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IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS AMONG STUDENTS: THE CASE OF ZORKOR SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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DECLARATION

Student's Declaration

I, Ethel Anagpoka Apika, declare that this dissertation with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own work, and it has not been submitted either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

Signature: ……

Date: ……..…...….

Supervisor's Declaration

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of dissertation as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.

Name of Supervisor:

Signature: ……

Date: ……..…...….

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late father Mr. Boniface Apika Adabooro, my dearest husband Hon. Nsor-Atindana Emmanuel and children Nsor-Atindana Rita, Nsor-Atindana Emmanuella and Nsor-Atindana Elisa

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study identified the common reading problems that negatively impact students' reading comprehension. It also investigated the effective reading strategies that teachers of English have utilized to improve reading comprehension levels of the students. For the purpose of this study, "effective reading comprehension strategies" are defined as any strategies that have been found by teachers as beneficial for improving reading comprehension levels of students. Importantly, a particular reading comprehension strategy could be beneficial based on these teachers' experiences while working with students who have difficult in reading, but it might not have been found to be an effective reading strategy in the literature. Thus, the focus of this research was on determining the effectiveness of using a particular strategy based on teachers' teaching experiences, rather than strategies only found in the literature. The data collection procedure involved interviews and questionnaire. The teachers in this research pointed out that the reading problems that negatively influence reading comprehension of their students include (a) issues with background knowledge, (b) trouble with fluency, (c) difficulty with informational text, (d) difficulty with making inferences, (e) issues with vocabulary, and (f) low reading level. According to the teachers, there are numerous reading comprehension strategies found to be effective to improve comprehension. These include graphic organizers, questioning, story mapping, peer-assisted strategy, think aloud, discussing the text with students, and different grouping. The teachers informally assess their students' reading comprehension through retelling, questioning, Cloze procedure, having students fill in graphic organizers, and writing activity.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

Reading comprehension is a critical learning skill for all students (Clarke, Truelove, Hulme & Snowling, 2013; Wong, 2011), as it is "the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language" (the Ran dreading Study Group, 2002, p. 11). Understanding words' meaning, analyse the authors points of view and aim for writing and gaining knowledge of new words are all very important reading skills that support reading comprehension (Ruiz, 2015). Students need reading comprehension skills to successfully accomplish the educational goals and expectations, which are required in the classroom settings. For example, having the ability to understand textual information play a critical role in helping learners to quickly locate information that is pertinent to the text, exclude information that is irrelevant to the text, and identify the important information to focus on.

Academic success also requires students to be able to understand, analyse, and apply information they gathered through their reading (Clarke, Truelove, Hulme, & Snowling, 2013). The importance of being able to understand written materials increases significantly in all academic areas as students move from one form to another (Clarke, Truelove, Hulme, & Snowling, 2013; Wong, 2011).

In contrast, not being able to successfully comprehend can prevent students from learning, retaining information that they read, and graduating from school, which will negatively impact different aspects of their lives later on (Hoeh, 2015; Mason, 2004). Reading difficulties negatively impact different aspects of students, including their

educational progress, self-esteem, attitudes about reading and learning, motivation to read, career choices, social-economic status and expectation for future reading success (Sloat, Beswick & Willms, 2007; Woolley, 2011).

Not only is reading comprehension a valuable skill for learning in school, but in order to successfully interact in everyday life, individuals need reading skills to read and understand labels, directions, job application forms, and newspapers (Chatman, 2015). Also, individuals need reading skills in order to be able to have and maintain a job and successfully engage indifferent daily activities (Hoeh, 2015; Mahdavi, & Tensfeldt, 2013), and live independently (Hoeh, 2015). The need for reading comprehension becomes very critical when thinking about the negative consequences of not being able to read in critical situations. For instance, not being able to read and comprehend dosage directions on a bottle of medicine or caution on a container of dangerous chemicals may put the individuals in a very dangerous situation that threaten their safety and lives. Those who do not possess the ability to understand what they are reading are put at a disadvantage in every educational and personal life situation (Blair, Rupley, & Nichols, 2007).

Also, difficulties with reading comprehension is one of the most major problems that students of Zorkor SHS have and which threatens their academic success. The reading problems that negatively impact students' comprehension could include one or more of the following: inappropriately use of prior knowledge, lack of vocabulary, difficulty of reading fluency, limited knowledge of common text structures (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Graham & Bellert, 2005), difficulty making inferences (Hall, & Barnes, 2017; Jiménez- Fernández, 2015; Sencibaugh, 2007), and unfamiliarity with the appropriate strategy needed to gain meaning from a text

(Woolley, 2008). Having one or more of these problems may prevent students from comprehending what they are reading and from being successful at the school. It is especially important to help students with reading difficulties overcome the reading problems that may prevent them from literacy success before they reach their final year. Failing to solve reading difficulties during students' early stage in SHS will follow them into their final year. Sloat, Beswick, and Willms (2007) stated that the majority of students who do not master the skills of reading to learn by the end of early stage will never learn to read well, have more difficulties with the grade level curriculum, need ongoing intensive assistance, and perform less than their classmates in reading achievement and curricular knowledge. Thus, the critical role that reading plays in students learning beyond third grade emphasizes the importance of identifying struggling readers in their early stage and providing them with the most appropriate reading strategies (Antoniou & Souvignier, 2007; Sloat, Beswick, and Willms, 2007). "Research strongly supports both the vital role of early identification in the prevention of reading difficulties and the urgent need to teach students to read during the first few years of school so that they can "read to learn" in grade 3 and beyond" (Sloat, Beswick & Willms, 2007, p. 524).

To avoid most of the long-term negative effects, teachers are required to utilize and integrate reading comprehension strategies in their daily instructional practices in order to increase the reading comprehension level of students with reading difficulties. Although different ways for teaching reading comprehension to students have been investigated by researchers (Ruiz, 2015), the majority of American students' experience difficulties with reading comprehension (Cromley & Azevedo, 2007). Taylor, Pearson, Clark and Warpole (2000) found that traditional classroom instruction in reading usually does not include many instructions or activities that

directly focus on reading comprehension. Therefore, exploring strategies to enhance reading comprehension may help teachers to produce new lessons that can be added to the reading curriculum at different grade levels. Additionally, helping students through teaching them how to effectively interact with written passages, through interactive strategies, allows them to easily recall what they read and obtain meaning from the passage (Ruiz, 2015).

Improving all students' reading skills in order to narrow the reading achievement gap is one of the essential goals of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA). Closing the gap can be done through requiring and encouraging schools to integrate high standards, high quality instruction, and teaching with research-based material and assessments (International Literacy Association 2016; Richburg-Burgess, 2012).

Teaching reading comprehension can be done through explicitly teaching students how to utilize particular strategies in order to improve their reading comprehension skills (Stetter & Hughes, 2010). Several reading comprehension strategies have been administrated as effective tools for improving students' understanding of written materials. These strategies include, but not limited to graphic organizers (DiCecco & Gleason, 2002), collaborative strategic reading (Vaughn et al., 2011), peer-assisted learning strategy (Rafdal et al., 2011), story-mapping (Zahoor & Janjua, 2013), and self-questioning (Rouse, Alber-Morgan, Cullen, & Sawyer, 2014).

Also, numerous classroom-based reading comprehension assessments have been used by teachers to measure the students' reading understanding of academic material as well as measure the effectiveness of a particular instructional method or teaching strategy. That data collected by classroom assessment provides teachers with an

opportunity to (a) develop the most appropriate instruction for students, (b) make a better determination about what lesson would be more effective to teach, (c) determine what supportive material to use during their lessons, and (d) what challenges the students may have. Cloze procedure (Ahangari, Ghorbani & Hassanzadeh, 2015), informal reading inventory (Burns and Roe, 2011 retelling procedure (Hagtvet, 2003), think aloud (Spinelli, 2012) are some examples of these classroom-based reading comprehension

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although reading comprehension is a fundamental skill that all students need for academic and personal success, approximately 80% (US Department of Education, 2003; Lerner, 2003; Gersten, Fuchs, Williams & Baker, 2001) to 90% (Kavale & Forness, 2000; Vaughn, Levy, Coleman & Bos, 2002) of students who are identified as having learning disabilities have major problems with reading. These problems may take different forms, such as inappropriate use of background knowledge (Graham & Bellert, 2005), lack of vocabulary knowledge (Clemens & Simmons, 2014), lack of reading fluency (Graham & Bellert, 2005), failure to distinguish between different text structures (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams & Baker, 2001), and difficulty making inferences (Hall & Barnes, 2017), which all have negative impact on students' reading comprehension.

Previous research studies on reading comprehension strategies have focused on several themes. For instance, several studies have examined the effectiveness of particular reading comprehension strategies on improving reading comprehension of students with learning disabilities. Taylor, Alber and Walker (2002) examined the effectiveness of both self-questioning and story-mapping strategies on reading

comprehension of elementary students with learning disabilities. The study was conducted in a special education resource room. The findings indicated that both self-questioning and story-mapping strategies were effective interventions to improve the students' literal and inferential comprehension. Also, Stagliano and Boon (2009) examined the impact of utilizing story-mapping strategy to improve reading comprehension of fourth graders with learning disabilities. Investigators utilized a multiple-probe design across participants to evaluate the influence of using story-mapping strategy to enhance the students' understanding of an expository text. The finding of this study displayed that story-mapping is an effective strategy that helped to improve the students' comprehension of an expository text. Some studies have focused on the relationship between students' stance toward reading and levels of reading comprehension strategy use (e.g., Sallabas, 2008; Kırmızı, 2011). The results of these studies displayed that there is a positive relationship between students' attitudes of reading and the using of reading strategies. In other words, students who have positive attitude toward reading tended to utilize reading strategy as an aid to construct meaning of a text.

However, few studies have examined the effective reading comprehension strategies for students who have difficulty with reading in the second and third grades (Gooden, 2012; Williams, 2005). Also, a minimal research attention has been directed toward examining the effective reading comprehension strategies experienced English teachers use in order to improve reading comprehension level of lower level students with reading difficulties (Chatman, 2015; Gersten et al., 2001; Reid & Lienemann, 2006; Swanson, 2000). Therefore, the deficiency that I have identified concerning this researchable problem is that the topic has not been explored by most researchers.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study aims at analysing the difficulties of students reading comprehension and device strategies that will help improve students' understanding what they read and improve their reading skills.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to;

1. identify the common reading problems that negatively influence reading comprehension of form one students
2. investigate the effective reading strategies that experienced teachers of English have utilized to improve reading comprehension levels of these students.
3. assess the classroom-based reading assessment tools that English teachers use to measure the students' reading comprehension growth and determine the effectiveness of these strategies?

1.5 Research Questions

1. What are the common reading problems that prevent form one students with reading difficulties from comprehending what they are reading?
2. What effective reading comprehension strategies do English teachers utilize in order to improve reading comprehension skills of students with reading difficulties?
3. What are the classroom-based reading assessment tools that English teachers use to measure the students' reading comprehension growth and determine the effectiveness of these strategies?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The current study is important to address the identified deficiencies in the reading comprehension literature and fill a gap in the current knowledge. Also, the findings of this study is very important to me as an instructor who is in charge of future English teachers' preparation. I may transfer the reading comprehension strategies that will be identified as useful and effective by the experienced English teachers in this study to Bongo district in order to help Zorkor teachers to effectively teach reading comprehension to their students with reading difficulties. That transferring could positively improve the students' academic achievement across all academic content areas.

Also, the findings of previous research suggested that students who face difficulty with reading in SHS will continue to struggle with reading in their later forms. Thus, there is a need for conducting more studies to examine the instructional strategies that have been used by experienced English teachers to improve reading comprehension level for SHS students with reading difficulties. In addition, due to the limited studies that have been conducted in Bongo district to examine the most effective reading comprehension strategies for SHS students, conducting this study may contribute to producing some strategies and practices that could be used by both English and general education teachers in order to improve the students' comprehension.

1.7 Limitation of the Study

A lot of factors that fight against me in the course of carrying out this study. Chief among them are time constrain and finance. Time limit was a great setback to and this was largely because of the factor that I had to combine my normal work as a teacher and the research work. The other factors that also militate against the progress of this study range from none cooperative behaviour of both the students and teachers that

form part of my sample unit to financial challenges which impeded me from getting in touch with other stakeholders at distant places who could contribute to the progress and success of this study. The above mentioned challenges eventually limited the coverage of this work to only students and teachers of Zorkor Senior High School.

1.8 Delimitation of the Study

This study focuses on analysis of student's difficulties in reading comprehension passages covered only the Bongo District of the Upper East Region and was limited to first year students of Zorkor SHS because of the fact that reading and comprehending what you read leads to improvement in the other aspects of the English Language. It will be unfair to generalise the results of this study for the whole Bongo District and beyond.

1.9 Organization of the Study

This study comprises five chapters. Chapter One covers the following; background or the study, statement of the problem, aim of the study, the objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, limitation of the study, and delimitation of the study. Chapter Two of this study covers the review of literature relevant to the topic includes the following: Reading comprehension and models, the importance of reading comprehension, reading comprehension models, reading comprehension problems, effective reading comprehension strategies, classroom-based reading comprehension assessments and summary of literature review. Chapter Three deals with research methodology of the study which includes the following; research design, population, sampling technique, sample size, research site, data collection, instruments for data collection, data analysis, data presentation, and summary of the chapter. Chapter Four of this study presents the discussion and analysis of the main findings of the study and Chapter Five presents the summary of the findings,

conclusions drawn from the study, recommendations and a suggested area for further research work.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The primary goal of this qualitative research study is to (a) identify the reading comprehension problems that prevent form one students with reading difficulties from comprehending the text well and (b) discover the effective reading comprehension strategies that experienced English teachers utilize in resource room settings to improve their students' comprehension levels.

To understand the essence of the present research, a review of relevant literature is discussed in the following sections: (a) reading comprehension skill and models, (b) reading problems that prevent students with reading difficulties of comprehending what they are reading, (c) effective reading comprehension strategies that have a positive impact on students' comprehension levels, (d) and classroom-based reading comprehension assessments that teachers use to assess students' reading comprehension and the effectiveness of these strategies.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that leads this study is related to the lens of Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory. Rosenblatt's efforts have significantly impacted the field of reading comprehension. Her transactional theory has emerged as a challenge to the idea that objective meaning exists only within the print itself (Sanders, 2012; Marhaeni, 2016). Thus, Rosenblatt's (1978) theory stresses that meaning cannot be created in isolation from the reader. According to Rosenblatt (1982), "reading is a transaction, a two-way process, involving a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances" (p. 268). Her description of the reading process is

harmonious with the definition of reading comprehension, which is the process in which readers involve in to gain meaning through particular interaction with a text (the Rand Reading Study Group, 2002; Snow, 2002). Both descriptions emphasize the importance of both reader and text in order to gain meaning of a particular passage. Thus, based on the transactional theory, the process of reading comprehension requires an active transaction between readers, as the heart of the reading process, and the text at a particular time in a specific context in order to obtain meaning of the reading materials (Taylor, 2011; Rosenblatt, 1982; Unrau and Alvermann, 2013).

Rosenblatt emphasized the importance of the interaction between the reader and the text by writing that "a novel or poem or play remains merely ink spots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols" (Rosenblatt, 1983, p. 24). In other words, making meaning of a particular passage requires readers to fetch their previous experiences and knowledge to that passage, which facilitate their own understanding (Rosenblatt, 1982; Unrau and Alvermann, 2013). Rosenblatt's (1978) theory supports the notion that the meaning does not solely exists in the text or in the reader, however; it is produced as a result of a particular interaction between reader and the text (Unrau and Alvermann, 2013; Rosenblatt, 2005; Sanders, 2012). That interaction reflects the reciprocal effect of reader and text in one another to construct meaning of reading (Rosenblatt, 2005). Thus, that meaning is influenced by the reader's own previous knowledge and stance. Rosenblatt clarified that influence by writing that "the reader must have the experience, must 'live through' what is being created during the reading" (1938, p.33).

By establishing the transactional theory, Rosenblatt has created a different classroom instructional method that enhances the experience between the student and the text. With it, instead of the teacher guiding influence students' understanding of a text, students have an opportunity to experience reading a text independently, which encourages them to create their own meaning (Sanders, 2012). With this theory, Rosenblatt contributed to a major philosophical shift in which reading comprehension is looked at as an interactive, constructive, and comprehensive process that readers engage in while reading rather than viewing the reading process as a product of learning that is measured by teachers (Maria, 1990; Snow, 2002).

Rosenblatt's theory encourages teachers provide instructional supports that smooth the transaction between students and text, as well as supply instructional assistance while students attempt to understand text. When students construct their own meaning of a particular text, the transactional process occurs independently of their teachers and they link to only the passage and the students' previous knowledge and experience. Even though teachers are not a part of that transactional process, they can still provide students with various methods to look at the passage in order to gain meaning, monitor the students' individual responses to the passage, and exchange and discuses ideas of the passages with the students through a way that improve the students' comprehension (Rosenblatt, 1982; 1983).

Transactional theory adopts the notion that the transactional process that students involve with to construct meaning from a passage is unique for each student based on what she/he brings to the text (Rosenblatt, 1978). That means that even though different students read the same passage, each individual student would interpret it differently. That is also true when an individual student reads the same passage once

and rereads it again after a period of time. The student tends to understand the same passage differently when he/she reads it a second time.

That different interpretations occur due to the student's experience and knowledge gained after her/his first reading, which significantly impacts the students' understanding when he/she reads it the second time (Rosenblatt, 1983). Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory emphasized that comprehension of a text occurs when students meld text and past experiences together during the transactional process. That combination is known as the aesthetic stance, in which the students' experience plays a role in enhancing the text while the text improves their experiences at the same time (Rosenblatt, 1983; Unrau and Alvermann, 2013).

I have decided to use Rosenblatt's transactional theory as a framework to lead my study. That is because I have found that her point of view regarding reading comprehension matches my own thinking. We both acknowledge that reading comprehension requires students to interact with the provided text in order to gain meaning. Also, meaning cannot be gained only from a text itself; thus, through that interaction they need to bring what they already know and experiences to that text.

In addition, I believe that teachers play a crucial role in facilitating the students' interaction with the text, helping students make a link between the text and their own previous knowledge through using variety of reading comprehension strategies, which all result in improving the students' reading comprehension. For this study, I wondered if the English teachers who are teaching reading comprehension strategies will look at reading comprehension as a process that requires students to make a link between the text and their own background knowledge in order to gain meaning from

that text. Also, I wondered if these teachers will either implicitly or explicitly teach based on Rosenblatt's transactional theory too.

2.2 Reading Comprehension Skills and Models

Reading is an essential skill that students need to gain in the early grades because it will be the foundation of learning in all academic subjects throughout their education (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Sloat, Beswick, and Willms, 2007). Mastering reading skills before students reach third grade is especially critical because after third grade, students begin to read in order to gain knowledge and learn from the academic content. In addition, students who fail to master reading skills by the end of third grade, have low motivation for learning, behavioural challenges, and low academic achievement (Sloat, Beswick, & Williams, 2007), and are possibly at a risk of not graduating from high school (KIDS COUNT, 2010). However, students who are able to master reading by third or fourth grade have greater possibility of achieving academic success (Foorman, Breier, & Fletcher, 2003). More importantly, while engaging in reading activities, students need to be able to understand what they are reading.

Reading comprehension is one of the most important components of reading to master. It requires students to move beyond decoding individual vocabulary and statements to constructing a solid understanding of the entire passage (Woolley, 2011). Comprehension is a complex process that requires an active interaction between the students' background knowledge of the context, the purpose of the reading material, and the level of vocabulary and language used by the authors in order to gain meaning of a text (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Hollenbeck, 2011; Jones, Hughes, Donahue, Parker-Katz, Talbott, & Tatum, 2012; Pardo, 2004; RAND

Reading Study Group, 2002; Snow & Sweet, 2003; Snow, 2002; Woolley, 2011). The process is complex because it requires students to engage in multiple cognitive activities, processes, and skills. These skills involve fluently decoding words, understanding the language syntax, making inferences, using background knowledge, and managing working memory as needed (Fletcher- Janzen, Reynolds, & Vannest, 2013; Hollenbeck, 2011; Kendeou, McMaster, & Christ, 2016; Woolley, 2011). Even a short passage of material requires the reader to have strategic control of when and how to use each of these skills.

