

Strategies for addressing reading comprehension difficulties in English among Standard Six pupils in Tanzania

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Abstract. This study explored strategies for effectively addressing reading comprehension difficulties among Standard Six pupils in Tanzania. The study was conducted in Kongwa District in Dodoma Region, and data was collected qualitatively from 37 participants, where nine (9) were English teachers, 10 head teachers, eight (8) Ward Education Officers (WEOs), and 10 External School Quality (SQ) assurers. Data was collected through interviews and documentary review. The findings reveal that teachers employed group reading, repeated reading, vocabulary teaching, and guided reading as interactive strategies to enhance pupils' learning comprehension. It was also found that using motivation, appropriate reading materials, technology, assessment and feedback, teaching and learning materials, and using English as the medium of instruction significantly enhances reading comprehension. However, it was found that a lack of a supportive school environment, Internet connectivity, and limited access to English reading materials hindered effective reading comprehension among pupils. It is argued in this study that teachers need to use interactive methods to improve pupils' reading comprehension and fluency in English, and ESQ assurers need to ensure that assessment and feedback are provided to schools. For this to be a reality, the government has to ensure that schools have reading materials, computers, overhead projectors, televisions (TVs), Internet connectivity, and an electrical power supply. Nevertheless, creating conducive and supportive environments at both school and home for pupils to practice the language and providing resources for ESQ assurers remains imperative.

Keywords: English language, interactive strategies, reading difficulties, Standard Six

1. Introduction

While defined differently in various contexts, reading difficulties fundamentally refer to an unexpected inability to read fluently [20]. According to Karanja [20], challenges may manifest as mispronunciation, omission, or substitution of words, leading to decoding errors and subsequent difficulties in comprehension. Such problems disrupt pupils' reading abilities and hinder their ability to engage with texts. The consequences of these challenges are profound, adversely affecting pupils' academic performance and cognitive development [31]. Standard Six represents an important grade in the primary school education system, serving as a preparation stage for the transition to secondary education, where English serves as a medium of instruction for almost all subjects except Kiswahili [43, 44]. Thus, at this stage, pupils are expected to demonstrate effective reading skills to enable them to engage with the advanced curriculum they would use in secondary education [43, 44].

Pupils who struggle with reading may frequently demonstrate short-term memory, concentration difficulties, and low motivation with classroom reading activities [13, 22].

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*Educational
Dimension*



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According to Vaughn et al. [51], reading difficulties hamper pupils' learning progress across different educational levels, including primary education, secondary education, and college. Reading comprehension is considered "the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language" [9, p. 2]. The ability to read is perceived as an important skill for learning a language that differs from one's native language [55]. Furthermore, reading comprehension plays a significant role in improving vocabulary, conversational ability, and fostering writing skills [57].

Reading comprehension presents a significant problem among many pupils around the world [1, 10, 13, 15, 16, 20, 24, 30, 35, 39–42, 51, 52, 54, 55]. It is estimated that about 10 percent of pupils globally leave school after their studying years without having developed strong reading comprehension skills [49]. This problem has been reported across various countries, seriously affecting pupils' learning and academic success [13, 20, 41, 42]. In the United States of America (USA), about 31 per cent of fourth and nearly 24 per cent of eighth graders struggle with reading comprehension difficulties [17, 41]. In Egypt, research indicated that about 1.2 million children aged 10 to 15 are illiterate and unable to practice basic reading skills [42]. While these data are old and there might be some changes, they highlight a widespread crisis in reading comprehension that affects many young learners globally.

While previous research has focused on countries such as Australia, Ecuador, Egypt, Kenya, Malaysia, Oman, South Africa, Uganda, the USA, and Zimbabwe, research addressing strategies for reading comprehension within the Tanzanian context remains limited. One notable study by Komba and John [23] investigated the English language abilities among pupils in English-medium primary schools in Tanzania. However, there is a pressing demand for exploring effective strategies to address reading comprehension difficulties, specifically within the context of Tanzanian primary schools. This study, therefore, aimed to explore strategies for addressing reading comprehension difficulties in English among Standard Six pupils in Tanzania. The key research question was: What strategies can effectively address reading comprehension difficulties among primary school pupils?

