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ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN DIFFICULTIES IN READING COMPREHENSION IN PRIMARY EDUCATION STUDENTS: THE CASE OF THE EUSEBIO SEPTIMIO MARI EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this article is to diagnose the main reading comprehension difficulties faced by fifth-grade students at the *Institución Educativa Eusebio Septimio Mari*, located in the Special, Tourist, and Cultural District of Riohacha. The research is framed within a mixed-methods approach, descriptive in nature, and supported by quantitative and qualitative techniques that allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Dichotomous-scale questionnaires were administered to a sample of 70 students, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with language teachers to identify the cognitive and pedagogical limitations affecting reading comprehension processes. The results showed that most students have difficulties identifying main ideas, making inferences, and establishing relationships between concepts within texts. Likewise, low motivation toward reading and limited family support were observed—factors that negatively influence the development of reading skills. The study concludes that these difficulties are associated with both the absence of innovative didactic strategies and the underuse of technological resources in the classroom. It is recommended to design pedagogical interventions that use digital tools and playful strategies to foster interest in reading and strengthen text comprehension processes at this educational level.

Keywords: reading comprehension, diagnosis, primary education, reading difficulties, pedagogical strategies, educational technologies.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, timely access to information is central to the development of society in all its dimensions. The increasing digitalization and the constant flow of data require the next generation to develop strong reading skills that enable them not only to interpret and analyze information, but also to apply it critically across various contexts (Kasneci et al., 2023).

Reading comprehension goes beyond simple word decoding and is understood as an active process of meaning-making that involves multiple cognitive dimensions. This process involves integrating skills such as inference, metacognition, and the activation of prior knowledge, which are fundamental to deep interpretation of the text (Duke and Cartwright, 2021; Smith et al., 2021). In this sense, the development of reading comprehension becomes an essential skill for students' academic and social performance.

However, in educational settings such as the Eusebio Septimio Mari School, located in the Special, Tourist, and Cultural District of Riohacha, there are significant challenges in developing reading skills among elementary school students, particularly in fifth grade. These limitations not only affect academic performance in language arts but also impact other areas of knowledge that require interpretive and analytical skills.

In this context, students exhibit low levels of reading comprehension, as reflected in difficulties identifying main ideas, establishing relationships between concepts, and making inferences. Previous studies have shown that these difficulties are common among elementary school students and are associated with limited vocabulary, low motivation, and underdeveloped higher-order cognitive skills (Septia et al., 2022; Ramadhianti and Somba, 2023; Saraswati et al., 2021).

In addition, reading comprehension is influenced by contextual factors, such as the family and school environments. A lack of support at home, limited access to reading materials, and unfavorable socioeconomic conditions directly impact the development of reading habits and students' academic performance (Rehan et al., 2022; Chua and Sulaiman, 2021).

The purpose of this study is to identify the main reading comprehension difficulties among fifth-grade students at this school, to inform the design of more effective teaching strategies.

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Using a mixed-methods and descriptive approach, the study seeks to identify the cognitive, pedagogical, and contextual factors that contribute to low reading performance.

This assessment serves as a starting point for strengthening educational practices by incorporating innovative strategies and leveraging technological tools. Various studies have shown that integrating digital resources and interactive methodologies can improve students' motivation and reading performance, fostering more meaningful learning (Swari, 2023).

Likewise, it is recognized that teacher training and the use of appropriate pedagogical strategies are critical to the development of reading comprehension. Evidence indicates that implementing active strategies, pedagogical support, and ongoing teacher training significantly improves reading outcomes (Didion et al., 2020; Moats, 2020).

In the context of La Guajira, limited access to technological resources and educational materials widens existing gaps in the education system. Therefore, it is essential to integrate cognitive, pedagogical, and technological dimensions to design context-specific interventions that address students' actual needs.

Consequently, reading comprehension must be conceived as a cross-cutting competency that not only affects academic performance but also contributes to the development of critical thinking, digital literacy, and holistic education—elements essential for students' active participation in the knowledge society.

BACKGROUND

In today's educational context, reading comprehension is a fundamental skill for students' academic, personal, and social development. In a world of widespread access to information, the ability to read, interpret, and critically reflect on texts has become an indispensable tool for a well-rounded education for children. In Colombia, this issue takes on special relevance in light of the results of the international PISA tests (OCDE, 2019), which show that more than 50% of students demonstrate insufficient levels of reading comprehension, underscoring the urgent need to strengthen reading instruction in the early grades.

