

OPTIMISING READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL LEARNERS

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Abstract

Teachers' pedagogical strategy in teaching reading comprehension cannot be neglected because when learners fail to comprehend text and give meaning to it, they experience difficulties understanding other subjects taught. This study, therefore, examined reading comprehension strategies adopted by teachers to enhance reading comprehension among primary school learners. This study adopted a qualitative research method with an interpret visit paradigm. Ten (10) teachers were purposively selected for the study one each from ten (10) primary schools. Data was collected the selected participants using semi-structured interview. The researchers ensured the trustworthiness of the interview through disclosure and corroboration. The data collected were transcribed for the purpose of analysis using the atlasti software and the thematic data analysis technique. Findings indicate that some teachers did not understand the various strategies to optimise reading comprehension. Teachers also lacked knowledge of the different learners learning preferences to plan their reading comprehension lessons. Furthermore, the lack of appropriate reading material and differentiated reading exercises for slow learners were highlighted among the challenges that hampered reading comprehension. The study recommends capacity-building programmes to provide strategies for differentiated teaching, to learn to accommodate slow learners and to provide appropriate resources by the education department.

Keywords: Reading Comprehension Strategies, Learning Preferences, Primary School Learners, Optimising Reading Comprehension, Primary School

INTRODUCTION

Reading remains one of the fundamental skills learners must acquire to excel in every other facet of their learning. This is because learning intensely depends on reading and meaningful assimilation of prints. Reading helps learners develop confidence in themselves and boost their memory through critical and analytic skills. Through reading, learners improve their vocabulary and writing skills; however, learners on their own may not benefit from the importance of reading without being taught. Paris and Hamilton (2014) noted that it is the school's responsibility to ensure learners make sense of the printed text through interpretive, constructive and critical thinking. Learners failing to read and comprehend symbols, figures, and words leads to illiteracy and adversely affects the learner and the nation's development. Reading is among the language development domain - listening, speaking, reading and writing (Hulstijn, 2011; Paul & Norbury, 2012). Whereas reading is important, comprehension is much more critical because reading is meaningless without understanding what is read.

In this study, reading comprehension refers to learners' ability to understand and correctly assign meaning to symbols, figures and text rather than reading textual contents alone (Hedgcock & Ferris 2018; Mohseni et al., 2017). Hence reading comprehension goes beyond word recognition and verbalisation of such words. Reading comprehension is thought-provoking information that is processed and assimilated meaningfully. It is somewhat of a complex linguistic process for young learners, which is why most young learners find it easier to listen and speak than to read because reading comprehension requires incremental skill development for decoding encrypted symbols (Powers & Powers, 2015). Most learners in Nigeria face several challenges that inhibit reading comprehension, and their teachers do not know how to tackle the learners' challenges. This experience culminates in the high rate of learner dropout from school in Nigeria (Adamu et al., 2022).

Most Nigerian cases show that the causes of learners' difficulty in reading comprehension are linked to learners' inability to pronounce unfamiliar vocabulary, ambiguous words, limited time to process the reading text, and large class size (Adamu et al., 2022; Powers & Powers, 2015). Considering that learners' difficulty in reading comprehension is not peculiar to Nigerian learners, Hulme and Snowling (2013) mention that the most widely recognised form of reading comprehension difficulty is often called poor comprehenders. Poor comprehenders are learners who find it inordinately challenging to recognise printed words (Hulme & Snowling, 2013). Evidently, teaching learners with poor comprehension challenges remains challenging for teachers in most rural primary schools hence the need to assist such teachers with strategies that enhance the reading comprehension of their learners (Agayon et al., 2022; Sari et al., 2020).

Next, most Nigerian children with reading comprehension challenges can read aloud accurately and fluently at a level appropriate for their age but fail to understand much of what they read (Adamu et al., 2022; Kelso et al., 2022). Although this condition has been studied for many years, Yuill and Oakhill (2013) maintain that it often goes unnoticed in the classroom because when such young learners are asked to read a passage aloud, they may do so easily. Their problems are revealed when they are asked questions about the meaning of what they read. For this reason, reading comprehension challenges and the language difficulties that underlie it may often be a hidden disability; hence many young learners and their teachers are likely unaware that they have a reading problem.