2. The context

In Tanzania, both Kiswahili and English are official languages. English is primarily considered an academic language, while Kiswahili serves as the medium of communication [27, 45]. The Tanzanian education landscape presents different challenges affecting pupils' reading skills in English. The 2023 edition of the Education and Training Policy 2014 [48] launches guidelines on language of instruction. The policy considers both Kiswahili and English as official languages of instruction. It presents Kiswahili as the prime language of instruction in primary schools, and English is designated as a subject. Moreover, the policy gives a chance to use English as the medium of instruction in some primary schools with special arrangements. In addition, the policy highlights the importance for pupils to develop proficiency in the English language with outlined objectives intended to prepare them for effective utilisation of these skills adequately [44, 46, 47]. This bilingual language system may contribute to limited exposure to the English language, destroying the development of reading skills among the pupils. Moreover, code-switching, though informally used as a strategy in teaching English, negatively impacts the language proficiency of the pupils [19].

Proficiency in reading English is key to professional advancement and academic success [18, 32]. It is an important aspect of professional advancement and functions as an international language of communication. Moreover, strong reading skills influence vocabulary growth and comprehension abilities, which are significant for

success in an increasingly competitive globalised world [44]. Despite the importance of reading English, comprehension remains challenging for many pupils. Most learners in primary school struggle with reading comprehension when they are first learning it [4, 14, 23, 25, 50]. Different factors contribute to reading difficulties among pupils. Some factors contributing to poor reading skills include the absence of teacher-student interaction and limited reading materials, such as textbooks. Other factors include large class sizes and undifferentiated reading exercises for struggling learners, which further challenge reading comprehension and result in poor English and academic success [18, 32].

3. Theoretical framework

Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (SCT) [53] guided the research thinking. The theory considers social interaction as a major process of learning and mental development [37]. According to Vygotsky, learning results from interaction with a more knowledgeable person (MKP) such as teachers [29]. Vygotsky's theory recognises the role played by cultural tools, such as language, and various resources, including textbooks, help pupils acquire knowledge and skills [33]. One of the most significant assumptions within this theory is that of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which explains the gap between a learner's capability to do something independently and that of what can be achieved under the guidance of someone more knowledgeable [26]. In this regard, teachers need to be capable of using strategies effectively to enhance interaction during teaching and learning to improve the reading skills of pupils.

Schools must ensure the availability of reading materials, such as teaching and learning materials, such as English textbooks, to enhance the pupils' reading comprehension. Teachers need to use strategies that effectively help pupils enhance their reading skills. Pupils also need to socialise and interact with teachers, fellow pupils, and parents and ensure that language is practised in cultural contexts for pupils to become more proficient readers.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research approach and design

The study employed a qualitative research approach. The chosen approach was informed by several reasons, including collecting data in participants' natural contexts, facilitating an in-depth exploration of complex issues beyond the reach of quantitative studies, and interpreting participants' experiences, opinions, and feelings for a deeper understanding of the strategies of enhancing reading comprehension [11, 36, 56]. The study adopted a descriptive research design [12]. This design was crucial as it enabled gathering respondents' views, perceptions, and experiences, enhancing understanding and describing the topic [2].

4.2. Study location

The study was carried out in the Kongwa District Council in the Dodoma Region in 10 public primary schools with the lowest performance in the subject of English at the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) for three years from 2022 to 2024. Kongwa was chosen because of its poor performance in the English subject. For example, in the 2024 PSLE, 37.4 per cent of Kongwa pupils passed in English, against Bahi district, whose passing rate was 58.6 per cent. In 2023, only 29.8 per cent of Kongwa children passed, compared to Bahi's 53.7 per cent. In 2022, it was even lower; 22.4 per cent of Kongwa pupils passed, compared to 31.3 per cent of Bahi pupils. Since reading comprehension forms a major part of the English exam, it was

significant to explore strategies that can effectively address reading comprehension difficulties facing pupils.

4.3. Sampling procedures and sample size

Purposive sampling was used in the study to select participants, including nine (9) English teachers, 10 head teachers, eight (8) Ward Education Officers (WEOs), and 10 ESQ Assurers (SQAs) based on their virtual positions. English teachers were selected because they are the key implementers of the education curriculum and need to use effective strategies to support pupils in English reading comprehension. Head teachers were chosen according to their leadership roles, as they play a significant role in monitoring the implementation of the primary education curriculum before the ESQ assurers visit the schools. WEOs were chosen because they have administrative roles and immediate School Quality Assurance responsibilities after the head teachers in their areas of jurisdiction. Thus, they were expected to have relevant data on the teaching and learning of the English subject. The sample size included 27 males and 10 females, making 37 total participants, and was determined based on the saturation. More details for participants' descriptions can be seen in table 1.

