

The Teaching and Learning of Reading: Its Challenges, Strategies, and Effectiveness in The Philippine Context: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Anchored on the research objective of understanding the current challenges that confront the learning and teaching of reading skills in the Philippines' basic education context, this systematic review study endeavors to identify the implemented intervention strategies and assess their effectiveness based on the empirical and anecdotal findings revealed in 10 published studies, coded S1 to S10, that met all the inclusion criteria for thematic analysis. The overall findings establish a clear existing need to develop multi-faceted approaches to addressing reading skill gaps, both in pedagogy and resource management. Specifically, it requires a revisit of teachers' holistic professional training, an improvement of the readability of instructional resources, and a renegotiated collaborative partnership between schools and families.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and Rationale

The ability to comprehend textual inputs is a foundational literacy skill and a critical component of language acquisition. As a receptive macro language skill, the ability to read has a significant influence on proficiency in productive skills, such as speaking and writing (Newton et al., 2018). In the Philippines' basic education context, however, pressing challenges and pedagogical issues persist in the teaching and learning of reading as a language skill. This has resulted in poor performance of learners in various internationally benchmarked assessments (Urbano et al., 2021).

Recent international assessments in reading have revealed a dismal performance by Filipino learners at the basic education level. The recent Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) 2019 shows alarming data. It found that after five years of formal schooling, approximately 70% of students were unable to meet regional and global standards. This indicates that a large proportion of students are at risk of not successfully transitioning to secondary school or pursuing further educational opportunities (Cheng & Spink, 2021). In addition, only 10% of the Grade 5 learners in the Philippines reached the minimum proficiency level in reading suggested by the SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) 4.1.1b target, highlighting the magnitude of the literacy gap.

Furthermore, the 2022 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which involved 15-year-old Filipino learners, reinforced these concerns. The Philippines scored significantly low or below the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) mean score on reading comprehension proficiency. Specifically, the Philippines had an average reading score of 347, which is more than 100 points less than the OECD average of 476. This score ranks the Philippines 79th out of 81 participating countries (OECD, 2023).

These results show weaknesses in basic reading instruction and underscore the urgent need for evidence-based interventions. Moreover, this persistent underperformance indicates a national learning crisis that needs a systemic and sustainable intervention program. Specifically, the program should be targeted towards strengthening foundational comprehension skills for advancing critical and creative thinking competencies. Ultimately, the achievement of national literacy goals rests on recognizing that improvement of reading outcomes at the basic education level is crucial to the fulfillment of those goals.

1.2. Identified Deficits, Needs, and Gaps in Reading Skills

Based on the foregoing findings, the studies covered in this review revealed that there are teaching and learning gaps that need to be addressed in the basic education context in the Philippines. Foremost, on the aspect of teaching, several studies highlighted key issues, including the lack of teachers' professional training in effective holistic reading pedagogy, insufficient localized and culturally relevant reading materials, inadequate time allocated for remedial instruction, and the absence of a home-school collaboration (Ligudon & Ildefonso, 2022; Domingo, 2025; De Ocampo, Tosino & Martir, 2024).

Conversely, on the aspect of learning, multiple studies identified a number of learner-related factors that contribute to the low reading proficiency among Filipino learners. These include a lack of motivation, short attention span, limited vocabulary, weak fluency, comprehension skills, and underdeveloped metacognitive awareness. (Alcayde & Basilan, 2023; Cabalog et al., 2023; De Ocampo, Tosino & Martir, 2024; Tadlas & Segumpan-Salon, 2024; Del Valle, 2025).

A multi-faceted and systematic approach is needed in addressing the reading crisis in the basic education level of the Philippines. Sustained professional development, culturally oriented instructional materials, and productive partnerships between schools and families are required to bridge teaching-related gaps. In the aspect of learning, nurturing intrinsic motivation and metacognitive strategies are equally important with improving vocabulary and comprehension skills. Thus, an integrated framework of pedagogy, policy and practice is imperative to achieve reading proficiency in the Philippines basic education context.

1.3. Strategic Significance of the Study

Considering the identified needs, it is urgently needed to understand the problem from various perspectives, supported by empirical evidence gathered through a systematic review of existing studies. Hence, this current study endeavors to analyze and synthesize them to better understand the challenges, intervention strategies, and their effectiveness in teaching and learning reading across various basic education contexts in the Philippines.

