

Grade 5 Teachers' Experiences in Addressing Reading Comprehension Difficulties in Geographically Isolated Public Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT: The study was conducted to determine the experiences of Grade 5 teachers in addressing reading comprehension difficulties of learners in geographically isolated public elementary school. This study focused on the reading comprehension difficulties experienced by the learners and contextual factors associated with the reading comprehension difficulties, the strategies used by the teachers through scaffolding, differentiated instruction, contextualization and interaction, the challenges experienced in providing sustained reading comprehension support amidst teaching and other school activities and the insights from teachers' experiences. This qualitative descriptive study used a total of six Grade 5 teachers from three geographically isolated public elementary schools with two Grade 5 teachers in each school. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis was used to analyses the data.

The analysis identified five major themes: (1) Beyond Reading Words: Difficulties in Constructing Meaning, (2) Limited Reading Exposure and Contextual Influences, (3) Going Back to the Basics: Scaffolding and Differentiated Instruction, (4) Making Reading Meaningful Through Context and Interaction, and (5) Balancing Reading Support with Competing Teaching Responsibilities. Based on reports from teachers, learners experienced difficulties in understanding vocabulary, identifying main ideas and supporting details, explaining answers, summarizing information, and making inferences. Teachers reported that some students can read the texts but cannot comprehend them or have difficulty identifying the main idea. Teachers associated these difficulties with limited exposure to reading, restricted access to reading materials, differences in home support, limited vocabulary, and resource constraints. Lack of reading materials and limited parental support also affect the learners' ability to read and read fluently. In response to these difficulties, teachers employed guided reading, vocabulary activities, repeated reading, questioning, simplified texts, visual materials, peer support, and differentiated learning activities. They also contextualized reading tasks and used interaction to relate texts to learners' experiences and prior knowledge. However, limited instructional time—compounded by ancillary responsibilities such as coordinator duties, administrative paperwork, and general school tasks—impeded teachers' ability to deliver consistent, individualized, and sustained reading support.

The findings suggest that addressing reading comprehension difficulties requires instruction that responds to learners' needs and contexts. Strengthening access to reading resources, providing adequate opportunities for reading intervention, and supporting teachers in managing competing responsibilities may help sustained reading comprehension support in geographically isolated public elementary schools.

KEYWORDS: reading comprehension, Grade 5 teachers, geographically isolated schools, reading difficulties, scaffolding, differentiated instruction

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is an essential literacy skill because it helps learners understand and make meaning from written texts and use what they read to support learning. In elementary education, comprehension involves more than recognizing and reading words; learners are expected to understand vocabulary, identify important ideas, connect information, explain their understanding, and draw inferences from what they read. In the researcher's school, it has been observed that some learners can read a text but have difficulty explaining what they have read. Recent research has continued to emphasize the importance of language-related skills in children's reading comprehension development, particularly the contribution of vocabulary and other language abilities to successful comprehension (Triana et al., 2024; Jago et al., 2025).

Reading comprehension difficulties may become evident when learners can read words or sentences but experience difficulty

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explaining, interpreting, or connecting ideas from a text. Vocabulary is particularly important because learners need sufficient language knowledge to understand sentences and passages. Jago et al. (2025), in a systematic review and meta-analysis of longitudinal studies, found significant associations between early vocabulary and later reading comprehension. Inferencing is also an important component of comprehension because it requires learners to move beyond explicitly stated information and construct meaning by connecting textual information with what they already know. These skills are particularly relevant in the elementary grades, when learners are increasingly expected to use reading to acquire knowledge. Based on teachers' observations, some learners can read fluently but have difficulty answering questions that require explanation or inference.

Teachers have an important role in helping learners who experience reading comprehension difficulties. Teachers may provide support through vocabulary development, guided reading, repeated reading, simplified texts, visual materials, peer support, and contextualized activities. In the actual classroom setting, teachers may use simple questions, pictures, explanations of unfamiliar words, or provide additional time to help learners understand the text. Such practices allow teachers to adjust instruction to learners' varying abilities and provide additional assistance when learners are unable to understand a text. Responsive instruction is particularly important when learners demonstrate different levels of reading proficiency within the same classroom.

The conditions in which learners develop their reading skills may also influence their comprehension. Reading exposure, access to reading materials, home support, and opportunities to engage with texts can provide learners more opportunities to develop vocabulary, background knowledge, and familiarity with texts. When these opportunities are limited, teachers may need to provide additional support within the classroom. Therefore, reading comprehension difficulties should not be viewed only as a result of learners' individual abilities. In rural or geographically isolated schools, learners may have different opportunities to read at home due to disparities in access to books and other reading materials. They may also be shaped by the resources and learning experiences available to learners.