Table 1

Study participants by their gender.

Study participants	Males	Females	Total
Head teachers	8	2	10
School Quality (SQ) Assurers	4	6	10
English teachers	8	1	9
Ward Education Officers (WEOs)	7	1	8
Total	27	10	37

4.4. Data collection methods

4.4.1. Interviews

The interview method was used to gather data to understand better the strategies for addressing reading comprehension problems among pupils [38]. Data was recorded using a voice recorder and by taking notes in notebooks. During the interviews, participants were encouraged to share their thoughts on strategies that can effectively help address reading challenges among pupils. The interview questions were translated into Kiswahili to ensure ease of understanding and to obtain more accurate information from the participants. However, conducting interviews is always time-consuming, and sometimes participants may stray from the main topic. It was important to rephrase the questions to keep the discussion focused and ensure that the necessary information was obtained. This helped save time and ensured the responses were relevant to the study. Each interview session lasted for about 45 minutes to one hour, and the interviews were conducted in an area free of disturbance where individuals were free to air their feelings and views.

4.4.2. Documentary review

The study also employed a documentary review method of data collection. Materials such as books, journals, government records, examination results, and census data were used to gather information. The consulted documents and their information are indicated in table 2.

Documents are usually used for different purposes and sometimes tend to be old. Thus, it was important to sort out and scrutinise them based on their relevance to support what was communicated in this study.

Table 2

Documents surveyed and information collected.

Type of documents surveyed	Information collected
Journal articles and empirical studies	Background information, knowledge gaps, what takes place in other countries, and the status of reading comprehension.
Educational policies	Issues related to the language of instruction in primary school education and policies that support the English language.
Books	Research methods
Examination results	Position of the study area in the English subject.

4.5. Data analysis and ethical concerns

Data analysis followed the thematic analysis method developed by Braun and Clarke [7], which involves a six-step systematic process. The first step involved familiarisation with the data by listening to audio recordings multiple times, transcribing, and translating discussions from Kiswahili to English to understand their meaning. Initial codes were then produced and organised into themes. Patterns were then created by grouping similar codes into brief themes. Once the themes were established, a report was written that connected the findings back to the literature and the research questions.

All ethical procedures were carefully followed. These included the application for ethical clearance and a research permit from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Academics, Research, and Consultancy (DVC ARC) at the University of Dodoma. The letter was routed to the Regional Administrative Secretary (RAS) of Dodoma. Upon approval by the RAS, the letters were submitted to the DAS and the District Executive Officer (DED), then to the WEOs and head teachers. To gain the participants' trust, it was necessary to formally introduce the researcher to the authorities before interacting with them. Particular care was taken to uphold ethical standards, such as ensuring the confidentiality and privacy of respondents by not disclosing their identities. The respondents were assured that the data collected would only be utilised for academic reasons. The teachers' consent was also obtained before their voices were recorded. All the participants were told that they had the option of whether to participate in the study or not. To avoid plagiarism, all ideas from other people were paraphrased, and all sources of information were acknowledged.

5. Findings

5.1. Instructional strategies to address reading comprehension difficulties

The study sought to explore strategies for addressing reading comprehension difficulties among pupils in primary schools in English. These are instructional strategies such as group reading, vocabulary teaching, guided reading, and direct strategies such as questioning. The key themes with their sub-themes are presented in table 3.

5.1.1. Group reading

The findings indicated that group reading was among the interactive strategies that effectively addressed pupils' reading comprehension challenge. During the interview, one of the English teachers had this to say:

I have been observing that group reading is an effective strategy for addressing reading difficulties among pupils, as it encourages collaboration and

Table 3
Strategies in addressing reading difficulties among pupils.

Key themes	Sub-themes	Category(s)
Instructional strategies	Interactive methods	Group reading, repeated reading, teaching vocabulary, and guided reading
		Question and answer
Teaching and learning environment	Motivation	Rewards
	Reading materials	Storybooks
	Use of technology	Software and apps
	Assessment and feedback	Tests and progress reports
	Teaching and learning materials	Word walls and digital tools
Language of instruction		English language

shared learning. In group reading, pupils read together, either in pairs or small groups, allowing them to support and learn from one another. This provides a conducive learning environment for struggling readers as they observe their peers’ reading techniques, which helps them build confidence and reduce feelings of isolation. (Interview, English teacher 5, 12th August 2024)

Another English teacher stated during the interview:

Group reading is the best strategy to help pupils develop reading skills because it allows them to participate and support each other. When pupils read in groups, they can learn from one another as well as from the teacher. Reading in groups promotes participation while developing reading skills through shared experiences. It also facilitates discussion of challenging words. Collaboration in such a manner enhances the confidence of pupils and lowers their fear. Generally, group reading strengthens reading abilities and resolves challenges. (Interview, English teacher 3, 14th August 2024)

Similarly, one of the head teachers remarked the following during the interview:

Group reading activities help pupils learn reading skills together by encouraging discussion, such as comprehension. When pupils read in small groups, they talk about what they understand and work together to summarise the key points. This helps each other to clear up any confusion in a supportive way. The approach helps pupils become more involved in understanding the text as they share their ideas and listen to different viewpoints. (Interview, Head teacher 6, 14th August 2024)

The findings suggest that interactive strategies such as group discussions are useful in addressing reading difficulties, especially comprehension. Both English teachers and head teachers confirmed that group discussion can significantly enhance reading comprehension among pupils. This highlights the importance of dialogue as it greatly stimulates pupils’ understanding and engagement with texts.

5.1.2. Repeated reading

The findings indicated that repeated reading was an effective strategy to help pupils build strong reading comprehension skills. One of the English teachers said during the interview:

Repeated reading is a powerful strategy to address reading comprehension difficulties among pupils. By reading the same text multiple times, pupils become more familiar with the words and overall content, which boosts their understanding. This repetition allows them to improve their ability to recognise words, resulting in understanding the meaning of the text, thus improving comprehension. In addition, repeated reading is useful for helping pupils read challenging texts. This strategy helps struggling readers develop reading comprehension. (Interview, English teacher 1, 2nd August 2024)

In the same vein, one of the WEOs pointed out during the interview:

I have observed that reading a text multiple times helps pupils get used to the language and content, which improves their reading comprehension. This practice helps them move from just recognising the words to understanding entire sentences or passages. (Interview, Ward Education Officer 1, 22nd August 2024)

However, one of the ESQ assurers commented during the interview on difficulties that pupils face in reading comprehension:

From my experience as an ESQ assurer, pupils struggle with reading comprehension. They find it difficult to grasp the main ideas and interpret the meaning behind texts. This results in shallow engagement with the materials and limits their ability to connect with what they read. Consequently, their performance in examinations requiring comprehension skills suffers significantly. (Interview, ESQ assurer 1, August 2024)

Another ESQ assurer had this to add during the interview:

I have been noting that very often pupils ask their teacher or fellow pupils for help to make sense of English text. This signifies the problem regarding comprehension abilities among pupils. Mostly, this helps in explaining what the sentence trying to portray. This difficulty seems to impact their English performance, as they are not able to grasp the materials being presented. Many pupils find it difficult to connect ideas within a text, which further exacerbates their inability to comprehend messages. (Interview, ESQ assurer 9, August 2024)

The findings from English teachers, head teachers, and WEOs indicated that repeated reading as an interactive strategy was significantly recognised as enhancing Standard Six pupils' reading comprehension. However, from the ESQ assurers' point of view, pupils still struggled with reading comprehension skills.

5.1.3. Vocabulary teaching

The results regarding strategies to address reading difficulties found that teaching vocabulary was crucial. During the interview, one of the English teachers added:

Teaching vocabulary is an important strategy to address reading difficulties among pupils because vocabularies help in understanding texts. When teachers focus on building pupils' vocabularies, they help them learn new words and their meanings, improving their ability to comprehend texts. Effective vocabulary instruction involves introducing new words in context. By engaging their vocabularies, pupils are more likely to understand what they read and can express themselves. This approach boosts reading comprehension and interest in reading. (Interview, English teacher 4, 2nd August 2024)

Another English teacher had this to say during the interview:

Teaching vocabulary is a key strategy to enhance reading comprehension among pupils. By expanding pupils' vocabulary, teachers help them understand the words they encounter in texts, which improves comprehension. When pupils are familiar with words, they find it easier to grasp the meaning of what they are reading. In addition, breaking down difficult words and explaining their meanings boosts pupils' confidence and reduces frustration when reading unfamiliar texts. (Interview, English teacher 5, 6th August 2024)

Based on the above quotations from English teachers, it is confirmed that teaching vocabulary is among the interactive strategies that can significantly address reading comprehension challenges among pupils.