2.2.1 Reading Comprehension Models

There are three major reading comprehension models that play a significant role in managing and facilitating the comprehension process, as well as assisting readers to better understand a written passage and overcome their reading comprehension difficulties while engaging in the reading process. These models include the bottom-up model, the top-down model, and the interactive model. The three models differ from one another based on the concentration of the method that readers apply in order to obtain meaning from a written passage. For instance, the bottom-up model requires readers to decode each word in the text in order to gain meaning. In contrast, the top-down model emphasizes the role that both the reader's background knowledge and previous experience about the given topic play in order to obtain meaning from a text. However, the interactive model looks at the reading process as an activity that requires engaging in two interactions. The first interaction occurs between the written text and the reader's prior experiences about the topic, while the second interaction occurs between different kinds of reading strategies that the reader utilizes (Ahmadi, Ismail, & Abdullah, 2013; Brunning, Shraw, & Ronning, 1999; Eskey, 2005; Grabe,

1991; Grabe, 2004). More explanations of these reading comprehension models follow.

Bottom-up model

The notion behind the bottom-up model is that readers should gradually start the reading process by decoding every letter, vocabulary word, and eventually sentence in order to construct meaning from a written passage. In other words, this model looks at the entire reading process as letter and vocabulary-based. Thus, in order to successfully gain meaning from a text, readers are required to understand and recognize each letter and vocabulary word while reading. Since this model emphasizes the importance of understanding every single word for comprehension, quick word understanding is an essential requirement for the bottom-up approach (Ahmadi et al., 2013; Van Duzer, 1999).

This reading comprehension model supposes that readers who follow the bottom-up reading process rapidly become expert readers whose proficiency plays a significant role in improving their ability to decipher (Pressley, 2000). However, this model looks at the readers who are not able to quickly decode words in the text as struggling readers whose comprehension process is interrupted by their failure to decode. Proficiency in decoding enables successful readers to easily and rapidly understand letter chunks, prefixes, suffixes, and the original vocabulary. As a result, readers' ability to rapidly decode words can exploit more memory capacity in their brains for reading comprehension. On the other hand, struggling readers spend more time and effort trying to figure out the meaning of each vocabulary word in the text, which results in losing a lot of the processing capacity in the brain that needed for understanding the text (Ahmadi & Gilakjani, 2012; Pressley, 2000).

Even though having the ability to rapidly decode is important for improving reading comprehension, the bottom-up model has been criticized for several reasons.

First, according to Grabe and Stoller (2002), the "bottom-up model suggests that all reading follows a mechanical pattern in which the reader creates a piece-by-piece mental translation of the information in the text, with little interference from the reader's own background knowledge" (p.32). Second, this model requires readers to apply the vocabulary-by-vocabulary decoding process, which is considered slow process that requires a lot of time and attempts from the reader to understand a text. Trying to decode each word in the text can weigh the reader's short-term memory; therefore, the reader is more likely to forget what they have read by the time they finish their reading process. As a result, instead of gaining a solid understanding from the written passage, the reader may only be able to understand different isolated words. Without having comprehensive understanding of a text, the reader will not be able to engage in reading and activate their critical thinking skills, which might also negatively impact their motivation level to read on a regular basis. Next, this model has been criticized because it does not take into consideration the role that the readers' prior knowledge plays in facilitating reading comprehension process. In other words, the constructing of the bottom-up model (letters→ words→ sentences) can limit the readers' ability to notice the processes that exist during the overall reading process. The limitations linked to the bottom-up reading comprehension model contributed to the produce of the top-down reading model (Adams, 1990; Eskey, 2005; Grabe, 2004).

Top-down model

In contrast to the bottom-up model, the top-down reading comprehension model engages readers' prior knowledge, experience, and expectation about a particular

topic in order to obtain meaning from a written passage. Thus, as described by Eskey (2005), the top-down model considers reading comprehension as a process that begins "from the brain to text" (p. 564). In the top-down model, readers are required to start the process of reading comprehension with building particular expectations about the text. These expectations should be built based on a reader's previous knowledge about a particular topic. After building some expectations, the reader moves to another task in which they draw on their world knowledge in order to decode vocabulary within the text to either prove or modify their pre-established expectations. Therefore, the top-down comprehension model looks at the text itself as meaningless, with the reader gaining meaning by integrating the text into their prior knowledge (Aebersold & Field, 1997; Ahmadi, Hairul, & Pourhossein, 2012).

The top-down reading comprehension model was developed by Goodman (1967), who believes that reading comprehension process is a "psycholinguistic guessing game," in which readers are required to bring in their previous knowledge in order to predict meaning. In addition, Smith (2004), another well-known proponent of the top-down model, emphasized the essential role that the reader plays in order to interpret a written text into meaning by utilizing their previous knowledge regarding the reading topic and experiences of how to read to either confirm or modify their pre-established expectations.

In order to obtain meaning from an entire written text, the reader has to involve a reading process called "text sampling" (Cohen, 1990). Basically, the text sampling concept confirms that in order to understand a text, the reader does not need to understand every single vocabulary word and sentence in the text. Instead of reading each word, the reader can construct meaning of the passage through reading particular

vocabulary words and sentences. The top-down model emphasizes the importance of different comprehension skills, such as prediction, analysis, making an inference from the text, and summarizing.

Even though the top-down reading comprehension model emerged to address the limitations within the bottom-up model, it has been criticized due to its heavy dependence on readers' prior expectation, information, and background knowledge, and its disregard of the significance of the text. Also, the top-down model is criticized for its neglect of the potential problems that readers might encounter while building their expectations or predictions about a specific passage, especially when the topic is not familiar to them. Therefore, the limitations and weakness of both the bottom-up and top-down reading models in clarifying the reading comprehension process have resulted in the birth of the interactive reading model (Ahmadi et al., 2013; Pearson, 1979; Samuels and Kamil, 1988; Wang, 2009).

Interactive model

Since the interactive model emerged to address weakness and limitations that were found in both the bottom-up and the top-down reading comprehension models, it tends to integrate features of each. Today, the interactive model is the most widely conclusive model for explaining the process of reading comprehension and confirms the importance of the interaction between a reader and the text (Ahmadi & Gilakjani, 2012). Mainly, the interactive model adapts the notion that neither the bottom-up nor the top-down model can be used in isolation to explain the entire reading comprehension process. Therefore, it called for the creation of an interaction between these two models (Ahmadi & Gilakjani, 2012; Ahmadi, Ismail, & Abdullah, 2013; Rumelhart, 1977).

In addition, Rumelhardt (1977) emphasized that "both sensory and non-sensory come together at one place and the reading process is the product of simultaneous joint application of all the knowledge sources" (p. 735). Similarly, Alderson (2000) pointed out that "the whole reading process is not an 'either/or' selection between the bottom-up and top-down models, but involves the interaction between both approaches" (p. 38).

The interactive reading comprehension model stresses the important roles that both lower-level processing skill, such as word recognition and higher-level inference and reasoning skills, such as text explanation play in comprehending a text (Grabe, 1991). Thus, the interactive model considers reading comprehension process as a product that emerged as to the reader's a result of gaining meaning through the interaction between both readers and written passages, instead of looking at reading comprehension as an easy transmission of the textual passage and information brain (Eskey, 2005; Grabe, 1991).

The interactive reading comprehension model highlights that skill readers can synthesizes information and construct meaning of the textual passage through reciprocally use bottom-up or top-down while engaging in the reading activity (Ahmadi et al., 2013; Eskey, 2005; Grabe, 1991; Wang, 2009). Moreover, Stanovich (1980) explained the view of "compensation" in the interactive model. He did that by suggesting that both the bottom-up and the top-down reading processes work as a complement for each other in the reading comprehension process. For instance, readers can rely on the bottom-up processes to offset for the required prior background knowledge when they lose the appropriate cognitive skills required for understanding a particular passage.

However, when the reader loses the appropriate bottom-up skills required to understand a passage, they will compensate by using the high-level processes (top-down skills). Unskilled readers usually resort to use more high-level processes than skilled readers do. That is because the use of the top-down processes appears to compensate for their lack of not being able to use the bottom-up processes (Eskey, 2005; Stanovich, 1980).

2.3 Reading Comprehension Problems

Reading comprehension is an essential component of reading that all students need to ensure success in both academic and personal lives. Nevertheless, majority of students with learning disabilities face serious problems with understanding what they are reading (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Graham & Bellert, 2005; Klingner, Vaughn, & Boardman, 2007; Shaywitz, 2003) even after they have acquired and mastered the necessary decoding skill (Kessler, 2009). Approximately 80% (Kavale & Reece, 1992; US Department of Education, 2003) to 90% (Kavale & Forness, 2000; Lyon, 1995; Vaughn, Levy, Coleman, & Bos, 2002) of students who are identified as having learning disabilities have major problems learning how to read. Reading comprehension problems that experienced by students with learning disabilities may take different forms, such as inappropriate use of background knowledge (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Graham & Bellert, 2005; William, 1993), lack of vocabulary knowledge (Clemens & Simmons, 2014; Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Graham & Bellert, 2005; Jitendra, Edwards, Sacks, & Jacobson, 2004), lack of reading fluency (Graham & Bellert, 2005), failure in distinguish between different text structures (Cain, 1996; Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Graham & Bellert, 2005; Wong & Wilson, 1984), and difficulty making

inferences (Hall & Barnes, 2017; Jiménez-Fernández, 2015; Sencibaugh, 2007). Detailed explanation about each problem is provided in the next section.

2.3.1 Inappropriately Use of Prior Knowledge

Lack of using prior knowledge appropriately is one of the reading comprehension problems that prevents students from successfully comprehending a written text (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Graham & Bellert, 2005). Prior knowledge is also commonly known as background knowledge, which refers to "the sum of what a person knows about the content of a text" (Brandao & Oakhill, 2005, p. 688). In other words, to better comprehend a written passage, the reader needs to make a connection between the new textual information and all information, world knowledge, and personal experiences he/she already has about the topic of the reading (McNamara & Kintsch, 1996). Making a connection between the reader's background knowledge and textual material is an important for facilitating the reading comprehension process (Ferstl & Kintsch, 1999; Kintsch, 1998; Kintsch & Rawson, 2005).

Being able to appropriately use and actuate prior knowledge is an important factor that help students to better understand a text (Armand, 2001; Adams & Collins, 1985; Cottrell & McNamara, 2002; Graham & Bellert, 2005; Pressley, 2000). When compared to readers with less background knowledge, readers who have more background knowledge about the reading can better understand a written material (Johnston, 1984; Taft and Leslie, 1985). In the study of undergraduate psychology students in the University of Lyon, Blanc and

Tapiero (2001) found that having more background knowledge about the topic of reading plays a significant role in helping readers to construct an accurate model of

the spatial situation. Readers who had more background knowledge were able to make more accurate connection between the new textual information and their previous experience when compare to readers with less background knowledge. Blanc and Tapiero (2001) concluded that background knowledge and demands of the task are very important elements in understanding and gaining meaning of a text.

In addition, having background knowledge about the reading material facilitates comprehension by allowing students to make a prediction, set some expectations, make inference about the reading (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Cain & Oakhill, 2001), guide their attention to the important information, facilitate recalling the information (Anderson & Pearson, 1984), and monitor their reading (Chi, 1978). Also, prior knowledge plays a major role in helping students to understand all information that is implicit (Brandao & Oakhill, 2005) and easily remember what have been read (Kendeau & Broek, 2007). Even though prior knowledge is critical element for facilitating the students' understanding, some students cannot fully comprehend a text due to their limited background knowledge.

Other researchers have similarly found that, although some students with learning disabilities may have prior knowledge about the topic of a reading, they usually fail to appropriately use that knowledge in order to facilitate their understanding of the new textual information (Graham & Bellert, 2005; Paris, Lipson, & Wixson,1983). Therefore, they need to be taught some pre-reading activities to be able to actuate their own prior knowledge about a given topic. William (1993) conducted a study to examine the students' comprehension of a modified story and their ability to recognize story themes. The study involved adolescents with learning disabilities. The results indicated that adolescents with learning disabilities brought incorrect or

irrelevant information into the story and have difficulty understanding the text. These difficulties raised a result of their inappropriately using of their prior knowledge related to the topic. Also, William found that when these students were asked to respond to inferential questions, they resorted to either totally depend on their previous knowledge or disregarded their previous knowledge (William, 1993).

Even though the lack of using prior knowledge appropriately prevents students from successfully comprehending a text, teachers can help them to develop and actuate their prior knowledge through employing different pre-reading activities. To successfully help their students develop an adequate background knowledge, teachers should be aware of topics that are more familiar to their students, as well as topics that the students have less prior knowledge about (Smith, 2012). Several studies found that students learn better when being taught through activities that evaluate, actuate, and induce their prior knowledge before they involve in the reading process (Jitendra, Hoppes, & Xin, 2000; Raben, Darch, & Eaves, 1999).

These structured pre-reading activities include some metacognitive strategies, such as K-W-L charts (Fisher, Frey, & Williams, 2002), using visual aid (Dye, 2000; Graham & Bellert, 2005) brainstorming, questioning activities, and writing activities that linked to the topic to assist students to bring their prior knowledge to the text (Graham & Bellert, 2005). Through the utilization of pre reading activities, which aims to both develop and activate the students' prior knowledge, teachers can facilitate the students learning by simplifying the textual information in order to make it accessible for all students. Doing this helps to improve students' reading comprehension by allowing students to easily and exactly recall what they have learned of the textual information, arrange the new information they just learned from the text in their memories

(Graham & Bellert, 2005), and link their prior knowledge with the information within the text (Ferstl & Kintsch, 1999; Kintsch, 1998; Kintsch & Rawson, 2005).

2.3.2 Lack of Vocabulary Knowledge

Vocabulary knowledge is an important factor that facilities students' reading comprehension by allowing them to rapidly decode vocabulary in the written text, which is an essential component of reading (Qian, 2002). Thus, there is a powerful and unequivocal relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension (Baumann & Kameenui, 1991; Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Joshi & Aaron, 2000; Malatesha Joshi, 2005; Martin-Chang & Gould, 2008; Paul & O'Rourke, 1988; Stanovich, 1986). Based on a review of several studies, Just and Carpenter (1985) reported that the correlation between vocabulary knowledge and comprehension extended from 0.66 to 0.75.

The relationship between vocabulary knowledge and comprehension is also described as a two-way relationship (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998; Ricketts, Nation, & Bishop, 2007). In other words, having more vocabulary knowledge enhances students' reading comprehension (Stanovich, 1986) and can be improved through reading experiences (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998). Also, when compare to students with less vocabulary knowledge, students with more vocabulary knowledge better understand a written text (Chou, 2011; Graves, 1986) and are able to rapidly acquire the meaning of new words (Boucher, 1986). Qian (2002) pointed out that "having a larger vocabulary gives the learner a larger database from which to guess the meaning of the unknown words or behaviour of newly learned words, having deeper vocabulary knowledge will very likely improve the results of the guessing work" (p. 518). Even though vocabulary knowledge plays a crucial role in facilitating

students' reading comprehension, some readers including students with learning disabilities and those who have low comprehension skills, fail to successfully comprehend a text due to their limited vocabulary knowledge (Clemens & Simmons, 2014; Jitendra, Edwards, Sacks, & Jacobson, 2004).

Along with inappropriately use of background knowledge, an inadequacy deficiency of vocabulary knowledge is another problem that negatively contributes in preventing students of comprehending a text (Graham & Bellert, 2005; Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Graves, 2004). Several researchers have found that students' comprehension of a passage is impacted by their familiarity with the words utilized in that passage (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Birsh, 1999; Bos & Anders, 1990; Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker 2001). For instance, McCormick (1999), as cited by Graham and Bellert (2005), explained how students' knowledge of vocabulary impacts their understanding of a written texts through providing the following example:

1. Apprehension of the semantic fields of morphological units is pivotal for deriving semantic content when reading. This seems to be consummately plausible, and most preceptors' ripostes to this attestation would predictably be, "Inexorably so!" (p. 256).
2. Knowledge of word meaning is important for reading comprehension. This seems to be quite logical, and most teachers' responses to this statement would be, "Of course!" (p. 256).

Even though these two passages report the exact message, they employ entirely different vocabulary words. A passage that is written with a lot of difficult academic terminology and vocabulary puts students in a very difficult situation where they have

a high error rate in the reading because of their failure to connect the passages to their prior knowledge. Using unfamiliar vocabulary also negatively influences the students reading comprehension, creating disappointment and loss of motivation to read (Graham & Bellert, 2005).

Understandably, beside an appropriate background knowledge of the topic, students need to have knowledge of the terminology and words utilized in the passage in order to better understand it (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Bos & Anders, 1990). However, when compared to their typical peers, students who have learning disabilities usually do not have a lot of vocabulary knowledge to bring to the reading activity (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001). In other words, they have serious vocabulary deficits (Clemens & Simmons, 2014; Jitendra, Edwards, Sacks, & Jacobson, 2004). Thus, their reading comprehension is negatively impacted by their lack of vocabulary knowledge.

In addition, Ricketts, Nation, and Bishop (2007) found that the limited amount of vocabulary knowledge that the students have could limit their understanding of a text, especially when the text contains unfamiliar vocabulary. Also, when compared to students with high comprehension skills, students with low comprehension exhibited vocabulary deficits and were only able to read fewer exception vocabulary. Similarly, Chou (2011) concluded that the size of vocabulary knowledge impacts students' reading comprehension. Thus, students with more vocabulary knowledge can better understand text when compared to students with less vocabulary knowledge. These results also consistent with the results of previous studies (e.g. Garcia 1991; Qian, 2002).

2.3.3 Lack of Reading Fluency

Reading fluency is an essential component of reading that refers to readers' ability to accurately, automatically, and rapidly read a written passage with suitable expression (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002; The National Reading Panel, 2000; Whalon, Al Otaiba, Delano, 2009). Fluency allows readers to rapidly process vocabulary units, such as letter sound correspondences in to understandable vocabulary, automatically make a connection between words, quickly process information, and thinking about the passage while reading, which all leads to construct the meaning of what they are reading (LaBerge and Samuels, 1974).

Having the ability to read rapidly and smoothly assists readers with both decoding and word identification, which results in saving more cognitive capacity for construction meaning (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002; Perfetti, 1985; Perfetti, 1977; Therrien, 2004). In contrast, having a slow word processing rate can hinder readers' thinking during the reading process and burden their working memory with their several attempts trying to sound out words, which lead to interrupt their understanding. In other words, instead of focusing on the content of the reading and how words are connected together, slow reading of words and information restricts readers' attention on letters and vocabularies, which prevents readers of processing information in their working memories for adequate time in order to gain meaning (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002; Perfetti, 1985; Perfetti, 1977; Therrien, 2004). Thus, beside assisting students to rapidly and accurately read and process information, reading fluency plays a critical role in facilitating their reading comprehension.

There is a strong reciprocal relationship between reading fluency and comprehension (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998; Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Pikulski & Chard, 2005; Speece & Ritchey, 2005;). Cunningham and Stanovich (1998) described that reciprocal relationship: Slow, capacity-draining word recognition processes require cognition resources that should be allocated to comprehension. Thus, reading for meaning is hindered; unrewarding reading experiences multiply; and practice is avoided or merely tolerated without real cognitive involvement. (p. 8)

Similarly, Hudson, Lane, and Pullen (2005) highlighted that "Each aspect of fluency has a clear connection to text comprehension" (p. 703). They clarified the link between reading fluency and comprehension by stressing that the lack of accuracy and rapidity in word reading reflects readers' deficit in fluency, which plays a major role in preventing them of gaining access to the meaning of the text. In other words, readers without fluency are at risk of misinterpreting the text. Moreover, the strong correlation that exists between measures of reading fluency and direct measures of reading comprehension highly supports the reasoning of this relationship (Deno, Mirkin, & Chiang, 1982; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Maxwell, 1988; Jenkins & Jewell, 1993; Jenkins, Fuchs, van den Broek, Espin, Deno, & Harris, 2003; Speece and Ritchey, 2005; O'Connor, Bell, Harty, Larkin, Sackor, & Zigmond, 2002).