Furthermore, the incongruence between the learner's prior knowledge, existing concepts of the reading passage and ineffective teachers' methods of teaching reading make reading comprehension challenging for learners (Adamu et al., 2022; Alkhawaldeh, 2012; Qrgez & Rashid, 2017). In addition, Mwanamukubi (2013) and Moletsane and Adams-Ojugbele, (2019) mentioned that teachers face challenges teaching reading and learners comprehending reading because of inadequate learning strategies and a high teacher-learner ratio. Meanwhile, teaching young learners to read accurately, fluently, and with adequate reading comprehension is among the main goals of ensuring literacy in primary education across the globe (Moussa, & Koester, 2022; UNICEF, 2005). Teachers must facilitate reading comprehension with the appropriate strategies for learners to comprehend their reading (Pourhosein et al., 2016). Such strategies include reading from simple to complex, using learners' background knowledge, generating

questions, making inferences, summarising, visualising, and comprehension monitoring, among others (Afflerbach et al., 2020; Watson et al., 2012). Learners should be able to discuss story chapters, narrate the different events and scenarios described in their storybook and draw lessons from them. Learners should be able to create story puzzles to produce a whole story, doing this allows learners' reading skills to develop by using linking words and phrases that show the order of events.

Furthermore, the use of debates and outlining the rules guiding their discussions, such as staying on topic, being respectful of other's turn to talk and point of view, and linking their comments to others, help facilitate reading comprehension skills since speaking precedes reading (Pourhosein et al., 2016; Watson et al., 2012). Facilitators of reading comprehension for young learners are expected to adopt suitable learning strategies that are developmentally age-appropriate for their learners. This is because reading informational text may be appropriate for some learners, while others may need a pictorial display to describe the topic's main idea. To this end, the researchers are motivated to investigate strategies that optimise reading comprehension for primary school learners. Considering the research focus for this study, and after a careful review of related literature, the researchers clearly stated the overall research purpose and objectives to include the following: The study's purpose was to examine how teachers optimise reading comprehension strategies for primary school learners. Specifically, its objectives sought to: (a) examine different reading comprehension strategies used by primary school teachers when teaching reading comprehension. (b) Find out the challenges primary school teachers face with young learners when teaching reading comprehension. (c) Understand how primary school teachers harness different learning preferences to optimise learners' reading comprehension.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The researchers adapted Kolb's Experiential Learning Model and Gardner's learning preferences in this study. The theories in addition to enhancing educators' understanding of experiential learning theory and linking it to classroom practice, the two theories are relevant to this study (McCarthy, 2010). The two theories assume students' learning styles are crucial to effective classroom interaction. Most researchers have concluded that learning is optimised when students actively participate in the learning process (Smart & Csapo, 2007). David Kolb's Learning styles' stress on separated rather individualistic approach of learning and Howard Gardner's content-oriented model of multiple intelligences are startlingly harmonizing and congruent. Unless and unit Learning Styles are pitted with learning preferences both concepts seem rather abstract with several obstacles between theory and pragmatism. Each theory manifests distinctive loopholes leading to criticisms and impracticability (Kaushik, 2017).

Kolb's Experiential Learning Models

Kolb's Experiential Learning Models (ELM) consists of four-stage hypothetical cycles, including concrete experience (CE), reflective observation (RO), abstract conceptualisation (AC) and active experimentation (AE), as shown in figure 1. Kolb's learning model, which essentially deals with how learners acquire and process knowledge, is grounded on Jung's

concept of types, where development is accomplished by higher-level integration and expression of non-dominant modes of dealing with the world (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; McLeod, 2017). Kolb asserts that learning is a transformation of experiences by an individual into a new abstract situation.

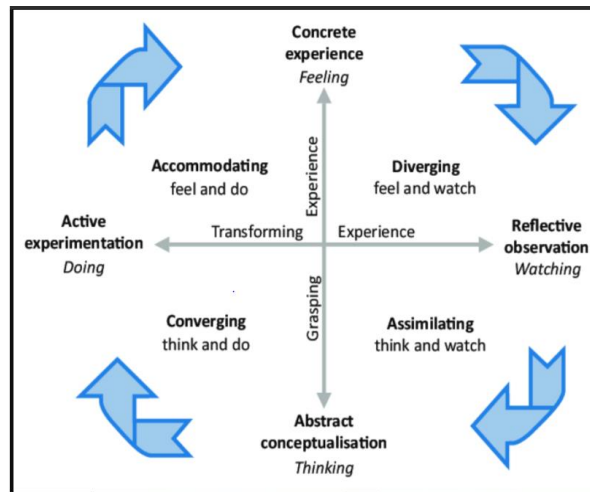


Figure 1: Dimensions of Experiential Learning Model (ELM)

The cycles are two-dimensional; one reflects concrete/abstract perception, and the other is active/reflective processing. Individuals in the CE stage of learning are generally open-minded and adaptable. In the RO stage, individuals observe and listen, view issues from divergent points of view, and discover meaning in the learning material. The AC stage is related to the application of thought and logic. Especially, planning, developing theories, and analysis are the most critical elements of this stage. The AE stage mainly focuses on activity and includes testing theories, planning, and influencing people and events (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

Individuals who operate in the concrete experience assert that thinking about a thing changes it, but those who prefer abstract conceptualisation think that meaning is constructed only after internal processing. In the second dimension, individuals who process information receive the outcomes of their perception and have it in a preferred way between active experimentation and reflective observation. Kolb (1984) defined four learning strategies for explaining individuals' learning preferences. These are Diverger, Assimilator, Converger and Accommodator.