5.1.4. Guided reading

The findings also revealed that interactive strategies, specifically guided reading, could effectively address reading comprehension difficulties. One of the English teachers had this to contribute during the interview:

Guided reading is an effective strategy for addressing reading difficulties by providing small-group instruction tailored to pupils' individual needs. Teachers work with pupils at similar reading levels, offering focused support and guiding them through challenging but manageable texts. Pupils practice strategies such as summarising, giving feedback, and clarifying misunderstandings, which help them understand reading comprehension. Ultimately, guided reading builds pupils' confidence and helps them become independent readers. (Interview, English teacher 2, 7th August 2024)

The findings from head teachers also emphasised that the guided reading strategy was the most effective strategy for addressing reading comprehension difficulties among pupils. With this strategy, teachers guide pupils with diverse reading comprehension activities by reflecting the needs of individual pupils. One of the head teachers remarked the following during the interview:

Pupils need to work in small groups to read a text, with the teacher providing close support, offering tailored attention and specific guidance. Throughout the session, the teacher observes the pupils' reading development, stepping in when they struggle with difficult sections. When pupils come across unfamiliar words or phrases, the teacher needs to assist them by explaining the meaning. This interactive process enhances both comprehension and vocabulary while improving reading fluency. (Interview, Head teacher 4, 12th August 2024)

These findings from English teachers and head teachers indicated that guided reading was an effective interactive strategy for addressing reading comprehension difficulties among primary school pupils.

5.1.5. Questions and answers

The findings revealed that direct strategies, such as questioning, can significantly address the challenge of reading comprehension difficulties. Participants emphasised that a questions-and-answers strategy could help mitigate reading comprehension difficulties among Standard Six pupils. One of the English teachers had this to say during the interview:

The question-and-answer strategy is a valuable tool for addressing reading difficulties among pupils, as it actively engages them in reading and enhances their comprehension. By asking questions about the text before, during, and after reading, teachers guide pupils to think critically about what they are reading, encouraging them to reflect on key ideas, make predictions, and connect concepts. (Interview, English teacher 1, 2nd August 2024)

Another English teacher had this to add during the interview:

The question-and-answer is an effective strategy to deal with reading difficulties among pupils. This approach involves engaging pupils in a dialogue about the text they are reading. By asking targeted questions, teachers assess how pupils understand the materials, identify areas where they struggle, and provide immediate clarification. Pupils are encouraged to think critically about the text, which helps them connect ideas and improve their comprehension. The strategy allows pupils to ask questions and helps address any confusion they have about vocabulary or concepts. This interactive method promotes understanding of the text, boosts reading confidence, and helps pupils overcome challenges they encounter during reading texts. (Interview, English teacher 1, 2nd August 2024)

Findings from the English teachers suggested that direct teaching strategies, particularly the question-and-answer, significantly addressed the challenges related to reading comprehension. This provides insights that when teachers utilise these direct strategies effectively, they can significantly help pupils overcome reading comprehension difficulties.

5.2. Conducive learning environment

The findings indicated that a conducive learning environment also plays a significant role in addressing reading difficulties among pupils in the English subject. Such aspects include motivation, availability of reading materials, the use of technology, assessment and feedback, and teaching and learning materials (table 3).

5.2.1. Motivation

The findings revealed that motivation can be used as a strategy to address reading comprehension among pupils. Motivation, such as rewards, emerged as a key strategy for addressing reading comprehension difficulties, as it influences pupils' willingness to engage in reading comprehension activities. One of the English teachers had these views during the interview:

When pupils are motivated, they are likely to put in the effort needed to overcome challenges and persist in their reading practice. Teachers foster

motivation by creating a positive and supportive learning environment where reading is celebrated and seen as enjoyable. (Interview, English teacher 8, 13th August 2024)

Another English teacher had this to share during the interview:

Motivation drives pupils' engagement and persistence with reading tasks. Motivation stimulates reading interests. When pupils are motivated with rewards and praises, they are more likely to participate in reading activities and feel reading as an enjoyable task, resulting in improved reading skills and comprehension in particular. Setting achievable goals and celebrating progress as motivation techniques also help pupils build confidence and reduce anxiety. By fostering motivation, teachers encourage pupils to develop a love for reading and improve their reading skills. (Interview, English teacher 8, 13th August 2024)

The findings from English teachers revealed that motivation was a strong strategy for addressing reading comprehension difficulties among primary school pupils. This highlights the power of motivation in dealing with reading difficulties.