Although reading fluency is a critical skill that could be describe as a bridge that links between word recognition and reading comprehension through smoothing students' processing of information, students with reading difficulties often have deficits in the area of fluency (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002; Meyer & Felton, 1999), which prevent them of successfully construct meaning of a written text (Chard et al., 2002; Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Martin & Martin, 2001; Therrien, 2004).

That fluency difficulty is related to the students' inability to read sight words, failure to decode words, and deficits in accurately and rapidly read phrases and sentences (Chard et al., 2002). Other researcher has observed that the majority of experience academic failure due to their deficits in reading fluency, comprehension, or both (Billingsley & Wildman, 1988; Therrien, Gormley, & Kubina, 2006; Therrien, 2004). Similarly, Wolf and Katzir-Cohen (2001) highlighted that having difficulties in some aspects of reading, such as single naming-speed deficits, phonological weakness, or failure in both, can lead to the development of problems in reading fluency and comprehension.

2.3.4 Limited Knowledge of Common Text Structures

Having limited knowledge about the common text structures is another difficulty that can negatively influence reading comprehension of students. Text structures are the way that an author organizes textual information in order to communicate a message to a reader (Weaver & Kintsch, 1991). Knowledge of text structures plays a major role in facilitating learning by helping students to link information in text and differentiate between important and less important ideas (Sáenz, & Fuchs, 2002). It also facilitates learning of the textual materials by encouraging the students to ask relevant questions about the text while engaging in the reading process (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001). In addition, having the ability to recognize the different types of text structures contributes in improving the students' performance in reading (Englert & Hiebert, 1984). Meyer, Brandt, and Bluth (1980) found that having knowledge of text structures assists students in organizing information presented in the written text as they are reading, which results in improving and organizing their retelling skills. It is very important for students to have knowledge about text

structures because they are expected to deal with various types of text structures while learning and progressing through school (Graham & Bellert, 2005).

As students' progress through school, they encounter and deal with different types of textual information. These types of texts include, but not limited to poems, plays, stories, novels, descriptions, and reports. Among all the different types of text structures, narrative and expository are the most well-known types of text that students encounter while learning (Graham & Bellert, 2005). Expository text is a type of textual information is often developed to provide readers with new information and knowledge about world and natural phenomena (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Graham & Bellert, 2005). In other words, the main focus of expository text is on expressing ideas, concepts, issues, argument (Berman & Nir-sagiv, 2007), cause and effect, problems and solution, and comparison and contrast, definition and example (Anderson & Armbruster, 1984), as well as clarifying the logical relationship between them (Berman & Nir-sagiv, 2007).

Expository texts may take different forms, such as text books, new articles, and magazine articles (Weaver & Kintsch, 1991). In contrast to the expository text, the narrative text is a story that is intentionally written to amuse or entertain the reader with the text (Sáenz, & Fuchs, 2002). Narrative texts include, but are not limited to fiction, myths, plays, and legends. The components of the narrative texts often written through following the same story structure, which consists of setting, characters, events, and outcome (Graham & Bellert, 2005), which makes them easy for students to understand (Dickens, 2016).

Moreover, it was found that when compared to typical students, students with learning disabilities tended to slowly recognize and develop knowledge of the main components of narrative texts (Montague, Maddux, & Dereshiwsky, 1990) and expository text (Weisberg & Balajthy, 1989); thus, they tended to retell less information about the text. Similarly, Cain (1996) highlighted that when compared to younger children who corresponded on their comprehension skill, students with learning disabilities have less awareness of narrative text structure. Also, Saenz and Fuchs (2002) found that gaining meaning of an expository text is more difficult than a narrative text for most students. Also, students with learning disabilities face more challenges with comprehending expository text than with narrative texts.

2.3.5 Difficulty Making Inferences

Having the ability to make inference while reading is an essential standards-based skill that students need in order to comprehend a text (Cain, Oakhill, & Bryant, 2004; Hall, & Barnes, 2017; Kendeou, Bohn-Gettler, White, & van den Broek, 2008; Oakhill, Cain & Bryant, 2003; Rapp, van den Broek, McMaster, Kendeou, & Espin, 2007; Woolley, 2011; Yeh, McTigue, Joshi, 2012). Making inferences is the students' ability to (a) draw their own conclusion of what has been said in the text without the explicit comment of the author (Keene & Zimmerman, 2007), (b), make predictions prior and during reading, and (c), utilize pictures or imagery to assist with comprehension (Bintz, Pienkosky-Moran, Berndt, Ritz, Skilton, Bircher, 2012; Torgesen, Houston, Rissman, 2007; Jiménez-Fernández, 2015; Woolley, 2011). Therefore, being able to perform all these metacognitive skills requires the students to make connections between different types of information in order to construct meaning from the text.

Making inferences of a written text is a constructive cognitive process (Baretta, Tomitch, MacNair, Lim, & Waldie, 2009) that allows students to make a mental representation of a text by integrating different types of information in order to gain meaning of that text. For instance, students need to make a connection between the various parts of information that is exactly reported in the text (Elleman, Compton, Fuchs, Fuchs, & Jenkins, 2011; Hall, & Barnes, 2017; Woolley, 2011). That type of connection is called a text-connecting inference. Making a connection between a pronoun and the subject that refers to it is another example of the text connecting inference (Hall & Barnes, 2017).

Also, students need to integrate information that is presented in the text with their own personal experiences, prior knowledge (Elleman, Compton, Fuchs, Fuchs, & Jenkins, 2011; Hall, & Barnes, 2017; Woolley, 2011), wisdom, values, thoughtfulness, and creativity in order to obtain meaning of that text (Keene & Zimmerman, 2007). Making a connection between textual information and personal experience is known as a knowledge-based inference (Hall & Barnes, 2017). Hall and Barnes (2017) provided an example of that connection by stating that "A *knowledge-based inference* might draw on what the reader knows about people's motivations to infer why a character performed a given action" (p. 279). That complex nature of inference generation skill contributes to that numerous students with disabilities experience failure in reading comprehension (Laing & Kamhi, 2002). Students with learning disabilities find it difficult to make inferences that are necessary for gaining meaning of the written text, which negatively influence their comprehension (Hall & Barnes, 2017; Sencibaugh, 2007; Jiménez-Fernández, 2015; Mccormick, & Hill, 1984).

2.4 Effective Reading Comprehension Strategies

Possessing the ability to gain meaning of a written text is an essential skill that all students need to ensure success in academic life (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1997; National Reading Panel, 2000; RAND Reading Study Group, 2002; Taylor, Alber, & Walker, 2002). However, students are different based on their ability to comprehend a written text (Grünke, Wilbert, & Stegemann, 2013; Swanson & De La Paz,1998; Taylor, Alber, & Walker, 2002). For example, unlike the unskilled readers, skilled readers usually use one or more cognitive skills and strategies while reading that they use to construct meaning of a text.

In other words, proficient readers read more strategically than struggling readers do. Strategic readers are active learners who are able to acquire strategic reading skills by themselves without being taught. They are able to construct meaning from a text through identifying and recalling significant information, monitoring their comprehension, integrating their prior knowledge with the new information, and summarizing as well as directing their learning (Gajria, Jitendra, Sood, & Sacks, 2007; Swanson & De La Paz, 1998).

In contrast, unskilled readers, including students with learning disabilities, usually fail to acquire strategic reading skills by themselves. They are not able to read strategically due to their failure to monitor their comprehension (Bos & Vaughn, 1994; Garner & Reis, 1981; Swanson & De La Paz, 1998), distinguish between various kinds of questions, appropriately utilize a specific strategy to gain meaning from a text (Raphael & Pearson, 1985), integrate prior knowledge with new information, or make a connection between the ideas within a passage to gain meaning (Oakhill & Patel, 1991). Also, inefficient readers are not able to utilize a

repair strategy, such as rereading a certain paragraph of a text when they fail to understand it (Garner & Reis, 1981).

Since poor readers have difficulties being strategic readers by themselves, they need to be taught how to implement strategies while reading to facilitate their understanding (Swanson & De La Paz, 1998). Since reading comprehension is a complex skill that has not been naturally acquired by all students, teachers can enhance students' reading comprehension by implementing different research-based reading comprehension strategies (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013; Pressley, 1998; Swanson & De La Paz, 1998; Osborn & Lehr, 1998). According to the report issued by The National Reading Panel (2000), teaching reading comprehension to students plays a significant role in helping them to improve their overall academic performance and not only in the reading area. Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires teachers to satisfy the literacy needs of all students, including those who have disabilities, especially those whose reading skills are below grade level. Meeting these needs requires teachers to provide students with intensive, supplemental, accelerated, and explicit intervention and support in literacy (International Literacy Association, 2016).

Reading comprehension strategies are instructional methods developed in order to teach students how to construct meaning of a written text (Johnson, Graham, & Harris, 1997; Schunk, 2003). These strategies include, but are not limited to, graphic organizers (DiCecco and Gleason, 2002; Kim, Vaughn, Wanzek and Wei, 2004), cooperative learning (Crowe, 2005; Klingner &Vaughn, 2000;), story-mapping (Grünke, Wilbert, & Stegemann, 2013; Johnson, Graham, & Harris, 1997), self-

questioning (Crabtree, Alber-Morgan, and Konrad, 2010; Taylor, Alber, & Walker, 2002), and peer-assisted learning strategies (Fuchs et al., 2002; Mathes et al, 1998).

Also, the National Reading Panel (2000) has highlighted six reading strategies that have effectively improved students reading comprehension. These strategies involve monitoring comprehension, using visual aids, answering questioning, generating questions, understanding story structure, and summarizing. Even though there are numerous reading comprehension strategies available for students to use, they should be explicitly taught to them. Explicitly teaching students how to use various comprehension strategies before, during, and after reading play an important role in improving their ability to comprehend what they are reading (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Liang, Peterson, & Graves, 2005; Pressley and Wharton-McDonald, 1997). Teachers can make significant efforts to improve their students' understanding of what they are reading by teaching them different effective reading comprehension strategies (Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013).

There are several teaching models that are recommended to explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies to students, such as the National Reading Panel (2002) model, Ellis's (1994) integrated strategies model, and Harris & Graham's (1992, 1996) self-regulated strategy development model. For example, according to Harris & Graham's self-regulated strategy development guideline, in order to explicitly teach students how to implement a specific reading strategy, teachers should engage the students through the following steps. These steps include

a) explicitly explaining the reading comprehension strategy, its steps, how to implement the strategy, and the importance of using it. b) activating students' prior background knowledge and other skills that students already know in order to

facilitate learning of the new strategy, c) providing students with corrective feedback about their current functioning level while using the strategy, d) modelling how to correctly use the strategy to the students while thinking aloud, e) providing students with multiple opportunities to cooperatively practice the strategy with their classmates, f) providing students with an opportunity to independently practice the strategy, g) helping students to generalizing the strategy by discussing where it is appropriate to use the strategy.

Detailed explanation of some the reading strategies that have been proved by research as effective reading comprehension to enhance students' reading comprehension are provided in the next sections. The following five strategies have been selected because they have been frequently cited by researchers as effective strategies to improve reading comprehension skills.

2.4.1 Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers are useful in the sense that "a picture is worth a thousand words" (Sam & Rajan, 2013). It is a visual model that has been used to organize, classify, and rearrange textual information in a very simple way that makes it easy to be remember and understood (Dye, 2000; Kim et at., 2004; Liliana, 2009; Muniz, 2015). That organization can be done through the "use of lines, arrows, and a spatial arrangement that describe text content, structure, and key conceptual relationship" (Darch & Eaves, 1986, p. 310). Representation of information through the graphic organizer can take different forms, such as semantic maps, concept maps, flowcharts, Venn diagrams, web, framed outlines, and story mapping (Bromley, Irwin-DeVitis, & Modlo, 1995; Dexter & Hughes, 2011; Kim, Vaughn, Wanzek, & Wei, 2004; Kim, Vaughn, Wanzek, & Wei, 2004). Although graphic organizers may take different forms, their

common goal is to facilitate the students' understanding through visualizing textual information.

Graphic organizers are a reading strategy that is helpful to both typical developing students and students who have learning disabilities. They benefit students in several ways. First, graphic organizers help students to make a connection between their previous knowledge and the new information in order to facilitate their understanding (Sam & Rajan, 2013). Second, they provide students with tools they can use to examine and show relationships of a text. (Anders, Bos, & Filip, 1984; Bos, Anders, Flip, & Jaffe, 1985, 1989; Darch & Eaves, 1986; Darch & Gersten, 1986; Sam & Rajan, 2013).

Third, they provide students with a framework that organize their thinking in order to avoid any perceptual errors that may emerge through the reading process and recall information (Boon, Burke, & Fore, 2006; Boon, Burke, Fore, & Hagan-Burke, 2006; DiCecco & Gleason, 2002; Sam & Rajan, 2013). Fourth, graph organizers help students to better comprehend textual information through making a prediction about the text, making inference, checking their understanding while reading, and remembering major information provided by the author (Chang, Sung, & Chen, 2002; DiCecco & Gleason, 2002; Kim, Vaughn, Wanzek, & Wei, 2004; Pang, 2013; Sam & Rajan, 2013). Graphic organizers also help students to gain meaning of complex vocabulary (Anders, Bos, & Filip, 1984; Bos, Anders, Flip, & Jaffe, 1985, 1989; Sam & Rajan, 2013). It also helps students write well-organised summaries of a text.

Finally, graphic organizers can be used at any stage of reading process (Darch et al., 1986; Simmons, Griffin, & Kameenui, 1988; Sam & Rajan, 2013). Chang et al. (2002) pointed out that "among the numerous reading strategies, graphic strategies are

one of the few approaches that can be applied at the preview stage before reading, during the reading process itself, and at the stage after reading" (p. 5).

The focus of the majority of the studies on graphic organizers is on students without learning disabilities, with few research studies conducted to examine the effectiveness of using graphic organizers with students who have learning disabilities. For example, graphic organizers were found to be a beneficial learning tool that improved the comprehension achievement of both high school students with learning disabilities (Darch & Eaves, 1986; Darch & Cersten, 1986) and students who have learning disabilities in grade 4 through 6 (Darch & Carnine, 1986; Griffin, Simmons, & Kame'enui, 1991) by clearly demonstrating the relationship between main concepts, relevant details, and vocabularies from a textual information (Anders, Bos, & Filip, 1984; Bos, Anders, Filip, & Jaffe, 1985, 1989). DiCecco and Gleason (2002) conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of using graphic organizers with middle school students who have learning disabilities.

In this study, specific graphic organizers were utilized as after reading activity to measure the students' factual comprehension of a social studies content. The students' comprehension was measured through using both multiple-choice test and written essays. The findings showed that students who were assigned for the intervention group performed better on relational content knowledge than students who were placed on the traditional instruction condition. They also supported that graphic organizers are an effective tool that can be used in order to improve students' comprehension because they help students to visualize the relational knowledge from expository text book.

Kim, Vaughn, Wanzek and Wei (2004) performed an intensive meta-analysis of the 21 intervention studies that assessed the effect of using graphic organizers on reading comprehension for students with learning disabilities. These studies involved a total of 848 students with learning disabilities. The results of their review indicated that, although improving reading comprehension is very difficult task, it could be done through using graphic organizers. Taken together, these studies suggest that using graphic organizers as a reading strategy can improve comprehension of students in all grades levels and across all academic subjects.

2.4.2 Collaborative Strategic Reading

Collaborative strategic reading is another strategy that has been widely used to improve students' reading comprehension. It encourages students' engagement in reading activities to extend their own learning and enhance the learning of their peers by working in small heterogeneous cooperative groups and engaging in peer discussion (Klingner, Vaughn, Boardman, & Swanson, 2012; Klingner, Vaughn, & Schumm, 1998; Klingner & Vaughn, 1999). Its main aim is "to teach students for specific comprehension strategies they can use with all informational and expository texts they read" and to assist them in developing strategic techniques for comprehending a text (Liang & Dole, 2006, p. 7).

Collaborative strategic reading method consists of a set of four cognitive strategies that students as a cooperative group engage with before, during, and after reading a text. The first strategy is "preview". In this phase, students are required to activate their previous background knowledge, make a prediction, and brainstorm about the given topic before they start the reading process. To learn as much about the passage as they can in a brief period of time. It serves to motivate students' interest in the

topic and to engage them in active reading from the onset. The second strategy is "click and clunk", a self-monitoring activity during reading. In this phase, students have an opportunity to manage their understanding by writing down all words, sentence, and phrases that are unfamiliar to them or difficult to be understand (clunk). They also write down words, concepts, phrases, and sentences that are familiar to them and can be easily understood (click). After students identify "click and clunk", they will work together as a group to re-read each clunk and try to gain meaning from the context.

Through that group activity, students have an opportunity to learn from one another through discussing all the identified clunks and try to figure them out. The goal is to teach students to monitor their reading comprehension and to identify when they have breakdowns in understanding. The third strategy is "getting the gist". In this phase, students engaging in a specific activity while reading in which they analyse and synthesize the important information of each paragraph as well as restate its main idea. This strategy can improve students' understanding and memory of what they have learned. The fourth strategy is "wrapping-up". After students complete the reading activity, they start to generate questions about the text. Students within a cooperative group have an opportunity to ask their questions and respond to their groups questions. The students close their group debate by exchanging significant ideas and information from the text (Boardman et al., 2016; Klingner, Vaughn, Boardman, & Swanson, 2012; Klingner & Vaughn, 1999).

Although collaborative strategic reading can be used to improve reading comprehension for all students, (Klingner et al., 1998; Klingner, Vaughn, Argüelles, Hughes, & Leftwhich, 2004; Vaughn et al., 2011), it was originally developed to

solve three issues in education. The first issue is the urgent need to satisfying educational needs of diverse learners. It primarily focuses on students who have learning disabilities, English language learners, and struggling learners. The second issue is the need to produce instructional strategies and techniques to improve students' reading comprehension for students to better understand textual information. The third issue is the need to place students in a cooperative learning environment to profit from peer-assist instruction (Flavell, 1979; Klingner et al., 1998; Vaughn, Klinger, & Bryant, 2001).

More recently, Boardman, Vaughn, Buckley, Reutebuch, Roberts, and Klingner (2016) conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of using collaborative strategic reading on reading comprehension of elementary students with learning disabilities. The study was conducted in 14 elementary schools. The participants were 60 teachers who were delivering instructions in the general education classrooms. Teachers in the control group were asked to teach their students through using their traditional instructional method with no collaborative strategic reading intervention, and the teachers in the intervention group were required to teach their students through implementing collaborative strategic reading intervention. Teachers who were assigned to the intervention group participated in a one day or collaborative strategic reading intervention professional development. Within that professional development training, they learned about the rationale of using the strategy, how to teach it, how to support students while implementing the strategy.

There are also several studies that have supported some components of cooperative strategic reading that positively impact the reading comprehension of students with learning disabilities (Kim et al., 2006). The first component is working within a

cooperative group. As a strategy, cooperative strategic reading provides students with a cooperative learning environment in which they work as disproportionate group to assist each other, check their understanding of the textual information, and discuss their thought interaction with each other. In other words, cooperative strategic reading improves students' reading comprehension through promoting their helping behaviours. (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Klingner &Vaughn, 2000). Also, Swanson and Hoskyn (1998) found that working within cooperative group enhanced the academic achievement of student with learning disabilities.

The second component is students' interaction through generating question about what they read. Both generating and answering questions about the textual information allows students to engage within a reciprocal and cooperative teaching activity, which allows them to exchange their ideas and confirm their understanding and helps them to better comprehend the textual information. Through having a discussion with their group, students can think about what are they reading and easily recall story details and retaining information for long period of time (Crowe, 2005; Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Klingner & Vaughn, 2000;).