One of the pragmatic objectives of this current study is to recommend a holistic approach that clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in addressing reading-related learning deficits. This includes proposing research-informed tasks to guide curricular and instructional designs, teachers' pedagogical training, resource management, and policy review and development, specifically the post-pandemic "catch-up" Fridays program.

The potential to inform evidence-based strategies that facilitate achievement of basic education's literacy goals at the national level is the strategic significance of this study. Thus, in doing so, the current study underscores the crucial role of reading competence as a pivotal component that promotes social mobility, equity and inclusive national development.

1.4. Research Questions

This systematic review of literature (2020-2025) on reading skills in the basic education context in the Philippines seeks to answer the following research questions (RQs):

- 1.) What are the common themes of the state of teaching and learning reading skills by educational level?
- 2.) What are the challenges in teaching and learning reading skills?
- 3.) What strategies are used by language teachers in addressing these challenges?
- 4.) How effective are these strategies based on research findings?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

Leveraging on the textual and statistical depth of existing studies, this current study employed a systematic review of related literature, a qualitative research method, to analyze and synthesize all relevant research evidence to answer the research questions. Thus, this involved the formulation of inclusion-exclusion criteria to guide the systematic search, critical appraisal, and synthesis of all relevant research-based evidence on the challenges, strategies, and effectiveness of teaching and learning reading within the basic education context in the Philippines.

This research design facilitated in the identification of common themes, gaps, and effective practices in teaching and learning reading in the Philippine basic education system. Moreover, it improved the credibility of the study's findings and conclusions, veering away from anecdotal evidence.

2.2. Data Analysis and Sampling Technique

This current study utilized thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes generated from the analyses and syntheses of 10 existing studies, coded S1 (study 1) to S10 (study 10) that met the established inclusion criteria (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2015). Hence, these studies were chosen by purposive non-random sampling.

A codebook was developed to systematically document emerging patterns across three main areas, namely: challenges, strategies, and effectiveness. By identifying and analyzing recurring patterns in the key areas, thematic analysis generated meaningful insights in depth, both convergent and divergent, about the challenges, strategies, and effectiveness of reading instruction in basic education in the Philippines.

2.3. Research Procedures and Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

The investigation started with a comprehensive search, guided with the inclusion-exclusion criteria, of peer-reviewed journal articles from university online databases, which included ERIC, ScienceDirect, and the Philippine E-Journals. After shortlisting relevant studies, a two-stage screening process was conducted.

The first stage involved a title and abstract review to ensure alignment with the research objectives. Subsequently, a full-text review followed in the second stage. Findings from the final selection of studies were extracted using a structured template that captured the following details: learners' challenges, intervention strategies, and effectiveness of intervention. This systematic approach ensured collection of valid and reliable data for its thematic analysis.

The following are the inclusion criteria for this current study:

- 1.) peer-reviewed published journal articles;

- 2.) published from 2020-2025;
- 3.) focused on the Philippines' basic education context;
- 4.) discussed challenges, intervention strategies, and the effectiveness of intervention;
- 5.) published in English.

On the other hand, the exclusion criteria are as follows:

- 1.) not peer-reviewed;
- 2.) not specific to the Philippines' basic education context;
- 3.) focused on general literacy and not on teaching and learning reading skills;
- 4.) opinion-based (editorials or concept papers) and without empirical evidence;
- 5.) Conference abstracts only.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To answer research question 1 (RQ1), Table 1 shows recurring common themes from the key findings, which are clustered by the educational levels of learners.

Table 1. Themes of the State of Teaching and Learning Reading Skills in the Philippines' Basic Education by Educational Level (2020-2025)

Study ID	Author/Year	Title	Educational Level	Key Findings/Themes
S1	Alcayde & Basilan (2023)	Teachers' Perceptions of the Challenges and Strategies in Supporting Students with Reading Difficulties	Elementary	Collaboration with families is critical.
S2	Cabalog et al., (2023)	Teachers' Strategies, Challenges, and Coping Mechanisms in Helping Struggling Readers during the Pandemic	Elementary	Learning support (remedial) is essential.
S3	Concepcion & Melchor (2024)	Reading Comprehension Level of Grade 6 Students	Elementary	Fostering a reading culture at home and school is imperative.
S4	Tadlas & Segumpan-Salon (2024)	Understanding Teachers' Reading Instructional Strategies and Assessment Techniques During the Post-Pandemic	Elementary/ Junior HS	Catch-up or remedial sessions are required (post-pandemic).
S5	Romero & Lim (2022)	Pedagogical Practices of Grade 6 & 7 Teachers in Blended Reading	Elementary/ Junior HS	A blended approach works with tech-literate learners.
S6	De Ocampo, Tosino & Martir (2024)	Teachers' Reading Comprehension Strategies, Approaches, and Challenges	Junior HS	Teachers' professional training is linked to better strategy use.
S7	Del Valle (2025)	Improving Reading Comprehension Using a Contextualized Metacognitive Strategy (CMS)	Junior HS	A structured reflection boosts reading comprehension.