Divergers (Concrete Experiencer/ Reflective Observer): This learning strategy is a mishmash of concrete experience and reflective observation learning strategies. Individuals with this learning strategy view things from various perspectives, hence diverging from a single experience to multiple possibilities in terms of assigning meaning to things they see. They are very flexible and prefer working with people; though Divergers can easily be influenced, constructive feedback is of the essence to them. Divergers do not like to be involved in the action as they are known for watching and expressing feelings in a given situation. Nevertheless, their judgments about any situation are considered carefully because their

thoughts and feelings are at work. Social practices, journalism, psychology, literature and art/theatre, broadcasting, law, and public speaking, among many others, are suitable jobs for Divergers (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). For reading comprehension to ensue for young learners who are divergent thinkers, teachers need to facilitate reading comprehension using concrete materials such as audio-visuals and giving learners constructive feedback. Learners should be allowed time to reflect on their reading and share their learning experiences with their peers. Reading comprehension should be flexible in that learners can choose from various reading materials that appeal to or make sense to them.

Convergers (Abstract Conceptualization/ Active Experimentation): Individuals who possess this learning strategy learn best through active experimentation and abstract conceptualisation. They like to work themselves, solve problems and find practical solutions. Convergers prefer to study technical projects instead of social issues or interpersonal relationships. They are eager to conduct laboratory experiments and can effortlessly learn via computer-based learning methods (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

One of the apparent characteristics of young learners is their ability to experiment and discover things by themselves. Facilitators of reading comprehension should provide a hands-on learning environment that encourages the young learner to be actively involved in the learning process of a reading comprehension lesson. At the primary school level, young learners can act out a story in the comprehension passage. As the teacher assigns different roles to the learners, they master their roles and act them out. Doing this allows for meaningful assimilation and comprehension of the topic or passage by the learners.

Accommodators (Concrete Experiencer/ Active Experimenter): The central learning abilities of Accommodators are Concrete Experience (CE) and Active Experimentation (AE). They have the most hands-on approach and strongly prefer involving themselves in the experience rather than thinking. Accommodators are risk-takers and often solve problems with other people's information. They prefer action-oriented activities. They like to discover but learn better by themselves than with other people. The main questions for accommodators are 'what if?' and 'why not?' to support their action-first approach. Concrete and active experimentation should characterise teaching comprehension for accommodative learners (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

Teachers must engage their senses of sight, feeling, hearing, smell and taste to facilitate learning for accommodative learners. Learning must not be in the abstract for such learners. A reading comprehension passage about buying and selling should be presented with features that characterise the trades of the immediate community familiar to the learners. Illustrations of buying and selling with money must be done with the local currency that the learner sees and understands rather than foreign currencies. For this reason, reading materials that are Eurocentric should be discouraged in African schools. Reading comprehension passages must be drawn from the activities that synchronise with the learner's immediate environment for comprehension to ensue.

Assimilators (Abstract Conceptualizer/ Reflective Observer): The dominant learning abilities of Assimilators are Abstract Conceptualization (AC) and Reflective Observation (RO). They have the most cognitive approach, preferring to think than to act. They prefer instructional methods for their learning, for example, lecture methods and laboratory demonstrations. This learning strategy reflects characteristics of basic sciences and mathematics. They are motivated to answer the question, “what is there to know?” They are good at creating theoretical models. They are less interested in people and more concerned with abstract concepts (Litzinger & Osif, 1993).

Supporting Klob’s ELM is Gardener’s multiple intelligence theory which has been adapted into the reading comprehension strategies teachers may adopt while facilitating reading for primary school learners.

Gardner’s learning preferences

The researchers know the current contentions surrounding Gardner’s multiple intelligence theory. Hence, in this study, the researchers chose to approach Gardner’s intelligence theory from the perspective of learners learning preferences. Indeed, learners have different learning preferences due to their uniqueness, as no two individuals are the same. Integrating Kolb’s ELM and Gardner’s learning preferences in this study allowed for a critical understanding of how teachers are expected to harness different learning strategies for the optimal gains in reading comprehension of primary school learners.

According to Cavas and Cavas (2020), between the late 1970s and early 1980s, an American psychologist named Howard Gardner opined that each learner had a designated learning strategy (which in this study is considered as learning preference) that was peculiar and particular. According to Davis et al. (2011), the study culminated in eight notable learning preferences: musical-rhythmic, visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic and existential. Understanding learners’ learning preferences will assist teachers in tailoring their teaching strategies to individual learners and creating suitable instruction for each learner. A one size fits all teaching strategy inhibits the development of a learner’s inert abilities because each learner has his or her learning preferences. However, a few challenges are associated with learners’ learning preferences.