2.4.3 Peer-assisted Learning Strategy

Peer-assisted learning strategy is another evidence-based strategy that is beneficial for increasing reading comprehension for all students. It is a commonly known instructional method used to enhance students' reading comprehension through engaging in a peer-tutoring activity. In this method, teachers pair a skilled reader with an unskilled reader and allow them to cooperatively engage in different reading activities that are designed to improve reading comprehension.

When implementing this strategy, teachers assign each student with a specific role to play, either tutor or tutee, while engaging in pre-structured reading tasks and activities. Students in each group have an opportunity to exchange the roles while working together on the reading activity. By allowing students to exchange roles, both tutor and tutee have an opportunity to practice the same responsibility that their partner will learn and practice the required skills to effectively perform the pre-structured reading activity. Each pair cooperatively works together for at least four weeks before they are paired with different classmates (Fuchs, Fuchs, Al Otaiba, Thompson, Yen, McMaster, Svenson, & Yang, 2001; Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, & Simmons,1997; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Burish, 2000; Falk & Wehby, 2001; Greenwood, Carta, & Hall, 1988; Gresten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; McMaster, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2007; Rafdal et al., 2011; Topping, 2001).

The peer-assisted learning strategy improves the students' reading comprehension through three reading activities, which are (1) partner reading with brief retelling, (2) paragraph shrinking, and (3) prediction. In the first phase, the partner reading activity, each student in the pair is required to read aloud for approximately five minutes before exchanging role. The reading starts by having a skilled reader within each pair read to the unskilled reader. After the skilled reader finishes reading, the unskilled reader is required to reread the same passage. While one student is reading, the other students carefully listens and tries to identify any reading errors and, if any have occurred during the reading, provide corrective feedback.

Having the proficient reader read first allows the unskilled reader to become familiar with the text and feel more comfortable before reading it later. After students each have a turn at oral reading, they move to the retelling phase, which lasts for

approximately 2 minutes. The unskilled reader starts by telling the proficient reader what he/she learned from the text. If the unskilled reader fails to remember the information from the text, the proficient reader as a tutor provides corrective feedback. The main aim of the retelling phase is to provide the students with opportunities to discuss and confirm their understanding of the reading material.

In the second phase, paragraph shrinking activity, the skilled reader as a tutor starts by reading paragraph by paragraph aloud. After reading each paragraph, the skilled reader stops to check reading comprehension of the unskilled reader through asking questions that require summarizing and identification of main ideas of the paragraph. In this activity, the unskilled reader is required to provide a summary of each paragraph in 10 words or less. If the unskilled reader uses more than ten words to summarize the paragraph, the skilled reader will ask the her/him to shrink it. However, if the unskilled reader does not accurately provide a good summary or provides irrelevant information, the skilled reader should reread the paragraph and summarize it. This activity lasts for approximately 5 minutes before the students exchange roles. The main purpose of the paragraph shrinking activity is to enhance reading comprehension through identifying the main idea and providing an accurate summary of each paragraph.

Prediction delay is the last reading activity that students engage in while implementing the peer-assisted learning strategy. In this phase, the proficient reader starts by making a prediction about the textual information, reading the text aloud, either confirming or disconfirming the prediction, and summarizing the text. While the proficient reader is reading, the unskilled reader monitors the reading process to identify any possible mistakes, determine if the reader is making a reasonable

prediction and accurately summarizing the text. After five minutes, the students switch roles (Fuchs et al., 2001; Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, & Simmons,1997; Simmons et al., 1994).

Peer-assisted learning strategy was designed by Doug Fuchs, Lynn Fuchs, and Debbie Simmons as a collaboration project with several public-school districts in Tennessee to help all students improve their reading skills (Fuchs et al., 1997; Sáenz, Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). Peer assisted learning strategy improves student learning by allowing students to have access to the general curriculum, pairing students with different ability level, allowing students to engage in several reading activities through peer tutoring, allowing teachers to satisfy the individual educational needs of all students (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Thomas et al., 2001; The Access Center, 2008).

2.4.4 Story-mapping

Story-mapping is another evidence-based reading strategy that has been widely used to enhance students' reading comprehension. It is a cognitive intervention that requires students to fill a pre-structured template with story grammar components as headings to visualize, organize, understand textual information from a story. The template works as a framework to guide students' attention in order to identify the story grammar elements while reading and writing them on the provided template (Boulineau, Fore, Hagan-Burke, & Burke, 2004; Mathes, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 1997; Onachukwu, Boon, Fore, & Bender, 2007; Swanson & De La Paz, 1998; Stetter & Hughes, 2010; Stagliano & Boon, 2009; Zahoor & Janjua, 2013).

Although story-mapping may take different forms, such as a diagram or graphic organizer, it should contain basic story grammar elements, such as the title, characters, time, setting, conflict, major events, solution, conclusion, and moral of the

story in order to guide students to organize, record, and comprehend information about a story (Grünke, Wilbert, Jürgen, & Kim, 2013; Daqi, 2007; Mathes, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 1997; Stein & Glenn, 1979; Stagliano & Boon, 2009; Wade et al., 2010). Improving the students' abilities to successfully identify all these story components plays a critical role in making a connection between the important events in the story, which can lead to a better understanding of the text.

Story-mapping is one of the reading strategies that can be used before during, and after the reading process for different purposes in order to facilitate students' comprehension of a text. For example, using the strategy before reading encourages students to activate their previous background knowledge about the topic, organize their discussion, and write some elements about the text. While using story-mapping during the reading process can help students direct their attention and continue identifying and writing relevant information about the text. Finally, using story-mapping after reading can help students to review and confirm their understanding of the text (Boulineau, Fore, Hagan-Burke, & Burke, 2004; Kirylo & Millet, 2000).

Although story mapping as a reading intervention can be used at any stage of reading process, it should be effectively taught modelled for students for best results. There are several considerations that teachers should take into account in order to teach their students how to correctly utilize story-mapping in order to improve their reading comprehension. For example, before teaching story-mapping, teachers should determine their students' reading abilities and weakness in order to decide what story-grammar elements are most appropriate to be taught to students. Teachers also should decide which vocabulary and phrase they will use in order to create and fill the story

map. Finally, teachers should determine whether to provide the students with a pre-structured story map or allow them to create their own.

After preparing to teach the phase, teachers should move to the teaching phase in which they start by modelling to the students how to find the required components of the story and record them into the story map while thinking aloud. In addition, teachers should explicitly use different self-instruction sentences during the modelling phase in order to hold students' attention and help them successfully apply the strategy steps. During the guided practice phase, teachers provide students with an opportunity to apply the strategy steps while providing them with immediate corrective feedback. Teachers should gradually remove the use of story-mapping, graphic representation, and reduce the rate of providing corrective feedback during independent and mastery sessions in order to help students to individually utilize the strategy (Grünke, Wilbert, Jürgen, & Kim, 2013; Mathes, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 1997; Swanson & De La Paz, 1998).

Story-mapping has been proven as an effective intervention when used by students to enhance reading comprehension across different grade levels, such as elementary level (Boulineau, Fore, Hagan-Burke, & Burke, 2004; Davis, 1994; Idol & Croll, 1987; Stagliano & Boon, 2009; Paris, 2007), middle school (Boyle, 1996; Gardill and Jitendra, 1999; Vallecorsa & deBettencourt, 1997; Onachukwu Boon, Fore, &Bender, 2007), and secondary level (Dimino, Gersten, Carnine, & Blake,1990; Gurney, Gersten, Dimino, & Carnine, 1990). More specifically, using story-mapping has positively impacted reading comprehension skills for students by improving their abilities to successfully identify story-grammar elements, such as setting, conflict, and characters (Boulineau, Fore, Hagan- Burke, & Burke, 2004; Dimino, Taylor, Gersten,

1995; Davis, 1994; DiCecco & Gleason, 2002; Idol & Croll, 1987), order the story information in its correct sequence (Gardill and Jitendra, 1999; Pearson, 1985), develop a connection that clearly show the relationship between the story components (Pearson, 1982), identify and recall important information from a text (Idol, 1987; Idol & Croll, 1997; Stetter & Hughes, 2010), improve overall comprehension of a narrative story (Paris, 2007), and correctly answer comprehension questions about an expository text (Onachukwu Boon, Fore, & Bender, 2007; Stagliano & Boon, 2009).

For example, Boulineau, Fore, Hagan-Burke, and Burke (2004) conducted a study to examine the influence of story-mapping on students' reading comprehension through a descriptive ABC design. The participants of this study were six elementary school students with learning disabilities. They were receiving special education services in a resource room due to their difficulties with reading. The study took place in resource room setting where the students usually receive their reading instruction. Participants' performance on story-grammar elements was probed by teachers, but no instructional strategy was provided during the baseline condition.

However, in the intervention condition, teachers provided the students with direct instruction, support, and feedback of story-grammar elements using the story map strategy. The intervention was provided to the students during the last half hour of their daily reading time. During the maintenance phase, the teacher removed all instruction and support. The students' performances were measured by calculating the percentage of the correct answer completed on each story-map (template) immediately after participants read each story and completed a template. The findings of this study show significant improvement in the percentage of correct story elements for all students from baseline to the intervention conditions. It was found that story-

mapping is an effective intervention to improve the reading comprehension of students with learning disabilities when reading a narrative text. Also, the same positive impact was found for all students during the maintenance phase. Similar findings also were found by other studies (Paris, 2007; Stagliano & Boon, 2009).

2.4.5 Self-questioning

Self-questioning is an affective metacognitive reading strategy developed to develop reading comprehension in all students. It is an intervention reading approach that requires students to actively engage in reading process by frequently stopping and asking themselves several questions about the reading in order to monitor their own comprehension and meaning construction of the text. Asking questions while involving in the reading process provides students with an opportunity to think about what are they reading, be active and independent readers, and be able to appropriately reflect on their reading (Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013; National Reading Panel, 2000; Rosenshine, Meister, & Chapman, 1996; Rouse, Alber-Morgan, Cullen, & Sawyer, 2014; Taylor, Alber, & Walker, 2002;). Although self-questioning has been proved to improve reading comprehension for all students, it may take various forms.

There are two forms to generate questions while implementing self-questioning strategy in order to increase students reading comprehension: student-generated questions and teacher generated questions. Generally, self-questioning strategy requires students to develop their own questions during and after the reading process. Requiring students to generate their own questions and answers to them allows students to monitor their comprehension, locate important information, better understand the text, and retain knowledge that they gained from the text.

However, the low reading abilities of some learners, may negatively impact their ability to create their own questions while reading. Therefore, teachers may decide to provide them with a list of questions to use during and after the reading in order to direct and facilitate their reading comprehension. Overall, the student-generated question method is mostly used with students without disabilities, while teacher-generated question is used with students with disabilities (Rouse, Alber-Morgan, Cullen, & Sawyer, 2014; Swanson & De La Paz,1998; Taylor, Alber, & Walker, 2002).

Regardless of the form that self-questioning may take, teachers should select the most appropriate form based on their students' learning abilities and explicitly teach it to them. Students should be explicitly taught how to use self-questioning for different purposes as it relates to reading comprehension. These purposes involve developing questions about main ideas and details (Hagaman, Casey, & Reid, 2010; Wong and Jones, 1982), integrating self-questioning with story-grammar components (Johnson, Graham & Harris, 1997; Singer & Donlan, 1982), summarizing and retelling textual information (Mansett-Williamson, Dunn, Hinshaw, & Nelson, 2008; Mason, Snyder, Sukhram & Kedem, 2006), and confirming understanding of information (Hagaman, Casey, & Reid, 2010; Johnson, Graham & Harris,1997; Mason, Snyder, Sukhram & Kedem, 2006). Regardless of the purposes beyond using self-questioning, teachers teach the strategy through following an explicit teaching technique.

When using this strategy, teachers should follow an explicit technique while teaching students how to generate questions about the reading in order to improve their reading comprehension. Those teaching techniques include modelling, guided practice, and independent practice. In the modelling phase, teachers model when to stop reading,

and how to generate questions relevant to the text, and answer the questions during and after the reading process through thinking aloud. In the guided practices phase, teachers provide the students with an opportunity to practice generating questions and answer them under their supervision and provide them with corrective feedback. In the independent practices, students are provided with an opportunity to independently practice the strategy (Mahdavi, & Tensfeldt, 2013; Swanson & De La Paz, 1998; Taylor, Alber, & Walker, 2002).

Several studies have examined the effectiveness of self-questioning on reading comprehension of students. For instance, Crabtree, Alber-Morgan, and Konrad (2010) conducted a study to examine the impact of using self-questioning on reading comprehension of high-school. Participants were provided with a list that consists of five pre-structured questions related to different story components (e.g., characters, events, time, setting, and conflict). The students were required to stop their reading at three pre-determined stopping points in order to ask and answer the provided questions. They were required to record their responses on the self-questioning form.

The results indicated that the students reading comprehension of a narrative texts and retelling significantly increased after teaching them through using self-questioning. Also, the results show that after implementation of the strategy, all participants were able to maintain their reading comprehension outcomes. Specifically, they were able to determine their stopping points and use the strategy after removing some prompts. Similar results were found by several other studies (Davey & McBride, 1986; Graves & Levin, 1989; Nolte & Singer, 1985). Self-questioning also has been demonstrated to improve reading comprehension for students with learning disabilities by improving their abilities to respond to inferential questions (Taylor, Alber, & Walker,

2002) and by allowing them to actively engage with the textual information and generate their own questions (Chan, 1991; Gaultney, 1995; Johnson, Graham, & Harris, 1997; Rouse, Alber- Morgan, Cullen, & Sawyer, 2014; Taylor, Alber, & Walker, 2002).

Overall, although various strategies have been demonstrated as effective intervention for improving students' reading comprehension, educators should not rely on one single strategy while teaching their students. That is because one specific strategy might be beneficial for one particular student, but not for another due to the unique comprehension problems that each student has. Also, educators should be aware of that even utilizing evidence-based strategies may negatively influence students' reading comprehension if it is employed in an inappropriate or very modified form (Kim, Linan, Thompson, &Misquitta, 2012; Watson, Gable, Gear, & Hughes, 2012).

2.5 Classroom-based Reading Comprehension Assessments

Reading comprehension assessment is an instrument that has been developed and used to measure and determine students' reading comprehension levels (Dewitz, 2003). It is an essential tool to measure the effectiveness of teaching reading and to check the efficiency of a reading intervention method designed to respond to educational needs of students (Woolley, 2011; Caccamise & Snyder, 2005). In other words, assessment helps determine why students have comprehension difficulties, so their teachers can develop appropriate instruction to meet their students' individual needs (Carlson, Seipel, & Mcmaster,2014). It also allows teachers to determine (1) whether or not the students have mastered the pre-determined criteria for their grade levels, (2), determine how effectively students utilize particular comprehension strategies, (3), and find out why some students may struggle (Klingner, Vaughn, &

Boardman, 2014). In contrast, the lack of using assessment tool may lead educators to the failure to meet the individual educational needs of students and place them in an inappropriate intervention program, which will negatively impact students' academic achievement (Woolley, 2011).

There are numerous assessment tools and tests available to measure reading than for other academic areas (Lerner & Johns, 2012), such as formal and informal assessment (Oakhill, Cain and Elbro, 2015). Based on the purpose of this study, the focus of the assessment theme as a part of the literature review is on the informal reading comprehension assessment, classroom based assessment. Therefore, in the following section more details and examples about classroom-based assessments are provided.

Informal assessment is a type of assessment that is most commonly used by classroom teachers (Ortlieb & Cheek, 2012). Informal assessment is also called Classroom-based assessment (Serafini (2010). It is known an informal assessment because (1) it is often created by teachers, and (2) its administration does not require following specific procedures to implement the assessment or specific time to finish the test. Mainly, informal assessment is criterion referenced. That is because they assess the students' information on a particular topic or their abilities to perform a pre-determined set of skills as evaluated by some criteria (Ortlieb & Cheek, 2012).

Informal classroom-based assessment is a critical component of classrooms' activities. That is because it plays a major role in assisting the teachers to determine the individual strengths, ability, needs, and weakness of each student in the classroom, which helps teachers to better serve a student through the most appropriate instruction based on his/her individual needs. Serafini (2010) referred to several features that make the classroom-based assessment more efficient than standardized tests for

assisting teachers to support students' learning. First, classroom-based assessment is frequent. That means that in order to collect data about a students' performance, teachers do not need to stop the student from what they are doing to collect the data. The assessment takes place while students are engaging in the learning process and it ongoing, not only for one day. Second, classroom-based assessment is non-competitive.

Teachers use the collected information to determine students' academic progress over time. Thus, in contrast to the standardized test, teachers use that information to compare a student's performance to himself/herself, not to his peers. Third, classroom-based assessment focus on the students' strengths. Through using classroom-based assessment, teachers can determine what each student can do and what is the most appropriate learning starting point for him/her. In other words, in contrast to the standardized test, classroom-bases assessment aims to enhance students' weakness rather than creating a profile of students' strengths. Lastly, classroom-based assessment is used to drive an instructional decision. That data collected by classroom assessment help teachers to (1) develop the most appropriate instruction for students, (2) make a better determination about what lesson would be more effective to teach, (3) determine what supportive material to use during their lessons, and (4) uncover challenges that students may have.

There are different types of informal reading comprehension assessments that can be used by classroom teachers. These include, but are not limited to: Cloze procedure (Ahangari, Ghorbani, & Hassanzadeh, 2015; Habibian, 2012; Kibui, 2012; Spinelli, 2012), informal reading inventory (Barr, Blachowicz, Bates, Katz, & Kaufman, 2007; Burns and Roe, 2011), retelling procedure (Dory, Popplewell, & Byer, 2001; Hagtvet,

2003), and think aloud (Klingner, Vaughn, and Boardman, 2014; Serafini, 2010; Spinelli, 2012). Since one of the research questions that are leading this study focuses on the classroom-based assessments, more details about these classroom-based assessments are provided in the following section.

2.5.1 Close Assessment

Close Assessment is a classroom reading technique used to measure students' reading comprehension level (Ahangari, Ghorbani, & Hassanzadeh 2015; Spinelli, 2012). It is a cognitive task that measures reading comprehension by providing students with a written passage in which certain vocabulary is missing at fixed intervals in the passage. The student's job is to supply the words that have been deleted from the passage (Gellert & Elbro, 2013; Spinelli, 2012). In order to correctly restore the missing vocabulary that belongs to a particular sentence in the passage, students need to recognize the contextual information surrounding it, which helps them guess the missing word and comprehend the passage (Spinelli, 2012; Trace, 2016).

According to Spinelli (2012), "this assessment procedure measures students' ability to read and interpret written passage, to understand the context of reading material, to use word prediction abilities for comprehension, and to use cues to identify words" (p. 224). In other words, to successfully supply the missing vocabulary, the student needs to engage in a variety of cognitive activities, such as reading, word prediction, making a connection between information in the text, and making inference, which all are necessary skills for comprehending a text (Kibui, 2012). Kibui (2011) noted that there is a correlation between how efficiently students can restore the missing vocabularies in Close Assessment and other criteria of how efficiently and correctly they can obtain meaning from written passages.

Several studies have highlighted that Close Assessment is a beneficial tool for measuring students reading comprehension (Yamashita, 2003). Williams, Ari, and Santamaria (2011) conducted a study to compare the achievement of 100 students on a silent reading test and two types of Close Assessment tests (Maze and open-ended) to determine which test format makes major greater variance in reading comprehension. The participants were two group of postsecondary students, struggling and typical. The findings of this study indicated that there is high correlation between both Close Assessment and the reading comprehension test ($r = .68$ and $.52$, $p < .00$). More recently, Gellert and Elbro (2013) developed a quick 10-minute Close Assessment that required participants to accurately comprehend information and concepts across the passage in order to correctly guess and fill in the deletions. The participants were 204 Danish adults. The results indicated that students' performance on the Cloze test were highly correlated ($r=.84$) with their performance on a 30-minute standard question-answer comprehension test.

