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Unlocking Difficult Words: Teachers' Use of Vocabulary Strategies

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Abstract

The study aimed to investigate the extent to which teachers utilize vocabulary strategies and the relationship of these strategies with the selected variables. It also determined the students' reading performance. The researcher utilized the descriptive-correlational survey and employed the systematic sampling technique in identifying the 180 Grade 7 respondents from the seven public secondary schools of Maria Districts 1 and 2 in the Division of Siquijor. The researcher used validated questionnaires and employed mean, percent, standard deviation, Chi-Square Test, and Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation in treating the data. The findings revealed that the extent of the teachers' utilization in terms of the following strategies is "high": (a) context clues, (b) word analysis, (c) use of dictionary, (d) breaking words into syllables, (e) making connections, (f) visualization/drawing. It was also found that the students' reading performance when exposed to a reading selection is "satisfactory". The data further indicated that the mentioned strategies are significantly related to the students' reading performance. Additionally, the findings also showed that book reading frequency and extent of encouragement of parents or guardians significantly relate to the students' performance; however, sex, main source of income, number of books at home, and number of magazines/newspapers do not. These findings emphasize that the higher the utilization of these strategies and the support of parents or guardians to home reading practices, the greater the students' gains in vocabulary, comprehension, and overall reading outcome.

Keywords: vocabulary strategies, reading performance, home learning environment, extent of utilization

Introduction

Despite the global push for quality education, many students continue to struggle with English proficiency, particularly in vocabulary, which is an essential component of reading comprehension and in the overall academic success (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2022). International assessments like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) revealed that weak vocabulary knowledge significantly hampers the students' ability to decode meaning, to make inferences, and to engage with academic texts (Clua, 2022). This problem is especially critical for second-language learners, whose limited exposure to English at home and in school, creates persistent learning gaps (Zheng et al., 2025). Vocabulary deficiency does not only affect reading performance but it also contributes to the broader global learning crisis. Addressing this issue is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goal 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education for all, and focuses on ensuring literacy and numeracy for all as key target areas (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2023).

In the Philippines, the students' reading and vocabulary skills are alarmingly low. According to the 2022 PISA results, only 24% of Filipino students attained the minimum reading proficiency. The country ranked 76th out of 81 participating nations which indicated a widespread difficulty in understanding basic texts (OECD, 2023). National assessments, like the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI), also show consistent struggles in vocabulary which directly affect reading comprehension (DepEd, 2020). These issues are worsened by the overcrowded classrooms, the limited access to reading materials, and the lack of targeted instruction on vocabulary strategies (Apiles, 2024). Despite the interventions, many students reached higher grade levels without mastering the basic

reading skills which reflects a growing literacy crisis that demands urgent and focused educational reforms. This condition emphasizes the need to explore if specific vocabulary strategies can bridge these local learning gaps.

Initially, most existing studies on reading focus on general comprehension or isolated strategies, often neglecting how multiple vocabulary techniques like context clues, word analysis, and visualization work together to support reading performance (Viñalon, 2023; Gáleas Arboleda et al., 2024). Few investigations have examined the frequency with which teachers employ these strategies or how such utilization directly impacts the learners' outcomes. The influence of learner variables, including sex, main source of income, and home literacy environment, also remains underexplored despite of the evidences showing their significant role in reading performance (Viñalon, 2023; Dulay, 2025). Only a few studies have explored how the teachers' vocabulary strategies directly relate to the Grade 7 students' reading performance. Hence, this study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing both the utilization of the vocabulary strategies and its relationship to the students' reading performance which offers a more holistic and contextualized perspective.

Further, this study addresses urgent gaps highlighted by the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II) and the Department of Education's (DepEd's) learning recovery initiatives, particularly in relation to vocabulary development and comprehension (EDCOM II, 2024; Department of Education, 2022). By exploring how various vocabulary strategies relate to the students' reading performance across sex, main source of income, and home literacy environment, the researcher offers valuable insights for improving reading instruction. Relative to this, the researcher's five (5) years of experience in handling diverse learners and applying vocabulary strategies in reading instruction, her exposure to classroom realities, curriculum standards, and reading assessments, provide her with the necessary competence to conduct this study rigorously and meaningfully. Her direct interaction with struggling readers had also deepened her understanding of the practical applications of these strategies which made the study both research-based and grounded on real educational needs.

This study aimed to investigate the extent to which the teachers utilize vocabulary strategies in unlocking difficult words and its impact on the students' reading performance.

Specifically, it sought to address the following research questions:

1. To what extent do teachers utilize the following strategies in unlocking difficult words:
    1.1 context clues;
    1.2 word analysis;
    1.3 use of dictionary;
    1.4 breaking words into syllables;
    1.5 making connections; and
    1.6 visualizing/drawing?
2. What is the performance of the students when exposed to a reading selection?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the extent of teachers' utilization of the strategies and the students' reading performance?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the students' profile (sex, main source of income, and home literacy environment) and their reading performance?

Literature Review

Effective vocabulary instruction is a crucial aspect of language teaching. This particular section contains literature, studies, and other sources relevant to the present study entitled "Unlocking Difficult Words: Teachers' Use of Vocabulary Strategies".

