

# Reading Proficiency, Instructional Strategies, and Challenges in Public Elementary Schools

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## Abstract

Reading proficiency is a fundamental skill that significantly influences learners' academic success and lifelong learning. This study aimed to assess the reading proficiency of elementary students and examine the instructional strategies, challenges, and opportunities in teaching reading in public elementary schools in the Second Congressional District of Camarines Sur. Specifically, it evaluated students' proficiency in phonemic awareness, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency; identified instructional strategies employed by teachers; determined challenges encountered; and explored available instructional opportunities. A descriptive-correlational research design was utilized, involving 110 teachers and 132 Grade 2 pupils selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using standardized reading assessments, survey questionnaires, and validated research instruments. Statistical tools such as mean, weighted mean, standard deviation, and Pearson correlation were employed to analyze the data. Findings revealed that students demonstrated a generally high level of reading proficiency, with vocabulary as the strongest area and phonemic awareness as the least developed. Teachers exhibited strong instructional practices, particularly in lesson design and delivery, although technology integration was relatively less emphasized. Challenges such as large class sizes and classroom dynamics were prominent, while instructional opportunities, especially professional development, were evident. Correlation results indicated limited significant relationships among variables, except for selected factors such as resource availability and overall instructional opportunities. The study concludes that improving reading proficiency requires a balanced approach that integrates effective instructional strategies, addresses contextual challenges, and maximizes instructional opportunities through the development of appropriate reading resource materials.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

Reading proficiency is acknowledged as a foundational competency that underpins academic achievement and lifelong learning (Garganera, 2025). Globally, access to quality literacy instruction is embedded in Sustainable Development Goal 4, which advocates for inclusive and equitable education for all (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2017). In the Philippines, this commitment is codified in the 1987 Constitution and reinforced by Republic Act No. 10533 (K to 12 Basic Education Program) and Republic Act No. 12028, laws that mandate the development of literacy as a core educational priority. Despite these legal frameworks and institutional programs such as the *Literacy Remediation Program* and *Tara, Basa! Tutoring Program*, national assessments continue to reveal significant gaps. Data from the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) for School Year

2024–2025 indicated that over 64,000 Grade 3 learners were classified as low emerging readers, signaling systemic challenges in literacy delivery (Department of Education [DepEd], 2025).

The problem is multidimensional. Literature identifies reading proficiency as a construct comprising phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Scarborough, 2001). Research by Bayoneta et al. (2025) highlights the necessity of phonemic awareness in early literacy, while Corpuz et al. (2024) and Rupley et al. (2020) establish vocabulary and fluency as critical bridges to comprehension. However, effective reading development is heavily dependent on how it is taught. Ghani and Bahal (2026) and Leye-Akinlabi (2025) affirm the efficacy of phonics-based and guided reading strategies, yet Dhakal (2024) argues that differentiated instruction remains the most appropriate approach for diverse classrooms. Conversely, the literature also documents persistent barriers: Bowne et al. (2017) and Jones (2021) cite large class sizes and limited time as structural constraints, while Maffea (2020) and Jumawid (2024) point to resource scarcity. Furthermore, socioeconomic factors and home environments significantly shape literacy outcomes (Beltrán Sierra et al., 2024).

Within the local context of the Second Congressional District of Camarines Sur, these national and global challenges are manifest. While local policies such as “No Read, No Pass” aim to enforce standards, school-based assessments reveal persistent gaps across all reading domains. Most existing studies examine proficiency, strategies, or challenges in isolation; there is a scarcity of research analyzing their dynamic interaction specifically within public elementary schools in this region. Consequently, this study was conducted to assess the reading proficiency of learners, determine the strategies employed by teachers, identify prevailing challenges, and examine the relationships between these variables. The ultimate objective was to generate context-specific data to inform the development of appropriate reading resource materials.

