

Exploring the Persistent Reading Difficulties of Elementary Learners

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Abstract

Persistent reading difficulties remain a significant concern in elementary education because they affect learners' academic performance, motivation, confidence, and participation in school activities. This study explored the meanings attached to persistent reading difficulties and the factors contributing to their persistence among elementary learners in the Bangui–Dumalneg District. Guided primarily by Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory of Reading and supported by the Simple View of Reading and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, the study employed a qualitative, interpretive research design. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions involving 46 participants, including struggling readers, parents or guardians, teachers, and school heads. Purposive sampling was used to select participants with direct experience related to persistent reading difficulties, and data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that learners associated reading difficulties with embarrassment, dependence, and reduced confidence; parents viewed them as a challenge accompanied by hope and concern; teachers regarded them as instructional and professional challenges; and school heads perceived them as school-wide concerns requiring coordinated action. The persistence of reading difficulties was attributed to repeated failure, loss of confidence, limited practice and guidance, avoidance of reading situations, inconsistent home support, instructional constraints, and systemic limitations within schools. The study concluded that persistent reading difficulties are shaped by interacting emotional, social, instructional, and institutional factors rather than by skill deficits alone. It recommends strengthening home–school collaboration, providing sustained literacy support, and addressing contextual factors that influence reading development. The study aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on Quality Education by promoting inclusive and equitable learning opportunities through improved literacy support. It also supports SDG 10 on Reduced Inequalities by highlighting barriers that affect learners' access to quality literacy development. The findings contribute to educational, community, and institutional sustainability by informing literacy practices, stakeholder collaboration, and school-based interventions that support long-term learner development.

Keywords: Bangui–Dumalneg District, Elementary Learners, Literacy Development, Qualitative Research, Reading Difficulties, Reading Proficiency, School Leadership, Stakeholder Perspectives, Thematic Analysis, Transactional Theory of Reading

1. Introduction

Reading is a fundamental academic skill that enables learners to acquire knowledge, develop language proficiency, and engage in lifelong learning. In elementary education, reading proficiency serves as the foundation for learning across subject areas. However, many learners continue to experience persistent reading difficulties that negatively affect academic achievement, motivation, self-confidence, and participation in school activities. Evidence from international, regional, and national assessments indicates that reading proficiency remains a significant educational concern in the Philippines. Despite ongoing literacy interventions, many learners continue to struggle with reading, suggesting that the problem extends beyond cognitive deficits and involves emotional, instructional, home-based, and systemic factors. This study explores the persistent reading difficulties of elementary learners by examining how learners, parents, teachers, and school heads understand the phenomenon and explain its persistence.

1.1 Persistent Reading Difficulties Among Elementary Learners

Reading proficiency is essential for academic success and lifelong learning. Learners who fail to develop foundational reading skills during the elementary years often experience long-term academic challenges. Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) emphasized that the early acquisition of foundational literacy skills is critical because reading difficulties that persist beyond the primary grades often become increasingly difficult to remediate. Persistent reading difficulties can affect learners' performance, confidence, motivation, and engagement in educational activities. Evidence from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 showed that Filipino learners performed significantly below the global average in reading literacy, with many failing to attain minimum proficiency levels (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023). Similarly, the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) 2024 reported that a substantial proportion of Filipino Grade 5 learners did not meet minimum reading standards, particularly in

comprehension and interpretive skills (SEAMEO & UNICEF, 2024). National assessments, including the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory and other school-based reading assessments, continue to indicate that many learners remain at instructional or frustration levels in reading (Department of Education [DepEd], 2025). Recent Philippine research likewise found that reading comprehension difficulties remain prevalent among elementary learners, particularly in the areas of comprehension, vocabulary development, and meaning-making processes (Cadalay & Dilawi, 2023). Similar findings were reported by Lego (2021), who observed that many Filipino learners remain at frustration levels in reading and require sustained foundational literacy instruction. These findings highlight the continuing challenge of reading difficulties among elementary learners and underscore the need to understand the phenomenon from the perspectives of those directly involved.