Therefore, Gellert and Elbro (2013) concluded that close test could be employed to assess reading comprehension. In addition to its role in measuring students' reading comprehension, there are some other advantages of Close Assessment that may encourage teachers to utilize it. The first advantage is that Close Assessment can be easily developed and scored by teachers (Kibui, 2012; Spinelli, 2012), the second is that it can be administrated to students individually (Spinelli, 2012) or in large group settings (Spinelli, 2012; Kibui, 2012), and the third is students' familiarity with the test application, procedure, and instruction due to the current wide use of Close Assessment in schools (Kibui, 2012). Beyond the individual student, Close Assessment can also be a helpful tool in determining whether or not the reading material developed for a particular grade level is appropriate for the students' reading

ability (Spinelli, 2012). A final advantage is that Close Assessment provides students with an interactive model that allows them to interact with the text in order to gain meaning of the text (Kibui, 2012). All of these features lead to the wide utilization of Close Assessment by educators.

2.5.2 Informal Reading Inventory

Informal Reading Inventory is another example of a classroom reading assessment that has been commonly used to measure students' reading comprehension (Spinelli, 2012; Serafini, 2010; Nilsson, 2013; Ford and Optiz 2008). It is an assessment method that contains a group of levelled vocabulary lists (i.e., sight words) and levelled reading texts that ranged from an easy to more difficult level, as well as comprehension questions that are stated to each text (Mercer, Mercer, & Pullen, 2011; Paris & Carpenter, 2003; Serafini, 2010). The aim of using the levelled vocabulary lists is to (1) assess the students' knowledge of sight words, (2) gain information on how students decode unfamiliar words, and (3) determine the most appropriate levelled text for each student to read. After determining the student's reading level, the levelled reading passages are used to gain information about the students' ability to comprehend the words based on the context of the passage and provide information about the strategies students use in order to understand the passage (Spinelli, 2012). Informal Reading Inventory measures students' reading comprehension by requiring them to either provide a summary about the text or answer different comprehension questions about it (Serafini, 2010).

Informal Reading Inventory is individually developed and administered for each student based on his/her learning abilities (Serafini, 2010; Spinelli, 2012). More specifically, after determining the most appropriate passage for each student through

using word lists, the teacher asks students to read their passages either out loud or silently. In some cases, especially for a student with poor fluency skills, the teacher may read the passage for the student. After reading the passage, the teacher asks several comprehension questions that require students to recall information, in order to assess their comprehension (Nilsson, 2013; Paris & Carpenter, 2003; Spinelli, 2012). Thus, students' reading comprehension ability is determined according to their ability to answer questions about the text (Serafini, 2010).

Besides assessing students' reading comprehension, there are other advantages of Informal Reading Inventory. First, Informal Reading Inventory allows teachers to determine the instructional level for each student in order to provide him/her with the most appropriateinstruction (Kibui, 2012; Nilsson, 2013; Venn, 2006). Second, it also helps teachers in assessing students' reading interests and background knowledge about a particular topic (Klingner, 2004). Thus, teachers can successfully differentiate instruction and group students based on their learning abilities and interests (Monti, 2003).

Third, Informal Reading Inventory also provides teachers with needed data to prepare and apply appropriate interventions. For example, Dewitz and Dewitz (2003) found that Informal Reading Inventory is a useful assessment tool that teachers can employ to collect helpful data that help in planning instruction to meet the students' educational need. Another advantage is that Informal Reading Inventory allows teachers to obtain ongoing helpful data to determine the effectiveness of a particular intervention (Scott & Weishaar, 2003; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). The several advantages of Informal Reading Inventory serve as contributing factors in its wide use among teachers and reading specialist (Flippo, Holland, McCarthy, and Swinning,

2009), with these advantages playing a critical role in helping teachers to better serves their students' educational needs.

2.5.4 Retelling Assessment

Retelling is another type of classroom-based reading assessment that has been widely employed to measure students' comprehension (Dory, Popplewell, & Byer, 2001; Hagtvet, 2003; Serafini, 2010). It involves students demonstrating their understanding and what they have learned through retelling and summarizing in their own words the major concepts and ideas from a selected passage (Spinelli, 2012; Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005; Serafini, 2010). Students can demonstrate their understanding of the passage by either producing a verbal presentation or engaging in a written activity (Han, 2005; Morrow, 2005).

Having students use their own words while retelling, helps teachers to determine that the students accurately understand the passage rather than just literally restate the authors' words (Spinelli, 2012). Also, the retelling activity allows teachers to determine students' reading comprehension by assessing the accuracy of the information that they are retelling when compared to the original passage (Serafini, 2010). Although the main purpose of using retelling assessment is to measure the students' reading comprehension, teachers can differentiate how they use it based on students' learning abilities.

There are four different forms of the retelling assessment that students can use in order to demonstrate their understanding of a passage. These forms differ in their complexity based on the way that students read a passage and the method that they use to express their retelling. The first form is written-to-written, in which students read a written passage to themselves and show their understanding of the reading

material in writing. The second form is written-to-oral. This form requires students to read a written passage to themselves and verbally summarize what they have learn and understand from that passage. The next is oral-to-written. In this form, the teacher reads the passage orally to a student and ask him/her to express his/her understanding of the information in writing. The last form is oral-to-oral. For this type, the teacher starts by orally reading the passage to the student and then requires him/her to verbally respond (Brown, & Cambourne, 1987; Serafini, 2010). Regardless of the retelling procedure form that teachers decide to use, its main focus should be on measuring the students' ability to understand the major components, ideas, details, and concepts presented in the passage (Han, 2005).

In addition to measuring the students' reading comprehension, there are other advantages of using the Retelling assessment. First, it allows teachers to assess different comprehension skills, which play a critical role in helping students to develop the most appropriate instructional intervention based on the students' abilities and needs (Klingner, 2004; Roberts, Good, & Corcoran, 2005). Second, the Retelling assessment does not require a lot of the teachers' time for preparation, creating, administering, and scoring the assessment (Han, 2005; Roberts et al., 2005). Third, Retelling provides teachers with helpful information about their students' abilities to organize, classify, integrate and make an inference about a textual information. Fourth, it also assists the teachers in discovering the specific challenges that students face while organizing the various component of a story in order to gain meaning of the story as a whole (Han, 2005).

Another advantage is that it can be used an essential part of oral reading analyses or combined with another assessment, such as Informal Reading Inventories (Serafini, 2010). Lastly, compared to other assessments, teachers can teach, model, and employ Retelling assessments more easily (McKenna & Stahl, 2009). In sum, all these features emphasize that retelling procedure is an effective tool that can be used as a diagnostic before reading, during reading, or post-reading as a comprehension assessment (Han, 2005).

Several studies have examined the Retelling procedure as a reading comprehension assessment. For example, Morrow (1985) conducted a study to examine the impact of two methods on the students' comprehension. The participants were 59 kindergarten students. Twenty-nine of these students were asked to use their own words to orally retell the story after listening to it. Thirty students were asked to show their comprehension of the story by drawing a picture that explains the events in the story. Morrow found that students who orally retold the story showed improvement on the total comprehension score compared to students who were asked to draw a picture. Gillan and Carlile (1997) conducted a study to assess the students' story retention through the Retelling procedure.

The participants in that study were 24 school-age students. Half of the students were typical development students while the other half were students with specific language impairments. Several questions were developed and asked of the participants before they read the story in order to activate their prior knowledge. After reading the story out loud, the students were asked to retell the story. Their retellings were assessed, analysed, and compared with the original story. Even though students who had particular language impairments encountered more difficulties with the

initial reading of the story, they were able to retell as much word and information from the story as their typical achieving peers.

2.5.5 Think-aloud

Think-aloud is another assessment tool that measures students' reading comprehension. With this assessment method, the students are required to verbalize their thinking before, during, and after the process of reading a selected passage (Klingner, Vaughn, &Boardman, 2014; Spinelli, 2012). However, unlike the Retelling Assessment, teachers ask students to frequently stop reading at different points (e.g. before, during, after) and ask them several questions to encourage them to think aloud about the process and metacognitive strategies that they use while reading (Klingner, Vaughn, & Boardman, 2014; Serafini, 2010). By stopping students and asking them what are they thinking while reading, teachers can focus in on assessing students' comprehension during the act of reading (Serafini, 2010).

The focus of the questions asked during the assessment differ based on their purposes. For example, questions asked before the reading focus on how students feel about the entire passage. Students are provided with the main topic and asked to reflect on it, such as "What do you think this text will be about?" (Gunning, 2002; Spinelli, 2012). However, during-reading questions would be focused on assessing students' comprehension of a particular part of the text, such as "What were you thinking while reading this part?" "What is this part talking about?" Post-reading questions would focus on the entire reading passage, such as "Provide me with a summary of the entire passage." (Gunning, 2002). Asking these questions play a significant role in assisting teachers to recognize what metacognitive strategies a student utilizes in order to construct meaning of a text while reading (Klingner, Vaughn, & Boardman, 2014;

Serafini, 2010). These metacognitive strategies may include paraphrasing, generating questions, making inferences, drawing conclusions, making prediction, creating mental images, and monitoring understanding (Klingner, Vaughn, & Boardman, 2014). Thus, Think-aloud focuses on assessing the students' ability to control their thinking processes as well as determining whether or not they use appropriate metacognitive strategies while reading in order to gain meaning of the text (Spinelli, 2012).

Beside measuring the students' reading comprehension, Think-aloud as an assessment has other advantages that help teachers to better serve their students. For example, Think-aloud provides teachers with helpful information about the students' strengths and weakness, which contributes in developing recommendations and modifications for their instructional practice (Klingner, Vaughn, & Boardman, 2014; Serafini, 2010). Think-aloud technique also allows teachers to determine which passage is found to be the most important or interesting to the students (Klingner, Vaughn, & Boardman, 2014). It also allows teachers to observe the strategies that students apply while reading in order to understand a particular text (Serafini, 2010).

Beyond its benefits for teachers, Think-aloud assessment allows students to recognize and control the cognitive process and strategies they are utilizing while reading. As a result, they can work toward improving their comprehension (Oster, 2001). In sum, the Think-aloud activity provides teachers with different types of information about the students' reading skill that is not easily to be gathered or evaluated through other assessment tools, such as observation or interview (Serafini, 2010). Overall, although several classroom-based reading comprehension assessments exist as described

above, teachers should use the most appropriate assessment based on students' educational needs and abilities.

2.6 Chapter 2 Summary

Chapter Two presents a review of related literature which started with a discussion of reading comprehension definition, its importance, and the common reading comprehension problems that students with learning disabilities face while reading. Also, the literature review discusses in details different examples of the reading comprehension strategies and classroom based assessment tools that have been commonly used by teachers. Chapter Three provides detailed explanation of the research approach and the appropriateness of the design that will be utilized to investigate the problem under study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The chapter three of this study focuses on the methodologies by which the researcher was able to come out with the difficulties students have in connection with reading comprehension and analysis of such difficulties. The chapter covers the following sub-headings; research design, research site, sampling techniques, sample size and population. The chapter also captures the instruments for data collection and data collection strategies.

3.1 Research Approach

The selection of the appropriate research method for this research was guided by both the research purpose and the research questions. (Stake 2010) stated that the research questions play a major role in selecting the most appropriate research methodology. Additionally, (Creswell 2013) stated that when a researcher needs to deeply discover and understand a researchable problem or an issue, it is most appropriate to use a qualitative research method of inquiry. Also, obtaining a strong understanding and detailed description of an issue or problem can be only done through directly interacting and communicating with individuals who are involved in that issue (Creswell, 2013).

Because I was interested in identifying "what" reading comprehension problems impede students' reading comprehension, the students experience, and deeply understanding "how" their teachers help them overcome these challenges using reading strategies, how teachers respond to the problem (Buchler, 2013), a qualitative

research method seemed to be the most appropriate approach for conducting this study.

3.2 Research Design

Qualitative research approach was adopted by the researcher for this study. Anderson (1988) agreed in authentic setting cannot be best represented quantitatively and said, "qualitative research their natural settings and uses multi-methods to interpret, understand, explain and bring meaning to them'', similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (1988, p8) states that ''qualitative research implies an emphasis on processes and meaning rather than focusing on quantity or frequency. Qualitative research emphasis the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry''.

The foregoing discussion on the qualitative approach influenced the choice of the researcher to use the qualitative approach for this study. Yin (1989), views the use of qualitative methodology in case study as being the preferred strategy for research studies dealing with contemporary phenomena within a real life context. In the light of this the researcher settled on the qualitative method of research for the conduct of this study using Zorkor Senior HighSchool as a case study to find out the difficulties students face in reading comprehension. The study was to find out how student can overcome their comprehension difficulties. Asamoah – Gyimah. (2007) state that the term qualitative research describes a number of different techniques that share some common characteristics many of which can be traced to ethnography.

This study seeks answers to the following research questions;

1. What are the common reading problems that prevent students from comprehending what they reading?

2. what effective reading comprehension strategies do English teachers utilize in order to improve reading comprehension skills?
3. what are the classroom-base reading assessment tools that English teachers use to measure the students' reading comprehension growth and determine the effectiveness of these strategies?

3.3 Population

Population is said to be a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects or events that confines to specific criteria and to which a researcher intends to generalize the results of the research (Asamoah –Gyimah, 2007).

Information shows that the number of students who fail the English Language final paper at Senior High School level is quite alarming and cuts across the country. The researcher would have wished to involve all students and English language teachers of Zorkor SHS in this study but time and budget constraints would not allow that. The school has a population 1,560 students comprising 675 boys 885 girls. The total population of teachers stand at 53 comprising 46 males and 7 females. A population of the first year students and teachers of English of Zorkor Senior High School in the Bongo District in the Upper East Region of Ghana was therefore selected. The students were selected from Arts 20, business10, home economics 10 and Agric 5. The researcher therefore decided to conduct this study in the school to analyse students' difficulties in understanding comprehension questions and come up with ways to help students overcome their difficulties.

3.4 Sampling Technique

Asamoah – Gyimah (2007) posits that sampling is for the purpose of obtaining a group of subjects who will be representative of the larger population or will provide

specific information needed. To ensure accuracy and save time and cost as well as getting a manageable size for easy accessibility a small population size was used as representation of the larger population.

3.5 Sample size

Purposive sampling was used to select forty-five students out of a larger group consisting of twenty boys and twenty-five girls. The students were grouped as follows for the purpose of the study; very weak, weak and fairly good. Four English language teachers were also selected to be interviewed. These particular students and teachers were selected because I thought that they could offer useful information that can help achieve the purpose of this study.

3.6 Research Site

This Research was conducted at Zorkor Senior High School. The school is one of the newly senior high schools in the Bongo District. The school was established in 2009. The school offers Arts, Agric, Business and Home Economics programmes.

The choice of the school for this research was based on the following factors; It is one of the new schools in the district; the school offers English Language as a core subject of study and also the fact that the researcher is a teacher in the school which will make the work a little bit convenient to her.

3.7 Data Collection

In research work data collection is an important aspect. It is data gathered and analysed that leads to finding solutions to the problem being investigated. The researcher chooses the type of data collection techniques to use, the sources from

which to collect data and the procedures to be used to administer the data collection tools.

3.8. Instrumentation

The researcher used questionnaire, interviews, observation and students' exercises as data collection instruments to solicit data for this study.

3.8.1. Questionnaire

Questionnaires are said to constitute the first attempts at true scaling. Questionnaires are particularly advantageous when the sample size is large enough to make it expensive and time consuming to observe or interview every subject (Asamoah – Gyimah, 2007).

The researcher used the open ended questionnaire type to obtain answers from students to given questions. The questionnaire contained fifteen questions and the students were required to answer all the questions. The number of students to whom the questionnaire was administered was forty (45) of whom twenty (20) were boys and twenty (25) girls. The questionnaire was given individually to students to answer without pending than their names. They were told not to discuss the question among themselves.

3.8.2 Interview

This tool of data collection was to afford the researcher face to face verbal interaction with the respondents so as to get answers to questions prepared by the researcher in advance. Personal interviewing is the most usual method of collecting data in social surveys. It is very similar in nature and purpose to questionnaire and, except for

certain relative advantages the two techniques are essentially interchangeable (Asamoah –Gyimaa, 2007).

The researcher interviewed four English language teachers who were part of the sample for the study. The teachers were made up of three males and a female in order to save time and reduce cost. I used the structured type of interview. An interview schedule was prepared with a planned sequence of questions. I had to meet the interviewees individually at their own time to interview them. I built cordial relationship with the teachers which made them to freely respond to the questions and also asked for clarification where they were in doubt. The cordial relationship between the researcher and the teachers interviewed helped her to receive the most appropriate responses to the questions asked.

3.8.3 Observation

Observation is one of the approaches in selecting a data. Spardley (1980) posits that observations are frequently used to collect data because it assumes different roles in process. I had the opportunity to observe two teachers when they were teaching. The classroom conditions, teaching itself and the teacher learner relationship were all observed. The first teacher gave out a printed material to the students. Students were asked to read the passage on two occasions and the teacher finally guided them to answer the questions by explaining the different types of questions asked (content questions, language questions and affect questions).

Again, the second teacher made them to read the passage alright and he explained all the difficult words to them but failed to teach them how to answer the questions based on the passage.

3.9 Ethical Consideration

Punch (2000 p.75) posits that, "all social research involves consent; access and associated ethical issues, since it is based on data from people about people". Fowler (2014, p.140) maintains that ethical consideration is "a manner in which research is carried out so that no individual suffers any adverse consequences as a result of the study". Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) see ethical consideration as a question of right and wrong in conducting a study. Singleton (2010) states that ethical consideration is an act of immoral and responsible ways. In line with best practices, permission to conduct this study was duly sought from the authorities from Zorkor Senior High School.

The headmaster at a meeting with the researcher granted the researcher permission to conduct the research in the school. The consent of participants was also sought and they consented to participate freely in the study. Cordial relationship was established between the researcher and participants, and contact numbers were exchanged between researcher and participants to make communication easier between them. The rights of participants were respected because participants could decide without being forced, to respond to any issue. Participants reserved the right not to answer any question they find discomforting to them, to disclose or not to disclose personal information. The researcher promised not to disrupt participants' daily activities because of the study. Privacy, Confidentiality and anonymity of participants were maintained because no participant names were mentioned in the study.

3.10 Data Analysis

The collected data by the researcher from the various sources were put together and categorized under the following sub-headings; students' difficulties, impact on performance and possible solutions to the problem.

3.11 Data Presentation

The researcher presents in the next chapter, the data collected in a narrative style in order to ensure maximum comprehension of what has been presented.

3.12 Summary

This chapter looked at the methodology used for the study through the following sub–headings; research design, population, sampling techniques, sampling size, research site, data collection, questionnaire, interviews, observation, data analysis and data presentation.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

4.0 Introduction

Chapter four of this study deals with the analysis and discussion of the data collected in the cause of this study. The analysis will be based on data collected through the interviews, questionnaire and observations. The analysis of the data has been done extensively with the aim of answering the research questions posed in chapter one of this study.

4.1 Definition

All the participants expressed their own definitions of reading comprehension. Even though each definition seemed unique from the others, they all stressed the main purpose of reading, which is gaining meaning from a text. Teacher A described reading comprehension as a "*system used to read and then understand what they have read and be able to use that information and use higher level thinking to compare to other things, to other text, to make connection to themselves, and to their lives and to the world*." Teacher B defined reading comprehension as the mental processing of information. She shared I think when you're able to think about your reading enough to get a mental image to make a picture in your mind about what's happening, to be able to fully understand, the details and the main ideas of that selection. Teacher C emphasized cognitive reading skills in their definition, such as being able to recall facts and details, interpret, analyse information, as well as fluency and word attack, which help to facilitate the reader's understanding of text. Teacher D shared that My understanding of reading comprehension is being able to interpret a text, regardless of what the text type is, and you are able to retell besides analysing, interpret, and

understand what you have just read, be it an informational text or a story or that type of thing. When you are reading, I think you need to be able to understand the main idea and the key details that are being part of your writing, part of the reading.