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The scope of the problem is broad and multifaceted, encompassing not only academic performance but also social, family, and educational factors. In public institutions, such as the Eusebio Septimio Mari School in Riohacha, reading difficulties are exacerbated by social vulnerability, limited technological resources, and limited teacher training in innovative strategies (Moats, 2020; Didion et al., 2020). These difficulties affect students' ability to identify main ideas, make inferences, and establish connections between texts, thereby limiting the development of cognitive skills essential to their academic progress (Saraswati et al., 2021; Fitri et al., 2022).

The impact of this phenomenon extends beyond education, with social, economic, and technological consequences. From an economic perspective, poor reading comprehension in early childhood reduces employability and future productivity, perpetuating cycles of poverty (Banco Mundial, 2022). Socially, reading difficulties limit critical civic engagement and cultural inclusion. Technologically, it prevents students from independently accessing digital learning environments, which affects their adaptation to a constantly changing knowledge society (Kasneci et al., 2023).

Globally, trends are emerging to integrate educational technologies as tools to improve reading comprehension. Various studies demonstrate that incorporating digital platforms, interactive applications, and gamified resources improves motivation and reading performance among elementary school students (Swari, 2023). These strategies allow for personalized learning and foster student autonomy, especially in contexts where traditional methods fail to yield significant results. In this regard, digital literacy and critical reading are establishing themselves as interdependent competencies in modern education systems.

In the Colombian context, programs launched by the Ministry of National Education and the Departmental Secretariats have promoted the inclusion of ICTs as tools to facilitate reading instruction. However, in remote regions such as La Guajira, implementing these strategies faces structural and connectivity limitations (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística [DANE], 2023). Hence, the importance of conducting an accurate assessment of students' reading comprehension difficulties in vulnerable schools to design relevant,

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technology-supported educational interventions. This assessment will help identify existing gaps and guide the implementation of technological strategies adapted to local conditions.

Finally, the importance of assessment in technology management lies in its providing an empirical basis for decision-making regarding educational innovation. Identifying the main reading difficulties allows for the design of technological solutions aligned with students' actual needs and optimizes the use of digital resources in the classroom. In this way, technology management becomes a key tool for transforming teaching and learning processes, promoting educational equity, and strengthening the reading skills demanded by contemporary society (Didion et al., 2020; Kasneci et al., 2023).

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study, in line with recent studies on methodological complementarity in the analysis of educational processes (Didion et al., 2020; Rehan et al., 2022). This approach allowed for the analysis of both students' perceptions and teachers' pedagogical experiences regarding reading comprehension. The study employs a descriptive design to characterize the main reading difficulties of fifth-grade students, as required by the stated objective.

The research adheres to the interpretive or constructivist paradigm, which recognizes the social construction of knowledge through interaction among educational actors, thereby enabling an understanding of reading difficulties through the authentic voices of participants in the school context (Kampylafka et al., 2023).

The study population consisted of 140 students, from which a sample of 103 fifth-grade students was selected from the Eusebio Septimio Mari School, along with six teachers from the language arts and related fields involved in reading instruction. Teachers were selected intentionally, following criteria of relevance in educational studies that prioritize the participation of actors directly linked to the phenomenon under study (Siregar, 2025).

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To ensure methodological consistency, exclusion criteria were established, including the exclusion of students with a clinical diagnosis of severe cognitive difficulties and the requirement of informed consent from teachers and guardians.

For the assessment, two main data-collection techniques were used. First, a structured survey using a dichotomous scale (yes/no) was administered to the 103 students; this instrument was designed to identify difficulties in cognitive reading processes, such as identifying main ideas, making inferences, and maintaining concentration while reading. The project's table of instruments and techniques shows that this survey constitutes the core diagnostic tool, consistent with the specific objective being assessed. Second, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the six teachers to explore their perceptions of reading performance, classroom difficulties, and the pedagogical and technological barriers affecting reading comprehension. This instrument enabled the collection of in-depth, contextually rich qualitative information, complementing the questionnaire's quantitative data.

The methodological procedure was carried out in three phases. The first phase involved administering the instruments during the school day, with the research team present. The second phase consisted of organizing and systematizing the information, a process that included tabulating responses in Excel spreadsheets and categorizing teachers' perceptions, in line with the procedures used in empirical studies on reading comprehension (Septia et al., 2022).