Vocabulary Strategies in Unlocking Difficult Words

Vocabulary strategies such as using context clues, breaking words into syllables, consulting dictionaries, and applying word analysis skills enable learners to independently derive meaning which leads to an improved comprehension and retention. Earlier researches suggested that explicit and integrated vocabulary instruction, which encompasses multiple strategies, consistently enhances reading accuracy, fluency, and learner confidence (Moncayo, 2023; Arboleda et al., 2024). A systematic review of recent instructional studies affirms that combining explicit strategy instruction with

repeated exposure to target vocabulary is more effective than the traditional or isolated teaching methods (Moncayo, 2023).

Recent researches further highlight the critical role of vocabulary knowledge in comprehension outcomes. A 2023 study among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners found that vocabulary depth (i.e., nuanced word knowledge) predicts reading comprehension more strongly than the breadth or the scope. This emphasized the need for instructional approaches that build rich lexical understanding (Rabadi, 2023). Additionally, a longitudinal investigation revealed that vocabulary breadth supports comprehension indirectly through the listening skills, while vocabulary depth exerts a direct strong influence on reading comprehension across the early grades (Lia et al., 2020). These findings underscore the importance of teaching strategies that both expand vocabulary scope and deepen word knowledge approaches central to empowering learners, especially those struggling in second language settings, to navigate complex academic texts independently.

The following are the identified vocabulary strategies:

Context Clues

This phrase refers to the surrounding words or phrases that the readers use to infer the meaning of unfamiliar terms without consulting external sources (Zorfass & Gray, 2020). A quasi-experimental study conducted with the Indonesian Grade 7 EFL students found that those taught to use contextual clues significantly improved their reading comprehension scores with 85.8% of the experimental group that shows notable gains after explicit instruction (Oktaviyanti et al., 2024). Similarly, in another quasi-experimental study with Iranian EFL learners, instruction in the four types of contextual clues namely explanation, example, synonym, and antonym, significantly enhanced the students' ability to infer the meanings of unfamiliar words compared to their untrained peers. This indicated that contextual clue training supports vocabulary acquisition and retention (Zamani et al., 2022).
Furthermore, researches highlighted that context clue instruction not only enhances vocabulary acquisition but also encourages independent word-solving skills across disciplines. For example, a study involving 12th-grade Thai students showed substantial increases in vocabulary knowledge after following structured exercises in definition, synonym, and example clues (Sukhaarkom & Pattamadilok, 2021). Another investigation at the university level in Indonesia confirmed that students who regularly practiced context analysis grew more adept at deciphering unknown words in academic texts (Stevani et al., 2022).

Word Analysis

This refers to the breaking of complex words into their smallest meaningful units like prefixes, roots, and suffixes to infer meaning (Crosson et al., 2021). A comprehensive 2024 meta-analysis confirmed a strong positive correlation between morphological awareness and reading comprehension in children aged 6 to 16 years old. Such, highlighted the direct impact of understanding word structure on reading performance (Liu et al., 2024). Additionally, Crosson et al. (2021) demonstrated, through intervention with multilingual adolescents, that developing morphological analysis skills significantly enhanced academic vocabulary knowledge, which in turn mediated improvements in reading comprehension.

Further evidences support the widespread benefits of morphological strategies across diverse learner populations. In a study involving Chinese students from primary to tertiary levels, Dong et al. (2020) found that vocabulary knowledge and, especially morphological awareness, had the strongest predictive power for reading comprehension, more so than phonological or orthographic skills. A recent meta-analysis on English-speaking learners also found that semantic-rich morphological tasks uniquely predicted reading comprehension even after controlling other language abilities (Liu et al., 2024).

Use of Dictionaries

This refers to the strategy of consulting reference materials, either print or electronic, to determine the meaning, pronunciation, usage, or grammatical role of unfamiliar words (Nation, 2022). Research supports its use as a direct and effective technique for unlocking vocabulary and enhancing comprehension during reading tasks. Uchihara et al.

(2025), for example, found that dictionary use make a unique contribution to both receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge when combined with context-based strategies that reinforced its role in vocabulary development.

Recent studies also emphasize the role of mobile-assisted vocabulary learning in improving word acquisition and retention. A quasi-experimental study with Chinese university students (Dan et al., 2024) revealed that the use of a mobile vocabulary application significantly enhanced knowledge of high-frequency L2 (Second Language) words in the short term, though long-term retention varied. Li and Hafner (2022) also found that mobile-assisted vocabulary interventions contributed meaningfully to both receptive and productive vocabulary development in Chinese EFL contexts.

Breaking Words into Syllables

This refers to the process of dividing words into syllables. This is a decoding strategy that supports pronunciation and comprehension by segmenting words into distinct sound units (De Simone et al., 2023). Researches indicated that recognizing syllable patterns helps early and struggling readers process multisyllabic words more efficiently which in turn improved fluency and decoding accuracy. Castles et al. (2020) asserted that explicit instruction in syllable segmentation enhances early reading development by improving the students' ability to decode multi-syllabic words. In multimedia learning environments, high segmentation, which is breaking content into smaller meaningful units, has been shown to reduce cognitive load and enhance vocabulary retention, fluency, and comprehension (Lui, 2024).

Syllable awareness also appears to be an essential component in sub-lexical processing. Eye-tracking research supports the idea that readers segment words into syllabic or morphemic chunks during real-time word recognition which is the key mechanism in facilitating faster and more accurate reading (De Simone et al., 2023).