S8	Domingo (2025)	Reading Skills and Perceived Challenges among High School Learners	Junior HS	Learner-centered, culturally relevant texts promote motivation.
S9	Ligudon & Ildefonso (2022)	Reading Strategies Employed by Senior High School English Teachers in the Philippines	Senior HS	Importance of scaffolding strategy
S10	Urbano, et al., (2021)	Reading and Writing Needs of Senior High School Students: The Case of Filipino Students in the Philippines	Senior HS	Importance of integrating and scaffolding reading into the writing tasks

3.1.Theme 1: Home Support for Positive Reading Habits

For young learners at the elementary level, home support is needed to develop positive reading habits (Alcayde & Basilan, 2023; Concepcion & Melchor, 2024). In addition, catch-up reading sessions, as post-pandemic remedial intervention, are essential to help young learners recover foundational reading skills disrupted by remote schooling (Cabalog et al., 2023).

To reinforce phonemic awareness, vocabulary acquisition, and basic comprehension skills, catch-up reading sessions should form an integral part of the reading curriculum and be provided to learners (Cabalog et al., 2023). Alcayde and Basilan (2023) and Concepcion and Melchor (2024) explain that this remedial measure, when integrated into home routines, provides parents and guardians with an opportunity to monitor progress, provide immediate feedback, and adapt reading materials to the learner's current proficiency level. These studies support the contention that regular parental involvement strengthens the child's intrinsic motivation to engage with literacy activities, which eventually facilitates recovery of foundational reading skills that may have weakened by remote instruction during the pandemic.

This theme implies that a young learner's motivation and interest in reading can be developed when parents and guardians are actively involved, such as engaging with regular catch-up reading sessions at home. This support activity reinforces foundational reading skills of the young learners and nurtures lifelong learning.

3.2.Theme 2: Culturally Relevant Reading Materials and ICT-enabled Pedagogy

For adolescent learners at the junior high school level, meaningful, culturally relevant reading materials and activities that are tailored to learners' developmental stages support achievement of reading proficiency (Del Valle, 2025; Domingo, 2025). Moreover, professional training on ICT-enabled reading pedagogy for teachers is required to enhance engagement, interaction, and comprehension (De Ocampo, Tosino & Martir, 2024).

To make reading more relatable and engaging, Del Valle (2025) discusses that reading materials that are culturally responsive enable adolescent learners to connect new concepts with familiar social contexts. De Ocampo et al. (2024) elaborate that when this material is combined with interactive ICT tools such as multimedia resources and collaborative online platforms, it can provide a multimodal learning experience that would engage diverse learning preferences. On the other hand, teacher training in ICT-enabled pedagogy should be programmed to equip educators with skills on how to leverage digital resources to provide learners with a digital experience that fosters readers' interaction and encourages higher level of reading comprehension.

Hence, this theme implies that learners are inclined to engage with content that contextualizes their own experiences and cultural backgrounds. Conversely, when educators are trained on how to integrate ICT into reading pedagogy, they can be enabled with digital strategies that ensure effective and inclusive reading instruction.

3.3.Theme 3: Authentic, Scaffolded, and Integrated Reading and Writing Tasks

At the senior high school level, as young adult learners are expected to read longer and more complex reading texts, the task must be anchored on a real-world activity that integrates and developmentally scaffolds reading and writing altogether to ensure learners progressively build reading competencies while navigating through different levels of academic texts in preparation for higher education (Ligudon & Ildefonso, 2022); Urbano et al., 2021).