1.2 Themes and Insights on Persistent Reading Difficulties Among Elementary Learners

Existing literature suggests that persistent reading difficulties result from multiple interacting factors rather than a single cause. Reading development is influenced by cognitive processes, instructional practices, home literacy environments, learner motivation, emotional experiences, and school support systems (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978). Learners who struggle with decoding often devote substantial cognitive effort to word recognition, limiting their ability to comprehend texts effectively. Emotional factors also influence reading development, as repeated experiences of failure may reduce learners' motivation and engagement in literacy activities (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Feelings of stigma and embarrassment associated with literacy difficulties may discourage learners from participating in reading activities and seeking academic assistance (Prins, 2017). According to Bandura (1997), learners' beliefs about their own capabilities influence their persistence and willingness to engage in challenging learning tasks. Emotional reactions such as frustration, embarrassment, and anxiety are commonly experienced by struggling readers and may further impede literacy development (Arzadon & Nato, 2020). Similarly, Saligumba (2021) reported that low literacy levels often result in diminished confidence, social withdrawal, and reduced participation in classroom activities. Learners with low reading self-efficacy are more likely to avoid reading activities and expect failure. Research further indicates that home support, quality instruction, and school-level interventions significantly affect reading outcomes. Parents often encounter challenges in supporting their children's reading development because of limited time, resources, and familiarity with literacy instruction strategies (Malabonga & Ignacio, 2021). Family help-seeking behaviors and literacy support practices have likewise been shown to influence learners' reading development (Ruan et al., 2022). The literature emphasizes that reading difficulties should be understood not only as skill deficits but also as experiences shaped by emotional, social, and contextual factors.

1.3 Local, National, and Global Context of Persistent Reading Difficulties Among Elementary Learners

Globally, reading literacy remains a key indicator of educational quality. The World Bank (2022) identified learning poverty as a major global concern, noting that millions of children worldwide are unable to read and understand age-appropriate texts by age ten. International assessments continue to reveal disparities in reading achievement among learners. Educational inequalities associated with poverty and unequal access to learning opportunities continue to affect literacy development among learners from disadvantaged communities (Gorski, 2018). In the Philippines, reading proficiency has emerged as a major educational concern based on international and regional assessments. Nationally, results from PISA 2022 and SEA-PLM 2024 demonstrate that many Filipino learners struggle with essential reading competencies (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023; SEAMEO & UNICEF, 2024). Local school-based assessments likewise reveal persistent reading difficulties among elementary learners (Department of Education [DepEd], 2025). The K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum Framework recognizes literacy as a foundational competency essential for lifelong learning and academic success (Department of Education, 2013). Likewise, DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019 emphasizes the importance of strengthening foundational skills and ensuring that learners acquire the competencies necessary for academic achievement (Department of Education, 2019). Within the Bangui–Dumalneg District, cases of learners who remain unable to read despite classroom instruction and literacy interventions continue to be observed. These circumstances highlight the importance of examining how different stakeholders understand and explain the persistence of reading difficulties within their educational context.

1.4 Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations of Persistent Reading Difficulties Among Elementary Learners

This study is primarily anchored on Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory of Reading (1978, 1994), supported by the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978). Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory of Reading views reading as a dynamic interaction between the reader and the text, where meaning is constructed through personal experiences, emotions, intentions, and social contexts. This perspective provides a framework for understanding how learners, parents, teachers, and school heads interpret the experience of persistent reading difficulties. The Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) explains reading ability as the interaction between decoding and language comprehension. This framework helps explain how deficiencies in foundational reading processes contribute to continued reading difficulties. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) emphasizes the role of social interaction and environmental influences in learning. The theory supports the examination of home literacy environments, instructional contexts, and school-level conditions that shape learners' reading development. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) further supports the view that learner development is influenced by interactions among family, school,

community, and broader social environments. This perspective complements the study's examination of contextual influences on reading development by highlighting how multiple environmental systems contribute to literacy learning. Epstein (2011) likewise emphasized that effective partnerships among schools, families, and communities contribute significantly to learner achievement and educational success. This perspective reinforces the importance of collaboration among learners, parents, teachers, and school heads in addressing persistent reading difficulties. Conceptually, the study views persistent reading difficulties as a phenomenon influenced by stakeholder perspectives. Learners, parents, teachers, and school heads construct meanings and explanations regarding reading difficulties based on their experiences, responsibilities, and educational contexts. These interpretations collectively contribute to a contextualized understanding of why reading difficulties persist among some elementary learners.