Spatial-visual learning learners and the teaching of reading comprehension

Spatial-visual learners are inclined to explore physical space and environment; they understand and visualise ideas in their minds and place the mental imagery of what they visualise in various forms (Gardner, 1983). Spatial-visual learners learn best through drawings, paintings, charts, videos, verbal imagery, and photographs (Gardner, 1983 & 2020). According to Gardner (1983) and Gardner (2020), such learners eventually consider career paths such as architects, artists, photographers, cartographers, sailors, chess players, and video game designers.

This strategy allows learners to create mental images of the text or prints they read. In doing this, they activate their imagination and creativity by relating the concept or idea they read to

visuals. As they interpret their understanding of prints through visual expressions, the teacher gets to understand whether reading comprehension has successfully occurred. Woolley (2014) mentions that most readers do not recall prints verbatim. However, as they construct mental imageries and incorporate visual representations of the prints they read, texts are retained, and their meanings become evident. This strategy is suitable for narrative stories. As the story is read, learners can imagine the storyline's settings, characters and plot. It becomes easier when asked to represent what they have read from a passage in a drawing.

Therefore, teachers and facilitators of reading comprehension are expected to demystify the abstract nature of reading comprehension passage for spatial-visual learners by presenting the comprehension passage in the forms of drawings, paintings, charts, videos, graphs, verbal imagery, and photographs, as this will help spatial-visual learners to comprehend the passage better.

Facilitating reading comprehension for body-kinaesthetic learners

Howard Gardner (1983) noted that learners with body-kinaesthetic learners appreciate, control, express and possess information physically through hand and bodily movement. Such learners learn much more by doing, exploring, and discovering. They construct or create what they have discovered rather than listening to teaching and reading a passage alone when they explore and discover things. Gardner (2020) opines that somebody-kinaesthetic learners pursue a profession in the fields such as; builders, surgeons, dancers, soldiers, and athletes, among many others. Accommodating body-kinaesthetic learners in reading comprehension entails allowing the facilitator or teacher to explore and discover the characters or meet them in the reading comprehension passage. After that, translate what they understood from the passage into physical performance; this may also take the shape of dramatisation.

Composing reading comprehension into songs to suit musical learners

From Howard Gardner's research findings, some learners are inclined toward a musical learning preference. Musical learners are sensitive to auditory components such as rhythm, meter, pitch, and timbre. He noted that musically inclined learners primarily learn new concepts, songs, lyrics, and rhythm using the lecture method. Converting reading comprehension passages into songs, lyrics, and rhythm to sing and make rhythmic beats to the song would benefit musically inclined learners. Such an approach would create indelible understanding in the learner; furthermore, Gardner (1983) and Gardner (2020) consider a fundamental link between musical and linguistic learning preferences.

Linguistic learners and language preference in reading comprehension

Linguistic learners are characterised by their ability to read, write, and learn languages, as stated by (Gardner 1983). Linguistic learners are always critical of the words used, how they were used, and why they were used in the passage. These learners enjoy listening to lectures and engaging in discussions and debates. Linguistic learners chose occupations such as teachers, poets, public speakers, politicians, authors, and journalists (Gardner, 1983 & 2020). Most teachers and facilitators of reading comprehension assume that all learners fall into this

category of linguistic learners. For this reason, teachers call out learners to stand before the entire class to read a passage before class members. Teachers do not consider that not every learner can sit down and listen to a lengthy comprehension passage. Neither do all learners have the capacity to discuss and debate.

The implication of logical-mathematical learning preference to reading comprehension

Individuals who operate in the logical-mathematical learning preference show high abilities in logical reasoning, manipulations of digits, and fact-finding through scientific investigation. Such learners become mathematicians, engineers, scientists, economists, and doctors (Gardner, 1983 & 2020).

Facilitating reading comprehension for learners with a logical-mathematical learning preference is interesting when the composition of the reading passage contains investigative or mathematical stories that can challenge such learners. Learning becomes unattractive and dull to such learners when it does not challenge their mental capacity. Teachers, therefore, should always weigh the weight of the cognitive demand of each reading comprehension task before assigning them to different learners. Not all reading comprehension tasks situated in the reading textbooks of learners are of the same cognitive demand.

Teaching learners of interpersonal learning preferences reading comprehension

The studies of Howard Garner in 1983 noted that individuals with interpersonal learning preferences are associated with varied social dimensions, including moods, temperaments, feelings for other persons (sympathy and empathy), and motivations. Bowker (2020:10) maintained that such individuals “learn best through interaction, group activities, and open discussion and debate”. Gardner (1983) mentioned that individuals with interpersonal learning preferences are likely to become politicians, sales, religious leaders, educators, and psychologists in terms of career choice.

As Bowker (2020) mentioned concerning how best interpersonal learners learn, teachers can utilise debates, group work, and open discussions to facilitate reading comprehension. Learners can learn to take turns and assume the roles of a leader in group activities as their interpersonal skills are enhanced.