Ligudon and Ildefonso (2022) elucidate that to motivate learners to engage with complex texts, the reading tasks should be anchored on authentic contexts such as problem-solving scenarios and case studies. This provides learners with sense of real-world purpose of their communicative tasks. Urbano et al., (2021) elaborates that when framed in this manner, the design of the communicative tasks allows for the meaningful integration of writing as a complementary productive skill, which reinforces inferential, critical and creative comprehensions. In addition, applying developmental scaffolding strategies, such as breaking down texts into comprehensible units and modeling reading techniques such as scanning and skimming, encourage learner's confidence and independence in engaging with diverse texts from various genres.

Therefore, this theme implies that integrating longer and more complex reading texts complemented with purposive writing tasks can improve engagement, comprehension, and critical thinking. In addition, when reading skills are gradually built on each other through developmental scaffolding approaches, young adult learners can navigate independently various academic genres with ease and confidence, specifically at higher education level.

To conclude, developing literacy at different educational stages requires a coordinated and age-appropriate approach. Young elementary learners gain strong support at home and focused help with their reading. Junior high students thrive when engaged in lessons that connect to their cultural context and use technology. Senior high students improve their reading proficiency by scaffolding and integrating reading and writing communicative tasks. A key factor in these emerging themes is the teachers' professional development. Investing in training on technology-based reading pedagogy helps teachers create and deliver instruction that meets the needs of each stage (Neuman & Celano, 2023).

As summarized in Table 2, recurring patterns of area-specific themes have emerged from the studies. These themes are generated from challenges in teaching reading skills, intervention strategies, and the effectiveness of these strategies.

Table 2. Summary of Challenges, Strategies, and Their Effectiveness in the

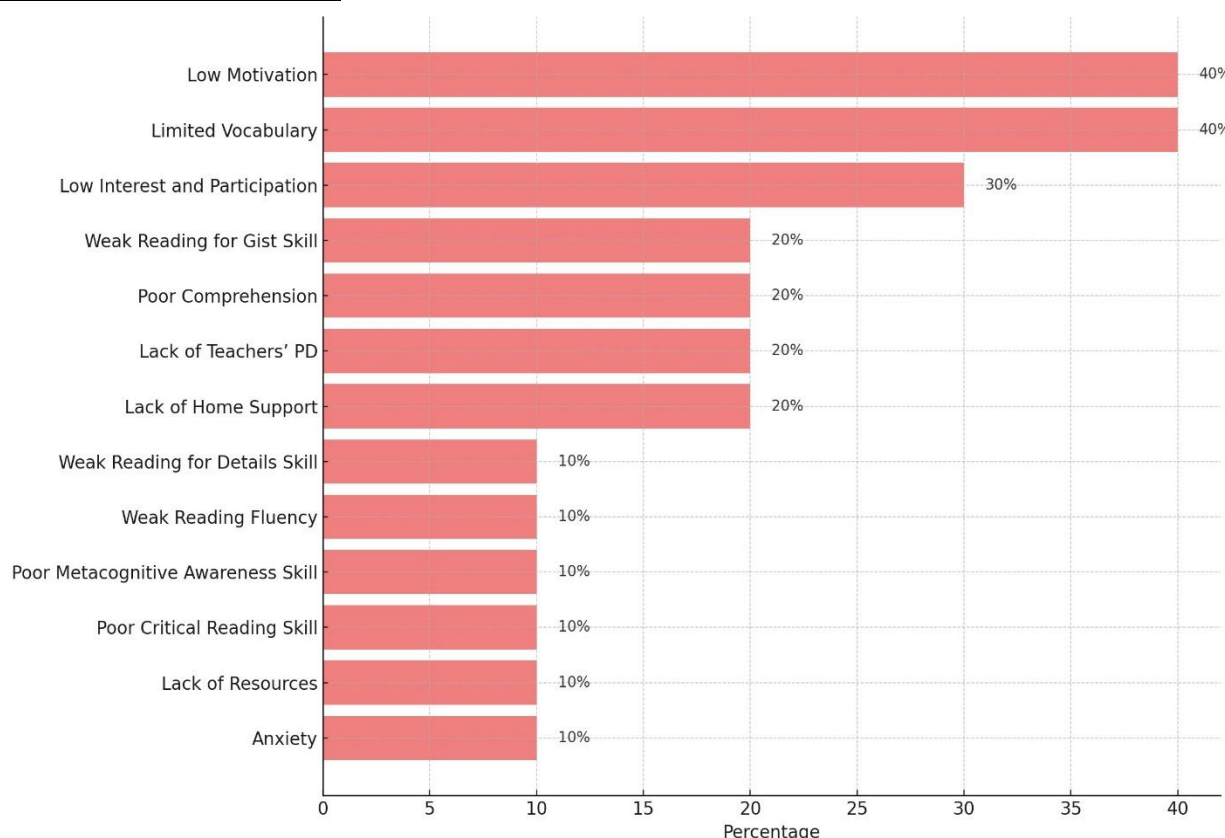
Philippines' Basic Education (2020-2025)