Making Connections

According to Harvey and Goudvis (2023), making connections involves encouraging students to link new information in the text to what they already know, thereby fostering active reading and improving inference-making and comprehension. This process supports meaning-making, especially when learners encounter unfamiliar vocabulary or complex ideas. In a one group pretest–posttest study conducted among college students in the Philippines, Nobles and Ortega Dela Cruz (2020) found that teaching making connections significantly improved multiple levels of comprehension from literal understanding to evaluative and critical thinking. Their findings demonstrated that explicit instruction in this strategy led to measurable gains in reading outcomes.
Across broader contexts, meta-analytic evidence indicates that elaboration-type strategies, which include making connections, consistently contribute to reading comprehension. Sun et al. (2021) reported that among all categories of reading strategies, elaboration strategies have substantial positive correlations with comprehension in both the First Language (L1) of the student or his or her native or primary language acquired from early childhood. It holds true as well with the student's Second Language (L2) or the additional language learned after the first language, often in school or in formal instructional settings or contexts.

Visualizing/Drawing

Creating mental images or sketches related to a text is an effective strategy that engages dual-coding processes activating both visual and verbal memory channels to enhance vocabulary retention and reading comprehension (Wooten & Cuevas, 2024). In a quasi-experimental study by Wooten and Cuevas (2024), elementary school students who learned domain-specific vocabulary through dual-coding instruction significantly outperformed those in conventional instruction which showed improved comprehension and motivation. Another quasi-experimental study with eighth graders in Indonesia found that students who received instruction using visualization strategies significantly outperformed their peers in reading comprehension post-tests, with mean scores of 84.4% in the experimental group versus the 72.5% in the control group (Damiri et al., 2022). Similarly, a classroom study at MTs AlHikmah Bandar Lampung revealed that using visualization instruction led to significantly higher comprehension scores among the Grade 8 students compared to the conventional instruction (Royhan et al., 2023).

Researches indicated that vocabulary strategies such as using context clues and word analysis are particularly effective in enhancing reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, while strategies like dictionary use, breaking words into syllables, making connections, and visualization also provide meaningful support (Oktaviyanti et al., 2024; Crosson et al., 2021; Wooten & Cuevas, 2024). Context clues allow learners to infer word meanings independently and word analysis strengthens understanding of complex word structures. Both have the most significant impact on the reading performance.

Performance in Reading Selection

Performance refers to how effectively an individual completes a task according to an established criteria which includes benchmarks such as accuracy (correctness), automaticity or fluency (speed and ease), and expressive delivery (prosody) that are essential in academic assessments (Cox, 2021). In English education, performance refers to the actual use of language in speaking, listening, reading, and writing under real communicative conditions. This showcases how effectively individuals apply linguistic competence in practice rather than in theory (Turner & Purpura, 2020). Specifically, performance in reading selections refers to a student's ability to decode accurately**,** read fluently, and comprehend text using strategies such as inferencing, summarizing, and self-monitoring. It reflects not only the learner's language proficiency but also how effectively they engaged with the text to construct meaning (Hsu et al., 2023).

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also commonly known as the Nation's Report Card, which is the United States' (US's) largest ongoing assessment of the students' academic achievements in key subject areas, including reading and mathematics, the U.S. children's reading scores have declined to historic lows, with a significant number of students performing at the "below basic" level. The 2025 report highlighted that nearly 40% of fourth graders and 33% of eighth graders lacked fundamental reading skills. This reflects ongoing struggles to recover from pandemic-related learning loss. These results underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions both at home and in school to support reading development (Mayer, 2025). In the Philippines, the students remain among the lowest performers in reading based on the PISA 2022 results. With an average score of 347, which is below the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 476, only 24% of the students met the minimum reading proficiency level which placed the Philippines at 76th out of 81 countries (Bautista, 2023).

Relationship Between Utilization of the Strategies and Performance

There is a strong positive relationship between the utilization of the reading strategies and the students' performance in reading selections. Researches consistently show that the more frequently and effectively the students apply strategies such as using context clues**,** word analysis**,** dictionaries**,** breaking words into syllables**,** making connections, and visualizing, the better are their reading comprehension and overall academic performance. For instance, Barber et al. (2021) found that strategic reading practices, particularly making connections and using background knowledge, significantly enhanced their comprehension and engagement. Similarly, creating mental images or sketches related to a text is an effective strategy that engages dual-coding processes which activate both visual and verbal memory channels to enhance vocabulary retention and comprehension (Hanna, 2021). Castles et al. (2020) emphasized that syllable and morphological awareness (central to word analysis) are foundational for fluent decoding and comprehension. Moreover, Dan et al. (2024) examined how mobile dictionary use impacted students with varying levels of motivation and found that all participants showed significant vocabulary improvement after consistently using the application. Thus, the higher utilization of these strategies correlates with improved performance in reading selections.

Relationship Between the Students' Profile (sex, main source of income, and home literacy environment) and Reading Performance

This study includes the sex, the family's main source of income, and the home literacy environment as these variables may be related to the students' reading performance.

On Sex

Granocchio et al. (2023) conducted a comprehensive mini review analyzing sex-related differences in reading achievement based on both population-level assessments (e.g., the PISA, the National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training System (INVALSI) and the standardized reading tests). The review found that the girls outperformed the boys in reading comprehension primarily during adolescence, with the performance gap being more pronounced in socially disadvantaged environments**.** Similarly, research suggests that differences in metacognitive reading strategies mediate gender disparities in performance. A multilevel mediation analysis of PISA data in China, consisting of 12,058 students from 361 schools, found that the girls' stronger metacognitive skills, such as self-monitoring and evaluating comprehension, significantly explained their higher digital reading performance compared to the boys (Yu, 2021). In addition, a systematic review of 41 studies among children aged from 4–18 years old demonstrated that the girls consistently engaged in more leisure reading and prefer fiction and continuous narrative texts, whereas boys gravitated toward nonfiction and informational materials. These differences contributed to the disparities in reading development (Jabbar & Warraich, 2023).

