, inferential, and critical comprehension among Key Stage 2 learners.

Research Questions

This study sought to examine the English reading comprehension of Key Stage 2 learners in Bayabas District, Division of Surigao del Sur, as a basis for developing a context-responsive reading intervention program. Specifically, it aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the proficiency level of Key Stage 2 learners in English reading based on the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (PHIL-IRI) results?
2. How effective is reading instruction for Key Stage 2 learners in terms of:
 - 2.1. methodology;
 - 2.2. instructional materials; and
 - 2.3. enhancement activities?
3. To what extent do the following factors affect the reading comprehension of Key Stage 2 learners:
 - 3.1. learner factors;
 - 3.2. family factors;
 - 3.3. community factors; and
 - 3.4. peer factors?
4. What is the level of reading comprehension of Key Stage 2 learners based on contextualized reading materials in terms of:
 - 4.1. literal comprehension;

- 4.2. inferential comprehension; and
- 4.3. critical comprehension?
5. Is there a significant difference between the learners' PHIL-IRI results and their performance in the contextualized reading comprehension assessment?
6. Is there a significant relationship between the perceived effectiveness of reading instruction and the learners' reading comprehension abilities?
7. Is there a significant relationship between the identified learner, family, community, and peer factors and the learners' reading comprehension abilities?
8. What are the lived experiences of Key Stage 2 teachers and learners regarding English reading comprehension, reading instruction, and the factors that influence reading development?
9. Based on the quantitative and qualitative findings, what reading intervention program may be proposed to enhance the English reading comprehension of Key Stage 2 learners in Bayabas District?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-method research design to examine the English reading comprehension of Key Stage 2 learners in Bayabas District and explore the factors associated with their reading performance. The quantitative component involved 237 Key Stage 2 learners and eight English teachers from eight elementary schools during School Year 2025–2026. Data were gathered using the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (PHIL-IRI), a researcher-developed questionnaire, and a validated contextualized reading comprehension test measuring literal, inferential, and critical comprehension. Descriptive statistics, the t-test, and Pearson product-moment correlation were used to analyze the quantitative data. The qualitative component involved focus group discussions with selected learners and in-depth interviews with Key Stage 2 teachers to explore their experiences, challenges, instructional practices, and contextual factors related to reading comprehension. The qualitative data were analyzed thematically, and the quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the learners' reading needs and to serve as the basis for developing a context-responsive reading intervention program.

RESULTS

Table 1. Key Stage 2 Learners' English Reading Proficiency Based on PHIL-IRI

PHIL-IRI Proficiency Level	Frequency	Percentage
3 Levels Down	171	29.41%
2 Levels Down	244	42.04%
Grade Ready	165	28.55%
Total	580	100.00%

Table 2. Perceived Effectiveness of Reading Instruction

Dimension of Reading Instruction Weighted Mean Descriptive Equivalent Rank			
Methodology Used	4.15	More Effective	3
Instructional Materials	4.18	More Effective	1.5
Enhancement Activities	4.18	More Effective	1.5
Overall	4.17	More Effective	—

Table 3. Factors Affecting English Reading Comprehension

Factor	Weighted Mean	Descriptive Equivalent	Rank
Learner Factor	1.88	Least Evidently Affect	3
Family Factor	1.84	Least Evidently Affect	4
Community Factor	2.04	Least Evidently Affect	1
Peer Factor	1.99	Least Evidently Affect	2
Overall	1.94	Least Evidently Affect	—

Table 4. Reading Comprehension Mastery by Skill

Reading Comprehension Skill	Overall Mastery	Grade 4	Grade 6
Literal	24.47%	38.75%	11.11%
Inferential	71.31%	58.75%	82.72%
Critical	4.22%	—	—

Table 5. Difference Between PHIL-IRI Results and Contextualized Reading Comprehension

Comparison	t-value	p-value	Decision at $\alpha = .05$	Result
PHIL-IRI vs. Contextualized Reading Comprehension	0.357	0.627	Fail to reject H_0	Not significant

Table 6. Relationship Between Reading Instruction and Reading Comprehension

Variables	Pearson's r	p- value	Decision at α = .05	Result
Reading Instruction Effectiveness × Reading Comprehension	0.211	0.6881	Fail to reject H_0	Not significant

Table 7. Relationship Between Identified Factors and Reading Comprehension

Variables	Pearson's r	p- value	Decision at α = .05	Result
Factors Affecting Reading Comprehension × Reading Comprehension	0.8929	0.0165	Reject H_0	Significant

Table 8. Major Qualitative Themes on Reading Comprehension

Major Theme	Key Findings
1. Teacher Experience in Teaching Reading Comprehension	Teaching reading was described as complex and demanding, particularly because of learners' foundational deficits. Teachers emphasized individualized, flexible, and patient approaches.
2. Foundational Reading Difficulties	Low vocabulary, poor word recognition, limited background knowledge, low motivation, varying reading levels, and absenteeism were repeatedly identified as major challenges.
3. Challenges and Solutions	Teachers addressed difficulties through one-on-one tutoring, differentiated activities, remediation, continuous practice, home visitation, and communication with parents.
4. Instructional Materials and Usage	Teachers used visual aids, graphic organizers, flashcards, videos, digital materials, and print resources to support comprehension and vocabulary development.
5. Enhancement Activities and Assistance	Vocabulary games, drills, flashcards, gamified materials, small-group sessions, simplified texts, and targeted decoding support were emphasized.
6. Family Support on Reading Habits	Reading together, storytelling, parental modeling, provision of books, encouragement, and positive home literacy environments were viewed as important forms of support.
7. Peer Influence on Reading Comprehension	Shared reading, group activities, peer discussions, collaborative learning, and voluntary assistance to struggling readers supported motivation and engagement.