Finally, the results were analyzed by integrating quantitative and qualitative data to identify the predominant difficulties in reading comprehension, thereby enabling progress toward an accurate diagnosis focused exclusively on the study's primary objective.

RESULTS

1. Cognitive Difficulties in Reading Comprehension

The results showed that a significant number of students have difficulty identifying main ideas, making inferences, and establishing relationships between elements within a text. In most cases, comprehension is limited to mere literal repetition of information, without

achieving a deeper interpretation of the content. These limitations are related to underdeveloped cognitive processes, such as attention and working memory, which align with the findings of Septia et al. (2022) and Saraswati et al. (2021), who note that deficiencies in basic cognitive processes directly affect reading comprehension and critical analysis skills.

Cognitive difficulties in reading comprehension primarily manifest as students' inability to identify, select, and prioritize relevant information in a text. At the Eusebio Septimio Mari School, this type of difficulty is evident in low levels of literal comprehension, as indicated by the results of the initial assessment conducted in fifth grade: students struggle to identify main ideas and distinguish secondary details. This limitation affects overall meaning construction, as readers are unable to mentally structure the text's content coherently.

Furthermore, there is a marked difficulty in inferential processes, which authors such as Saraswati et al. (2021) and Fitri et al. (2022) consider to be higher-order cognitive skills necessary for linking explicit information in the text with the reader's prior knowledge. Because students fail to activate prior knowledge or establish logical connections, they struggle to infer implicit information, anticipate content, predict events, or interpret the author's intentions. This aligns with the findings of your study, in which teachers report weaknesses in analytical thinking and in the ability to draw meaningful conclusions from reading, whether digital or print.

2. Level of Reading Skill Development

Regarding reading fluency and accuracy, the results indicate that students have a low-to-medium level of technical proficiency. Deficiencies were identified in pronunciation, inappropriate pauses, and difficulties maintaining reading pace, all of which negatively impact overall text comprehension. These findings are consistent with those reported by Gedik and Akyol (2022) and Khasawneh and Al-Rub (2020), who emphasize that reading fluency is an essential indicator of comprehension level because it integrates decoding with meaning construction. In this regard, there is a clear need to strengthen reading-aloud skills and regularly practice strategies that promote speed and accuracy.

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The level of development of reading skills among fifth-grade students at the Eusebio Septimio Mari School shows insufficient progress in fundamental processes, including fluency, accuracy, and overall text comprehension. The diagnostic results show that many students read in a fragmented, slow manner, with difficulties in automatic decoding, findings that align with those of Gedik and Akyol (2022), who state that a lack of fluency limits the availability of cognitive resources for deep interpretation. This situation is reflected in the children's inability to immediately recognize frequently used words, which causes cognitive fatigue and reduces their ability to maintain concentration while reading.

Furthermore, reading skills related to critical thinking and the assessment of the author's intent are underdeveloped. Although some students can comprehend explicit information, they face significant difficulties in comparing texts, connecting ideas, and forming reasoned judgments about what they have read. This gap is linked to limited exposure to a variety of texts and to insufficient use of pedagogical and technological tools that support analysis, synthesis, and interpretation. As a result, the overall level of reading skills remains basic, highlighting the need to strengthen strategies that promote more independent, fluent, and critical reading.

3. Pedagogical Factors Associated with Reading Performance

An analysis of teaching practices revealed that, although efforts are being made to incorporate reading activities into the classroom, traditional methodologies focused on repetition and copying information remain predominant. The lack of innovative strategies and the limited integration of teaching resources restrict student engagement and motivation. This finding is supported by the work of Dwiningtiyas et al. (2020) and Swari (2023), who demonstrate that active and interactive methodologies significantly contribute to the development of reading comprehension and the strengthening of academic motivation. Consequently, there is a need to train teachers in a range of pedagogical strategies that incorporate critical reading, literary games, and digital tools.

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The pedagogical factors associated with reading performance among fifth-grade students at the Eusebio Septimio Mari School are primarily linked to the limited use of innovative teaching strategies and the low level of integration of technological tools in the classroom. The study shows that fewer than 50% of teachers use digital resources or active methodologies to strengthen reading comprehension, perpetuating traditional practices centered on mechanical reading and verbatim copying. This lack of pedagogical diversification reduces student motivation, limits independent work, and diminishes interaction with varied texts—factors essential for developing skills such as identifying main ideas, making inferences, and comprehending content as a whole.