The study is anchored on Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1979) Guy-Evans, 2025, which posits that development is influenced by interacting environmental systems—microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystem, and macrosystem. This framework is supported by Scarborough’s Reading Rope Model (2001), which conceptualizes reading as the integration of word recognition and language comprehension strands; Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory (1978), emphasizing social interaction and scaffolding in learning; and Piaget’s Constructivist Learning Theory (1952), highlighting active knowledge construction. Synthesizing these, the Integrated Instructional-Outcome Theory serves as the study’s unifying framework, proposing that proficiency is the product of the interplay between instructional practices, environmental challenges, and available opportunities.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to comprehensively assess the reading proficiency of elementary learners and examine the instructional strategies, challenges, and opportunities in teaching reading in public elementary schools, as a basis for proposing effective reading resource materials. Specifically, it attained the following objectives:

1. To assess reading proficiency in terms of phonemic awareness, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency.
2. To determine instructional strategies regarding design, delivery, and resource utilization.
3. To identify challenges related to resources, teacher preparedness, socioeconomic factors, classroom dynamics, and class size.
4. To determine significant relationships between strategies and challenges.

5. To propose reading materials based on findings.

## METHODOLOGY

This research utilized a **descriptive–correlational research design** to comprehensively examine the status of variables and the associations among them. According to Creswell (2014), descriptive designs are appropriate for documenting existing conditions, while correlational designs allow for the statistical measurement of relationships between variables without implying causation (Schober et al., 2018). This design was selected to provide both a detailed profile of reading proficiency and instructional practices and to analyze how these variables relate to one another within the educational setting (Putri et al., 2025). The study was conducted in the public central elementary schools of the Second Congressional District of Camarines Sur during School Year 2025–2026. The respondents consisted of 110 teachers selected through stratified proportionate sampling to ensure equitable representation across schools, and 132 Grade 2 pupils chosen via purposive sampling, as Grade 2 is identified as a critical period for literacy development. Stratified sampling ensured that each school contributed respondents proportional to its population size, enhancing the reliability and representativeness of the data (Etikan et al., 2016). Inclusion criteria required teachers to be full-time faculty with at least one year of experience and directly involved in reading instruction.

Data collection employed a multi-instrument approach for triangulation (Creswell, 2014):

1. **Reading Proficiency Assessment:** Learners were evaluated using the Standardized Reading Assessment Tool (SCH/MT), measuring competencies in phonemic awareness, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. This provided objective, quantifiable data on learner performance, avoiding reliance on self-reported measures.
2. **Teacher Survey Questionnaire:** A researcher-developed instrument was used to gather data on instructional strategies (design, delivery, technology use) and challenges encountered. Items were anchored on a Likert scale to measure the frequency and extent of practices and perceptions.
3. **Validation Procedures:** Responses were verified by School Heads and Master Teachers to minimize bias inherent in self-reported data and to ensure alignment with actual classroom practices.

The data gathering process followed a systematic protocol:

- **Permits:** Approval was secured from the Schools Division Office and school administrators.
- **Assessment Administration:** Standardized testing was conducted in controlled settings to maintain consistency.
- **Survey Distribution:** Questionnaires were administered and retrieved to ensure high response rates.
- **Observation and Documentary Analysis:** Supplementary data were gathered through classroom observation checklists and review of school records, lesson plans, and assessment results.

Statistical treatment included:

- **Weighted Mean and Mean:** Used to determine the level of reading proficiency, the extent of instructional strategies, and the severity of challenges (Ganti, 2026; Tanujaya et al., 2023).
- **Standard Deviation:** To measure the dispersion or variability of responses.
- **Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient:** To test the hypothesis regarding the significant relationship between instructional strategies and challenges (Senthilnathan, 2019).

Ethical standards were strictly observed, adhering to the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Measures included informed consent, anonymity of respondents and schools, secure data storage, and voluntary participation. The study also acknowledges the use of artificial intelligence for editorial refinement, while confirming

that data analysis and interpretation remained the sole intellectual property of the researcher.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The assessment of reading proficiency covered four domains: phonemic awareness, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and fluency. Overall findings indicated that learners demonstrated a **High to Very High** level of proficiency, with an aggregate weighted mean reflecting generally adequate literacy skills. However, significant variations were observed across specific components and skills.

### Level of Reading Proficiency of Elementary Learners

Table 1 summarizes students' reading proficiency, showing Vocabulary as the highest at 4.22 (Very High), followed by Comprehension (4.20), Fluency (4.18), and Phonemic Awareness (4.06), all rated High. Overall, proficiency levels range from High to Very High, indicating generally strong literacy performance.