Study ID	Author/Year	Learners' Challenges	Intervention Strategies	Effectiveness of Strategies
S1	Alcayde & Basilan (2023)	Low motivation, comprehension delays, and participation	Individualized instruction, reinforcement, and family engagement	Reported improvements in participation and comprehension
S2	Cabalog et al., (2023)	Time constraints, parental non-support, and lack of resources	Phonetics, reading games, and remedial sessions	Reported increase in engagement, but uneven gains

S3	Concepcion & Melchor (2024)	Limited vocabulary and weak reading fluency	Teacher's training and home collaboration	Promoted positive reading culture in school and at home
S4	Tadlas & Segumpan-Salon (2024)	Low motivation, disrupted reading habits	Skimming/scanning, summarizing strategies	Moderately effective, dependent on consistent use, post-pandemic gaps require adaptation
S5	Romero & Lim (2022)	Tech fatigue, lack of student attention, and reading disinterest	Pre-During-Post Acts; Cooperative learning, blended guided reading	Observed improved engagement
S6	De Ocampo, Tosino & Martir (2024)	Poor vocabulary, ineffective strategies, and a lack of teacher PD	Think-aloud, vocabulary pre-teaching, peer reading, interaction-feedback	Statistically significant positive effects on comprehension
S7	Del Valle (2025)	Low metacognitive awareness, weak summarizing skills	Contextualized metacognitive tasks (predict-monitor-reflect); used of graphic organizers	Significant improvement in comprehension post-intervention
S8	Domingo (2025)	Poor decoding, low comprehension, anxiety, and environmental distractions	Localized reading texts, differentiated materials	Significantly effective in promoting engagement and contextual comprehension
S9	Ligudon & Ildefonso (2022)	Limited vocabulary, lack of training, and motivation	Pre-during-post reading strategies (e.g., DRTA)	Positively perceived; qualitative improvement noted
S10	Urbano et al., (2021)	Poor skills in vocabulary, recognizing text genre, evaluating organization, and coherence	Explicit instruction, text-based approach, authentic and collaborative tasks	Reported improvement when scaffolded into writing tasks

To answer research question 2 (RQ2), Chart 1 presents the challenges encountered in teaching and learning reading skills in the Philippines' basic education context. The highest concerns are the *low motivation* of learners and their *limited vocabulary*, as reported by four out of 10 studies. The learners' *low interest and participation* accounted second, as identified three out of 10 studies.

Chart 1. Reading-Related Challenges in the Philippines' Basic Education (2020-2025)