4.1.1 How Comprehension Occurs

All participants highlighted the importance of being able to make a connection between a given text and a reader's background knowledge and world around them in order for reading comprehension to occur. Teacher B described that for students to understand the text, they need to be able to "*connect to prior knowledge. Also connect it to the world around them. How does this fit into my understanding of the world or to my understanding of people I know?"* She also provided more justification of how making connection between the reader's background knowledge and the text is important by sharing that I think that it makes the information relevant to them and personal to them through what I know about how our brains work and learning new information. We build our knowledge by adding to what we already know. That where the new information gets stored. So, if you have something to connect it to, so it is easier to take that new knowledge.

In addition to the importance of making connection between background knowledge and the text, three of the teachers emphasized the important of understanding the word meaning within the text. They believed that comprehension occurs through incorporating the use of background knowledge, past experience, and word meaning knowledge. Teacher A shared that I think reading comprehension takes place when a student is able to relate to the story and gains understanding and is able to have an opinion about the characters or details about the characters. The students may also relate past experiences to that information that recalling to and by doing that the

students understand the story and therefore reading comprehension takes place. Or if there is a past lesson or past experience that the student has that they can bring to the story that also helps with their comprehension. In order for students to make meaning of a text, they need to understand the words and how they are put together. It is easier for students to make meaning if they can connect with their prior knowledge, a previous experience or even just a previous learning experience so that they have some context and vocabulary. I could read a sentence in Akan, sure, but if I do not have any context or meaning of the words, if I cannot connect it to anything that I have learn at all, then it will mean nothing. He also believed that the text itself is not enough for students to get meaning from unless they are able to connect it to their background knowledge. He pointed that No, because I could physically read something in Akan, but I wouldn't have a clue what it means, unless I was able to connect it, unless I was able to grasp the meaning behind it and then apply it. I would have to have a knowledge of vocabulary. I would have to have the knowledge of dialog. I would definitely have to make a connection.

Teacher C clearly stressed the importance of having other reading skills besides the ability to connect the text to readers' background knowledge in order for comprehension to occur. He shared that *"first they have to be able to decode and have phonemic awareness, understanding the phonics in order to decode using the text clues also."* He also added that *"You have to have fluency too because if you don't have fluency, you are not going to understand what you are reading. The decoding piece of it and background knowledge to me is very important and being able to take connect text to the real world."*

4.2 Teachers' Personal Point of View Regarding Reading Comprehension

Three of the interviewed teachers expressed their philosophy regarding reading comprehension. Teacher B highlighted that reading comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading, and it is the last step of the reading process. She believed that there are some pre reading comprehension skills that students need to have before they can comprehend a text, such as being able to read words, being able to identify sounds. She shared that reading comprehension is really like the goal and the reason to read. You have got to understand what you are reading. I think it often times comes later in the reading process, especially for my students, they need to be able to read the words, they need to be able to identify the sounds, and then put it all together to finally make comprehension. She also emphasized the importance of reading comprehension by sharing that the idea of understanding the words on the paper and then taking it and applying or grasping what is being said in order to form your own ideas or in order to use that information in your own life is really what reading is about.

Teacher C stressed that the different types of students that he has have their own reading methods and behavioural aspects toward reading, which requires him as a teacher to use different approaches and strategies and to be flexible to meet his students' needs. He shared that ''My philosophy as it relates to reading comprehension is a kind of bilateral approach and as much as that students have a qualifying number of reading approach, but they then have some behavioural aspects to it too that you have to take into consideration. So, because of that, you have to have different approaches to know how you intervene in their reading weaknesses. So, my philosophy behind that has to do with using a number of approaches, have flexibility within those approaches as well. He provided further explanation about the importance of being flexible when working with students with reading difficulties. I

found it important to be flexible with these students because they have different needs. When you become an asset over time, you use a right intervention and strategies, and you do see a lot of growth.

4.3 Research Question 1: What are the common reading problems that prevents students from comprehending what they are reading?

The first research question asked about the reading problems that negatively impact the reading comprehension of students. The problems emerged in the following categories: (a) problems, (b) challenges, (c) and manifestation of the problems. In the following sections, I will separately highlight these problems and challenges based on the teachers' voices.

Problems

According to the participants' teaching experience and their responses to the interview questions, there are a variety of problems that prevent students with reading difficulties from comprehending a text. The problems emerged as the following sub-categories: (a) issues with background knowledge, (b) trouble with fluency, (c) difficulty with informational text, (d) difficulty with making inferences, (e) issues with vocabulary, (f) low reading level, (f) memory issues, and (g) non- interesting topic. Further explanation of these problems is provided in the following sections.

4.3.1 Issues with background knowledge.

Issues with background knowledge are organized within two types. The first type is the lack of background knowledge. The lack of background knowledge refers to the students not having adequate background knowledge and past experience, which are very important to facilitate their reading comprehension of text. Regarding the importance of having background knowledge and life experience teacher A shared

that "*I think the more life experience they have then the more they can connect those experiences to their reading and build on a knowledge base."* Teacher B pointed out that Background knowledge is important in reading because it builds connections, and what I mean by that specifically is, some students are involved with memorizing and recalling things from their background, and if it's a new story, they relate that to something that happened in their past and that helps build memory and helps them understand and comprehend the story that they are engaged in. All interviewed teachers agreed that their students who have reading difficulties do not have enough background knowledge, which prevents them from comprehending a text well.

Teacher C explained how the lack of background knowledge negatively impacted his students with reading difficulties from comprehending a text by sharing that. So, we have this passage about sailors and about when they introduce the steam system on boats and the students did not know some of the vocabulary words. I copied down the passage, it said, *"For thousands of years, sailors had made their boats go by using sails, and oars. It seemed foolish to believe a boat could be pushed by a steam*." And they did not know what a sailor was. They have never heard that word sailor. They did not know what a sail was or an oar, so all of that can get in the way of understanding what a passage was talking about. He stressed that students who do not have enough background knowledge and life experiences have nothing to connect the new information with, which makes the new information hard to understand. He also describes how this problem negatively influenced the students by sharing that; They have no frame of reference for the new information. They do not have previous knowledge to build upon so, for example, one of the students that I had did not know the rules of baseball, did not know the rules of the game, did not know what the word

"strike" meant, did not know what an out was and so, therefore, did not know how that character felt when they were struck out or gotten out.

Teacher B shared an example to explain how the lack of background knowledge might negatively impact the students' comprehension.

She stated that;

> *A student in form one is reading about the lifecycle of a geranium, but has never seen a picture or knows anything about a geranium. They are not going to connect to the story or remember any of those details. But if I just simply remind them that, oh yeah, your grandma has a geranium in her front yard, and then automatically the students can click to that, what it is, it is a flower, it is probably pink, and whatever, they can make more meaning and have more connection to real life or something.*

Teacher D shared that the students that I see at my school vary widely on social economics status,

> *So some of my poor students have not had the life experiences of going to a museum or even going to a pool before or seeing, watching a baseball game. Whereas, some of my other students can't believe they don't know what we are talking about because that's just part of their life. She provided further explanation by stating that Families with low socioeconomic status cannot afford to go do the things the other families can do like enrichment activities, like go to museums, or trips to the beach, or pay for their kids to play sports, so therefore, their kids may lack some of those experiences the other kind have had.* If they did not have access to a car, then they cannot as easily go and do things.

Most of the students that I have, come from the upper part of the country, has never been to the beach before, so did not know how sand felt, had not had that experience before.

Blanc and Tapiero (2001) concluded that background knowledge and demands of the task are very important elements in understanding and gaining meaning of a text. Also, to better comprehend a written passage, the reader needs to make a connection

between the new textual information and all information, world knowledge, and personal experiences he/she already has about the topic of the reading (McNamara & Kintsch, 1996). Making a connection between the reader's background knowledge and textual material is important for facilitating the reading comprehension process (Ferstl & Kintsch, 1999; Kintsch, 1998; Kintsch & Rawson, 2005). According to the present study, it seems to be a relationship between the lack of background knowledge, life experience, and the students' social economic status. Thus, students with low social economic status may not have as much life experience as other students do, which reduces their chances of building a sufficient amount of background knowledge regarding life experiences, situations, and activities.

The second type is the inappropriate use of background knowledge. These teachers reported that even though some of their students might have some background knowledge about the given topic, they inappropriately use or incorporate that background knowledge when they are reading.

Teacher A pointed out that;

> *With my form one students with reading difficulties, I noticed that some students that I work with have the tendency to elaborate a little bit too much, especially when we were reading. If we are reading a story, they will share information about the story, but they will bring irrelevant information into the story.*

They will make things up; they will give incidence that do not relate to the current story we are reading, so this become concern sometimes.

When he was asked to provide an example,

> *He stated I have this one boy who talks a lot. He also exaggerated a lot. We were reading a story regarding a crow and drinking water, and he went on taking about birds and what happened to the bird around their house, what he and his friend did, and then once again it was not relating to the story. He thought it was related to the story we are reading, but it was not. It was irrelevant information.*

I noticed that he was bringing information that was not related to the text he was giving stories that was not related to the story about the bird or the birds' problem. He just keeps going on and giving information that was not related, so that became a problem.

Teacher C pointed out that;

> *With my form one students they at times have inappropriate use of their background knowledge, so we will be reading a story and then when I go to ask the comprehension questions they will go off intentionally based on something they know or what happened in their background.*

So, for example, maybe there is a birthday party in the story and then instead they concentrating on what happened at the birthday party at the store in the story. *They will go off and start talking about maybe their own birthday party or a birthday party they went to, and it is not relevant to the story other than a birthday party occurred, and so they are using that background knowledge really inappropriately.* They just start to grasp, and then you have to stop them and pull them back to the story that they are reading and say, "No we are talking about this story."

All four teachers pointed some methods and strategies that they use in order to help their students overcome their issues with background knowledge. Two teachers shared that they use graphic organizer to help students build a background knowledge. Teacher B said, *"I do try to use like draw on their background knowledge through graphic organizer."* Teacher D stressed the importance of helping students through checking their background knowledge and building upon it. He shared that I think it's also a good way to start stories and reading is to tap into the background of the student, so you know where they are at and part of my understanding that I need to

build that background before we go to a new story or a story that students are getting for the first time.

He builds the students' background knowledge through explaining and demonstration. He shared that *"I will either do it by bringing things in, by explaining by demonstrating, by modelling those are ways that I bring in."* Different teachers stressed that teachers should know their students in order to provide them with the most appropriate story. Teacher A *"Knowing your audience when you choose a story and helping students to make those connections are pretty important."* Teacher B and C highlighted the importance of teaching vocabulary and showing pictures in order to help students to build background knowledge. Teacher A pointed that teaching the vocabulary and pre-teach background information, I use my phone, and we will look at pictures, and when I'm teaching the vocabulary, so that they have understanding whatever we're reading. So, I am trying to do that pre-teach of stuff.

In terms of using their background knowledge inappropriately, teacher D pointed some ways to help their students. He often stops his students and explicitly direct them to focus on the current story. He shared that you have to stop them and pull them back to the story that they are reading and say, "*No we are talking about this story."* So, they can use that background knowledge in appropriate times and off intention that are not relevant to what the comprehension is going on in the story.

Other researchers have similarly found that, although some students may have prior knowledge about the topic of a reading, they usually fail to appropriately use that knowledge in order to facilitate their understanding of the new textual information (Graham & Bellert, 2005; Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Carr & Thompson 1996; Paris, Lipson, & Wixson,1983)

4.3.2 Trouble with fluency

Based on the teachers' responses, trouble with fluency is another problem that negatively impact the students' comprehension. The trouble with fluency takes two different forms, which are fast reading and slow reading. All of the teachers interviewed agreed that lack of fluency and slow decoding negatively influence students' comprehension. Teacher *A explained how lack of fluency affects the student comprehension by sharing that I think a lot of the students I've seen they have a lot of trouble just with decoding.* So, a lot of cases it seems like their brain capacity and brain power is so focused on decoding the word that there's nothing left for comprehension, so a lot of times decoding actually gets in the way of comprehension. He provided further explanation by saying *that I think when the working memory is taken up by sound out words there is really no working memory left for thinking about the story and thinking about what is happening in the story if you are reading so slowly or so choppy that you cannot put together the meaning.*

Teacher B describing her students stated that *"They are just slow readers. They are slow to get the concept. So when they having trouble decoding, their reading is so choppy and slow, they are losing the meaning of the sentence."* She added that I can see that they are comprehending when I read them a story and then we talk about it. They can answer questions because they are listening. They have the capacity to comprehend, but it is when their reading in such a choppy way, and so slowly, then they start to lose the meaning.

Teacher C also explained how slow readers do not comprehend a text well by sharing that *"They are not able to understand what they are reading because they are spending so much energy and process on trying to figure out what the word is, they*

just lose the meaning. They are not putting it all together." Teacher A and C shared that they utilize rereading strategy and modelling in order to help their slow reading students with fluency in order to improve their comprehension. Teacher B described how she helps her students a lot of times, just rereading passages, rereading practice, providing a good model for them, so I will read it, so that they can hear where I pause, the intonation, and then say,*"can you read it and make it sound like me."*

Teacher D pointed out that I do accommodate in the classroom here. We do a lot of rereading, or the students will read it, and then I will read it over again, or listen to books on tape if it's a classroom book or something, so they hear it fluently.

The four highlighted that not only slow reading, but also fast reading might be a problem that prevents students from comprehending a text. One teacher pointed out that "I have had a student who just reads super-fast to get through it because he can read the words, but he goes so quickly that he has no idea what he is reading." Another teacher pointed out that "Some kids read very fast, but they do not understand what they are reading." When he was asked to provide an example, he shared that A present form one student that I have, and I had some students in the past, they were very good at fluency. They can read well, but sometimes they want to go fast and would not demonstrate comprehension when you would ask them questions about what they read, and quite often, they would have to go back and reread, so that is one situation.

Having a slow word processing rate can hinder readers' thinking during the reading process and burden their working memory with their several attempts trying to sound out words, which lead to interrupt their understanding. In other words, instead of focusing on the content of the reading and how words are connected together, slow

reading of words and information restricts readers' attention on letters and vocabularies, which prevents readers of processing information in their working memories for adequate time in order to gain meaning (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002; Perfetti, 1985; Perfetti, 1977; Therrien, 2004).

Teacher B pointed out that she helped her fast readers through one-minute prompts. She shared *that;*

> *"We did one-minute prompts where he would have to read, and he was thinking "I get as fast", as I can and then when it comes to the retell, he can give me maybe one detail about that." The other teacher helps his fast reader students through rereading. He stated that "They want to go fast and would not demonstrate comprehension when you would ask them questions about what they read and, quite often, they would have to go back and reread."*

4.3.3 Difficulty with informational text

All interviewed teachers agreed that form one students have hard time reading and understanding informational text when compared to fantasy or narrative stories. Teacher C shared that I had a student last year that had a hard time with informational texts, but could follow a fantasy story or a narrative story quite well and tell you what happened in the beginning, middle and end, but then when it came to reading a book with lots of information, it was harder for her to recall the facts in the text.

Also, teachers explained why informational text is hard for their students. The interviewed teachers highlighted that their students face difficulty with understanding informational text due to the hard-academic vocabulary that have been used in these types of text. Teacher D stated that, there is really a pump up in informational text. They are reading a lot more science and more social studies, and so those are heavy in vocabulary, and our children just do not have that. So, all they know is that they want to avoid it because it is hard. You know they are already struggling with reading, but

then we get into informational text, and it is very tough because they do not have any knowledge of the vocabulary.

When teacher A was asked to share an example of his experience while working with students with reading difficulties, he pointed out that this happened with one of my students. We were reading a story about cleaning up our planet, as I explained before, and the student understood the concept. However, when we had a change of reading genres, and we went to science fiction, it had more technical terms in it, and the student struggled with words that he had never seen before, and there were some words dealing with fantasy that he had never seen before. So, it was difficult. Their previous story did not have the technical words that the science fiction did. So that is an example.

Teachers B, C stated that to be understood, informational text requires students to use high level thinking skills, which are weak for their students. One teacher shared that Informational text some requires that you have to recall certain facts and sequencing and details and recalling what happen first, seconds, and last. And that is a problem with students who have difficulty with recalling and comprehension. Three of the interviewed teachers mentioned some ways that they utilize in order to assist their students in understanding informational text. One teacher helped her students through teaching vocabulary. She pointed out that “You really have to focus on teaching the vocabulary so they do not lose comprehension.” Another teacher helped her students through reading the text to her students. She shared that “Therefore, I basically read the information out loud, and then It’s more of an oral comprehension, as opposed to him being able to decode the text on his own to be able to read.

4.3.4 Difficulty with making inferences

All participants mentioned difficulty making inferences as a problem that negatively influences the reading comprehension of form one students with reading difficulties. Teacher A stated that my students who do not comprehend have difficulty making inferences with the stories because they're looking when they are reading, they are just understanding the basic knowledge, the basic facts like literal facts. And then when they have to tie it to what might have happen because of something, they are not making that connection and therefore that affects their comprehension.

Teacher B described how making inferences is difficult for her students by pointing out that *"That's one of the hardest skills. I think that the students have to learn."* When she was asked to provide an actual example of how the difficulty making inference prevents her students from comprehending a text well, she shared that One student was reading a passage that said, *"It made Cynthia sad when her dad came home late*." And then later in the passage it said her dad came home late that night. So, one of the questions was" How did she feel? And if she cannot make the inference and put together the information that she (Cynthia) was always sad when her dad was late and, in fact, her dad was late that night, so she must feel sad, she could not put that together to make the inference that she, felt sad.

Teacher C pointed out that difficulty with making inference impact the students' performance on reading text. He shared that *"Inference is a problem of testing over the year that my students were weak."* The same teacher explained the importance being able to make inferences in facilitating understanding of the text. He shared that *"Contextually they are able to bring in their own personal experiences and try to develop a concept or the meaning of what is going on in the story, so that why*

inferences is important." He also explained why his students with reading difficulties have difficulty with inference by stating that What I have noticed so far in terms of making inferences requires that recalling strong memory skills, and how it impacts the students that I have worked with in the past and present is if you have poor skills in recalling information or once again the sequencing of the events becomes a problem.

All the participants shared some strategies and method that they use in order to help students with reading difficulties to improve their ability in making inference. Teacher A shared that The inferencing! I've used the comprehensive tool kit. It has a whole unit on inferencing, and that's been helpful with students. It basically has the formula like what you know plus what you learned from the story equals an inference, so they actually have them write it down and fill it out. So, what you know already, and they will write it down. What you learned from this story, and they will write it down. And then last, can you draw an inference from that or can you answer this question?

Teacher B highlighted the use of questioning in order to improve the students' ability to make inference. She shared that "we are working on the why and why if he cannot make inferences yet."

Making inferences of a written text is a constructive cognitive process (Baretta, Tomitch, MacNair, Lim & Waldie, 2009) that allows students to make a mental representation of a text by integrating different types of information in order to gain meaning of that text. For instance, students need to make a connection between the various parts of information that is exactly reported in the text (Elleman, Compton, Fuchs, Fuchs, & Jenkins, 2011; Hall, & Barnes, 2017; Woolley, 2011).

4.3.5 Issue with vocabulary

All interviewed teachers agreed that their students with reading difficulties have very limited amount of vocabulary, which negatively impacts their comprehension of text. Teacher A stressed lack of vocabulary as a problem for her students by sharing that *"vocabulary definitely is a big one. There are too many words in a text that they don't know or that they don't know well enough like automatically. Comprehension definitely is affected by lack of vocabulary."* Teacher B described her students by stating that *"They also have limited vocabulary, and so when you introduce a new word, they will not have any experience with the word. They will not even recognize it."* Teacher C shared that his students lack academic vocabulary, which prevents them from comprehending a text.