Intrapersonal learners and their learning mode

Intrapersonal learning preference, which on the other hand, is known as self-intelligence learners, has to do with the feelings of oneself which leads to self-awareness and self-regulation; it is somewhat the opposite of the interpersonal learning preference. In contrast, interpersonal learning preference considers the external feelings and relationships of others; the intrapersonal learning mode deals with the inward feelings of the person (Gardner, 1983). Learners who operate in the intrapersonal learning preference are usually intuitive and have wisdom and understanding as they reflect on their emotions. Gardner (1983 & 2020) avow that no specific career or profession can be assigned to persons with intrapersonal learning preferences; however, it was noted that such persons are independent learners. Their sense of independence characterises learners identified as having intrapersonal learning preferences.

Hence, individualised instruction should be considered when facilitating reading comprehension for such learners. Reflexion on the reading comprehension passage should also be a technique for facilitating reading comprehension for intrapersonal inclined learners.

Naturalistic learners and their learning preference

Gardner, in his studies, identified persons who can manipulate environmental elements such as objects, animals, plants, and nature as naturalistic learners (Gardner, 2020). These learners love to care for the environment and advocate for green energy globally. Naturalistic learners make good ecologists, biologists, farmers, hunters, naturalists, and forest guards (Gardner, 2020). Most young learners are lovers of nature and appreciate domestic and wildlife, flowers, gardens, and many others. Teachers should make reading comprehension experiences lively with such learners by relating a reading passage to a real-life situation.

A study was conducted by Bidabadi and Yamat (2010) to investigate students' learning preferences, their implications on teaching and learning as well as the design of the textbooks. The study participants were made of 37 males and 55 females, totalling 92 Iranian university students, these students were randomly selected, and a questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection. The finding from the study revealed that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female students in Communicative (3.24 mean; 0.35 SD), Concrete (3.07 mean; 0.38 SD), Authority-Oriented (3.10 mean; 0.35 SD), and Analytical (3.02 mean; 0.38 SD) learning preferences (Bidabadi & Yamat, 2010). This implies that learners learning preferences should be considered when teachers facilitate learning. Sener and Çokçaliskan (2018) investigated multiple intelligences and learning preferences to reveal Gardner's multiple intelligences in secondary school students. The research method used was the quantitative research method, and the data was collected through a perceptual learning-preference preference questionnaire and the multiple intelligence inventory. It was revealed that "students had almost all the types of learning preferences, but mostly they were found to be tactile and auditory learners. The three learning preferences: Naturalistic, Visual and Kinesthetic learning preference types, received the highest score" (Sener & Çokçaliskan, 2018:125). This study confirms that learners learn in various ways, and their learning preferences must be considered for optimal learning gains.

Gilakjani (2012) determined to investigate the impacts of visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic learning preferences on teaching the English language. The research paradigm was quantitative. More than 100 research participants from the Iranian EFL university students whose majors were the English Language responded to the research instrument (questionnaire). The findings revealed that "visual learners are most comfortable with pictures, images and graphs while studying and retaining information, ... Auditory learners learn best when hearing the information and, perhaps, listening to the lecture, ... Kinesthetic learners prefer active participation experiences, for example, drama, role-play or moving around" (Gilakjani, 2012:110). Other strategies the researchers considered relevant to the study include; utilising learners' previous knowledge, making inferences, generating question strategy and identifying main idea and summarisation strategies.

Utilising learners' previous knowledge: At school age, every learner comes from a rich background familiar to them. In other words, learners have various experiences through their interactions with their environment and are thus knowledgeable. Woolley (2014) asserts that learners construct and integrate their previous knowledge with the content of the text structure they read. Therefore, this strategy requires reading comprehension teachers to assist learners in linking their previous knowledge to the new knowledge in their reading passage to facilitate understanding (Ekasary et al., 2022). Furthermore, this reading comprehension strategy is entrenched in the ideology of Barlett's popular schematic theory, which argues that a learner to use their previous knowledge to understand the current phenomenon (An, 2013).

Making inferences: Most reading passages for learners may not explicitly provide complete descriptions and conclusions of the topic as the passage may focus mainly on narrating the storyline (Kendeou et al., 2014). However, allowing learners to make inferences on the passage helps to determine if learners have comprehended the passage they read. In making inferences, learners can evaluate and draw a conclusion from the passage (Cain & Oakhill, 1999; Kendeou, et al., 2014). Learners may ask questions to query the attitudes of the characters portrayed in the passage they read and make valuable contributions (Kendeou et al., 2014). Making inferences triggers learners to construct meaning through critical thinking while brainstorming ways the passage would better represent its main ideas or storyline.