1.5 Research Gaps and Rationale for Exploring Persistent Reading Difficulties Among Elementary Learners

Although extensive research has examined reading proficiency and literacy outcomes, much of the existing literature in the Philippine context remains quantitatively oriented and focused on assessment results. Limited qualitative studies explore how learners, parents, teachers, and school heads interpret persistent reading difficulties and explain their continued occurrence. Existing studies often emphasize reading performance levels, intervention outcomes, and cognitive factors while giving less attention to stakeholder meanings, emotional experiences, and contextual explanations. Studies have also documented challenges encountered by elementary teachers in providing effective reading instruction within resource-constrained public-school settings (Bautista & Santos, 2021). Additionally, learner engagement may be affected by time poverty and competing responsibilities that reduce opportunities for academic support and literacy practice (Idulog et al., 2023). Consequently, there remains a need for qualitative inquiry that captures the perspectives of those directly affected by persistent reading difficulties. This study addresses this gap by exploring the meanings attached to persistent reading difficulties and the factors contributing to their persistence from the perspectives of learners, parents, teachers, and school heads. Through a qualitative approach, the study seeks to provide a holistic understanding of the phenomenon and generate insights that may inform more responsive literacy practices and policies.

1.6 Alignment of the Study on Persistent Reading Difficulties with Relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

This study aligns primarily with SDG 4 – Quality Education, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Persistent reading difficulties hinder learners' access to meaningful educational opportunities and limit their ability to achieve academic success. Understanding the factors that contribute to reading difficulties can support efforts to improve literacy outcomes and educational equity. The study also relates to SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities because addressing persistent reading difficulties may help reduce educational disparities among learners who face barriers to literacy development. By highlighting stakeholder perspectives and contextual influences, the study supports more inclusive educational practices. Additionally, the study contributes to SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals through its recognition of the collaborative roles of learners, parents, teachers, school heads, and educational stakeholders in supporting literacy development.

1.7 Importance of the Study on Persistent Reading Difficulties to Multidisciplinary Sustainability

The study contributes to educational sustainability by generating insights that may improve literacy instruction, learner support mechanisms, and educational interventions for struggling readers. Strengthening reading proficiency supports long-term educational attainment and lifelong learning. It also contributes to socio-economic sustainability, as literacy serves as a foundational skill for future educational and employment opportunities. Improved literacy outcomes may enhance learners' capacity to participate meaningfully in society and economic activities. From a community sustainability perspective, the study highlights the importance of home-school collaboration in supporting reading development. Understanding the roles of parents, teachers, and school leaders may strengthen community-based approaches to literacy improvement. The study further contributes to institutional sustainability by providing evidence that may inform school leadership practices, literacy policies, and educational decision-making. Effective instructional leadership plays a critical role in improving student learning outcomes and sustaining school improvement efforts (Hallinger & Lee, 2021). School leaders who prioritize literacy development create conditions that support successful reading interventions (Lim & Rosales, 2022; Navarro, 2021). Instructional coaching has likewise been identified as a valuable strategy for improving instructional quality and strengthening teacher capacity (Knight, 2017). By examining emotional, instructional, and systemic dimensions of reading difficulties, the research supports the development of more responsive and sustainable literacy programs for elementary learners.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative, interpretive research design to examine the meanings, interpretations, and explanations associated with inability to read among elementary learners. Rather than measuring reading performance or testing causal relationships, the study focused on understanding how learners, parents, teachers, and school heads perceive and explain persistent reading difficulties. The interpretive approach enabled the examination of emotional, contextual, instructional,