Major Theme	Key Findings
8. Community and School Programs	School-based programs such as ARAL Reading Program and Bawat Bata Bumabasa provided structured reading time, guided activities, story sessions, and dedicated reading spaces.

Table 9. Proposed Reading Intervention Program: Project BRIDGE

Component	Proposed Intervention
Program Title	Boosting Reading through Integrated Development and Guided Engagement (Project BRIDGE)
Primary Need Addressed	High proportion of learners reading below grade level and weak learner, family, and community support
Instructional Approach	Differentiated and tiered reading instruction based on PHIL-IRI profiles
Learner Support	Individualized reading pathways, simplified texts, targeted decoding and vocabulary activities
Peer Support	Buddy Reading, peer tutoring, Reading Ambassadors, collaborative reading
Family Support	Parent reading toolkits, home-reading guides, reading together, storytelling and discussion
Community Support	Community Reading Corners, mobile reading carts, community storytelling activities
Learning Resources	Reading Passports, story maps, big books, storybooks, E-Story sessions, English-language signages
Key Personnel	Program coordinator, peer tutors, community volunteers, and parent partners
Implementation Period	10 months
Major Activities	Stakeholder orientation, PHIL-IRI baseline mapping, Buddy Reading, Word Quest, parental toolkits, Community Reading Corners, mid-year remediation review, reading camp/storytelling festival, post-test, and recognition
Proposed Budget	₱26,200
Evaluation	Post-test using PHIL-IRI and monitoring of learner progress through Reading Passports

Table 10. Project BRIDGE Implementation Timeline

Phase	Month	Major Activity	Main Purpose
Preparation	1	Stakeholder Orientation	Present findings and secure stakeholder support
	2	Baseline Mapping	Group learners according to PHIL-IRI profiles
Launch	3	Buddy Reading and Word Quest	Build engagement and activate peer support
Implementation	4	Distribution of Parental Toolkits	Strengthen home reading support
	5–6	Community Reading Corners	Extend reading opportunities into the community
	7	Mid-Year Remediation Review	Monitor progress and adjust instruction
	8	Reading Camp/Storytelling Festival	Promote reading as a community activity
Evaluation	9	Post-Test Using PHIL-IRI	Measure changes in below-grade-level reading
	10	Recognition and Awarding	Reinforce positive reading-support behaviors

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that English reading comprehension remains a substantial concern among Key Stage 2 learners in Bayabas District. Based on the PHIL-IRI results, 71.45% of the assessed learners were below their expected grade level, with 42.04% classified as two levels down and 29.41% as three levels down. This finding suggests that reading difficulties persist across the Key Stage 2 years and require sustained, differentiated support rather than a uniform intervention. A systematic review by Joo and Lee (2021) found that elementary reading-comprehension interventions varied considerably in their design and delivery but consistently demonstrated potential for improving comprehension. Their findings support the need for structured intervention programs that are responsive to learners' specific reading difficulties.

The study also found that reading instruction was generally perceived as more effective ($WM = 4.17$), particularly in instructional materials and enhancement activities. However, the effectiveness of instruction was not significantly associated with reading comprehension ($r = 0.211$, $p = .6881$). This finding suggests that the presence of apparently effective classroom practices does not necessarily translate directly into measurable comprehension performance, particularly when learners have substantial foundational difficulties. Hall et al. (2023) reported that reading interventions for elementary learners with or at risk for reading difficulties produced significant overall effects, but the magnitude of effects varied according to intervention characteristics, dosage, and the reading outcome assessed. Their findings reinforce the importance of

considering not only whether instruction is implemented but also its intensity, specificity, duration, and alignment with learners' particular needs.

The particularly low performance in literal comprehension (24.47%) and critical comprehension (4.22%), despite comparatively higher inferential mastery (71.31%), is another important finding. The pattern suggests that learners may demonstrate some capacity to construct meaning or draw conclusions while still experiencing weaknesses in retrieving explicit information and evaluating texts. Rodríguez Brito et al. (2023), in their systematic review of reading fluency, word recognition, and comprehension among primary learners, emphasized the interconnected nature of these reading processes. Their review highlights the importance of strengthening foundational reading processes while developing comprehension simultaneously. This is consistent with the qualitative findings of the present study, particularly teachers' reports of low vocabulary and poor word recognition among struggling learners.