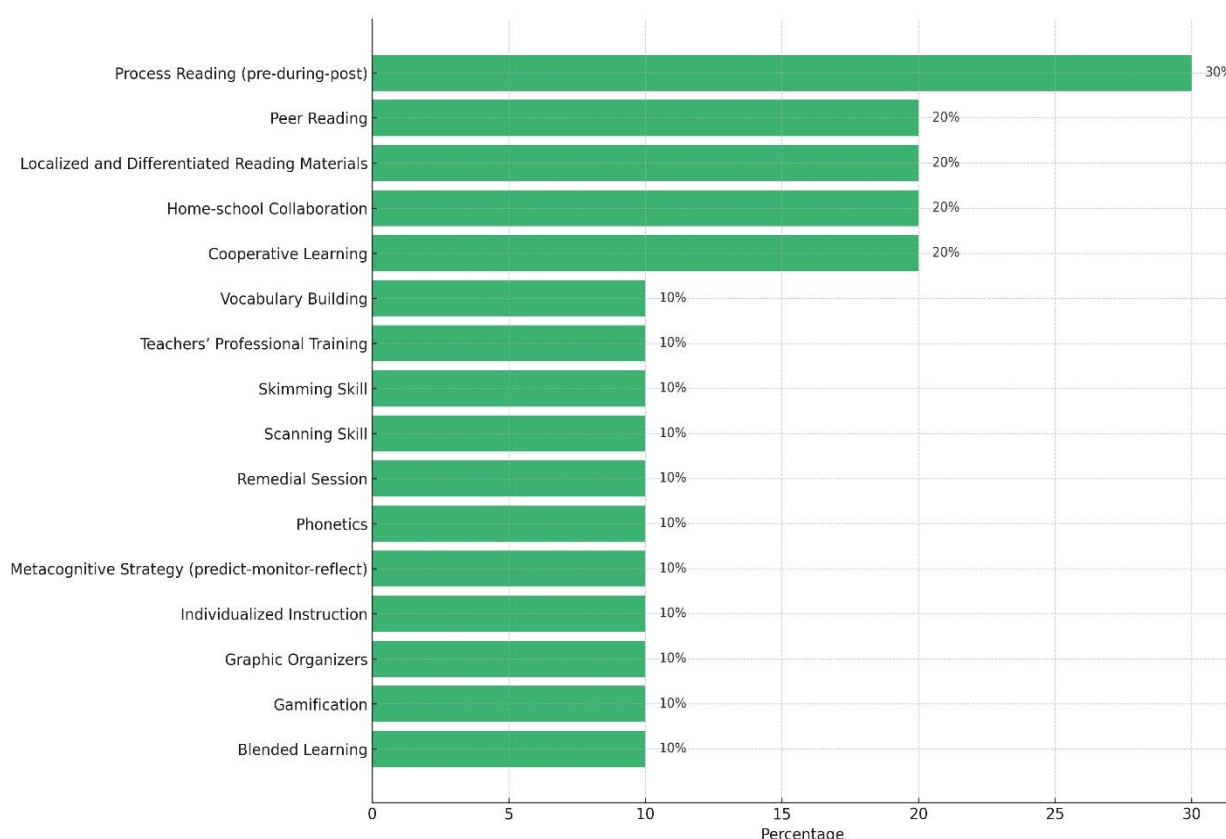
Additionally, learners' weakness in reading comprehension, particularly in their ability to read for gist and details, insufficient teachers' professional training on reading pedagogy, and lack of home support ranked third, as reported by two out of 10 studies. Finally, weakness in fluency, poor metacognitive awareness, anxiety, and lack of contextualized resources ranked fourth as reflected in one out of 10 studies.

As shown, reading difficulties are outcomes of multiple challenges, mainly from skill deficiency compounded by pedagogical and resource gaps. On the skill level, limited vocabulary and poor comprehension skills can erode a learner's confidence to interact with texts and other learners in reading activities. On the other hand, inadequate training opportunities for teachers in reading pedagogy and inconsistent home support can result in ineffective intervention measures. Hence, when these challenges are aggravated by a lack of culturally relevant reading materials, a cycle that sustains low motivation and weak engagement can be created.

These findings suggest that learners' ability to develop reading proficiency is significantly influenced by psychological factors that hinder a positive attitude toward reading. The view of Bernardo et al. (2021) that affective and motivational factors have a crucial role in shaping learners' reading skills development, especially in multilingual contexts like the Philippines, with inadequate reading materials, is reinforced in these findings.

To answer research question 3 (RQ3), Chart 2 shows that several pedagogical and resource-based reading intervention strategies are implemented to address the challenges and bridge the gaps. Strategies like *process reading (pre-during-post reading activities)* ranked the highest, as identified by three out of 10 studies. This is followed by *peer reading, cooperative learning, localized and differentiated reading materials, and home-school collaboration*, ranked second as reflected in two out of 10 studies. The other strategies ranked third, as reported by one out of 10 studies.

Chart 2. Reading Intervention Strategies in the Philippines' Basic Education (2020-2025)



As shown, these strategies collectively underscore the need for a dual focus intervention on improving instructional delivery and reading resources. For instance, process reading enables teachers to provide scaffold comprehension by supporting learners in active meaning-making in the whole reading process. Another is boosting motivation and comprehension through collaborative learning strategies such as peer reading and cooperative reading activities. Conversely, reading materials that are localized and differentiated can address learners' diverse needs and cultural contexts, which can reinforce the development of reading habits at home.

These findings imply that the reading intervention strategies should confront the challenges mainly from two fronts- the resource and the pedagogy dimensions. Kim et al. (2021) underscore the need for integrative reading interventions that simultaneously address deficits in instructional practices so that reading outcomes can be improved. This contention is reinforced by these findings.