He pointed out that *"We talk very differently in a school setting than some of these students' homes. Even just the dialect is very different. If they are not exposed to academic English, it's going to be a challenge."* All the four interview teachers highlighted that difficulty with vocabulary might take different forms. These forms include multiple meaning words and multiple shape and size of the words. Regarding multiple meaning words, teacher A shared that with the student, we were reading about something a forest and a pond and they were talking about the bank of the pond, and when they didn't understand that bank had multiple meanings, they weren't understanding the bank around the water, all they could think was a bank. What's a bank? *"It's like, that's where you go to get money or something."* So, it wasn't going with the right context of the story. So especially when you have multiple meaning words; my student would have difficulty connecting it to the reading it makes no sense to them. Therefore, in the questionnaire a question was asked how does he help

his students to gain more vocabulary? He said, he helped his students through providing them with different example of text and words.

He shared that Showing them different types of text. If I do not show different types of text and of the words and their size, it will affect the students' comprehension. Because I know if I keep the word in insolation meaning, if they see the word and just write in one certain way, they can recall it. But when it changes in a different book, in a different setting, it becomes a problem and affects their comprehension and their fluency, and they can't read with understanding.

Qian (2002) pointed out that "having a larger vocabulary gives the learner a larger database from which to guess the meaning of the unknown words or behavior of newly learned words, having deeper vocabulary knowledge will very likely improve the results of the guessing work" (p. 518). Even though vocabulary knowledge plays a critical role in facilitating students' reading comprehension, some readers including students with learning disabilities and those who have low comprehension skills, fail to successfully comprehend a text due to their limited vocabulary knowledge (Clemens & Simmons, 2014; Jitendra, Edwards, Sacks, & Jacobson, 2004).

4.3.6 Low reading level

Forty percent of the participants shared that their students with reading difficulties have difficulty with comprehending a text due to their low reading level and lack of pre-reading skills. Teacher A shared that Students sometimes have two to three grade levels below reading, which puts some of them in basic reading level, which they're still trying to find the letter sounds and putting letters together to make the word. And if they are stuck in that, putting a whole sentence together, making an understanding the paragraph, of the deeper meaning, or taking it even further, is just not going to

happen. She added that “I have got a form one student who does not know his letter sounds and that is where we are kind of stuck right now.” She also mentioned how she helped her students to improve their reading level through teaching the pre-reading skills.

4.3.7 Memory issues

Teachers B and C mentioned memory issues as a problem that prevents students with reading difficulties from comprehending a text. He shared that, memory plays a part in it, and as much as that the student might not have seen the word enough and, therefore, interfere with ability to recall words, that could be words from the Fry List or words from their spelling list. So once again those all affect the students’ ability to read and memorise. When he was asked to provide an example, he reported that One particular girl that I have worked with, a very nice girl. She had difficulty recalling initial blends or word endings. She would try different techniques, but it would not work. This affected her overall comprehension, and we are still working on that. Another teacher pointed how low memory skill negatively impact her student’s comprehension by sharing that “I have one with memory issues too, and he won't remember what a letter is.”

4.3.8 Non- interesting topic

Only teacher B mentioned that if the topic of reading is not interesting to the students, that makes understanding the text very hard. She shared that “I think if they are not interested in the text, they have less motivation to read it, comprehend it, care about it, understand it. So, it is hard. It makes it harder if it's something that they're not interested in.” She explained how being interested in a specific topic helps students to understand a text through sharing the following example: I had a student whose

vocabulary was very behind, but when it came to the vocabulary like basketball, he knew all the terms, like dribbling, traveling, he knew, and so when he saw those in print he knew the words and was able to understand what the story was talking about when normally longer words like that, or specialized words, I would have had to teach. She also described the reaction of one of her students toward a topic that is not interesting to him by saying that "One of my students once said I do not want to read this story. This is dumb and just pushed it away."

Challenges

Based on the participants' responses and experiences while working with students with reading difficulties, teachers C and D mentioned one challenge that negatively influences the students' comprehension: a lack of opportunity to practice reading outside school. Teacher C shared that *"They have not been exposed to books at home during school holidays time. They just don't have that working knowledge."* Teacher D described it as a huge problem by sharing that "I think different social economic groups have different levels of that. But the population I have right now, I mean, some of these children say*, "I do not have books at home."* It breaks my heart, but how can they open up their mind to having that, that knowledge of different vocabulary, if they don't see it, if they don't hear it. he justified the importance of practicing reading by pointing that I just know that the more practice, the more reading, that the child does, it is going to give them greater vocabulary.

It is going to give them greater context and be able to make more of those personal life connections. I think students need to build vocabulary. They also need to listen to a fluent reader read to them, and practicing outside of the school day is critical. You cannot do it all at school. She also emphasized how practicing reading is critical to

helping students improve their reading skills by providing an actual example from her classroom: Well, I have two students. One student who has a very supportive and a very involved mom. She says that she has time to sit and listen to her children read their home work to her hearing once every day. He is making greater gains than my other student in comprehension and reading in general.

Manifestation of the Problems:

When are you first seeing the manifestation of the problems?

The participants' views regarding when they first are seeing the manifestation of these problems are organized within two parts. The first part is the manifestation of the problems based on the form. Three teachers reported that they start to notice these problems when students fail to learn the pre-reading skills. Teacher A shared that as early as they report first year, when they had trouble recalling alphabet, letter sound recognitions certain word, sight words. And so, you see a number of reading skills or pre reading skills that they have trouble focusing on. Teacher B stated that I can see it young, I can go into the classroom and tell you which student know the letters because they have been exposed, which ones have no clue. She stressed that even though she notices these problems in first year first term. SHS students are expected to read faster and know more. And do more and students with reading difficulties, they are not that. Instead of reading for the progress, instead of reading for the process, students are reading for information. In SHS, students are expected to get through decoding skills and comprehending text. Students with reading difficulties are not quite there yet, and therefore struggle with content. The class moves quickly through subjects, and students still decoding words are not focused on the meaning and understanding.

Teacher C pointed out that he starts to notice the manifestation of these problem in first year. He shared that "By second term, if they are not reading with good comprehension, then they really start to stick out, and you really start to notice." The second part is the methods and ways that teachers use in order to help their students to improve their comprehension before they reach third year. Four of the interviewed teachers shared different methods to help their students improve their comprehension and be ready for final exams.

Teacher B shared that "I can start using some of those comprehension strategies with them, small group, and use the strategies that we have talked about to help with their comprehension." She stressed that students should receive the needed support early and not wait until they fall behind their peers. She stated that "I think they can make progress overall and not fall far behind if the help starts earlier." Another teacher helps his students through teaching some reading skills, such as letter sound and sight words. He shared that "I help them work on letter-sound recognition, and I help them review sight words simple sight words." He explained how helping students through teaching them letter-sound recognition and reviewing sight words is beneficial to improve the students' comprehension. He shared that "Well, they gain a better understanding of the words and them details in the story. Also, they understand the whole story's plot." Another teacher explained how he helps his students before they reach third year by pointing that When reading comprehension is missing with my young students, I first seek out the specific skills lacking in that particular child. Many times, comprehension is lacking due to the inability to read fluently. This may even be due to lack of decoding skills. I would pick an intervention based on the skill deficit of the child. Many times, I will supplement a child's education with a direct instruction program, such as reading mastery, which is a direct instruction program

that targets phonemic awareness, phonics, blending sound together, reading words, making meaning of words, and finally, putting it all together. I would combine that instruction with practicing some listening comprehension strategies.

4.4 Research Question 2: What effective reading comprehension strategies do teachers of English utilize in order to improve reading comprehension skills?

The second research question explored the effective reading comprehension strategies that teachers of English utilize to improve reading comprehension of students with reading difficulty. Effective reading comprehension strategies organized into two main categories. These include: (a) the effective strategies and (b) the impact of the teachers' experience on selecting these strategies. In the following sections, I will separately highlight each category based on the teachers' responses.

The Effective Strategies

Based on the responses of the teachers of English, the category of the effective strategies category is divided into five sub-categories: (a) non-computerized strategies, (b) computerized strategies, (c) differentiating strategies, (d) criteria for selecting the strategies, and (e) onset and reasons behind using these strategies.

4.4.1 Non-computerized strategies

I defined the non-computerized strategies as any reading comprehension strategy that does not require a computer when it is implement by teachers or students. According to the teachers, there are numerous non-computerized reading comprehension strategies found to be effective to improve comprehension of students with reading difficulties. These include: (a) graphic organizers, (b) questioning, (c) story mapping, (d) peer-assisted strategy, (e) think aloud, (f) discussing the text, (g) explicit

instruction, (h) brain storming, (i) different grouping, (j) close reading, (k) collaborative strategic reading, and (l) cloze procedure.

Graphic organizer: All of the teachers interviewed mentioned different forms of graphic organizers as an effective reading comprehension strategy that helped to improve reading comprehension of their students with reading difficulties. These forms included Venn Diagram, T chart, and. Teacher B stated that "We also use a lot of graphic organizers for during reading and after reading." She also provided further explanation of how graphic organizer help her students after reading a text by adding that after they have read it, it can help to sequence events in the story to really firm up in their mind. What happened first, next, last. Also like picking out the most important things of the story, the most important ideas, or events to have like a graphic organizer about a character to really study that character kind of more in depth. So, I think it helps them answer questions about character's motivation or even to make inferences about what a character might do in the future or might do next.

Graphic organizers are useful in the sense that "a picture is worth a thousand words" (Sam & Rajan, 2013). It is a visual model that has been used to organize, classify, and rearrange textual information in a very simple way that makes it easy to be remember and understood (Dye, 2000; Kim et at., 2004; Liliana, 2009; Muniz, 2015).

Teacher A was asked to justify why he thinks graphic organizers are an effective strategy, he shared that Graphic organizers help student organize all that information, so they can come to a common understanding or a personal understanding. It helps them sequence events. It helps them tell the differences between characters. So, children can get a better understanding of what happened between two characters and over all increases their concept or comprehension about the story. He also added that

It presents what the students bring to the reading in terms of their background experience, what knowledge they have, and how they are related to what they are going to read, what they think the story is about in terms of predicting, and they actually read it, once again discuss how it is related to what they know.

Teacher C explained how graphic organizers help his students by sharing that I think the graphic organizer, like the Venn Diagram, can help organize their ideas, provide an opportunity for them to go back and reread the text, think more deeply about the text and really analyse it. We did a Venn diagram about the differences and similarities between a cat and a dog, so they had to go back to the text and find some of those similarity and differences.

Questioning*:* Questioning is another strategy that was mentioned by all interviewed teachers. Teacher A shared that we do a lot of questioning as they are reading. So, I will interrupt their reading to ask a question to see if they have understood so far of what they have read. And that starts off again as me leading it, and then hopefully, as they start to pick it up and do it in their minds on their own. When she was asked why she believed that questioning is an effective strategy for improving students reading comprehension, she shared that *"I think that it kind of reinforces while you are reading you have really got to be thinking. If you are just reading the words on the page, then your mind is not thinking about the words that you are reading, then that's not really reading."*

According to the participants' responses, based on the students' ability, questioning as strategy can take two forms, either the teachers question the students or the students question themselves while reading. One teacher shared that "I start by doing the questioning, and as we progress along, try to get them to question themselves to be

able to check their own comprehension." Another teacher stated that "if the ability is not there. then they are waiting for me to ask the questions." She explained why questioning is an effective strategy by adding that I feel like it starts to teach them, "Oh, I need to be paying attention as I go along, and I need to think about what I am reading, and if I have a question, I need to think about what the answer is, or if I have missed it, I have to go back and reread it.

Teacher D described how questioning as a strategy helped his students by sharing that When using questioning with my students, I have noticed that helps generate understanding of the main idea concept in the plot. Some students will go further and ask "what if" questions. They will also gain understanding of the details, and it will also bring in their own experiences.

Story mapping*:* All participants shared that story mapping is an effective strategy that helps to improve their students' reading comprehension. Teacher B reported that *"We do use story mapping."* She explained the benefits of story mapping: It gives them like an organized retelling of the story, so that they are kind of summarizing it and organizing it chronologically at the same time. It is giving them an opportunity to identify the characters, plot, setting, problem, and solution. The students read carefully to learn the details.

Teacher A pointed out that We use story mapping from the basic level on in a variety of ways, getting the children to understand. It is kind of like graphic organizer. It is another way of helping them put all of that information kind of in a file. Story mapping is useful.

Teacher C justified the benefit of story mapping by highlighting that when students know where to start, they can easily develop topic sentences, they can easily develop meaning from a story mapping. They can easily understand main idea. It develops details, it develops comprehension. Students are able to recall information quicker if they are using story mapping. Teacher D shared that *"I think it helps them improve their comprehension by matching the details with the main idea, sequencing events, adding "what if", and being able to predict."*

Peer-assisted reading strategy: Eighty percent of the total participants mentioned the peer-assisted reading strategy as effective for increasing the students' reading comprehension. Teacher B justified how peer-assisted strategy helps her students by sharing that I think sometimes they are more able to listen to each other than to listen to you all the time. And it just kind of motivates them if they see that their peers or their classmates are coming up with these ideas and are able to do these things. Then it kind of makes them want to be able to do it. She stated that with the strategy, students *"talking with one another, hearing what each other thinks, hearing what they have to say, hearing each other's personal connection to the texts."*

Teacher A described how peer-assisted strategy assists his students by sharing that *Students have a chance to learn additional information. They can coordinate, discuss, and reflect information that has been in the book and share with one another and feel more confident about what is going on in terms of general understanding of the text and the content.* He also added that peer-assisted reading strategy help students by providing them with a chance to learn from each other through close reading. He shared that with close reading, they can get to hear peers pronounce and they get the support of peers when they are practicing words. And it allows them to hear the word

as it should be pronounced. It gives them confidence and, one again, with practice they seem to improve over time.

Teacher C reported how that strategy helped his students by stating that

> *"I think being able to have to explain, being able to say your thoughts to somebody else, and have them understand what you are saying. Also makes the comprehension better and at a higher level."*

Peer-assisted learning strategy was designed by Doug Fuchs, Lynn Fuchs, and Debbie Simmons as a collaboration project with several public-school districts in Tennessee to help all students improve their reading skills (Fuchs et al., 1997; Sáenz, Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005).

***Think aloud**:* Sixty percent of interviewed teachers highlighted think aloud as an effective reading comprehension strategy. Teacher A explained how think aloud helps his students by stating that *"because they can see how I do it and then hopefully model it, and then they would be able to repeat it at some point."* Teacher C described how think aloud benefits his students by sharing that Think-aloud helps my students to understand what is read, what is needed, what they think about it. They also have a chance to share with other students in the classroom. It helps them focus on understanding the main idea when it comes to the reading.

***Discussing the text**:* Three teachers interviewed indicated that discussing the text with their students is another effective strategy that helps increase the students' reading comprehension. Teacher A described her use of discussing the text as a strategy as *"Stopping throughout the text. If we are reading something, I stop and we discuss part of that."* Another teacher clarified how having a discussion with her students about the text is an effective strategy by sharing that *"Some of them might just miss a*

piece of the story, but as we are talking about it like, "Oh! Yeah! That it is. And it makes more sense."

Teacher C pointed out that this strategy helps his students by allowing them to work together and learn from each other. He stated that they are learning from each other. And then also just they are hearing themselves say it out loud I think it helps them, as well as with the strategy of looking back in the text making sure they may highlight together they may say, *"no I don't think that's right let's go back to the text."* So, they can find out if they are comprehending it correctly because I talk to them, *"you have to look back and find the evidence in the text."*

***Explicit instruction**:* The interviewed teachers mentioned direct and explicit instruction as an effective strategy for improving reading comprehension of students with reading difficulties. Teacher D described how he explicitly teaches reading comprehension, *"I do a lot of direct instruction."* When he was asked how he teaches comprehension through direct instruction, he said that *"It's a lot of repeating things, where I say something and the children repeat back."* he added I think that is a really good strategy because I think that they are understanding even though they are saying back what you might ask or say. It keeps them focused. It keeps them on track. It keeps them moving along, so they have to suck in the information.

Brainstorming: Two teachers mentioned brainstorming as an effective reading comprehension strategy. Teacher D described how he use brain storming to help a particular student of his: I have a particular student that I am working with, and I use ABC brain storming with him. And what we do is, there are different letters of the alphabet and characters or something in the story that the student recalls that starts with the C for example. That student will write that down and talk about it. He can

pick five letters, he can pick ten letters, it is up to him. And once we pick those letters, we discussed how they are related to the story, and that increased the students' comprehension.

Different grouping: All interviewed teachers mentioned the using of different grouping methods while teaching reading comprehension to their form one students with reading difficulties. Two teachers pointed to small groups as an effective strategy. Teacher B shared how she uses small groups: I can tell them to turn and talk to their partner. How do you think she was feeling at the end of the story or at the beginning of the story and then they can tell what they think and then tell each other the reason why if they disagree?

> Teacher A mentioned that *"We do more like a whole group, but it is more like five or seven students. I think they hear more of what their peers say then they hear what I say."*

Teacher C said that he groups her students based on their learning abilities and friendship. He shared that I do different groupings. Sometimes, I will group students that are friends already because I know that they will work nicely together. Other times, I will group like a higher-level student with maybe a lower level student to really motivate the lower level student. He believes doing that helps students to improve their comprehension by talking with one another, hearing what each other thinks, hearing what they have to say, hearing each other's personal connection to the texts. They just seem more interested in what their peers have to say. They seem to have more interest and motivation.

Teacher D highlighted one-to-one as another grouping method that helps to improve his students' reading comprehension. He explained how he uses this strategy with students: When we do one-to-one, students share one thought from their reading that

they feel that is important. They can bring their past connection to what is going on in the story, and they are allowed to share that, but they can share one thing, and they can say one good thing or one bad thing within limit. He added that one-to-one helps his students by allowing them to formulate thoughts and opinions, which are important to our reading. It lets me know that they understood the story, and that they are starting to use higher level thinking when they answer questions from one-to-one. So, I like that that seems to work well.

Close reading: Three of the interviewed teachers mentioned close reading as an effective strategy that increases their students' reading comprehension. Teacher A shared how close reading helps his students: With close reading, they can get to hear peers pronounce, and they get the support of peers when they are practicing words, and it allows them to hear the word as it should be pronounced, gives them confidence and, one again, with practice they seem to improve over time. When he was asked to share an example, he offered that there is a student in my class who will not know words and struggles with sight words that are used in close reading. And when they allowed the opportunity to practice those words, they demonstrated over time that they comprehend the sight words better.

Teacher B shared an example that demonstrates how she helped one of her students through close reading: One of the students has a severe attention problem. So, there will not be any comprehension if I do not somehow get her attention and so I will do a strategy like close proximity. *I will sit close to her, and then I need to keep checking in with that student. I will ask questions directly to the student, so she is not off. I have to keep her attention.*

Collaborative strategic reading: Only teacher D mentioned collaborative strategic reading as an effective strategy that improves reading comprehension of students with reading difficulties. He shared that *"So when they are doing collaborative reading, working together is very familiar with them. I have to do a lot of pre-teaching through as far as the ground rules and, at least once a week, I remind them what the rules are with collaborative reading."* He justified why collaborative strategic reading is an effective strategy by adding that Honestly, with students with reading difficulties, when you do something collaborative, they understand that they each have a trouble, and so when one will not be able to answer the question, they will work together to answer the question. They are very generous in that. They help each other. So, if one does not exactly know the answer, they want to help each other. They kind of know each other's weak spots.

Collaborative strategic reading is another strategy that has been widely used to improve students' reading comprehension. It encourages students' engagement in reading activities to extend their own learning and enhance the learning of their peers by working in small heterogeneous cooperative groups and engaging in peer discussion (Klingner, Vaughn, Boardman, & Swanson, 2012; Klingner, Vaughn, & Schumm, 1998; Klingner & Vaughn, 1999). Its main aim is "to teach students four specific comprehension strategies they can use with all informational and expository texts they read" and to assist them in developing strategic techniques for comprehending a text (Liang & Dole, 2006, p. 7).

Cloze procedure: Teacher B shared that she uses cloze procedure passages to teach reading comprehension to her form one students. She explained how cloze procedure helps her students: Using the cloze procedure makes them think of the context clues

that are within the story so that they could figure out what word might go there. Also knowing a verb or words that make sense to whatever the sentence is that you want them to fill in the cloze word procedure. So, they have to be able to pull from what they have learned. *"Oh! Do I need to put this type of a noun or this type of a verb or this type of an adverb or an adjective to make sense to the story?"* So, using that procedure definitely helps to improve their understanding of what the text is asking them for.