These issues are particularly pertinent to geographically isolated and disadvantaged communities, where the schools might experience restrictions in terms of educational resources, facilities, connectivity and other supports. In the Philippines, through the Last Mile Schools Program, the Department of Education seeks to address the requirements of geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas that fill the existing gaps (Department of Education, 2019). As per the Last Mile and GIDA Schools Act or Republic Act No. 12321, the government support will be institutionalized in public basic education schools located in geographically-isolated and disadvantaged areas and other underserved communities. In response to these conditions, the study sought to investigate instructional strategies and teachers' experiences to deal with reading comprehension difficulties in this context.

The geographical and educational contexts of these schools may affect their reading instruction. The lack of access to books and other instructional material could limit learners' reading practice opportunities, while differences in home support could lead to learners having different reading and language experiences. It may be necessary for teachers to adapt the resources at their disposal, contextualize reading activities, and employ flexible instructional strategies. At the same time, it may be difficult for teachers to offer further reading assistance as they deal with regular lessons, assessment, classroom management, and other school-related tasks.

Despite the large body of research examining reading comprehension, there is a need to investigate how Grade 5 teachers experience and respond to comprehension difficulties in geographically isolated public schools. The researcher noted that reading comprehension outcomes and interventions have been the focus of several studies but not enough studies look closely at the experience of teachers in isolated schools. Educational research and practices yield valuable information about reading outcomes, teaching approaches, and resource requirements. Nevertheless, the experience of teachers can clarify how comprehension difficulties manifest in classrooms and how teachers respond based on the resources they can draw on from their schools and local communities. The practical difficulties of offering consistent reading support, while carrying out regular teaching and other school responsibilities, may also emerge from their experiences.

It's important to understand these experiences because reading comprehension support is not merely about spotting learners' difficulties. In addition, it entails considering the contextual factors that influence the development of reading, the instructional responses of teachers and the issues affecting their ability to offer ongoing support. This understanding gained from the context may help the researcher to point out the relevant practices and forms of support for teachers and learners in geographically isolated school settings.

The present study aimed to explore the experiences of teachers of Grade 5 in handling reading comprehension difficulties of learners in geographically-isolated public elementary schools. Particularly, it investigated the difficulties learners experience during reading comprehension and the contextual factors impacting these difficulties; the instructional responses of teachers through scaffolding, differentiated instruction, contextualization, and interaction; the challenges in sustaining reading comprehension support amid teaching and other school responsibilities; and the meaningful insights from the teachers' experiences. The study focused on the perspectives of the Grade 5 teachers to understand how reading comprehension difficulties

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are handled in geographically isolated public elementary schools.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research is based on the Simple View of Reading (SVR) by Gough and Tunmer (1986) and Hoover and Gough (1990). They describe reading comprehension as the result of two major processes: decoding and linguistic comprehension. Decoding is the ability to recognize and read printed words; linguistic comprehension is the ability to understand spoken and written language and to construct meaning from what is read. The model implies that a weakness in either component can impact overall reading.

The Simple View of Reading is a relevant theoretical framework for this investigation because the teachers who participated reported learners who could read words and passages aloud but who struggled to explain, interpret, summarize and construct meaning from the texts. The experience shows the difference between being able to read the words and understand their meaning. The teachers who participated noted that there were learners who could read the text fluently, but struggled in explaining it. This elucidates Theme 1: Beyond Reading Words, Difficulties in Constructing Meaning, especially in vocabulary, identifying main ideas and supporting details, explaining answers, summarizing and making inferences.

The theory also emphasizes the importance of linguistic comprehension in successful reading. Learners need vocabulary and sufficient language knowledge to understand sentences, connect ideas, and interpret information in texts. In the present study, teachers associated learners' comprehension difficulties with limited reading exposure, restricted access to reading materials, differences in home support, and vocabulary limitations. This context is important to the study because the teachers pointed out that learners may have different opportunities to read and receive support at home and at school. This is evident in Theme 2, Limited Reading Exposure and Contextual Influences. Although the Simple View of Reading primarily describes the relationship between decoding and linguistic comprehension, the study also recognizes that the development of these abilities occurs within learners' home, school, and community contexts.

The theory also helps explain the teachers' instructional responses to learners' comprehension difficulties. When learners experience difficulty understanding texts, teachers may provide additional support to strengthen vocabulary, language comprehension, and engagement with reading materials. In this study, teachers reported using guided reading, vocabulary activities, repeated reading, questioning, simplified texts, visual materials, peer support, and differentiated learning activities. This connection is evident in Theme 3, Going Back to the Basics: Scaffolding and Differentiated Instruction, which shows how teachers adapted instruction to learners' varied reading needs.