Finally, research question 4 (RQ4) investigates the effectiveness of the implemented reading intervention strategies. Generally, all studies reported that reading intervention strategies are effective. However, the weight of these claims can be measured in terms of the basis of their scientific evidence. It was found that of the 10 research studies covered in this current study, only 30% are supported with empirical evidence through statistical tests. These are the intervention strategies on *process reading-thinking aloud*, *metacognitive strategy-predict, monitor, and reflect*, *vocabulary building*, *peer reading*, *graphic organizer*, *contextualized and differentiated reading materials*, while the other reading interventions are supported with anecdotal evidence by observation. These are *home-schooling collaboration*, *gamification*, *cooperative*, and *blended learning*.

While home-school collaboration and gamification are perceived to be promising, their impact may be influenced by subjective observation as they are assessed anecdotally. This does not connote, however, that the anecdotal methods are not effective. It may only mean that its effectiveness may not be generalized due to a lack of statistical support. These findings, nevertheless, support the contention of Sohn et al. (2023) when they argue for the importance of grounding reading interventions in empirical research to strengthen their credibility and scalability.

3.4. Implications for Practice

As proven empirically in various research reviewed in this current study, pedagogical - oriented reading intervention strategies such as process reading, including thinking aloud, metacognitive strategy like predicting, monitoring, and reflecting, vocabulary building through context clues, and peer or cooperative reading need to be explicitly integrated as part of the instructional approach into the language curriculum of the basic education of the Philippines. In the same vein, resource-based intervention strategies such as the design, development, and utilization of graphic organizers and contextualized and differentiated reading materials should be accounted as an integral part of the reading resources of the basic education institutions in the Philippines.

The findings in this current study collectively underscore a dual approach, pedagogical and resource-based intervention strategies, to improving reading proficiency among Filipino learners at the basic education level. Process reading, think-aloud activities, metacognitive strategies, vocabulary building, and cooperative learning are the pedagogical approaches that have demonstrated efficacy in enhancing comprehension and critical thinking. Conversely, the design of graphic organizers as well as the development of contextualized and differentiated reading materials customized to learners' needs have been proven effective in reinforcing teaching methods to address literacy challenges.

However, this does not exclude those implemented reading intervention strategies that lack empirical evidence despite their perceived effectiveness. For instance, home-school collaboration is a strategic stakeholder's approach intervention, which may potentially help young learners develop better reading habits and attitudes. In that context, the reading training program should not be confined only to teachers but also to parents, who will play a critical role in the instructional support at home.

To conclude, a systematic and evidence-based integration of pedagogical and resource-based interventions strengthens reading proficiency programs in the Philippines' basic education system. In particular, the studies reviewed recognized home-school collaboration as a reinforced support for holistic literacy development. For instance, to promote positive reading habits early at home, parents or guardians should be trained and empowered to support learners actively. After all, a collaborative, inclusive, and sustainable approach that combines instruction, resources, and stakeholder engagement is required to address effectively the reading crisis in the basic education of the Philippines.

4. CONCLUSION

This current study investigated four research questions, which covered the common themes of the reading challenges, intervention strategies, and the effectiveness of intervention in the context of basic education in the Philippines from 2020-2025. It was found that the effectiveness of some of the implemented reading intervention strategies has strong empirical evidence, while others are merely based on anecdotal evidence.

However, regardless of the studies' research strengths and limitations, it can be inferred that the challenges that confront the teaching and learning of reading skills in the basic

education context in the Philippines must be addressed in a multi-faceted approach. Specifically, there is a clear existing need to revisit teachers' professional training on a more holistic reading pedagogy, improve readability of instructional resources, and build informed collaborative partnerships between schools and families.

These strategic intervening actions should be aimed at enhancing the learners' cognitive strategies, motivation, engagement, and language skills. Implementing these actions deliberately and simultaneously enables basic education stakeholders in the Philippines to close the literacy gap and ensure that Filipino learners acquire the essential and functional reading skills required for academic and lifelong learning success.

In light of the findings, a more deliberate and comprehensive course of action is evidently required in addressing persistent reading challenges in the Philippines basic education. The establishment of a stronger home-school collaboration, development of culturally relevant and accessible reading materials, and enhancement of teachers' professional training are central to this undertaking. Thus, to create an environment that nurtures sustainable reading proficiency and ultimately lifelong learning skills, such educational reform initiatives should be systematically and inclusively implemented.

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