**Table 1**  
**Elementary Students Reading Proficiency**

Aspects	Average Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Vocabulary	4.22	Very High
Comprehension	4.20	High
Fluency	4.18	High
Phonemic Awareness	4.06	High

*Note:* (VH) Very High 4.21–5.00; (H) High 3.41–4.20; (A) Average 2.61–3.40; (L) Low 1.81–2.60; (VL) Very Low 1.00–1.80

Vocabulary is the only domain reaching the superior level, while scores gradually decline toward Phonemic Awareness, the lowest-rated skill. Although differences are small, the trend reveals uneven development: learners excel in meaning-based skills but demonstrate comparatively weaker mastery in sound manipulation and phonological processing.

Learners possess a strong vocabulary base, suggesting effective instruction in word knowledge. However, lower phonemic awareness implies limited proficiency in decoding strategies, indicating instruction may prioritize meaning-making over sound-symbol relationships. This reliance on sight words and context could hinder performance with complex texts, as foundational processing skills remain less developed.

These findings align with Scarborough's Reading Rope Model Theory as cited by Kambach and Mesmer, (2024), showing well-developed comprehension strands but less integrated word-recognition skills. Strong vocabulary supports Corpuz et al. (2024) and Zeng et al. (2025), while gaps in phonemic awareness validate Bayoneta et al. (2025) and Doty (2024). Consistent with Vygotsky (1978), learners require further scaffolding in phonics, as recommended by Ghani and Bahal (2026). These results guide the development of learning materials focused on balancing vocabulary strength with improved phonemic competence.

### Level of Instructional Strategies by Teachers

Table 2 summarizes the instructional strategies employed by teachers across two dimensions. Design and Delivery obtained an average weighted mean of 4.30, interpreted as Very High. Meanwhile, Technologies and Resources registered a mean score of 4.02, described as High. These results indicate that teachers utilize instructional strategies extensively, though levels of implementation vary between the two categories.

**Table 2**  
**Instructional Strategies Employed by Teachers**

Instructional Strategies	Average Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Design and Delivery	4.30	Very High
Technologies and Resources	4.02	High

*Note:* (VH) Very High 4.21–5.00; (H) High 3.41–4.20; (A) Average 2.61–3.40; (L) Low 1.81–2.60; (VL) Very Low 1.00–1.80

Statistically, Design and Delivery exceeded the threshold for *Very High* (4.21–5.00), reflecting consistent, well-structured, and highly effective pedagogical practices. In contrast, Technologies and Resources, while within the *High* range (3.41–4.20), is significantly lower and did not reach the superior level. The difference of 0.28 points reveals a distinct gap: teachers demonstrate strong competence in lesson planning, execution, and interaction, but show comparatively less integration and utilization of digital tools, modern media, and varied instructional materials.

It can be inferred that teachers possess strong pedagogical content knowledge and mastery of teaching methods, ensuring quality instruction through effective lesson structuring and delivery. However, the lower rating in Technologies and Resources suggests limited access to digital infrastructure, insufficient technical skills, or a continued reliance on traditional teaching aids. This implies that while the *process* of teaching is excellent, the *mediums and tools* used are less diverse or modernized. Instruction remains effective but is predominantly teacher-centered and print-based, with untapped potential for technology-enhanced learning.

These findings relate to Sociocultural Theory of Learning as cited by Vasileva and Balyasnikova, (2019) confirming strong application of scaffolding and social interaction in lesson delivery. The high rating in design aligns with Suwan and Pateña (2024), who emphasize the importance of structured lesson organization. However, the lower score in technology supports Haleem et al. (2022) and Anderson et al. (2024), who note that resource limitations and contextual barriers often hinder digital integration in public schools. This pattern also connects to the study’s identified challenges, indicating that resource constraints may restrict teachers’ ability to diversify instructional aids, despite their strong capability in teaching execution.

### Challenges Encountered by Teachers and Learners in Achieving Reading Proficiency

Table 3 presents the summary of challenges encountered by teachers and learners in achieving reading proficiency, measured through Average Weighted Mean and interpreted using a scale where 4.21–5.00 is Very High, 3.41–4.20 is High, 2.61–3.40 is Average, 1.81–2.60 is Low, and 1.00–1.80 is Very Low. Large Class Sizes ranked highest with a mean of 4.26, interpreted as Very High. The remaining challenges Classroom Dynamics (4.13), Socio-Economic Factors (4.05), Teacher Preparedness (3.97), and Resource Limitations (3.96) all obtained ratings within the High range. Collectively, the data show that all identified challenges are experienced significantly, with large class sizes standing out as the most critical concern.