Through the use of familiar examples, discussions, questioning, peer interaction, group activities and visual materials, the teacher is able to support the learners' comprehension through meaningful experience. Theme 4, Making Meaningful Reading Through Context and Interaction, represents these practices. Although the Simple View of Reading does not suggest specific teaching strategies, it does provide a theoretical basis for recognizing the need for meaningful teaching experiences to support the linguistic-comprehension component.

The framework can also be approached through understanding the practical situation in which teachers provide reading support. The limited instructional time and competing teaching and school demands reported by participants affected their capacity to provide regular and individualized assistance. This is evident in Theme 5, Balancing Reading Support with Competing Responsibilities Teaching. This theme broadens the view of reading comprehension beyond learner-level factors by recognizing that the provision of reading support is also influenced by teachers' available time, resources, and working conditions. This is important to consider because reading support is influenced not only by the needs of the learners but also by the time and other responsibilities that the participating teachers have to manage.

Overall, the Simple View of Reading guides the interpretation of the participants' experiences. It explains why learners may demonstrate basic word-reading ability while continuing to experience difficulty constructing meaning from texts. The five themes emerging from the study further show that comprehension difficulties and teachers' responses are situated within broader instructional and contextual conditions. Thus, the framework supports an understanding of reading comprehension as involving both learner-level language processes and the instructional context in which teachers provide support.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Reading comprehension goes beyond recognizing printed words. It requires learners to construct meaning by connecting information in the text with vocabulary knowledge, language comprehension, background knowledge, and other cognitive processes. The Simple View of Reading proposed by Gough and Tunmer (1986) and further developed by Hoover and Gough (1990) explains reading comprehension through the interaction of decoding and linguistic comprehension. This is relevant to elementary learners because successful reading requires both the ability to recognize words and the ability to understand the language represented by those words.

Recent research also emphasizes the importance of language-related skills in reading comprehension. Vocabulary knowledge, in

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particular, contributes to learners' ability to understand texts because unfamiliar words may interfere with the interpretation of sentences and the integration of ideas. Jago et al. (2025), in a systematic review and meta-analysis, reported significant longitudinal associations between early vocabulary and later reading comprehension. Participating teachers observed that some learners have difficulty understanding the text when they are unfamiliar with the words used. This finding shows the importance of language development in supporting children's comprehension of written texts.

Reading comprehension involves higher-level processes such as identifying main ideas, understanding supporting details, explaining information, summarizing, and making inferences. Inferencing requires readers to connect explicit information in a text with meaning derived through interpretation and prior knowledge. In the teachers' accounts, learners had greater difficulty explaining their answers, identifying important ideas, and making inferences. Thus, learners may demonstrate basic word-reading ability while still struggling to construct a coherent understanding of a text.

These perspectives are directly relevant to the present study because the participating teachers described learners who could read words and passages aloud but struggled to explain what they had read. The literature therefore supports the distinction between reading words and constructing meaning, which is evident in Theme 1, *Beyond Reading Words: Difficulties in Constructing Meaning*. This shows that the reading comprehension difficulties observed by teachers are not only related to the ability to read words but also to the ability to understand and explain the text expressively.

A. Vocabulary, Reading Exposure, and Learners' Comprehension Development

Vocabulary is closely related to reading comprehension because learners need to understand the meanings of words to construct meaning from sentences and larger texts. Learners with limited vocabulary may have difficulty understanding unfamiliar expressions, connecting ideas, and interpreting information presented in reading passages. Jago et al. (2025) found a significant relationship between vocabulary and later reading comprehension, showing the importance of vocabulary in reading development. Teachers also observed that some learners had difficulty understanding texts when they encountered unfamiliar words. Reading exposure gives learners opportunities to encounter new vocabulary, sentence structures, ideas, and different types of texts. Learners who have limited opportunities to read may have fewer chances to develop the language and background knowledge needed for better comprehension. Regular reading can also support what learners learn in the classroom.

The home environment may also affect learners' reading development. Access to books and other reading materials, parental encouragement, and opportunities to participate in literacy activities may influence learners' exposure to print and language. However, learners have different levels of access to these experiences. Differences in family circumstances and available resources may contribute to differences in reading skills and comprehension. Teachers also noted that learners may have varying opportunities to read at home depending on the availability of books and other reading materials.