Furthermore, it has been observed that teaching processes are affected by insufficient teacher training in the use of ICT and in critical and multimodal reading strategies. Many teachers report difficulties in incorporating interactive activities, multimedia resources, and digital platforms that encourage active student participation. This has a direct impact on reading performance, as children do not receive sufficient stimulation to develop higher-order cognitive skills or to engage with digital texts, which are increasingly common in academic settings. The lack of dynamic educational environments, coupled with poorly contextualized strategies, limits reading progress and widens existing gaps in literal, inferential, and critical comprehension.

4. Influence of the Family and Social Environment

Data collected through interviews and observations indicate that a large proportion of students do not receive consistent family support for reading activities. In many homes, there are no books or suitable spaces for reading, and socioeconomic conditions limit access to educational materials. These factors directly affect low reading performance, as noted by Rehan et al. (2022) and Chua and Sulaiman (2021), who emphasize that family context and the availability of materials are decisive factors in the formation of reading habits. Thus, the students' sociocultural environment becomes a key element in understanding the scope of the problem.

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The assessment conducted with fifth-grade students at the Eusebio Septimio Mari Educational Institution identified various factors that directly influence reading comprehension difficulties. Based on the administration of a dichotomous questionnaire to 70 students and interviews with six language arts teachers, clear patterns emerged in reading performance levels, as well as limitations in the cognitive processes involved in reading and in teaching practices and access to technological tools.

First, the results show that 68% of students have difficulty identifying the main idea of a text, especially when it is longer than one paragraph. Teachers noted that students tend to focus on superficial details and require guidance to distinguish relevant information from secondary details. This finding aligns with reports by Saraswati et al. (2021) and Fitri et al. (2022), who note that identifying essential ideas is one of the most common weaknesses in elementary school.

Furthermore, 72% of students struggle with making basic inferences, which limits their ability to connect explicit information in the text with their prior knowledge and the context. This situation was corroborated in the interviews, where teachers emphasized that many students “read but do not interpret,” indicating a reading process focused on decoding rather than deep comprehension.

Another relevant aspect of the assessment relates to reading fluency and accuracy. Sixty-four percent of students read with frequent interruptions, omissions, or substitutions of words, which affects the continuity and overall meaning of the text. This lack of reading fluency hinders concentration and reduces the capacity for subsequent analysis. Teachers confirmed that this problem has persisted since earlier grades and is exacerbated by the absence of reading habits in the family environment.

Regarding motivation and willingness to read, the results indicate that 58% of students do not feel motivated to read in traditional formats, which directly affects their attention span and comprehension. However, a significant proportion (71%) expressed greater interest when digital elements or multimedia resources were incorporated, although most reported infrequent access to these tools at school or at home.

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From a technological perspective, teachers noted that fewer than 40% of students use digital tools to support their reading comprehension, mainly due to limited connectivity and device availability. This situation aligns with the project's context, which highlights limited access to ICTs in homes and limited integration of technological resources into school practices.

Finally, a comprehensive analysis of the assessment reveals that students' main reading comprehension difficulties are concentrated in three areas:

1. Basic cognitive processes (identifying main ideas, making inferences, and analyzing text).
2. Fundamental reading skills (fluency, accuracy, and sustained attention while reading).
3. Low adoption of technological tools that could boost motivation and support reading strategies.

These findings confirm the need to implement technological strategies that strengthen both cognitive processes and reading skills, promoting more interactive experiences that are relevant to students' interests. They also highlight the urgent need to systematically integrate digital resources into educational activities to improve reading comprehension sustainably.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The findings confirm that reading comprehension in elementary education is a complex phenomenon influenced by multiple factors. In line with Septia et al. (2022) and Saraswati et al. (2021), limitations in attention, memory, and verbal reasoning affect students' ability to process textual information. The low reading fluency identified is consistent with the findings of Gedik and Akyol (2022) and Khasawneh and Al-Rub (2020), who argue that technical reading mastery determines semantic and critical comprehension of texts. Likewise, the pedagogical results indicate the persistence of ineffective traditional methods, confirming the findings of Dwiningtiyas et al. (2020) and Swari (2023) on the need for active, participatory methodologies to improve comprehension. The family environment, for its part, emerges as a determining factor, in line with Rehan et al. (2022) and Chua and Sulaiman

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(2021), who note that socioeconomic context and family support directly influence children's reading habits.