Generating question strategy: Allowing learners to generate and ask relevant questions among themselves regarding the passage they read is another valuable strategy that can be used to determine the level of reading comprehension learners experience. This strategy assists learners in understanding better, integrating, identifying and summarising the main ideas and information in their reading passage. Damanik and Herman (2021) noted that learners taught using the question generation strategy find it easier to discover information that enables them to differentiate new knowledge from their previous experience. Undoubtedly, question strategy allows learners to gain clarity on prints and helps to widen their cognitive horizon on the topic.

Identifying main idea and summarisation strategy: To ensure learners comprehend what they read, using the main idea identification and summary strategy is plausible. The strategy entails readers noting the main ideas and striking expressions that appeal to them when reading a passage. At the end of their reading, learners are asked to connect and represent all the main ideas they noted from the passage, which produces a summary of what they read.

Challenges associated with learners' learning preferences

Learners are affected by diverse learning challenges; however, some are linked to how they are wired to learn, which their teachers may not identify. Learners learning preferences are connected to how they perceive, process, accommodate, assimilate, and understand information (Cavas & Cavas, 2020). These constitute teaching and learning challenges for teachers and learners, respectively. Asadipiran (2016) noted that some learners have variations in learning, as some learn at a very high speed, others learn at a plodding speed, and some are weak learners. Therefore, applying one teaching strategy for all learners as a professional teacher is unsuitable. Furthermore, Asadipiran (2016) maintains that the character of each

learner, who acquires, retains, and retrieves information, must be considered and factored into each learning strategy designed for each learner. Hence the discussion on learners learning preferences helped to position this study on optimising Kolb and Gardener's learning strategies for primary school learning reading comprehension.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted qualitative research design, situated within an interpretive paradigm. Ten (10) primary schools from within the Owerri municipality area of Imo State were selected using convenience sampling technique. The choice for convenience sampling in selecting the schools was because the schools were in close range; hence it was time and cost-effective (Creswell, & Creswell, 2017). Ten (10) participants were purposively selected one each from the conveniently selected schools for the study. These participants were purposively selected on the premise that they teach reading comprehension as part of English language to primary school learners. In addition, the participants must have had at least three (3) years of teaching experience in reading comprehension in primary school. Another consideration was that the participants must be spread across the primary classes from the conveniently sampled schools. This implies that a participant represented each primary school that was selected.

The study was sited in Owerri municipality of Imo state. Owerri municipal is among the towns that make up the Owerri Educational Zone of Imo State, Nigeria. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews to collect data, which were administered physically to the participants and were audio recorded. Disclosure and corroboration were used to ensure the interview questions' trustworthiness. Considering that the researchers would not want to usurp the teaching and learning time, participants agreed to attend the interview after school hours. The time for each session of the interview for each participant was 35 minutes, and it lasted for three weeks with a minimum of three (3) participants interviewed per week. Atlasti was the software used for the thematic data analysis. First, Member checking was used to ensure the validity of the data collected. Next, the researchers transcribed the interview that was audio recorded, sorted and coded responses with similarities while creating categories that formed thematic patterns. The ethics committee of the Faculty of Education University of Johannesburg, South Africa, the school principals and the teacher participants gave their permission to conduct and be involved in the research.

Data analysis, results and discussion of findings

This study section presented the results and findings from the data analysis. Qualitative data obtained was transcribed verbatim and thematically analysed. The data in Figure 1 shows the years of experience of each teacher participant. The researchers used colour codes to sort teacher responses into themes to facilitate data analysis and the discussion of findings.

How many year(s) of teaching experience do you have?

10 responses

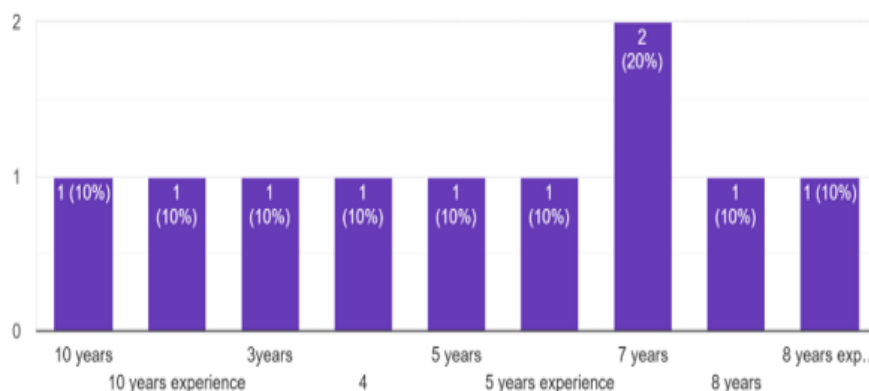


Figure 1: Years of teacher participants' teaching experience

Figure 1 shows that teacher participants' years of teaching experience in reading comprehension range from 3 to 10 years.