These ideas are relevant to the present study because teachers identified limited exposure to reading, differences in home support, restricted access to reading materials, vocabulary limitations, and resource constraints as factors that teachers associated with learners' comprehension difficulties. This is also evident in Theme 2, *Limited Reading Exposure and Contextual Influences*, which shows that learners' reading development is also affected by their home and school conditions. It is important to consider these factors because learners' comprehension may be influenced by more than just their abilities. Opportunities to read, access to reading materials, and the support they receive at home may also be related to their reading experiences.

B. Instructional Scaffolding and Differentiated Instruction in Reading

Teachers play an important role in helping learners overcome reading comprehension difficulties. When learners have difficulty understanding the text independently, teachers may provide scaffolding by breaking complex tasks into manageable steps, modeling comprehension processes, asking guiding questions, providing explanations, and gradually reducing assistance as learners become more independent.

Scaffolding is important in elementary classrooms with different levels of learners' reading ability. Differentiated instruction allows teachers to adjust learning activities, materials, and support based on learners' needs. Rather than providing the same level of assistance to all learners, teachers can adjust activities for those who require additional support while allowing more independent learners to engage with appropriately challenging tasks. It is also important to consider how teachers actually use differentiated instruction when learners have difficulty understanding what they read, particularly because learners in the same class may have different levels of reading comprehension.

Reading instruction can also include vocabulary and comprehension activities while working with meaningful texts and activities. These activities allow learners to encounter vocabulary, discuss ideas, respond to questions, and apply comprehension strategies while engaging with texts. Reading instruction may therefore be more responsive when teachers address specific needs of learners instead of using the same comprehension activities. In the teachers' accounts, explaining unfamiliar words is important because some learners have difficulty understanding the text when they encounter words that are unfamiliar to them.

The present study shows these practices through teachers' reported use of guided reading, vocabulary activities, repeated reading,

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questioning, simplified texts, visual materials, peer support, and differentiated learning activities. Based on the teachers' accounts, scaffolding is not used merely as a general strategy but as a response to learners' specific difficulties with vocabulary, answering questions, and understanding the text. These practices are evident in Theme 3, Going Back to the Basics: Scaffolding and Differentiated Instruction, showing how teachers provide additional support when learners cannot independently meet comprehension demands.

D. Contextualized and Interactive Approaches to Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension may improve when learners are able to connect new information with their prior knowledge. Contextualized instruction allows teachers to relate texts, vocabulary, examples, and activities to learners' familiar experiences. Such connections may make unfamiliar concepts easier to understand and help learners establish meaning from texts.

Classroom interaction can also support reading comprehension. Through teacher questioning, classroom discussion, peer interaction, and collaborative activities, learners can explain their thinking, hear alternative interpretations, clarify misunderstandings, and develop their understanding of texts. In the teachers' accounts, questioning and discussion helped learners explain their answers and develop a clearer understanding of what they had read. These interactions can be useful for learners who have difficulty understanding written information on their own.

Visual materials can help learners understand unfamiliar concepts and vocabulary. Pictures, diagrams, and other visual aids may help learners connect written information with prior knowledge and experiences. The teachers mentioned using pictures and other visual materials to help learners understand unfamiliar words and ideas in the text. When combined with questioning and discussion, visual support may provide learners with different ways to understand a text.

These approaches are reflected in contextualized and interactive approaches and can be seen in the present study's Theme 4, Making Reading Meaningful Through Context and Interaction. The participating teachers reported using familiar examples, community experiences, questioning, discussions, peer support, group activities, and visual materials to help learners understand texts. The teachers' accounts show that they viewed comprehension as an active process supported by meaningful engagement rather than simply the ability to answer written questions. These experiences show that reading comprehension support becomes more accessible when teachers connect texts to familiar experiences and provide learners with opportunities to speak, ask questions, and collaborate.

E. Reading Instruction in Geographically Isolated Public Elementary Schools

The school context is important in understanding teachers' experiences in addressing reading comprehension difficulties. In the Philippines, geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas may experience limitations in educational facilities, instructional resources, connectivity, and other forms of educational support. The Department of Education's Last Mile Schools Program was developed to address gaps in schools located in isolated and disadvantaged communities and to improve access to basic education services (Department of Education, 2019).

The availability of learning and reading materials is important to literacy instruction. Teachers working in geographically isolated schools may need to make use of available school resources and adapt available materials according to learners' needs. Limited access to books, supplementary materials, and other instructional resources may reduce learners' opportunities to engage with varied texts and may require teachers to develop alternative ways of supporting reading instruction. Teachers say they make use of whatever materials are available in the school to help learners with reading. This is important to the present study because the teachers mentioned that they need to use and adapt the available reading materials to meet the needs of their learners.

The geographical context may also be connected to learners' home and community experiences. When access to reading materials and literacy activities outside school is limited, classroom instruction may become an important source of reading exposure. Teachers may therefore need to contextualize learning activities, use locally familiar examples, and maximize available resources to make reading meaningful to learners.