On Main Source of Income

Researches consistently show that socioeconomic status (SES), including family income, is strongly associated with the students' academic achievement such as reading competence, among others. A meta analytic review by Liu et al. (2022) synthesized findings from hundreds of studies and international assessments which revealed that students from higher SES families consistently achieve higher academic outcomes than their lower SES peers. This relationship could be explained by the greater access to educational resources, enrichment activities, and supportive learning environments that higher-income families can provide. Complementing these findings, longitudinal research on Chinese learners shows that family income and socioeconomic status significantly influence English word reading both directly and indirectly. This becomes possible through the development of the learners' phonological awareness and their letter-name knowledge. In contrast, their influence on Chinese as a first language (L1) reading is primarily indirect, operating through phonological awareness and vocabulary knowledge (Pan et al., 2025).

On Home Literacy Environment

This includes access to books, frequency of shared reading, and active reading practices which play a critical role in developing early reading skills. Georgiou and Zhang (2024) examined the long-term influence of the home literacy environment (HLE) on reading achievement beyond the early grades. Their study found that the early exposure to rich literacy experiences at home, such as frequent parent-child reading, access to diverse reading materials, and parental modeling of reading behaviors, continued to have a positive effect on the children's reading fluency and comprehension through the later years of primary education**.** In addition, Liu and Chung (2024) explored how the home literacy environment (HLE) influences the children's English as a Second Language (ESL) in bilingual contexts. The study revealed that children from homes with richer literacy environments showed higher levels of motivation and engagement in learning English. This highlights the crucial role of parental involvement as well as their access to English print and media resources.

Methodology

The research utilized the descriptive-correlational survey. It is descriptive because it determined the extent of the teachers' use of various vocabulary strategies such as the following: context clues, word analysis, dictionary use, breaking words into syllables, making connections, and visualizing/drawing. On the other hand, it is also correlational because it examined the relationship between the utilization of these strategies and the students' performance in the reading selections, as well as the relationship between the students' profile (sex, main source of income, and home literacy environment) and their reading performance.

The respondents of this study are the Grade 7 students of the seven public secondary schools of Districts 1 and 2 in the municipality of Maria in the Division of Siquijor for School Year 2025–2026. The Yamane's formula was used to compute the sample population which means that 180 of the 270 total population of the aforementioned seven public secondary schools are the representatives of the population or the samples. Respondents were selected using the

systematic sampling technique where every second student on the list was included, starting from a randomly selected point.

The research instrument utilized for this study was self-made except for the Part IV which was adopted from the Department of Education's (DepEd's) Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) for Junior High School Manual for the year 2024. This questionnaire was validated by 3 English teachers who are currently Master's Degree holders. To ensure item reliability, a dry-run was performed to thirty (30) Grade 7 students of Candaping National High School who were not part of the sampling data. The reliability of the instrument was computed using the Cronbach's Alpha. The results of the item reliability test below indicated that the questionnaires could be administered to the respondents. Since all the reliability values were greater than 0.70, the items for each variable were considered reliable.

Strategies	**Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients**
Context Clues	0.757
Word Analysis	0.742
Use of Dictionaries	0.807
Breaking Words into Syllables	0.785
Making Connections	0.732
Visualizing/Drawing	0.702

The questionnaire has four parts. Part I displays the disclosure statement where the respondents signified their consent for the researcher to gather data/information, provided that the confidentiality of the data is observed. It also contains the purpose of the study. Part II was used to gather information on the profile of the respondents (sex, main source of income, and home literacy environment). Part III of the questionnaire focused on the extent of the vocabulary strategies employed by the teachers as perceived by the students. Part IV of the research instrument was adopted from the Department of Education's (DepEd's) Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) for Junior High School Manual for the year 2024, which contains reading passages entitled "What Little Things", "Africa's Plea", "Plant Intelligence", and "Get to Know PAGASA's Rainfall Warnings". The said manual provided the 30-item multiple-choice test used in the study that focused on vocabulary understanding, inference, and summarization.

To analyze the data, various statistical tools were used: (A) Percent. This was used to describe the profile variables of the respondents, such as sex, main source of income, and home literacy environment. (B) Mean. This determined the extent to which vocabulary strategies such as context clues, word analysis, use of dictionaries, breaking words into syllables, making connections, and visualizing/drawing were utilized by the teachers. (C) Standard Deviation. This measured the variability or dispersion of responses around the mean. (D) Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation. This was used to determine the significance of the relationship between the extent of utilization of vocabulary strategies and the students' reading performance, and the profile of the students in terms of home literacy environment and their reading performance. (E) Chi-Square Test. This was used to identify the significance of the relationship between the profile of the students in terms of sex and the main source of income, and their reading performance.