Table 1: Different Teaching strategies primary school teachers use in teaching reading comprehension

Participants' code	Strategies employ for teaching reading comprehension
T1	I use examples. I also use repetition and explanation.
T2	Questioning, summarisation, set induction.
T3	Demonstration method, playway method, simulation, dramatisation method question and answer technique, discussion method.
T4	Reading and pointing style
T5	Learners centered style. By asking the pupil to take turns in reading.
T6	Play way style. Reading, pointing and explanation method
T7	Repetition of the passage read at least two or three times Explanation of new words to the pupils
T8	Point and read style
T9	Involvement of the learners. Allowing the pupil to read one by one, then I pick the difficult words and explain
T10	Playway style, explanations

Teaching strategies primary school teachers use in teaching reading comprehension

The researchers determined primary school teachers' strategies when teaching reading comprehension. In doing this, the participants responded; thus, T1, T6, T7, T9 and T10 noted that they repeated the comprehension passage and explained it. T2 and T3 indicated that they use question and answer techniques as a teaching strategy for facilitating reading comprehension. Furthermore, T2 and T3 avow that they employ discussion of the passage in teaching comprehension. Similarly, T3, T6, and T10 claim that they use the demonstration method, play-way method, simulation and dramatic method in teaching reading

comprehension. In addition, T4, T5, T6, T8 and T9 opine that they use the point-and-read style to teach reading to young learners. According to Gardner (2020), linguistic learners are characterised by their ability to enjoy lectures, involved in discussions and debates; this assertion was confirmed by all the teachers (T1-T10) who mentioned that they facilitate reading comprehension through repetition, point and read, questions and answers and discussion methods. However, T3, T6, and T10 noted that they also apply body-kinaesthetic learning preferences to facilitate reading comprehension and linguistic learning preferences. This is seen in their use of demonstration, play-way, dramatic and simulation methods in teaching reading comprehension. Considering the Kolb Experiential Learning Model, these teachers only accommodated the Accommodators (concrete experienter/ active experimenter). Kolb (1984) asserts that Accommodators prefer a hands-on approach rather than being involved in their experience. Furthermore, the findings reveal that other learners who are divergers, convergers and assimilators were left out as the teachers preferred teaching strategy did not accommodate them. Similarly, when teachers preferred teaching strategies were compared with Gardner’s learning preferences, it was observed that spatial-visual learners, musically inclined learners, logical-mathematical learners, interpersonal and intrapersonal learners, and naturalistic learners were in the loop of the reading comprehension taught in the class.

Table 2: Challenges primary school teachers face with learners when teaching reading comprehension

Participants' code	What challenges do you face with your learners when teaching reading comprehension?
T1	The children share the book with their neighbours. They also do not do homework because of no book.
T2	Lack of reading material, inappropriate use of vocabulary
T3	Lack of provision of learning materials to the pupils
T4	Lack of reading materials by some of the learners
T5	Slow readers, lack of enough reading materials
T6	Inaccuracies in pronunciation, time
T7	Inability of the pupils to comprehend or understand the passage. Inability of the pupils buying textbook. Inability of the pupils to pronounce the words correctly or to read the passage correctly.
T8	Pronunciation problem
T9	Slow readers and lack of reading materials for the whole pupils
T10	Slow developers. Some of the pupils are yet to talk very well, making reading and understanding very difficult

Challenges of teaching reading comprehension to primary school learners

Responding to challenges teachers face when facilitating reading comprehension with their learners, T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, and T9 maintain that lack of reading material is a great challenge for reading comprehension. T1 added that learners’ inability to do their homework results from their lack of reading material. On the other hand, T2, T6, and T7 mentioned that learners’ inability to pronounce words correctly (pronunciation problem) and read them correctly is a challenge in teaching reading comprehension. However, T5, T9, and T10 avow that some learners are slow developers and that it poses a challenge for them to teach reading

comprehension. In addition, T7 and T10 noted that learners' inability to comprehend or understand the passage makes teaching reading comprehension difficult.

Alkhalwaldeh (2012) and Qrquez and Rashid (2017) mention that learners' inability to pronounce unfamiliar vocabulary, ambiguous words, and teachers' ineffective teaching methods contribute to learners' reading challenges. Similarly, Mwanamukubi (2013) noted that inadequate teaching and learning materials are among the challenges teachers encounter when facilitating reading in class. UNICEF (2005) noted that teaching learners reading with adequate comprehension is one of the objectives of ensuring global literacy. The finding from table 2, therefore, threatens this objective.

Findings from table 2 affirm teachers' claims that lack of reading materials, pronunciation problems, and learners not understanding the reading passage are the challenges they encounter when teaching reading comprehension. Furthermore, T5, T9 and T10 particularly mention those slow readers and slow developers are among the challenges they experience when facilitating reading comprehension. Powers and Powers (2015) explain that incremental skill development is needed for learners to encode that which has been encrypted.