These conditions are also reflected in Theme 2, Limited Reading Exposure and Contextual Influences, in the present study. The teachers described restricted access to reading materials, differences in home support, and resource limitations as conditions that influenced their reading experiences. This shows that reading difficulties should be viewed not only as learner-related concerns but also in the context of the resources and reading opportunities available at school and at home. The geographically isolated school setting therefore helps explain the context in which learners experience reading difficulties and teachers provide reading support.

F. Teacher Workload and Sustained Reading Support

Providing reading support requires time for assessment, planning, individualized instruction, monitoring, and follow-up. However, other responsibilities may limit the time available for additional reading support. Classroom teaching, assessment, administrative duties, school programs, classroom management, and other responsibilities may limit opportunities for sustained individualized

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support.

This becomes more challenging when several learners in the same classroom experience different levels of reading difficulty. Teachers must balance the needs of struggling readers with curriculum requirements and other school responsibilities. As a result, teachers may need to integrate reading support into regular classroom instruction and use strategies that can accommodate learners' needs within the time available in class.

Sustained reading support is therefore influenced not only by teachers' knowledge of instructional strategies but also by the teaching conditions they face. When teachers have limited time or multiple competing responsibilities, giving regular support to all struggling readers may become difficult. It is important to view reading support as part of the teachers' actual workload because they are not only focused on reading intervention but also perform other regular responsibilities in the school.

The concern is also reflected in Theme 5: Balancing Reading Support with Competing Teaching Responsibilities. The significance of the theme stems from teachers' experiences that the success of maintaining reading support does not merely depend on teachers' willingness to support the learner but their availability to the learner as well. Participants reported that limited time for instruction and competing teaching and school obligations compromised their ability to provide regular and individualized assistance. This indicates that considerations regarding teacher workload and instructional conditions should be included in the analysis of sustained reading comprehension support.

G. Synthesis of the Literature

The reviewed literature demonstrates that reading a text is a function of word recognition and linguistic comprehension. Learners must not only decode words but also understand vocabulary, connect ideas, identify important information, summarize, explain, and make inferences. This is relevant to the present study because learners may experience difficulty with these processes. They are relevant to the present study on the difficulties learners experience in constructing meaning from texts.

The literature also indicates that reading comprehension development is influenced by learners' exposure to reading materials, language experiences, home support, and access to educational resources. These factors are important in geographically isolated school contexts where access to instructional and reading resources may be limited. Thus, reading comprehension difficulties may reflect both learner-level challenges and the conditions surrounding learners' reading experiences.

In responding to these difficulties, teachers may use scaffolding, differentiated instruction, vocabulary activities, guided reading, questioning, repeated reading, visual materials, and other responsive approaches. Contextualized instruction and interaction can further help learners connect texts with prior knowledge and communicate their understanding. These instructional perspectives are reflected in the teachers' use of learner-responsive, contextualized, and interactive strategies identified in the present study.

At the same time, effective reading support depends on teachers' capacity to provide sufficient time and sustained assistance. Multiple instructional and school responsibilities may limit opportunities for individualized intervention, particularly when several learners require support simultaneously. This should be considered when examining teacher workload alongside instructional practices. It is important to consider instructional strategies and teacher workload together because the use of a particular strategy may be affected by the time available to teachers.

Although existing literature provides substantial discussion of reading comprehension, instructional strategies, and contextual influences on literacy development, there remains a need to understand how Grade 5 teachers themselves experience and respond to reading comprehension difficulties in geographically isolated public elementary schools. In particular, there is limited context-specific understanding of how teachers address learners' comprehension difficulties, work within resource limitations, adapt instruction, and manage competing teaching and school responsibilities.

This study focuses on the experiences of Grade 5 teachers in geographically isolated public elementary schools. It offers an analysis in context of (1) teachers' reading comprehension difficulty insights and contextual difficulty, (2) their instructional responses, (3) the challenge of sustaining reading support, and (4) the insights drawn from their experiences. The literature reviewed offers the basis for interpreting the five themes developed from the teachers' accounts and remains aligned with the four research questions of the study.

Statement of the Problem

The experiences of Grade 5 teachers in addressing reading comprehension difficulties in public elementary schools located in geographically isolated areas were explored in this study. Specifically, it aimed to address the research questions below.

1. How do Grade 5 teachers describe the reading comprehension difficulties experienced by their learners and the contextual factors that influence these difficulties?
2. How do Grade 5 teachers respond to learners' reading comprehension difficulties through scaffolding, differentiated instruction, contextualization, and interaction?
3. What challenges do Grade 5 teachers encounter in providing reading comprehension support while managing their regular teaching and other school responsibilities?