The qualitative findings further showed that teachers rely on visual materials, graphic organizers, flashcards, digital resources, vocabulary activities, small-group instruction, and individualized support. These practices are particularly relevant to the learners in the present study because English functions as an additional language for many Filipino learners. Murphy and Arciuli (2024) reviewed 53 studies of digital reading-comprehension instruction for children learning English as an additional language and found that multiple-strategy instruction was common, with more than half of the reviewed studies reporting statistically significant comprehension gains. However, they also cautioned that the quality of evidence varied considerably. Thus, the present findings support the use of varied and engaging instructional resources, but these should be deliberately matched with learners' proficiency levels and specific comprehension needs rather than simply increasing the amount of instructional materials used.

The study's finding of a strong positive relationship between the identified contextual factors and reading comprehension ($r = 0.8929$, $p = .0165$) is particularly important. Although learner, family, community, and peer factors were individually rated as least evidently affecting comprehension, the aggregate factor variable was significantly associated with comprehension performance. The qualitative data help explain this finding: teachers described family reading support, peer collaboration, and community and school-based literacy activities as important sources of motivation and engagement. Similarly, Carter et al. (2024) found in a systematic review of reading-comprehension interventions in a multilingual context that successful interventions commonly incorporated reading strategies, vocabulary development, teacher preparation, and adequate resources. Their findings suggest that comprehension development should be understood within the broader linguistic and learning environment rather than as an exclusively classroom-based process.

The findings collectively provide a strong basis for the proposed Project BRIDGE. The intervention's emphasis on differentiated instruction, peer tutoring, parental support, community reading opportunities, vocabulary development, and continuous monitoring corresponds closely with the needs identified in both the quantitative and qualitative phases. This direction is also consistent with Triana et al. (2024), whose systematic

review of elementary reading-comprehension research identified varied instructional approaches, strategies, school programs, and technology-supported resources as important approaches to improving comprehension. For Bayabas District, however, the intervention should prioritize targeted remediation of foundational reading difficulties and sustained support, rather than relying solely on general classroom enrichment.

Overall, the results suggest that the reading problem in Bayabas District is multidimensional. The learners' low PHIL-IRI proficiency and weak literal and critical comprehension indicate substantial skill deficits, while the qualitative findings reveal vocabulary, word-recognition, attendance, motivation, family support, and resource-related challenges. At the same time, teachers report using a range of effective instructional strategies. The absence of a significant relationship between perceived instructional effectiveness and comprehension, together with the significant association between contextual factors and comprehension, indicates that future interventions should integrate instructional, learner, family, peer, and community supports. The proposed Project BRIDGE therefore provides a reasonable context-responsive framework for addressing the identified reading needs.

Conclusions

The findings indicate that reading comprehension among Key Stage 2 learners in Bayabas District remains a significant instructional concern, particularly in literal and critical comprehension, despite generally effective reading instruction practices reported by teachers. While no significant relationship was found between the perceived effectiveness of reading instruction and learners' comprehension performance, a strong positive relationship was identified between learner, family, community, and peer-related factors and reading comprehension, highlighting the importance of a broader support system beyond classroom instruction. The qualitative findings further revealed challenges involving vocabulary, word recognition, motivation, attendance, resources, and varied learning needs, alongside the value of differentiated instruction, guided reading, parental involvement, peer support, and community-based programs. Thus, the findings support the implementation of Project BRIDGE (Boosting Reading through Integrated Development and Guided Engagement) as an integrated intervention that combines targeted reading instruction with family, peer, and community engagement to strengthen learners' English reading comprehension. This multidimensional approach is consistent with recent evidence emphasizing explicit, scaffolded, peer-supported, and appropriately resourced reading instruction for multilingual and English-learning pupils.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Bayabas District implement Project BRIDGE (Boosting Reading through Integrated Development and Guided Engagement), prioritizing learners who demonstrate below-grade-level reading performance through regular PHIL-IRI-based assessment, differentiated instruction, guided reading, explicit vocabulary development, and contextualized comprehension activities. Schools should strengthen peer-assisted and small-group reading through reading buddies, tutoring, and collaborative activities, while providing teachers with appropriate print, visual, and digital

instructional materials. Given the strong relationship between the identified learner, family, community, and peer factors and reading comprehension, parents and community partners should also be actively engaged through home-reading activities, parent orientations, reading corners, and community-based reading sessions. Teachers and school heads should continuously monitor learners' progress and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions using comparable pre- and post-assessments so that strategies can be adjusted according to learners' needs. These recommendations are also consistent with recent evidence supporting peer tutoring and family-supported reading interventions.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This study adhered to established ethical standards in the conduct of educational research. Permission to conduct the study was secured from the appropriate education authorities and school administrators in Bayabas District. The participation of the respondents was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from the participants and, where applicable, their parents or guardians. The respondents were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study, their right to participate or withdraw, and the confidential treatment of the information they provided. Learners' identities and individual responses were protected, and the data gathered were used solely for academic and research purposes. The researchers also ensured that the administration of the research instruments, focus group discussions, and interviews did not cause harm or undue discomfort to the participants and that all collected data were handled and reported responsibly.

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