Table 3: How primary school teachers harness different learning preferences to optimise reading comprehension

Participants' code	How do you harness different learning preferences to optimise learners' reading comprehension?
T1	Through improvisation and reading.
T2	By making adequate use of instructional material, asking questions, adequate use of summary.
T3	The use of adequate instructional materials and keeping a conducive atmosphere in the classroom... grouping the pupils in different categories of learning according to their intelligent quotient(IQ) in other to all them learn in their own pace and also to carry them all along to attain the goal of teaching and learning proper in the absence of adequate infrastructure
T4	Improvisation of learning centers / materials.
T5	Grouping the pupils. The smart readers will be grouped with the slow readers to encourage them. Giving a group assignment.
T6	Parent's involvement.
T7	Increase their reading speed. Increase verbal fluency.
T8	Drilling and directing them how to read by starting from simple words to complex
T9	Encouraging the pupils to read more even at home. Getting their parents involved
T10	Giving more time in explanations in order to carry both the fast and slow learners along.

Primary school teachers' approach to harnessing different learning preferences

In harnessing different learning preferences to optimise reading comprehension, T1 and T4 noted that they improvise learning centres and materials. T2 and T3 said they make adequate use of instructional materials. Furthermore, T3 and T5 mention that they group learners into different categories and give them group assignments. Additionally, T6 and T9 noted that they involve parents in their child's reading comprehension. On the other hand, T8 mention that she drills and directs learners to read from simple to complex.

Kolb's theory and Gardner's learning preferences provide various deducible approaches teachers can use to facilitate learning, particularly reading comprehension. Gardner (2020) mentions that spatial-visual learners explore physical spaces and learning environments. Teachers of reading comprehension can use the available spaces in their school environment to allow learners to translate reading comprehension into some forms of drawing, painting, charts, graphs, verbal imagery, and photographs to harness different learning preferences. Similarly, according to Gardner (2020), musical learning preferences enable auditory learners to learn through rhythm, meter, pitch, and timbre. Harnessing a learning preference from musically inclined learners is very easy in a reading comprehension classroom if teachers learn to integrate rhythm, beats, songs, ideas, concepts, and the reading passage. On the other hand, Kolb (1984) avows that a mishmash of the concrete experienter and reflective observer learning preferences will allow divergent thinkers to learn with concrete materials; thus, teachers can harness this learning preference by introducing concrete objects that are associated with the reading passage into the reading comprehension. However, apart from T3 and T5, who noted group work as an approach to harnessing different learning preferences, other teachers seemingly have no ideas on how to harness different learning preferences to teach reading comprehension. Table 3 shows that primary school teachers who teach reading comprehension are not sufficiently knowledgeable about the different learning preferences they can employ to teach reading comprehension.

CONCLUSION

The study, which focused on harnessing Kolb and Gardner's learning preferences for optimal learning gains in reading comprehension for primary school learners, showed that primary school reading comprehension teachers make inefficient use of Kolb and Gardner's learning preferences in facilitating reading comprehension. Most teachers are unaware of Gardner's learning preferences and Kolb's experiential learning theory. The study showed that teachers face many challenges that inhibit reading comprehension in their various classes. The findings of our study complement the findings of other studies and have strong relevance to resolving challenges that inhibit reading comprehension among different groups of students. There are several avenues for future research. There is no question that more extensive, methodologically rigorous studies are necessary to: (a) determine whether Kolb and Gardner's learning preferences are effective in facilitating reading comprehension among pupils; and (b) Identify which of the two learning preferences is the most effective for enhancing reading comprehension within and outside of the group setting, while reducing secondary effects of teacher bias towards using these theories. Further research is needed to determine whether reading comprehension content should differ based on teacher knowledge and approach.

This study has several limitations. Due to resource constraints, we only included ten (10) teachers from selected primary schools in the study using a convenient sampling technique. Because of this, it is unlikely that the findings can be generalised to secondary school teachers. The researchers are unaware of other studies examining the optimisation of Kolb and Gardner's learning strategies for primary school learners reading comprehension in Nigeria. It is, therefore, essential to interpret the findings cautiously. Considering the findings, researchers

have provided some recommendations to ameliorate teachers' challenges when teaching reading comprehension and to help them harness different learning preferences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A professional development programme should allow teachers to use Kolb and Gardner's learning preferences to facilitate reading comprehension for primary school learners. Government and parents should provide adequate reading materials for learners as a lack of reading materials inhibits the teaching and learning of reading comprehension. Teachers of reading comprehension should study the learning preferences of each learner in their classes to tailor and suit the teaching and learning of reading comprehension accordingly.

Funding

This work was supported by the South African Research Chairs Initiative of the Department of Science and Innovation and National Research Foundation of South Africa, South African Research Chair in Education and Care in Childhood, Faculty of Education, University of Johannesburg, South Africa (grant number: 87300, 2017).

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