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4. What insights can be drawn from Grade 5 teachers' experiences in addressing reading comprehension difficulties in geographically isolated public elementary schools?

III. METHODOLOGY

Utilizing a qualitative descriptive research design, the present study aimed to characterize the experiences of Grade 5 teachers in handling the reading comprehension difficulties of learners in geographically isolated public elementary schools. A qualitative descriptive design is appropriate in the study to have a clear and comprehensive account of teachers' experiences, observations, instructional practices, and challenges based on their own perspectives. In addition, it allowed the participants to share their experience in their own words while also letting the researcher identify any themes present in the interview data.

A. Participants and Selection Process

The study's participants were six (6) Grade 5 teachers, two from each three (3) geographically isolated public elementary schools. They were deliberately chosen due to their experience as teachers of Grade 5 learners who struggled with reading comprehension within their school settings.

Purposive sampling was employed since the study required participants who could provide firsthand relevant account of the teachers' experiences. The selected teachers had firsthand experience in observing learners' reading comprehension difficulties, implementing reading support strategies, and addressing the contextual and instructional challenges of providing sustained reading support in geographically isolated schools.

B. Data Collection

The six Grade 5 teachers who participated were interviewed using a semi-structured approach. The interview questions were guided by the four research questions and relate to: (1) learners' reading comprehension difficulties and contextual factors contributing to the difficulties; (2) teachers' instructional responses through scaffolding, differentiated instruction, contextualization, and interaction; (3) challenges in providing sustained reading comprehension instruction support amidst regular teaching and other schooling demands; and (4) teachers' insights drawn from their context to manage reading comprehension difficulties within geographically isolated schools.

The semi-structured format helped maintain a certain level of consistency in all interviews while providing the participants with sufficient opportunity to elaborate on their experiences and provide examples from their classrooms practices. The participants were encouraged to communicate their observations, teaching strategies, context, and challenges they faced from their own experiences in teaching Grade 5 learners.

The participants were briefed on the study's purposes and nature of participation before being interviewed. With their agreement, the interviews were noted down and audio recorded to facilitate data analysis of the interviewees' responses.

C. Ethical Considerations

The study was guided by ethical considerations. Prior to the data collection, the participants were made aware of the research objective, the nature of participation and that the participation was entirely voluntary. They were also informed that they could refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study any time without penalty.

Through the use of codes and removal of identifying information, the confidentiality and identities of participants were protected throughout the research. In presenting the findings, the teacher's real names were replaced by participant codes. The findings did not include any identifying information of participants and their schools. All interview data were kept confidential and used for research purposes only.

D. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interview data. The analysis involved familiarization with the interview data, statements related to the research questions, coding of relevant responses, grouping related codes, development of initial themes, review and refinement of themes, and interpretation of the themes.

Through the four research questions, the patterns were established in the teachers' accounts regarding the learners' difficulties with reading comprehension, the contextual factors, the teachers' instructional responses, challenges in maintaining reading support, and insights drawn from such experiences.

While there were four research questions that guided the study, there emerged five major themes through a thematic analysis since the participants' responses revealed specific distinct patterns within the areas of the questions. The five themes included: (1) Beyond Reading Words: Difficulties in Constructing Meaning; (2) Limited Reading Exposure and Contextual Influences; (3) Going Back to the Basics: Scaffolding and Differentiated Instruction; (4) Making Reading Meaningful Through Context and Interaction; and (5) Balancing Reading Support with Competing Teaching Responsibilities.

The themes were analyzed in relation to the research questions and the Simple View of Reading, which is a theoretical framework

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that illustrates how reading comprehension arises from the interaction of decoding and linguistic comprehension. The analysis also took into account the context of geographically isolated public elementary schools for the interpretation of the teachers' experiences, responses and challenges.

IV. RESULTS

Following a thematic analysis of the interviews with six Grade 5 teachers from three geographically isolated public elementary schools, five major themes emerged from their experiences dealing with learners' difficulties in reading comprehension. These themes include: (1) Beyond Reading Words: Difficulties in Constructing Meaning; (2) Limited Reading Exposure and Contextual Influences; (3) Going Back to the Basics: Scaffolding and Differentiated Instruction; (4) Making Reading Meaningful Through Context and Interaction; and (5) Balancing Reading Support with Competing Teaching Responsibilities.

The findings are provided in line with the four research questions. Themes 1 and 2 address the first research question, while Themes 3 and 4 address the second research question. The third research question is addressed by Theme 5, while the fourth is addressed through the synthesis of all five themes.