In order to uphold the principles of sound research, ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the study. Prior to the data gathering, ethical clearance was obtained from the Division Office of Siquijor as well as from the administrators of the identified schools in Districts 1 and 2 in the municipality of Maria, Division of Siquijor, through formal letters of request for the granting of permission to conduct the study in the targeted locations. During the data collection, the respondents were fully informed of the purpose, procedures, and terms of the study, and their informed consent was secured through the disclosure statement. It was clearly emphasized to them that their participation in the research was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from it at any time without fear of being coerced or intimidated. After the data were gathered, strict confidentiality measures were implemented to protect the privacy of the information shared by the respondents. Moreover, the study prioritized minimizing the potential risks to the respondents and adhered to the institutional and division-level research guidelines to maintain ethical compliance in educational research settings. After the completion of the study, all collected data, including the questionnaires and the test results, were securely stored and are accessible only to the researcher. The participants' identities will remain confidential and any personal information were anonymized.

Results and Discussion

Table 1.1. Extent to which Teachers Utilize Context Clues as Strategies in Unlocking Difficult Words

	My teacher utilizes the following strategies to a certain extent, as he/she…	x̄	EoU
1.	clarifies to us the meanings of difficult words through the use of examples or sample situations.	3.97	H
2.	helps us understand the meanings of new vocabulary words through definition or direct meanings.	3.94	H
3.	checks our understanding of context clues through quizzes, exercises, and class discussions.	3.94	H
4.	makes us understand the meanings of unfamiliar words through the use of synonyms or words with the same meanings.	3.92	H
5.	gives us activities like worksheets to practice using context clues.	3.89	H
6.	encourages us to figure out the meanings of unfamiliar words on our own by using clues in the sentence.	3.68	H
7.	introduces to us the meanings of difficult words through the use of antonyms or words with opposite meanings.	3.65	H
	Composite	3.86	H
	SD	0.92	

Note: *Extent of Utilization (EoU); 4.21-5.00, Very High (VH); 3.41-4.20, High (H), 2.61-3.40, Moderate (M); 1.81-2.60, Low (L); 1.00- 1.80, Very Low (VL)*

Table 1.1 indicates the extent to which teachers utilize context clues as strategies in unlocking difficult words. The outcome reveals that the extent of teachers' utilization of context clues was "high" across all indicators; My teacher clarifies to us the meanings of difficult words through the use of examples or sample situations. (Mean= 3.97); My teacher helps us understand the meanings of new vocabulary words through definition or direct meanings. (Mean= 3.94); My teacher checks our understanding of context clues through quizzes, exercises, and class discussions. (Mean= 3.94); My teacher makes us understand the meanings of unfamiliar words through the use of synonyms or words with the same meanings. (Mean= 3.92). My teacher gives us activities like worksheets to practice using context clues. (Mean= 3.89); My teacher encourages us to figure out the meanings of unfamiliar words on our own by using clues in the sentence. (Mean= 3.68); My teacher introduces to us the meanings of difficult words through the use of antonyms or words with opposite meanings. (Mean= 3.65). Overall, the extent of teachers' utilization of context clues exposed with a composite mean of 3.86 and a standard deviation of 0.92. This finding means that the strategy is frequently used and contributes positively to vocabulary development.

Table 1.2. Extent to which Teachers Utilize Word Analysis as a Strategy in Unlocking Difficult Words

	My teacher utilizes the following strategies to a certain extent, as he/she…	x̄	EoU
1.	shows us how to break words like unhappy into "un-" (not) + "happy" to understand that it means "not happy."	3.92	H
2.	helps us find the base word in words like careful (base word: care) to know the meaning.	3.92	H
3.	gives us examples, such as showing how the word teacher comes from teach + -er which means "a person who teaches."	3.92	H
4.	explains to us the common prefixes (like un-, re-, dis-) and suffixes (like -ful, -less, -ment) and tells what they mean.	3.88	H
5.	emphasizes to us the different parts of speech like nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.	3.84	H
6.	helps us to analyze word connotations (like the difference between house vs home, old vs aged).	3.77	H
7.	gives us exercises like word-building, word-study, or comprehension tasks.	3.71	H
	Composite	3.85	H
	SD	0.93	

Note: *Extent of Utilization (EoU); 4.21-5.00, Very High (VH); 3.41-4.20, High (H), 2.61-3.40, Moderate (M); 1.81-2.60, Low (L); 1.00- 1.80, Very Low (VL)*

As shown in Table 1.2, the data depicts the extent to which teachers utilize word analysis as a strategy in unlocking difficult words. The findings reflect that the extent of teachers' utilization of word analysis were "high" across all indicators; My teacher shows us how to break words like unhappy into "un-" (not) + "happy" to understand that it means "not happy." (Mean= 3.92); My teacher helps us find the base word in words like careful (base word: care) to know the meaning. (Mean= 3.92); My teacher gives us examples, such as showing how the word teacher comes from teach + -er which means "a person who teaches." (Mean= 3.92); My teacher explains to us the common prefixes (like un-, re-, dis-) and suffixes (like -ful, -less, -ment) and tells what they mean. (Mean= 3.88). My teacher emphasizes to us the different parts of speech like nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. (Mean= 3.84); My teacher helps us to analyze word connotations (like the difference between house vs home, old vs aged). (Mean= 3.77); My teacher gives us exercises like word-building, word-study, or comprehension tasks. (Mean= 3.71). Overall, the extent of teachers' utilization of word analysis revealed with a composite mean of 3.85 and a standard deviation of 0.93. This finding means that the strategy is frequently used and contributes positively to vocabulary development.