**Table 3 Challenges Encountered by Teachers and Learners in Achieving Reading Proficiency**

Challenges	Average Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Large Class Sizes	4.26	Very High

Classroom Dynamics	4.13	High
Socio-Economic	4.05	High
Teacher Preparedness	3.97	High
Resource Limitations	3.96	High

Note: (VH) Very High 4.21–5.00; (H) High 3.41–4.20; (A) Average 2.61–3.40; (L) Low 1.81–2.60; (VL) Very Low 1.00–1.80

Statistically, challenges form a clear hierarchy, with Large Class Sizes as the most severe constraint. Other issues resource shortages, teacher readiness, socioeconomic factors, and classroom dynamics are also significant and comparable in intensity. Overcrowding emerges as the dominant structural barrier, compounding difficulties in management, resource distribution, and individualized instruction. Overall, challenges are multidimensional and interconnected, affecting all aspects of the learning environment.

The findings infer systemic constraints, with large class sizes as the primary limiting factor, restricting individualized instruction, assessment, and interaction. Overcrowding also worsens classroom dynamics, while socioeconomic barriers continue to hinder learning support at home. Gaps in specialized training and material availability further challenge instruction. Overall, teacher capacity is compromised by environmental pressures rather than effort alone. Unless class-size issues are resolved, interventions focused only on resources or training will likely remain ineffective.

These was aligned to the Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1979), showing how factors across environmental layers interact to shape literacy outcomes. Large class sizes emerge as the primary constraint, supporting Bowne et al. (2017) and Jones (2021) regarding the adverse impact of high pupil-teacher ratios on instruction. Consistent with Sociocultural Theory of Learning as cited by Vasileva and Balyasnikova, (2019), overcrowding degrades classroom dynamics by limiting scaffolding and meaningful interaction. Resource shortages corroborate Maffea (2020) and Jumawid (2024), while socioeconomic barriers validate Beltrán Sierra et al. (2024) and Yogeswaran et al. (2025). Gaps in specialized training align with Capin et al. (2024) and Milne and Topping (2025). Through the lens these constraints mediate strategy effectiveness, explaining why proficiency remains strong but uneven. Consequently, interventions must be scalable, resource-efficient, and responsive to socioeconomic and structural realities.

### Relationships Between Instructional Strategies and Challenges Encountered

Table 4 presents the correlation between two strategy components *Design & Delivery* and *Technologies & Learning Resources* and five challenges: *Resource Limitations*, *Teacher Preparedness*, *Socio-Economic Factors*, *Classroom Dynamics*, and *Class Size*. *Design & Delivery* showed **no significant correlations** with any variable ( $p > .05$ ). Conversely, *Technologies & Learning Resources* yielded a **significant negative correlation** only with *Teacher Preparedness* ( $r = -.680, p = .021$ ), while all other associations remained non-significant.

**Table 4 Correlation Matrix of Instructional Strategies Components and Challenges**

	Resource Limit	Teacher Prep	Socio-Eco	Classroom D	Class Size
Design & Delivery Pearson's r	0.412	0.040	-0.007	-0.463	-0.198

	p-value	.237	0.908	0.984	0.152	0.583
Technologies & Learning Resources <sup>r</sup>	Pearson's	-0.480	-0.680*	-0.006	-0.308	0.015
	p-value	0.161	0.021	0.985	0.387	0.967

Note. \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

It is analyzed that *Design & Delivery* operates independently of challenges; despite moderate coefficients, none reached statistical significance, meaning planning and execution are unaffected by constraints. In contrast, the strong inverse link between *Technologies & Resources* and *Teacher Preparedness* indicates that as training gaps increase, the use of diverse and modern resources declines sharply. Other barriers like material shortages, class size, or socioeconomic factors showed no measurable statistical effect on how tools and methods are applied, suggesting that only teacher-related capacity directly influences resource utilization.