and institutional dimensions of the phenomenon and was consistent with the Transactional Theory of Reading, which emphasizes meaning-making and interpretation.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in selected public elementary schools in the Bangui–Dumalneg District under the Schools Division of Ilocos Norte, Philippines. The locale was selected because it represents a typical public-school setting where persistent reading difficulties continue to be observed despite regular classroom instruction. The participating schools serve learners from Key Stage 1 (Grades 1–3) and Key Stage 2 (Grades 4–6) and provided access to learners, parents, teachers, and school heads directly involved in addressing reading concerns. The setting enabled the collection of diverse stakeholder perspectives within a common educational and community context.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The study involved four groups of participants who were directly affected by or involved in addressing persistent reading difficulties. These included 15 elementary learners identified as struggling readers, 15 corresponding parents or guardians, 10 teachers handling the participating learners, and six school heads representing the South, Central, and North Zones of the Bangui–Dumalneg District. The learners represented both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 levels, allowing the study to capture experiences and perspectives across different stages of elementary education. Parents provided home-based perspectives, teachers contributed instructional insights, and school heads offered leadership and institutional viewpoints regarding reading difficulties and their persistence.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study employed purposive sampling to select participants with direct experience related to persistent inability to read among elementary learners. Learners were initially identified through teacher recommendations based on classroom observations and school-based reading assessments used for instructional purposes. Once learners were selected, their parents or guardians were included to provide corresponding home perspectives. Teachers handling the participating learners and school heads from selected schools were subsequently chosen to contribute instructional and administrative perspectives. A total of 46 participants were included. Participant selection was based on relevance to the research questions and accessibility within the selected schools. Data collection continued until sufficient information had been gathered to address the study objectives.

2.5 Research Instrument

The study utilized qualitative data-gathering instruments designed to elicit participants' meanings, interpretations, and explanations regarding inability to read and its persistence. Semi-structured interview guides were prepared for learners, parents or guardians, teachers, and school heads. The interview questions were aligned with the study's research questions and allowed participants to discuss their experiences, perceptions, and explanations in depth. The semi-structured format enabled follow-up questioning and clarification when necessary. Focus group discussion guides were also used with selected parents and teachers to facilitate collective reflection on shared experiences and perceptions related to persistent reading difficulties. These discussions complemented individual interviews by generating additional insights into common challenges and contextual factors. All instruments were reviewed prior to data collection to ensure clarity, appropriateness, and alignment with the qualitative and interpretive nature of the study.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the appropriate educational authorities and participating school heads. Coordination with teachers and administrators was conducted to identify eligible learner participants and arrange data collection schedules. After learners were identified, parents or guardians were informed about the study and consent was secured. Teachers and school heads were then invited to participate. Data were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Individual interviews were conducted with learners, teachers, and school heads to obtain detailed personal perspectives regarding inability to read and its persistence. Focus group discussions with selected parents and teachers provided opportunities for shared reflection on common experiences and challenges. Sessions were conducted at mutually agreed times and locations. With participants' permission, interviews and discussions were audio-recorded, and field notes were taken to capture relevant observations and contextual information. Audio recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim and reviewed for completeness and accuracy before analysis. Data collection ended when sufficient information had been obtained and no substantially new insights emerged.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). Interview and focus group discussion transcripts, together with field notes, were reviewed repeatedly to develop familiarity with the data. Meaningful units were coded according to recurring ideas related to inability to read, stakeholder interpretations, emotional responses, instructional challenges, and factors contributing to persistence. Related codes were then grouped into broader themes corresponding to the study's research questions. Themes were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence, clarity,

and relevance, and were subsequently interpreted in relation to the study's theoretical framework, particularly the Transactional Theory of Reading. This process facilitated a systematic examination of stakeholder perspectives and generated insights into the meanings and persistence of inability to read.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were observed throughout the study. Permission was obtained from relevant educational authorities and participating schools before data collection commenced. Participation was voluntary, and written informed consent was secured from parents or guardians, teachers, and school heads. Learner participation required both parental consent and learner assent. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through the use of pseudonyms or codes, and all identifying information was excluded from reports and presentations. Audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored and accessed only for research purposes. Particular care was taken when interviewing learners to ensure a respectful and non-threatening environment that minimized embarrassment or distress. The use of Ilocano verbatim responses in reporting findings respected participants' linguistic identity while preserving authenticity and anonymity. The study adhered to the ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice throughout the research process.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Meanings Attached to Persistent Reading Difficulties

3.1.1 Learners' Meanings of Persistent Reading Difficulties

Learners viewed reading difficulty in three ways. Some believed that reading is not the most important skill for survival because they observed adults in their families and communities who could work and support their households despite being unable to read. Others associated reading difficulty with shame and embarrassment during classroom activities where their inability became visible to teachers and classmates. Learners also described dependence on parents, siblings, and classmates for understanding written instructions and completing school tasks. These findings indicate that learners construct meanings based on their lived experiences and social environment. Reading difficulty is understood not merely as a lack of skill but as an experience influenced by community realities, emotional responses, and dependence on others. This supports Rosenblatt's view that meaning is constructed through interaction among the learner, context, and experience.