Table 1.3. Extent to which Teachers Utilize Dictionary as a Strategy in Unlocking Difficult Words

	My teacher utilizes the following strategies to a certain extent, as he/she…	x̄	EoU
1.	teaches us how to use guide words and check pronunciations.	4.00	H
2.	gives us activities where we have to look for words and study their meanings, pronunciations, and uses in sentences.	3.87	H
3.	allows us to use both printed and online dictionaries to find word meanings.	3.79	H
4.	inspires us to know more about a word's history and origin by using the dictionary.	3.78	H
5.	requires us to use appropriate words when writing by using the dictionary.	3.75	H
6.	tells us to use the dictionary when we are not sure about the correct spellings of words.	3.73	H
7.	gives us time to practice using dictionaries on our own in class.	3.58	H
	Composite	3.79	H
	SD	0.96	

Note: *Extent of Utilization (EoU); 4.21-5.00, Very High (VH); 3.41-4.20, High (H), 2.61-3.40, Moderate (M); 1.81-2.60, Low (L); 1.00- 1.80, Very Low (VL)*

Table 1.3 shows the extent to which teachers utilize dictionary as a strategy in unlocking difficult words. The result presents that the extent of teachers' utilization of dictionary was "high" across all indicators; My teacher teaches us how to use guide words and check pronunciations. (Mean= 4.00); My teacher gives us activities where we have to look for words and study their meanings, pronunciations, and uses in sentences. (Mean= 3.87); My teacher allows us to use both printed and online dictionaries to find word meanings. (Mean= 3.79); My teacher inspires us to know more about a word's history and origin by using the dictionary. (Mean= 3.78). My teacher requires us to use appropriate words when writing by using the dictionary. (Mean= 3.75); My teacher tells us to use the dictionary when we are not sure about the correct spellings of words. (Mean= 3.73); My teacher gives us time to practice using dictionaries on our own in class. (Mean= 3.58). Overall, the extent of teachers' utilization of dictionary exhibited with a composite mean of 3.79 and a standard deviation of 0.96. This finding means that the strategy is frequently used and contributes positively to vocabulary development.

Table 1.4. Extent to which Teachers Break Words into Syllables as a Strategy in Unlocking Difficult Words

	My teacher utilizes the following strategies to a certain extent, as he/she…	x̄	EoU
1.	guides us how to divide or syllabicate words after prefixes (re-play).	3.82	H
2.	teaches us to divide or syllabicate words between double consonants (hap-py).	3.77	H
3.	gives us activities where we practice dividing words into syllables during reading and vocabulary lessons.	3.77	H

4.	models on how to split long words into smaller chunks (in-for-ma-tion), when reading, spelling, or writing new words.	3.72	H
5.	demonstrates to us how to divide or syllabicate words between a consonant and vowel (ti-ger).	3.67	H
6.	uses clapping or tapping to help us count and hear the number of syllables of words.	3.65	H
7.	encourages us to use syllable rules, like sounding out each syllable slowly (ex-am-ple).	3.65	H
	Composite	3.72	H
	SD	0.98	

Note: *Extent of Utilization (EoU); 4.21-5.00, Very High (VH); 3.41-4.20, High (H), 2.61-3.40, Moderate (M); 1.81-2.60, Low (L); 1.00- 1.80, Very Low (VL)*

Table 1.4 displays the extent to which teachers break words into syllables as a strategy in unlocking difficult words. The findings unveiled that the extent of teachers' utilization of breaking words into syllables were "high" across all indicators; My teacher guides us how to divide or syllabicate words after prefixes (re-play). (Mean= 3.82); My teacher teaches us to divide or syllabicate words between double consonants (hap-py). (Mean= 3.77); My teacher gives us activities where we practice dividing words into syllables during reading and vocabulary lessons. (Mean= 3.77); My teacher models on how to split long words into smaller chunks (in-for-ma-tion), when reading, spelling, or writing new words. (Mean= 3.72). My teacher demonstrates to us how to divide or syllabicate words between a consonant and vowel (ti-ger). (Mean= 3.67); My teacher uses clapping or tapping to help us count and hear the number of syllables of words. (Mean= 3.65); My teacher encourages us to use syllable rules, like sounding out each syllable slowly (ex-am-ple). (Mean= 3.65). Overall, the extent of teachers' utilization of breaking words into syllables revealed with a composite mean of 3.72 and a standard deviation of 0.98. This finding means that the strategy is frequently used and contributes positively to vocabulary development.

Table 1.5. Extent to which Teachers Utilize Making Connections as Strategy in Unlocking Difficult Words

	My teacher utilizes the following strategies to a certain extent, as he/she…	$\bar{x}$	EoU
1.	teaches us how to make text-to-self connections like telling a personal story similar to the text.	3.99	H
2.	encourages us to connect new words or ideas to our own experiences.	3.94	H
3.	provides us guiding questions, such as "Does this remind you of something you've read before?" or "How is this situation similar to something happening in the world today?"	3.89	H
4.	guides us how to make text-to-world connections like relating what we read to real-life situations (such as connecting a story about teamwork to experiences in school or sports).	3.88	H
5.	checks if we can make meaningful connections by asking us to explain them in discussions, short reflections, or written activities like journals.	3.82	H
6.	shows us how to make connections by giving examples during read-alouds or class reading.	3.81	H
7.	demonstrates us how to make text-to-text connections such as comparing it with another book or movie.	3.78	H
	Composite	3.87	H
	SD	0.96	