5.2.2. Availability of reading materials

The findings indicated that reading materials, especially providing pupils with storybooks that match their reading levels and interests, foster a love of reading and improve literacy skills. One of the English teachers stated during the interview:

The use of picture books is an effective strategy for addressing comprehension reading difficulties among pupils. Picture books combine visual elements with text, helping pupils better understand the story by connecting images with words. The pictures provide contextual evidence, which supports pupils in interpreting the meaning of unfamiliar words and grasping the overall narrative, making the reading experience less daunting. This approach engages pupils with varying levels of literacy and reading skills and simplifies complex ideas, ultimately improving their ability to comprehend information more enjoyably and interactively. However, we do not have enough textbooks to help pupils improve their reading capabilities. (Interview, English teacher 1, 2nd August 2024)

One of the head teachers said during the interview:

Picture books are an effective strategy for addressing comprehension-reading difficulties among pupils because they combine engaging illustrations with text, facilitating a deeper understanding of the story. The visual materials provide context that helps pupils grasp the narrative and infer meaning from the text, making it easier to decode unfamiliar words and concepts. This combination not only captures students' attention but also encourages them to make connections between the images and the storyline, enhancing their overall comprehension. However, these materials are not enough in our school. (Interview, Head teacher 2, 19th August 2024)

The findings suggested that providing pupils with reading materials, such as visual materials, is an effective strategy for dealing with reading difficulties among primary school pupils. English teachers and head teachers recognised that providing reading materials, especially picture books, helps address reading comprehension difficulties. However, it was found that schools did not have reading materials to cater to pupils' learning in topics related to reading comprehension.

5.2.3. Use of technology

The findings demonstrated that technology was a significant strategy for addressing reading difficulties. Two categories emerged from the findings in this sub-theme: software and apps. The findings revealed that informants insist on using technology to address reading difficulties in English. For example, one of the English teachers had this to contribute during the interview:

I believe that using technology can help pupils improve their reading comprehension skills. Tools such as interactive reading apps make reading comprehension fun; thus, pupils frequently would like to engage with what they read. This resource often comes with helpful features such as audio-books and pictures, which support reading and make difficult ideas easier to understand. By using online platforms, pupils can better understand the materials. Further, using technology makes reading comprehension easier and enjoyable while also helping pupils develop reading comprehension skills. However, a lack of computers, access to Internet connectivity, and unreliable electrical power supply have been serious problems in our school. We also do not have televisions (TVs) or overhead projectors that can help pupils practice the language. (Interview, English teacher 7, 20th August 2024)

Similarly, head teachers suggested using software and educational apps to address reading comprehension difficulties effectively. One of the head teachers had this view during the interview:

The application of technology is the most effective strategy for addressing reading difficulties among pupils. Different educational software can be used to enhance interactive reading exercises tailored to the varying skill levels of the pupils. For example, audiobooks and text-to-speech programmes can promote comprehension by enabling pupils to listen to the text. Technology also allows access to different resources, such as books, which encourages reading excitement, resulting in improved reading comprehension. Yet, as you see, our school is located in a somewhat rural area where Internet connectivity and power supply are problems that hinder the use of technology in teaching. (Interview, Head teacher 2, 19th August 2024)

The findings revealed that technology is an effective strategy for addressing reading difficulties. English teachers and head teachers concurred that educational software, such as text-to-speech programmes, can significantly enhance pupils' reading comprehension skills. However, access to Internet connectivity and unreliable electrical power supply, including a lack of computers, TVs, and overhead projectors, affected the use of technology in teaching reading comprehension.

5.2.4. Assessment and feedback

The findings indicated that to address reading comprehension difficulties, assessment and feedback, such as tests and their feedback, are effective strategies for pupils to improve reading comprehension skills in primary schools. One of the ESQ assurers made the following insights during the interview:

Conducting frequent assessments and providing timely feedback are essential for addressing reading difficulties. Regular assessments allow teachers to monitor each pupil's progress closely and help to identify specific areas

where a pupil needs support or intervention. This ongoing assessment and feedback provide insights into each pupil's strengths and weaknesses, enabling teachers to tailor their instruction to meet individual needs. This responsive approach ensures that issues are addressed, leading to improved reading comprehension. However, we do not conduct school supervision because we lack the resources to visit schools. (Interview, ESQ assurer 7, 20th August 2024)

Head teachers also had the same concern. To them, assessment and feedback are the right strategies for addressing reading difficulties among pupils in primary schools. One of the head teachers had this observation during the interview:

Regular classroom assessments, such as tests or exercises, help identify specific areas where pupils have trouble with reading comprehension. For example, giving quizzes after reading assignments, along with giving feedback, can help identify challenges pupils face, enabling teachers to focus on those specific issues. (Interview, Head teacher 3, 28th August, 2024)

These findings, from both ESQ assessors and head teachers, highlighted that assessment and feedback are effective strategies for addressing reading comprehension challenges among primary school pupils.