3.1.2 Parents' Meanings of Persistent Reading Difficulties

Parents viewed their children's reading difficulty as a challenge rather than a hopeless condition. They expressed continued hope that their children would eventually learn to read and emphasized patience, encouragement, and emotional support. At the same time, parents described reading difficulty as a source of worry and guilt because of concerns about future academic success and their inability to provide adequate assistance. Some parents also viewed the situation as requiring acceptance and gradual development rather than pressure and comparison. These findings suggest that parents experience a combination of optimism and emotional burden. Their interpretations reflect concern for their children's future while acknowledging personal limitations in supporting reading development. Such perspectives highlight the importance of family experiences in shaping how reading difficulties are understood.

3.1.3 Teachers' Meanings of Persistent Reading Difficulties

Teachers interpreted persistent reading difficulties as a professional responsibility requiring patience, commitment, and instructional adaptation. They viewed reading difficulty as a major instructional challenge because learners struggle across multiple subjects when reading skills are weak. Teachers also observed emotional consequences, including reduced confidence, embarrassment, and declining motivation among struggling readers. The findings show that teachers recognize reading difficulty as both an academic and emotional concern. Their experiences demonstrate that reading challenges affect participation, engagement, and overall learning. These perspectives reinforce the idea that reading difficulty extends beyond technical skill deficits and influences broader educational experiences.

3.1.4 School Heads' Meanings of Persistent Reading Difficulties

School heads viewed reading difficulty as a leadership concern requiring coordinated school action. They described it as a school-wide academic issue affecting achievement, assessment outcomes, and overall school performance. School heads also emphasized systemic constraints such as limited resources, lack of reading specialists, and inconsistent parental involvement. These findings indicate that school heads understand reading difficulty from an institutional perspective. Their interpretations emphasize the role of leadership, resource allocation, and school-wide literacy support. Reading difficulty is therefore viewed not only as an **individual learner problem but also as an organizational concern affecting educational quality.**

3.2 Reasons Why Persistent Reading Difficulties Continue

3.2.1 Repeated Failure and Loss of Confidence

Learners reported that repeated mistakes and unsuccessful reading experiences caused them to lose confidence and believe they were incapable of improvement. Continuous failure reduced motivation and willingness to engage in reading activities. The findings suggest that repeated negative experiences reinforce feelings of inadequacy and discourage further effort. This supports research indicating that repeated negative reading experiences diminish motivation and engagement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Meron, 2018).

3.2.2 Limited Practice and Guidance

Learners attributed continued reading difficulty to limited opportunities for practice and inadequate guidance, particularly at home. Many lacked family members who could assist with reading, while others had little time to practice because of household responsibilities. These findings demonstrate the importance of consistent support in literacy development. Without regular guidance and opportunities for practice, learners struggle to strengthen reading skills and construct positive reading experiences.

3.2.3 Avoidance of Reading Situations

Learners described avoiding reading activities because of embarrassment and fear of making mistakes. This avoidance reduced participation in classroom reading tasks and limited opportunities for improvement. The findings show that emotional responses to reading difficulty contribute to continued reading problems. Avoidance behaviors reduce exposure to reading experiences and reinforce existing weaknesses, creating a cycle of limited engagement and slow progress. This observation supports the Transactional Theory of Reading, which emphasizes the role of emotional experiences in shaping reading behavior.

3.2.4 Home-Related Constraints

Parents attributed persistent reading difficulties to limited time caused by work and household responsibilities, lack of knowledge about how to teach reading, and inconsistent home support. Many parents expressed willingness to help but lacked the skills, time, or resources necessary to provide continuous assistance. These findings align with studies emphasizing that inconsistent home literacy environments contribute to prolonged reading difficulty (Lareau, 2003; Salandanan, 2021). Inconsistent reinforcement of reading skills weakens learners' opportunities for continuous development and practice.