Note: *Extent of Utilization (EoU); 4.21-5.00, Very High (VH); 3.41-4.20, High (H), 2.61-3.40, Moderate (M); 1.81-2.60, Low (L); 1.00- 1.80, Very Low (VL)*

Table 1.5 reflects the extent to which teachers utilize making connections as strategy in unlocking difficult words. The result points out that the extent of teachers' utilization of dictionary was "high" across all indicators; My teacher teaches us how to make text-to-self connections like telling a personal story similar to the text. (Mean= 3.99); My teacher encourages us to connect new words or ideas to our own experiences. (Mean= 3.94); My teacher provides us guiding questions, such as "Does this remind you of something you've read before?" or "How is this situation similar to something happening in the world today?" (Mean= 3.89); My teacher guides us how to make text-to-world

connections like relating what we read to real-life situations (such as connecting a story about teamwork to experiences in school or sports). (Mean= 3.88). My teacher checks if we can make meaningful connections by asking us to explain them in discussions, short reflections, or written activities like journals. (Mean= 3.82); My teacher shows us how to make connections by giving examples during read-alouds or class reading. (Mean= 3.81); My teacher demonstrates us how to make text-to-text connections such as comparing it with another book or movie. (Mean= 3.78). Overall, the extent of teachers' utilization of making connections exposed with a composite mean of 3.87 and a standard deviation of 0.96. This finding means that the strategy is frequently used and contributes positively to vocabulary development.

Table 1.6. Extent to which Teachers Utilize Visualizing/Drawing as a Strategy in Unlocking Difficult Words

	My teacher utilizes the following strategies to a certain extent, as he/she…	x̄	EoU
1.	teaches us to make mental pictures while reading (like imagining a forest with tall trees and birds when the story describes nature).	3.78	H
2.	uses visualization in vocabulary lessons, like asking us to draw or imagine a picture of words such as "volcano" or "journey" to help us remember their meanings.	3.77	H
3.	uses drawing activities, such as sketching a character or a setting, to show our understanding of the story or new words.	3.74	H
4.	encourages us to describe or sketch scenes, characters, or ideas from what we have read.	3.73	H
5.	shows us how to visualize by giving examples during read-alouds, like saying, "When I read this part, I imagine the room being dark and quiet."	3.70	H
6.	reminds us to use any of the five senses when forming mental images.	3.66	H
7.	checks our understanding through drawings that show what we pictured while reading.	3.55	H
	Composite	3.70	H
	SD	0.99	

Note: *Extent of Utilization (EoU); 4.21-5.00, Very High (VH); 3.41-4.20, High (H), 2.61-3.40, Moderate (M); 1.81-2.60, Low (L); 1.00- 1.80, Very Low (VL)*

Table 1.6 indicates the extent to which teachers utilize visualizing/drawing as a strategy in unlocking difficult words. The findings unveil that the extent of teachers' utilization of visualizing or drawing was "high" across all indicators; My teacher teaches us to make mental pictures while reading (like imagining a forest with tall trees and birds when the story describes nature). (Mean= 3.78); My teacher uses visualization in vocabulary lessons, like asking us to draw or imagine a picture of words such as "volcano" or "journey" to help us remember their meanings. (Mean= 3.77); My teacher uses drawing activities, such as sketching a character or a setting, to show our understanding of the story or new words. (Mean= 3.74); My teacher encourages us to describe or sketch scenes, characters, or ideas from what we have read. (Mean= 3.73). My teacher shows us how to visualize by giving examples during read-alouds, like saying, "When I read this part, I imagine the room being dark and quiet." (Mean= 3.70); My teacher reminds us to use any of the five senses when forming mental images. (Mean= 3.66); My teacher checks our understanding through drawings that show what we pictured while reading. (Mean= 3.55). Overall, the extent of teachers' utilization of visualizing or drawing revealed with a composite mean of 3.70 and a standard deviation of 0.99. This finding means that the strategy is frequently used and contributes positively to vocabulary development.

Table 1.7. Summary Table of the Extent to which Teachers Utilize the Strategies in Unlocking Difficult Words

Utilization of…	x̄	EoU	SD
Context Clues	3.86	H	0.92
Word Analysis	3.85	H	0.93
Use Of Dictionary	3.79	H	0.96
Breaking Words Into Syllables	3.72	H	0.98
Making Connections	3.87	H	0.96
Visualizing/Drawing	3.70	H	0.99
Overall	3.80	H	0.96

Note: *Extent of Utilization (EoU); 4.21-5.00, Very High (VH); 3.41-4.20, High (H), 2.61-3.40, Moderate (M); 1.81-2.60, Low (L); 1.00- 1.80, Very Low (VL)*

Table 7 displays the summary of the extent to which teachers utilize the strategies in unlocking difficult words. The data revealed that the perception of students on the extent of the teachers' utilization of vocabulary strategies in unlocking difficult words is "high" across all identified strategies, namely: context clues (Mean= 3.86, SD=0.92); word analysis (Mean= 3.85, SD=0.93); use of dictionary (Mean= 3.79, SD=0.96); breaking words into syllables (Mean= 3.72, SD=0.98); making connections (Mean= 3.87, SD=0.96); and visualizing/drawing (Mean= 3.70, SD=0.99). This result means the strategies are frequently used and contribute positively to vocabulary development.