Theme 1. Beyond Reading Words: Difficulties in Constructing Meaning

The participants indicated that reading comprehension difficulties go beyond the learners' capacity to recognize and read words. As per the teachers, a few Grade 5 learners managed to read out sentences or passages but failed to explain what they read. The learners experienced more difficulty when they were asked to identify, find, explain, summarize, or make an inference about the main idea and supporting details.

Teachers also observed difficulties in understanding unfamiliar vocabulary. Limited vocabulary affected learners' ability to understand sentences and connect ideas across a passage. Some learners needed additional explanation before they could determine the meaning of words or understand the message of a text.

The teachers' accounts showed that reading comprehension difficulties were seen not only in word reading but also in learners' difficulty constructing meaning from texts. Learners often required additional questioning, explanation, and guidance before they could show their understanding. The need for additional questioning and explanation was evident in the teachers' descriptions of how they supported learners during comprehension tasks.

One participant explained that learners could sometimes read the words but still struggled to explain the meaning of the passage. This observation shows the difference between being able to read words and being able to comprehend what is being read.

Overall, the participants identified vocabulary, identifying main ideas and supporting details, explaining answers, summarizing, and making inferences as common comprehension difficulties among their Grade 5 learners.

Theme 2. Limited Reading Exposure and Contextual Influences

The participants linked learners' reading comprehension difficulties to limited exposure to reading materials and opportunities to read. Teachers reported that some learners had limited opportunities to read books and other materials outside the classroom. Limited access to reading resources also reduced the opportunities learners had to practice reading.

The teachers also described differences in learners' home support and experiences with reading. Some learners received assistance and encouragement with reading at home, while others had fewer opportunities for reading-related activities outside school. These differences contributed to varying levels of vocabulary, background knowledge, and familiarity with texts among learners.

The schools' locations also played a role in the teachers' experiences. Teachers in geographically isolated communities were further disadvantaged in their access to teaching materials and other school resources. Consequently, they had to use the resources available in their respective schools and communities to plan the reading activities.

Through the narratives of the participants, it emerged that reading comprehension difficulties were influenced by external factors. Learners' opportunities to develop reading comprehension were impeded by limited exposure to reading, limited access to reading materials, limited vocabulary, differences in home support and limited resources.

Theme 3. Going Back to the Basics: Scaffolding and Differentiated Instruction

The participants adapted their instruction according to learners' reading abilities and needs despite the challenges encountered by the learners. The teachers described different scaffolding practices they used with struggling readers to help them understand texts and ultimately become more independent in reading activities.

The strategies they shared were guided reading, vocabulary activities, repeated reading, questioning, simplified texts, visual materials, peer support, and differentiated learning activities. When the learners were unable to comprehend a text independently or answer comprehension questions, the teachers provided further explanations or guidance.

The participants further described going back to foundational reading skills as needed. Instead of having learners immediately complete all grade-level comprehension tasks independently, teachers sometimes simplified the text, reviewed the vocabulary, provided an example of the task, or broke an activity into smaller and more manageable tasks.

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The teachers also adjusted the activities according to the varied capability of learners. The participants acknowledge that learners in the same Grade 5 class do not have the same reading needs. Consequently, the teachers offered varied levels and type of support tailored to the individual learner's level of difficulty.

These practices show that the teachers responded to difficulties with reading comprehension through appropriate instructional adaptation to learner needs, particularly by offering extra support to those experiencing difficulties.

Theme 4. Making Reading Meaningful Through Context and Interaction

The participants also highlighted the need to relate reading activities to the learners' experiences and familiar contexts. In order to help learners grasp unfamiliar texts and concepts, teachers provided examples from learners' daily lives, communities, and other familiar contexts.

Examples set in context proved especially helpful for learners who encountered unfamiliar vocabulary or situations on a reading passage. The instructors linked the text with the experiences that learners were already equipped with. Through this method, the learners were able to relate the text with their prior knowledge.

Another important part of the teachers' reading support was interaction. The participants outlined the use of questioning, discussions, peer support, and group activities to elicit learner understanding. Instead of relying solely on personal written responses, teachers provided learners with opportunities to discuss ideas and listen to each other's and the teacher's explanations. Visual resources were also used to facilitate understanding. Images and other visuals helped learners understand new concepts and vocabulary, especially when it was difficult to understand the text alone.

The study's findings demonstrate that the teachers believed that reading comprehension was an active process that could be strengthened by contextualization, interaction, visuals and meaningful engagement.

Theme 5. Balancing Reading Support with Competing Teaching Responsibilities

The participants adopted various strategies to resolve reading comprehension difficulties; however, providing ongoing and individual support also posed challenges. A major concern was the limited time teachers had for reading intervention instruction.