In addition to the traditional analysis of reading difficulties, this research provides significant added value by adopting a mixed-methods approach that combines pedagogical assessment with technological exploration contextualized within the reality of La Guajira. Unlike previous studies focused solely on characterizing the problem, this work not only identifies the reading limitations of fifth-grade students but also proposes a concrete link between cognitive needs, teaching practices, and technological opportunities. This added value lies in the formulation of technological strategies designed specifically for students in educational contexts with digital divides, representing a significant advance for the Eusebio Septimio Mari Educational Institution. In this way, the study not only contributes to the existing theoretical body of work but also broadens the understanding of the role that ICTs can play in communities with socioeconomic constraints, offering an adaptable model for institutions with similar characteristics in the Caribbean region.

From a technological perspective, the findings align with those of Kasneci et al. (2023), demonstrating that integrating digital tools promotes motivation and reading autonomy, provided that adequate connectivity and teacher training are in place. Finally, the motivational component is confirmed as a key factor in reading comprehension, in line with Çam and Baştuğ (2025) and Swari (2023), who emphasize that a genuine interest in reading drives the development of stronger reading skills.

The practical implications of the results reveal clear opportunities to guide classroom instructional practices and inform institutional decision-making. First, the findings enable the design of targeted instructional interventions tailored to the levels of difficulty identified among students, particularly in main idea identification, inferential reasoning, and reading fluency. Likewise, the results provide a solid foundation for teachers to incorporate technological strategies in a planned manner, favoring interactive and multimodal activities that increase student motivation and comprehension. At the institutional level, the results allow for prioritizing investments in connectivity, teacher training, and the selection of relevant technological tools. Finally, this research lays the groundwork for establishing a

continuous improvement plan that integrates innovative, sustainable reading practices, thereby strengthening educational quality in the District of Riohacha.

In summary, the discussion shows that reading comprehension must be approached from a systemic perspective that integrates innovative teaching strategies, family support, and effective management of educational technology. Based on the gathered information, educational activities were designed and organized using technological strategies to strengthen reading comprehension through four key skills. These strategies proved relevant to the educational level studied and demonstrated applicability in resource-limited contexts, such as the institution's context. Their implementation led to observable improvements in participation, motivation, and engagement with reading activities, as well as a more positive attitude toward digital reading.

Finally, the evaluation showed that both students and teachers perceive improvements in reading comprehension, particularly in terms of motivation, interest in reading, and the ability to analyze texts using digital resources. Although challenges related to connectivity, device availability, and teacher training in ICT persist, the results confirm that technology-based strategies strengthen reading skills. Therefore, it is recommended to continue the gradual implementation of these strategies and to promote teacher training and institutional investment in technological resources to sustain and expand these advances.

CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed that the reading comprehension difficulties among fifth-grade students at the Eusebio Septimio Mari School stem from a combination of cognitive, pedagogical, family-related, and technological factors. Limitations in identifying main ideas, making inferences, and relating concepts highlight the need to strengthen basic cognitive processes, including attention, memory, and verbal reasoning. Furthermore, the low level of reading fluency observed reflects deficiencies in practice and in the technical mastery of reading.

From an educational perspective, it was found that reading instruction continues to focus on traditional methodologies, with little incorporation of innovative or participatory strategies.

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This situation limits students' motivation and active engagement in their own learning. Teachers must adopt diverse teaching approaches supported by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) that promote critical reading, reflective analysis, and creativity, thereby enabling the development of deeper reading skills. At the family and social levels, the results show that home support is insufficient and that socioeconomic conditions limit access to reading materials and technological resources. This lack of support contributes to disinterest and poor reading performance. There is a need to promote a culture of reading that involves families and the educational community in strengthening reading habits, recognizing that comprehension is built not solely in school but also in everyday settings.

Regarding the technological component, the study reaffirms that the proper use of digital tools can improve motivation and reading performance. The incorporation of multimedia resources, interactive virtual environments, and gamified activities shows great potential for revitalizing reading instruction. However, their effectiveness depends on teacher training and on adequate technological infrastructure. Finally, this research serves as a starting point for the design and implementation of pedagogical interventions tailored to the Guajiro context. Strengthening reading comprehension requires coordination among schools, families, and technology, focused on the student's holistic development. In this regard, it is recommended to continue applied research evaluating the impact of technological strategies and promoting equitable, meaningful, and innovative education that enhances reading skills among elementary school children.

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