5.2.5. Use of teaching and learning materials

The findings indicated that both head and English teachers emphasised the relevance of a conducive learning environment, especially using teaching and learning materials such as word walls, as an effective strategy for addressing reading comprehension difficulties among pupils. One of the English teachers contributed during the interview:

Teaching and learning materials are a powerful strategy for addressing reading difficulties among pupils. These materials, such as word walls, provide visual and interactive support that makes reading engaging. For example, a word wall helps pupils understand and remember vocabulary by showing words and their meanings in a visual format. Visual materials break down complex information into simpler parts, helping pupils see connections and patterns within the text. This approach makes abstract concepts concrete and easier to grasp. By incorporating teaching and learning materials into lessons, teachers can address reading comprehension difficulties among pupils in primary schools. However, having enough reading materials has been a problem for pupils when practising reading. (Interview, English teacher 7, 20th August 2024)

Another English teacher had these insights during the interview:

Teaching and learning materials such as word walls/charts and flashcards make reading enjoyable. Teaching and learning materials help break down complex information into simpler, manageable pieces, which aids pupils in understanding and retaining key concepts. For example, word walls/charts illustrate important vocabulary and their meanings. By incorporating these materials into lessons, teachers cater to different learning needs, making the materials easier to grasp. This approach not only enhances pupils' comprehension and reading skills but also supports their academic growth by providing clear, organised, and interactive learning experiences. However, we do not have enough reading materials for all pupils. (Interview, English teacher 7, 20th August 2024)

Again, one of the head teachers had this view during the interview:

Using teaching and learning materials such as word walls/charts helps boost understanding and engagement. For instance, visual materials that show the setting of a story help students picture the context and better grasp the text. These materials also serve as useful reference points during discussions, helping pupils link their reading experiences to visual elements. By combining consistent reading practice with a variety of teaching tools, teachers create an interactive learning environment that enhances reading comprehension. (Interview, Head teacher 7, 20th August 2024)

As can be seen, teaching and learning materials, such as word walls, are effective strategies for addressing reading comprehension difficulties. Both English teachers and head teachers supported using teaching and learning materials, especially word walls, as an effective strategy for addressing the challenge of reading comprehension among pupils, although again, teachers complained of a lack of reading materials.

5.2.6. Language of instruction

Participants were asked to express their experiences on strategies that can address the challenge regarding reading comprehension among pupils in primary school. The findings revealed that prioritising the English language as the language of instruction could help address the problem, as this could help pupils improve their reading skills. One of the English teachers remarked the following:

Using English as the primary language of instruction is vital for improving reading skills among pupils. When English is consistently used in teaching and learning, pupils are immersed in the language, which enhances their reading abilities and language proficiency. This practice ensures that pupils are regularly exposed to English texts, vocabulary, and sentence structures, helping them develop a stronger grasp of the language. (Interview, English teacher 6, 14th August 2024)

Likewise, one of the WEOs had this to say during the interview:

I believe that using English as the main language of instruction may help address reading comprehension difficulties among pupils. When English is the major language in teaching and learning, pupils are expected to have reading comprehension skills because they develop strong vocabulary through regular exposure. The consistent use of English enhances their understanding and lifts their confidence in reading. Over time, as the English language is being used as the instructional language, pupils are expected to improve their language skills, including reading comprehension, and also acquire the ability to handle difficult texts. However, a lack of practice in English within the school and at home hinders pupils from being confident in using it and being fluent when reading. (Interview, Ward Education Officer 2, 21st August 2024)

The findings from the English teachers and WEOs highlighted the importance of using the English language as a medium of instruction in primary schools to strengthen pupils' reading comprehension abilities. To them, using English as the language of instruction plays a significant role in addressing reading difficulties among pupils. Yet, a lack of practice at school and home was a bottleneck to acquiring reading comprehension skills.