Table 2. Reading Performance of the Students when Exposed to a Reading Selection

Rating	Verbal Description	f	%	$\bar{x}$	SD
90%-100%	Outstanding	28	15.56		
85%-89%	Very Satisfactory	80	44.44		
80%-84%	Satisfactory	4	2.22	81.36	8.36
75%-79%	Fairly Satisfactory	3	1.67		
≤74%	Did Not Meet Expectations	65	36.11		
Total		180	100		

Table 2 exhibits the reading performance of the students when exposed to a reading selection. There are 15.56% of the students who obtained an outstanding rating. The 44.44% of them have a very satisfactory rating and the other 2.22% have a satisfactory performance. Furthermore, there are 1.67% of students who have a fairly satisfactory rating. However, 36.11% of the students did not meet the expectation performance rating. The overall reading performance of the students is 81.36% with a verbal description of "satisfactory".

Table 3. Relationship between the Extent of Utilization of the Strategies and the Students' Reading Performance

Reading performance and…	r_s	p	Decision	Remark
Context Clues	0.352	<.001	Reject H_{o1}	Significant
Word Analysis	0.374	<.001	Reject H_{o1}	Significant
Use Of Dictionary	0.382	<.001	Reject H_{o1}	Significant
Breaking Words Into Syllables	0.356	<.001	Reject H_{o1}	Significant
Making Connections	0.422	<.001	Reject H_{o1}	Significant
Visualizing/Drawing	0.450	<.001	Reject H_{o1}	Significant
Overall	0.461	<.001	Reject H_{o1}	Significant

Note: Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation at 0.05 Level of Significance

Table 3 presents the relationship between the extent of utilization of various reading strategies and the students' reading performance among the 180 respondents using Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation at the 0.05 level of significance.

Based on the computed values, all the strategies show statistically significant relationships with the students' reading performance. The correlation coefficients (r_s) range from 0.352 to 0.461 with all p-values at less than .001. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H_{o1}) is rejected for all the strategy variables and the results are marked as significant.

Table 4. Relationship between the Students' Profile and the Students' Reading Performance

Reading performance and…	Comp. Value	*P*	Decision	Remark
Sex	$\chi^2 = 1.934$	0.380	Fail to Reject H_{o2}	Not Significant
Main Source of Income	$\chi^2 = 10.84$	0.211	Fail to Reject H_{o2}	Not Significant
Home Literacy Environment				

• No. of Books	$r_s = 0.115$	0.124	Fail to Reject H_{o2}	Not Significant
• No. of Mags/Newspapers	$r_s = 0.083$	0.268	Fail to Reject H_{o2}	Not Significant
• Book Reading Frequency	$r_s = 0.481$	<.001	Reject H_{o2}	Significant
• Extent of Encouragement	$r_s = 0.259$	<.001	Reject H_{o2}	Significant

Note: Chi-Square Test and Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation at 0.05 Level of Significance

Table 4 shows the relationship between the students' profile such as sex, main source of income, and home literacy environment and their reading performance, using both the Chi-Square Test and Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation at the 0.05 level of significance.

For the non-significant findings, the sex ($\chi^2 = 1.934$, $p = 0.380$), the main source of income ($\chi^2 = 10.84$, $p = 0.211$), the number of books at home ($r_s = 0.115$, $p = 0.124$), and the number of magazines/newspapers ($r_s = 0.083$, $p = 0.268$) all yield p-values greater than 0.05. Thus, the decision is to fail to reject the null hypothesis (H_{o2}) and to consider the relationships as not significant.

In contrast, significant findings are observed for book reading frequency ($r_s = 0.481$, $p < .001$) and extent of encouragement of parents or guardians ($r_s = 0.259$, $p < .001$). In both cases, the null hypothesis (H_{o2}) is rejected and the relationships are deemed significant.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is safe to conclude that the teachers did effectively implement a variety of vocabulary strategies that substantially enhanced the students' reading performance. The high utilization of strategies such as making connections, use of context clues, word analysis, use of dictionary, breaking words into syllables, and visualization/drawing demonstrated that these strategies were applied frequently in the classroom and that there is still room to possibly apply them even more. Aside from that, the students' reading performance was positively influenced by book reading frequency as well as the extent of the encouragement of parents or guardians in reading at home, which provides reinforcement and motivation that complement classroom instruction. These findings emphasize that the higher the utilization of these strategies, and with the support of the parents or guardians to home reading practices, the greater will be the students' gains in vocabulary, comprehension, and overall reading outcome.

Therefore, the researcher recommends that the school administrators embed vocabulary strategies to the ARAL-Reading Program and other reading initiatives/programs/projects especially by integrating them to the School Improvement Plan (SIP). This may be done by conducting regular in-service trainings and Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions focused on effective vocabulary strategies in reading instruction. It is also advised that the school administrators establish partnerships or agreements with the Local Government Units (LGUs) and the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) for additional reading resources to ensure that classrooms and school libraries are equipped with enough reading materials, dictionaries (print and digital), and other visual aids to be used by the students. Additionally, the integration of vocabulary strategies in daily reading lessons with explicit modeling and guided practice is encouraged. Also, students must develop consistent reading habits both in school and at home to strengthen vocabulary knowledge and reading confidence. Parents are likewise urged to maintain regular email or messaging updates with the teacher to monitor the students' reading progress. Finally, it is recommended that future researchers complement quantitative findings with qualitative approaches such as classroom observations and structured interviews to examine how the students process unfamiliar words and how the teachers' instructional strategies influence reading comprehension in the real classroom contexts.

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