It was inferred that Core teaching practices are stable and resilient, maintained consistently regardless of environmental difficulties, reflecting strong professional adherence to standards. However, the adoption of technology and varied materials depends almost entirely on teacher competence. When readiness is low, instruction reverts to traditional methods. This implies challenges are perceived but do not alter fundamental pedagogy; only internal capacity gaps limit innovation. The null hypothesis is accepted in all cases except where preparedness directly shapes resource use.

This aligns with Sociocultural Theory of Learning as cited by Vasileva and Balyasnikova, (2019), confirming that tool use is mediated by capability, and supports Haleem et al. (2022) and Anderson et al. (2024) that technology integration relies on competence, not just availability. Consistent with Suwan & Pateña (2024), lesson design follows professional standards rather than context. From Bronfenbrenner (1979), mesosystem factors like training outweigh microsystem barriers. Challenges form the context but only interact significantly when specialized skills are required. This explains strong foundational proficiency but limited modernization, and directs interventions toward capacity building,

### Proposed Reading Resource Materials and Development Process

The proposed reading resources are structured, engaging tools designed to enhance reading proficiency across all levels, covering phonemic awareness, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and digital learning, alongside guides for teachers and take-home kits.

- **Analysis Phase:** Findings revealed gaps in foundational skills (phonemic awareness, comprehension, fluency), limited differentiated materials, and teacher preparedness needs, forming the basis for resource development.
- **Design Phase:** A multi-modal framework was adopted, combining traditional and modern tools (e.g., decodable books, graphic organizers, digital platforms) to support diverse needs and extend literacy from classroom to home.
- **Development Phase:** Concepts were turned into tangible resources, including kits for sound manipulation, leveled readers, vocabulary aids, workbooks, fluency materials, digital tools, teacher guides, and family literacy kits. These directly address identified weaknesses: building decoding skills,

deepening understanding, integrating technology, and equipping teachers with clear strategies for effective implementation.

**Table 5**  
**Proposed Reading Materials Overview**

<b>Proposed Reading Material</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Purpose/Focus</b>
Phonemic Awareness Kits	Sound activities: rhyming cards, sound mats	Build foundational decoding & sound skills
Decodable Readers & Phonics Books	Leveled texts with phonics patterns & controlled vocabulary	Support early decoding & phonics instruction
Vocabulary-Building Tools	Picture dictionaries, flashcards, word walls	Enhance meaning, usage & semantic mapping
Comprehension Workbooks & Graphic Organizers	Guided passages, story maps, Venn diagrams	Improve comprehension & critical thinking
Fluency Practice Aids	Timed readings, scripts, poetry	Develop speed, accuracy & expression
Digital Reading Platforms	E-books, interactive stories, progress tracking	Deliver engaging, personalized reading
Comprehensive Teacher Guides	Strategies, lesson plans, assessments, training	Equip teachers with effective instruction methods
Home–Community Literacy Kits	Storybooks, logs, family guides	Encourage family involvement & out-of-school literacy

**CONCLUSIONS**

1. Learners show high overall proficiency but uneven skills; vocabulary is strongest, while phonemic awareness is weakest, requiring greater focus on foundational sound instruction.
2. Teachers excel in lesson design and delivery, but technology and resource integration remain limited and underutilized.
3. Large class sizes are the primary barrier, worsened by poor dynamics and socioeconomic constraints, severely affecting instruction.
4. Teacher readiness depends not only on training but also on access to quality resources; better materials build confidence and performance.
5. The study concludes that contextually responsive reading materials are essential interventions. Designed to address gaps in phonemic awareness, comprehension, and fluency, these resources also compensate for limited tools and teacher preparedness. Aligned with actual needs and realities, they serve as a practical solution to improve instruction and raise learners’ reading proficiency.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Implement daily phonics activities to strengthen phonemic awareness.
2. Enhance vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency via guided, repeated, and differentiated reading.
3. Conduct regular progress monitoring and align lessons with clear learning goals.
4. Prioritize training in innovative methods and technology integration for reading.

5. Train teachers in digital assessment tools and promote collaborative learning strategies.
6. Use small-group instruction, provide more materials, and seek funding support.
7. Offer continuous training, improve classroom management, and strengthen programs addressing socioeconomic gaps.

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