6. Discussion of the findings

The findings indicated that teachers employed group, repeated, guided reading, and vocabulary teaching as interactive strategies to enhance the learning of reading comprehension for pupils. The findings also suggested that using motivation, appropriate reading materials, technology, assessment and feedback, teaching and learning materials, and English language as the medium of instruction significantly enhanced reading comprehension. These findings support what Al Ghafri and Al Hosni [3] found in Oman, Cárdenas [10] in Ecuador, Lai et al. [24] in Malaysia, and Ahmada [1], Sitepu, Siahaan and Hutaauruk [40] in Indonesia that interactive strategies enhanced reading comprehension among pupils. All these studies underscored the multifaceted nature of interactive strategies for addressing reading comprehension difficulties among pupils. However, a lack of computers, limited access to Internet connectivity, and unreliable power supply in schools hindered the use of technology in teaching and learning reading comprehension.

As observed by Vos and Fouché [52] in South Africa, effective reading comprehension skills significantly improve pupils' learning confidence. Studies by Hempenstall [15] in Australia and Rachael's [35] study in Uganda indicated that reading comprehension serves as a foundational skill for pupils' learning and improvement of academic performance. According to the study by Wanphet and Tantawy [54] in Egypt, reading comprehension is an important intellectual skill that enables pupils to acquire knowledge. Moreover, reading abilities enhance the development of other language skills, such as writing skills [34].

It was also found that limited access to English reading materials and a lack of a supportive school environment hindered effective reading comprehension among pupils. These findings support the study by Ibrahim, Abdullah and Amalia [16] in Indonesia, who found that ineffective reading strategies and an unsupportive school environment greatly affected pupils' reading comprehension abilities. The study by Shumba and Gada [39] in Zimbabwe also revealed the same findings that inadequate access to English reading materials and improper teaching strategies were the foremost factors that led to reading problems among pupils. The study by Jacob and Pillay [18] in South Africa found that ineffective teaching and learning strategies, lack of appropriate reading materials, and limited reading exercises contributed to reading comprehension difficulties among pupils. These findings contradict Vygotsky's theory, emphasising creating a conducive environment that supports pupils' learning. Thus, this suggests that schools need teaching and learning materials, including interactive strategies to help pupils learn effectively [33]. However, while the problem seems to face most countries where English is not a native language, as observed by Hempenstall [15], Isa [17], and Spencer and Wagner [41], countries such as Australia and the USA experience the same pupils' reading comprehension difficulties. Thus, there is always a need to have a supportive learning environment to enhance pupils' acquisition of competencies and skills in reading comprehension.

The findings again indicated that using English as a medium of instruction in primary schools could enhance the pupils' reading comprehension skills, confidence with the language, and fluency. These findings contradict the findings of Babaci-Wilhite [5] in Zanzibar and Brock-Utne [8] in African countries, who believed that local languages play a great role in effective learning among pupils. To these scholars, pupils learn better when they are taught through their local languages or mother tongue. However, some support using English as a medium of instruction as it is a global language spoken by many people in different countries and can connect people from diverse backgrounds [6, 21].

It was further found that teachers could not use technology to teach reading compre-

hension as they faced the challenge of the unavailability of electrical power supplies, computers, Internet connectivity, overhead projectors, and TVs. The study by Matete, Kimario and Behera [28] in Tanzania found the same problem: universities faced a shortage of computers, TVs and a lack of access to Internet connectivity in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Thus, it is unsurprising that rural primary schools face these challenges.

7. Conclusion and implications

This study explored strategies for effectively addressing reading comprehension difficulties among Standard Six pupils in Tanzania. The findings indicated that a range of strategies can successfully address these challenges. These strategies include group reading, repeated reading, vocabulary instruction, and guided reading. Furthermore, the study highlighted question-and-answer, rewards, storybooks, educational software and apps, assessment and feedback, word walls, and incorporating English as the instructional language as interactive strategies to enhance pupils' learning and reading comprehension. Different important measures should be implemented to improve reading comprehension among pupils. The government should provide regular professional training for teachers to equip them with effective instructional strategies. Again, government and other educational stakeholders should ensure the availability of sufficient reading materials, as this is important for developing pupils' comprehension abilities. Engaging parents and the community is also important, as their involvement can encourage pupils to practice reading at home and integrate English into their daily lives. Furthermore, teachers should regularly conduct assessments of pupils' progress to help them better understand and address each pupil's unique learning needs.

8. Suggestions for future research

The study focused on public primary schools, leaving aside private schools. It also confined itself to Standard Six pupils, leaving other classes. Future research can focus on other classes and levels of education. Since this study did not focus on private schools, a comparative analysis can be conducted to see the difference in pupils' ability in reading comprehension between public and private schools.

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