The teachers mentioned that extra time apart from the regular classroom instruction is required to assist struggling readers. However, they also had other school duties and classroom responsibilities which competed for their available time.

The accounts of the participants showed that individualizing support for those with reading difficulties is particularly challenging when multiple learners need assistance at the same time. The teachers also had to balance the needs of the students who have difficulties reading with the demands of the regular curriculum, classroom management, assessment and school responsibilities.

A participant mentioned the struggle of balancing a number of school responsibilities with Grade 5 teaching. These competing responsibilities reduce the time available to provide further reading intervention to learners requiring sustained assistance.

Thus, the teachers were committed to fostering the success of all of their students. However, a lack of instructional time limited their ability to offer consistent, individualized, and sustained reading intervention.

Synthesis of Findings in Relation to the Research Questions

The five themes respond to the four research questions of the study. The first research question addresses learners' reading comprehension difficulties and contextual factors. Themes 1 and 2 reflect the findings of this research question. Findings reveal that learners' difficulties are not limited to word identification but also encompass vocabulary identification and main idea identification, supporting detail identification, answer explaining, summary making, and inference making. These challenges were also linked to limited reading experience, limited access to reading materials, variations in home support, vocabulary limitations, and lack of resources.

The second research question investigates how teachers respond to reading comprehension difficulties. This is evident in Themes 3 and 4, which indicate that teachers used scaffolding and differentiated instruction with their students through guided reading, vocabulary activity, repeated readings, questioning, simplified texts, visual material, peer support, and differentiated learning activities. The teachers also provided context to reading tasks and encouraged interaction through discussion, questioning, peer support and group work. This helped learners to connect the texts to their familiar experiences and prior knowledge.

V. CONCLUSION

The study focused on the experiences of Grade 5 teachers in solving the reading comprehension difficulties of learners in geographically isolated public elementary schools. The findings indicated that students' difficulties related to reading comprehension were not limited to being able to identify and read words. The teachers note that students often struggle to understand vocabulary, find main ideas and supporting details, explain answers, summarize answers, and make inferences. These findings suggest that some learners were able to read the text but had difficulty making meaning from their reading.

The findings reveal that contextual conditions as a consequence of insufficient exposure to reading materials and reading activities, differences in home support, limited access to educational resources, and vocabulary limitations also cause learners'

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reading comprehension difficulties. According to the teachers' accounts, reading comprehension difficulties should not simply be viewed as individual learner issues, as it is possible that the opportunities and resources afforded to learners also shape their reading development.

In response to these challenges, the teachers modified their instruction according to learner needs. Some of the strategies employed included guided reading, vocabulary activities, repeated reading, questioning, simplified texts, visual materials, peer support, and differentiated learning activities. Teachers also contextualized reading activities by connecting texts and concepts with learners' familiar experiences and used discussion, questioning, peer support, and group activities to encourage interaction and clarify understanding. These practices show how teachers adjusted instruction to learners' varying reading abilities and needs. However, the teachers' ability to provide sustained and individualized reading comprehension support was constrained by limited instructional time and competing teaching and school responsibilities. Teachers needed to balance the needs of struggling readers with curriculum requirements, classroom management, assessment, and other school-related tasks. Thus, although teachers demonstrated commitment and flexibility in supporting learners, continuous and individualized reading intervention remained challenging given their school responsibilities.

Overall, the study concludes that addressing reading comprehension difficulties among Grade 5 learners in geographically isolated public elementary schools requires learner-responsive instruction, meaningful and contextualized reading experiences, adequate learning resources, and sufficient opportunities for sustained teacher support. The teachers' experiences show the importance of considering both learners' comprehension needs and the contextual conditions surrounding teaching and learning when developing reading support initiatives for geographically isolated schools.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The researcher is grateful to everyone who contributed to this study.

First, the researcher sincerely thanks the Grade 5 teachers who participated in the study for generously sharing their experiences, insights, instructional practices, and challenges in addressing learners' reading comprehension difficulties. Their openness and cooperation made this study possible.

The researcher also extends sincere appreciation to the school heads and administrators of the participating geographically isolated public elementary schools for their support and assistance during the conduct of the study.

The researcher is also grateful to the researcher's research adviser, colleagues, and mentors for their guidance, constructive suggestions, and encouragement during the research process. The researcher is also grateful to family and friends for their support, understanding, and encouragement while completing this study.

Above all, the researcher thanks God Almighty for the wisdom, strength, guidance, and perseverance throughout this research.

To everyone who contributed to this study in any way, thank you very much.

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