3.2.5 Instructional Constraints

Teachers identified large class sizes, limited instructional time, insufficient remediation opportunities, ancillary assignments, and administrative duties as factors contributing to persistent reading difficulties. These responsibilities restricted individualized support and reduced opportunities for sustained reading intervention. The findings corroborate research showing that structural classroom constraints limit effective reading intervention even when teachers are committed to learner support (Allington, 2012; EDCOM II, 2024). Similar structural barriers to literacy instruction have been documented in Philippine public schools, including teacher workload, limited instructional resources, and competing administrative responsibilities (Tutor & Elbanbuena, 2024). Limited time and competing responsibilities hinder the continuity of reading instruction and remediation.

3.2.6 Learner Anxiety and Reading Avoidance

Teachers observed that many struggling readers experience anxiety, fear of mistakes, and embarrassment during reading activities. These emotional responses often result in withdrawal from reading tasks and reduced participation in classroom instruction. These findings demonstrate how emotional factors contribute to reading persistence. Anxiety and avoidance reduce engagement with literacy activities and prevent learners from gaining the practice needed to improve reading performance.

3.2.7 Systemic and School-Level Constraints

School heads identified limited reading materials, insufficient specialized personnel, staffing limitations, and weak home-school collaboration as factors contributing to persistent reading difficulties. They emphasized that reading interventions are difficult to sustain when resources and coordinated support are limited. The findings align with institutional analyses indicating that systemic limitations and inconsistent home-school collaboration hinder literacy improvement (OECD, 2023; World Bank, 2023). These conditions reduce the effectiveness and continuity of literacy support programs and contribute to the persistence of reading difficulties.

3.3 Synthesis of Findings

The findings demonstrate that persistent reading difficulties are not viewed as isolated learner deficiencies but as experiences shaped by emotional, social, instructional, and institutional conditions. Learners associate reading difficulty with embarrassment, dependence, and reduced confidence; parents connect it with hope, worry, and limitations in providing

support; teachers view it as a professional and instructional challenge; and school heads interpret it as a leadership and organizational concern. The persistence of reading difficulty results from the interaction of repeated failure, avoidance, limited home support, instructional constraints, and systemic limitations. These factors reinforce one another across home, classroom, and school contexts. Viewed through the Transactional Theory of Reading, learners repeatedly encounter negative or fragmented reading experiences that strengthen fear, avoidance, and disengagement. The findings therefore affirm that persistent reading difficulties are experiential and contextual rather than purely technical, requiring responses that address emotional, instructional, family, and institutional dimensions simultaneously (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Meron, 2018; Lareau, 2003; Salandanan, 2021; Allington, 2012; EDCOM II, 2024; OECD, 2023; World Bank, 2023).

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

Persistent reading difficulties among elementary learners are understood as more than an academic problem, encompassing emotional, social, instructional, and institutional dimensions. Learners associated reading difficulty with embarrassment, dependence on others, and reduced confidence; parents viewed it as a challenge accompanied by hope, worry, and acceptance; teachers regarded it as a professional and instructional responsibility; and school heads perceived it as a leadership and school-wide concern. The persistence of reading difficulties was attributed to repeated failure, loss of confidence, limited practice and guidance, avoidance of reading situations, inconsistent home support, instructional constraints, and systemic limitations within schools. These findings indicate that persistent reading difficulties result from interacting factors across home, classroom, and school contexts rather than from reading skill deficits alone.

Schools, teachers, parents, and school leaders should strengthen collaborative efforts to address persistent reading difficulties by providing consistent reading support, sustained remediation opportunities, appropriate instructional resources, and supportive learning environments that encourage learner participation and confidence. Greater attention should be given to improving home-school partnerships, enhancing reading interventions, and addressing emotional, instructional, and institutional factors that contribute to the persistence of reading difficulties among elementary learners.

The study was limited to selected public elementary schools in the Bangui-Dumalneg District and focused on the perspectives of learners, parents, teachers, and school heads regarding persistent reading difficulties. As a qualitative and interpretive inquiry, the findings provide context-specific insights and are not intended for statistical generalization. The study also did not measure reading performance levels, diagnose reading disabilities, or evaluate the effectiveness of specific reading interventions or programs.

Compliance with ethical standards

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles for research involving human participants. Participation was voluntary, and appropriate permissions were secured prior to data collection. Measures were implemented to protect participants' rights, privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity throughout the research process. Informed consent and assent procedures were observed where applicable, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Data collected were used solely for research purposes and were handled with appropriate safeguards to ensure confidentiality and responsible reporting.

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