Computerized strategies: In contrast to the non-computerized strategies, the computerized strategies are defined as any strategy that requires a computer when it used by students. On this aspect, no teacher responded because the school lacks computers, so they do not use those strategies.

Differentiating strategies: Eighty percent of interviewed teachers agreed that reading comprehension strategies are not one-size-fits- all. That means that some strategies might work very well with one student, but not with others. Therefore, the majority of teachers of English do not use the same strategy with all students, they differentiate. When teacher B was asked if she uses the same reading comprehension strategies with all students, she shared that *"No not with all students. I think just knowing your students that some strategies are going to work better for some or be more useful for some than others." When another teacher was asked the same question, he stated that "No. No. Everybody is different."*

> Teacher C shared that *"Definitely different, individualized." Only one teacher uses the same strategies with all students with reading difficulties. She reported that "I use similar strategies yes."*

4.5.4 Criteria for selecting the strategies. When you select your strategies, do you take consideration some factors such as students' previous knowledge, abilities, socio-cultural aspect sand needs? If yes, please provide me with an example.

Since 80% of the teachers who answered this question agreed that reading comprehension strategies are not one-size-fits-all, they take into consideration some criteria for selecting a strategy for a particular student. These criteria include: (a) students' abilities and needs, (b) current pre-reading skills and reading level, (c) prior knowledge, (d) learning styles, (e) strategies that used in general classrooms, (f) different tests.

Students' abilities and needs: Teacher A, B and C mentioned that they take into consideration the students' abilities and need when they select their reading comprehension strategies. When teacher A was asked about the criteria that he takes into consideration to select a strategy for his students, he shared that *"What their ability level is, what their strengths and weaknesses are, what their disability is, and you have to consider that." Another teacher stated that "their abilities, their strengths, and weaknesses."* He shared an actual example from his classroom, he shared that *"Some of my students are good writers. And I can ask comprehension questions that require them to write and recall, but some students I might have to do one-in-one with them to get their response out of them*." Teacher b shared that So, let me think back to last year when I had a girl with a learning disability. She had a hard time with time order. So, she could retell a story, but it was never in order. She would just kind of jump around as she remembered things. So, I thought, well a sequence of events, story map, or some time order words in there to help her structure her retell was really going to help.

Teacher c stated that I have two students of varying skills. One student has strong memory skills. The other student does not. With the student with weak memory skills, I might use a graphic that asks the students to recall additional details and I ask about the main ideas two or three times. So, he can have an opportunity for grasping the concept and the comprehension. And the other student who has stronger skills, I can give them a graphic organizer in which they can very much do individually. They may not need much direction.

Current pre-reading skills and reading level: Teacher A and D shared that they consider the students' current pre-reading skills and reading level when they select a strategy for their students. Teacher A shared that *"I want to see if they have pre-reading skills. That means, can they identify the alphabet? Do they know diphthongs and digraphs? The sight words? Do they know the first 100, the second 100?"*

Prior knowledge: Teacher C mentioned that they take into account the students' prior knowledge when they select a strategy for them. The teacher shared that *"once again the information that they are bringing. I definitely take into consideration their previous knowledge, especially if I have known them for a year or two. I have a good idea of their previous knowledge."*

Learning styles: All the interviewed teachers mentioned that they take into consideration the students' learning styles when they select a strategy for their students. Teacher D shared that *"I have students their learning style is very visual. So, I have used the draw up picture of that strategy, since that is their strengths and the story map because that is kind of a more visual way of looking at a story."* Teacher B shared that I have one form one student who is a completely visual learner. I mean, I can say anything to him he will not get it. But as soon as I draw picture of it, as soon

as I point to the words visually, he will get it. I have another who is completely opposite and makes things so difficult. Visuals are lost on him. He needs to hear the story more than once and ask and answer questions to internalize the story. So, I definitely take into account their differences.

Strategies used in the general classrooms: Three of the teachers mentioned that when they select a strategy for their students, they take into consideration the strategies that are used in the students' general classrooms. Teacher D shared that *"I also look at what their peers are working on and learning. And I try to match that if I can with some of the same strategies."* teacher A stated that "other strategies that are used by other teachers. They may have been taught a skill that I do not use that helps them. And so, I want to listen to what they use and then how to change and then incorporate that, as well. That helps them with reading fluency or word understanding.

The results of different tests: Only teacher B mentioned that she takes into account the results of different tests when she selects a strategy for her students. She shared that *"IQ test. I also look at the other academic tests that they do. And I do some informal testing myself to see which programs or strategies that I'm going to use with that particular student."*

4.5 Onset and Reasons Behind using these Strategies

All teachers shared that they start to use these reading comprehension strategies with their students as soon as they start reading comprehension lessons. Teacher A, B and D mentioned that they start using reading comprehension strategies with their students in first year. When teachers were asked why they start teaching strategies to their students in first year, one teacher shard that *"We need them starting to understand what they are reading right away. I mean the earlier you can get them, the better it is*

for them." Teacher A Explained So that they understand that when we read something, the whole point is to take meaning from it and understand more about our world. I want to give them that level of reading, and part of that is reading to them because some of them are struggling so much. So, I want to give them that desire to read and understanding what they are reading. Every student is different in terms of their ability to comprehend. So individually, I have to see where they are at, and I think they start more successful. That is my philosophy.

Based on the teachers' responses, two of them utilize reading comprehension strategies as a response to the reading developmental process. Teacher C shared that *"I would say more of the developmental process."* Teacher B shared that I think it's development process. I just think for developmental. They need to start as soon as they can.

Teacher A and B use reading comprehension strategies as a result of a student failure and a response to the reading development process. Teacher D said that I do not think it is as easy as one or the other. I think that it is both. I think the child comes to us with deficits in reading, right? And so, it is our job to remediate that. But I think it is a response to the way things are taught. They shared that they have two approaches to that. And as much as that developmentally, some children have some concerns and issues that have to do with recalling, they have issues regarding ability to concentrate and when they are manifested in the school environment.

4.6 The Impact of the Teachers' Experience on Selecting These Strategies

The impact of the teachers' teaching experience on selecting reading comprehension category is divided into two sub-categories: (a) how experience helps teachers to select strategies, and (b) ways to modify strategies.

How experience helps teachers to select strategies. All interviewed teacher mentioned that, as their experience of working with students with reading difficulties increased year after year, they were able to better serve their students and know what strategies might work well with them. Teacher A shared that I think once you have had more experience with students, you really get to know them quite well. So, you know kind of already what they need, what they had trouble with last year, what they are still struggling with. Teacher B shared that I do feel like, the more you teach, the more you kind of know what the students need. And each individual student has their own strengths and weakness. So, as I teach, I get better at that, and as I get to know the student, I get better at that, knowing what they need of me.

All teachers pointed that they are using only research-based strategies when teaching reading comprehension to their students. Teacher D shared that *"I usually use the research based strategies. I have done a lot of different programs. So, I have gathered a lot of different strategies and tools from the different programs that I have used with the students."* He justified the reason behind using only research-based strategies by adding that *"I just do not want to waste my time with a strategy that has not been approved or that I do not know it would work. So, I want to use my time with the students and waste less as I can." Another teacher shared that "I use research best practices. Those seems to work well."*

4.7 Ways to Modify Strategies

All participants agreed that they do modify the use of some strategies based on the students' educational needs and abilities. One teacher said, "I may adapt or tweak something here and there or add. Some of the strategies I may use with that particular

student that I have, I may break the strategy down into smaller pieces, practice them more, repeat it, practice it."

4.8 Research Question 3: What are the classroom-based reading assessment tools do teachers of English use to measure the students' reading comprehension growth and determine the effectiveness of these strategies?

The third research question asked how teachers informally assess the reading comprehension of their students. According to the teachers' responses, the informal classroom-based assessment emerged as the following categories: (a) importance of assessment, (b) informal assessment tools, (c) how often is reading comprehension assessed, and (d) ways to modify some assessment tools based on the students' needs and abilities.

4.8.1 Importance of Assessment

In terms of the importance of informal reading comprehension assessment, 80% of the interviewed teachers mentioned that informal assessment helps them in order to better serve their students with reading difficulties. It mainly provides teachers with a clear picture of students' reading comprehension level and performance. As a result, it helps to guide the teachers' instructions in a way that benefits the students. It also informs teachers whether or not the strategies that they are adopting work. Teacher A described how informal assessment help him by sharing that *"It gives me kind of a clear picture of where they are heading and how they are doing. I guess thinking about my teaching the next day and if I need to revisit a concept."* Teacher c shared that *"It tells me what to do next. It will tell me Oh! That strategy was not working, and let's try something else. It helps to guide my instruction. It gives me more of a clear picture of what the students are capable of.*"

Teacher b pointed out that I think assessment will drive my instructions to where their weaknesses are, and then I can apply interventions to their weaknesses and hopefully make them more independent and fluent readers, and that is my goal. It tells me how fluent students are in terms of their reading skills, what reading skills or interventions I might need to do in terms of those individuals or small reading lessons that I might need to approach in the future.

4.8.2 What are the informal assessment tools do you use?

The assessment tool refers to any informal assessment methods that teachers of English use to assess the students' reading comprehension and determined the effectiveness of the strategies that they have been used with students. Teachers pointed out different classroom based assessment tools that they use to assess reading comprehension of students with reading difficulties. These assessments include: (a) retelling, (b) questioning, (c) cloze procedure, (d) having students fill in graphic organizers, (e) writing activity, (f) informal reading inventory and running records, and (g) teachers made-tests.

Retelling: All teachers mentioned that they use retelling to informally assess the reading comprehension of their students. Retelling as an assessment requires students to either verbally or in writing retell and summarize the reading passage to the teachers. Therefore, teachers can determine whether or not the students comprehend the text well. Teacher a shared that I will ask them to tell me verbally what happened beginning, middle, next, so if their strengths are not writing, I still know that they understand what has happened in the story. I will sometimes also say, *"Okay, I need some details."* So, I want them to tell me a detail, something happened, something in a detail in the story. She also added that *"retelling is very effective. I mean, if they can*

tell some of the main ideas and details, whether or not they get the story." Another teacher stated that sometimes, I will just start all off with, *"Tell me what happened in this story."* Some students can just go on and on and tell you everything about the story. Some need a little more prompting. Okay, well then what happened? And then what happened next? And what happened at the end? and some can answer when prompted. She thinks retelling is a beneficial assessment because "It tells you whether they got to understand what the most important part of the story is, if they connected one event to the next to go through the story from beginning to end."

Teacher C shared that *"I think retelling tells the most. I use that one a lot. If a student can retell a story to me, then they got it. They may not remember the details, but the meaning is there. It tells me what they understood."* Another teacher pointed out how she differentiates retelling based on the students' abilities by sharing that "I use both oral and written. Again, if they are unable to really write clearly, because a lot of my students cannot. These students have difficulty also with being fluent in writing, and so I may choose to do an oral retell." Another teacher shared that I have noticed with my students, retelling allows me to check their understanding if they're comprehending the materials, see their ability to recall information, see how they sequence things. I can measure their comprehension by their ability to recall and give me information about the details that they read. Retelling allows students to confirm the information they get from the story.

Cloze procedure: Teacher A, B and D use cloze procedure to assess reading comprehension of their students. Teacher A pointed out that "I do use a cloze procedure. It has missing words that they have to fill in order to see if they comprehend it. I have used it more for understanding the who, what, when, where,

why, the questions of the story, making sure that they have comprehended what they have read." Another teacher stated that *"It helps them understand certain words, certain phrases, certain inflection on word. I feel comfortable, and I do think it is helpful"* He added that *"cloze allows me to see if the students know how to select words within that story and assess their reading and comprehension and word skills."* Teacher D shared that it is very specific. *It looks as if the students can read a sentence and fill in the blank that is missing, then they grasp the sentence's meaning and get the whole picture through that. It could be a measurable tool that we can use to kind of monitor comprehension progress.*

Cloze Assessment is a classroom reading technique used to measure students' reading comprehension level (Ahangari, Ghorbani, & Hassanzadeh 2015; Spinelli, 2012). It is a cognitive task that measures reading comprehension by providing students with a written passage in which certain vocabulary is missing at fixed intervals in the passage. The student's job is to supply the words that have been deleted from the passage (Gellert & Elbro, 2013; Spinelli, 2012). In order to correctly restore the missing vocabulary that belongs to a particular sentence in the passage, students need to recognize the contextual information surrounding it, which helps them guess the missing word and comprehend the passage (Spinelli, 2012; Trace, 2016).

Having students fill in graphic organizers: Two of the teachers mentioned that they usually ask their students to fill graphic organizers to assess their reading comprehension. Teacher A described his use of a graphic organizer by sharing that *"It is informally to assess what they know, what they learned, and what they did not know. As an assessment, it allows them to interrupt information from reading, to add to their stories, and to gain language skills by verbal presentation."*

Teacher B pointed out that filling in a graphic organizer is helpful for student because it is able to have them hold on the parts of the story. If I am asking them usually, I can have them do it independently after they have had numerous practices on filling their own graphic organizers and answering oral questions. She also shared that she uses graphic organizers *"just as a quick informal assessment to see if they are learning the information and comprehending what the information has to say."*

Writing activity: Teacher C and D mentioned that they ask their students to express their reading comprehension through a writing activity. Teacher C shared that *"Having the students express their comprehension through writing that is a big one for me, I like that."* He added that It helps them in so many ways, but in terms of me, it is easier for me to see what they comprehend in writing because I can always have it in front of me. I see them organize their thoughts, I see them compare and contrast what they gained from the book, from what they recall from their head. By using writing, it gives them a freedom to add and take away details that are not important.''

Informal reading inventory and running records: Only teacher A mentioned that he is using informal reading inventory and running records to assess the students' reading comprehension. He shared that *"Informal reading inventory. It's a quick measure that gives you a good measure of did they get the main point of the story."* He added that they usually have questions, like within the text questions and beyond the text, so I can see a lot of my students get the questions that are within the text. Those are the ones they can go back and find the answers to write in the story. Beyond the text not quite so much. It is like, "Why did the author includes a table on this page?" And that is a little more difficult for them sometimes. And then beyond the text, it seems to be the most difficult because that's usually the inferencing.

In terms of running records, he shared that "I normally use to monitor their reading running record with some comprehension questions afterwards, and that is oral mostly. That is my informal assessment." He reported some of the advantage of using running records by adding that You can use it with whatever they happen to be reading. You do not need something special. You can use questions that are provided. Usually we have books with questions provided for that, or you can create your own, so its flexible to use.

Teachers made-tests: Only teacher D shared that he usually creates his own informal test to assess the students' reading comprehension. He stated that *"I can develop my own test. So, there will be some open-ended questions. There are some multiple choices, and there will be some questions to demonstrate their overall comprehension."* He explained that how teacher made tests help him assess his students *"When students answer the questions, especially the open-ended questions. Because the open-ended questions allow them to bring their own thoughts and understanding. Therefore, I can tell if they are generally answering the questions correctly."*

4.9 How Often Is Reading Comprehension Assessed?

In terms of how often teachers informally assess their students' reading comprehension, they all agreed that they do it on a daily basis. They also pointed out that about once a week, they do assess the students' performance to write it down in their official records.

Teacher A shared that *"I kind of have an informal assessment every day. But for my records, I do once a week."* When teacher B was asked how often does she assess her students reading comprehension, she reported that *"I would say every day."* Teacher

A shared that *"Every assignment, every day. Writing down a recording and making it all official is once a week."* Teacher C stated that *"As you are teaching you are doing a daily informal assessment because you are constantly checking what the students comprehend."*

4.10 Do you modify some of these assessments tools based on the students' needs or abilities?

All the teachers agreed that they do modify the use of some of these assessments based on the students' needs and abilities. Teacher D stated that When they are retelling or filling out a graphic organizer, some students can just write down the information to retell the story or to answer questions or do a graphic organizer. *Some students are not so good with writing, so I will just allow them to tell me that aloud.* Teacher B shared that *"I would ask questions on a more simplistic basis for some students at different levels. I have got others that have a much more in-depth knowledge base, and I would probably ask them more inferencing more difficult questions."* Teacher A explained how he differentiates the use of retelling as assessment tool based on the students' abilities by sharing that *"Some of my students are able to write, so I ask them to do a written retell for me."*

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUTION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter is the last section of this study. The chapter is made up of the overview of the research findings, recommendations and conclusions

5.1 Summary of Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to;

(1) Identify the common reading problems that negatively impact reading comprehension of students.

(2) To investigate the effective reading strategies that teachers utilize to improve reading comprehension levels of their students. In this chapter.

(3) The classroom-based reading assessment tools that teachers of English use to measure the students' reading comprehension growth and determine the effectiveness of these strategies?

Results as Connected to Research Questions and to Existing Studies

Findings of this study as related to the three-main research questions and to the existing literature is discussed in the following sections.

5.2 Research Question 1: Problems and Challenges

The first research question asked, "What are the common reading problems that prevent students from comprehending what they are reading?" The teachers' responses regarding this question emerged as three main themes: (a) problems, (b) challenges, (c) and manifestation of the problems.

Problems

According to the teachers' responses, the problems that negatively impact reading comprehension of some of their students included: (a) issues with background knowledge, (b) trouble with fluency, (c) difficulty with informational text, (d) difficulty with making inferences, (e) issues with vocabulary, (f) low reading level, (g) memory issues, and (h) non- interesting topic. Further discussion of the common problems that shared by most teachers is provided in the following section.

The first problem is the issue with background knowledge. According to the finding of this research, the issues with background knowledge take two forms: lack of background knowledge and using background knowledge inappropriately. Teachers reported the lack of background knowledge as a problem that prevent some of their students from understanding what they are reading. Teachers also emphasized the important rule that background plays in facilitating students' comprehension of a given text.

According to the results, having background knowledge is very important factor that facilitates students' understanding of a text through connecting the information to their previous experiences. In contrast, students who do not have enough background knowledge and life experience have nothing to connect the new information with, which makes the new information hard to be understood. What was found in this study regarding the importance of background knowledge generally aligns with what Blanc and Tapiero (2001) found in their study.

They pointed out that having more background knowledge about the topic of reading plays a significant role in helping readers to construct meaning from a text. Readers who had more background knowledge were able to make more accurate connection

between the new textual information and their previous experience when compare to readers with less background knowledge. Blanc and Tapiero (2001) concluded that background knowledge and demands of the task are very important elements in understanding and gaining meaning of a text. Also, to better comprehend a written passage, the reader needs to make a connection between the new textual information and all information, world knowledge, and personal experiences he/she already has about the topic of the reading (McNamara & Kintsch, 1996).

Making a connection between the reader's background knowledge and textual material is an important for facilitating the reading comprehension process (Ferstl & Kintsch, 1999; Kintsch, 1998; Kintsch & Rawson, 2005). According to the present study, it seems to be a relationship between the lack of background knowledge, life experience, and the students' social economic status. Thus, students with low social economic status may not have as much life experience as other students do, which reduces their chances of building a sufficient amount of background knowledge regarding life experiences, situations, and activities. Even though that seems logical because families with low social economic status cannot afford taking their children to different activities, it is worth more investigation.

Using background knowledge inappropriately also negatively impacts the students' understanding of a text. According to the present study, some students tend to use their background knowledge regard the given text inappropriately while reading. Particularly, the students do that by bringing irrelevant information into the given, which negatively influence their understanding. What was found in this study regarding the inappropriate use of background knowledge are consistent with previous research. For example, Maria and MacGinitie's (1980) pointed out that students with

learning disability tend to eliminate new information that was presented in the written passage when it did not match their previous knowledge instead of modifying their prior knowledge.

Other researchers have similarly found that, although some students may have prior knowledge about the topic of a reading, they usually fail to appropriately use that knowledge in order to facilitate their understanding of the new textual information (Graham & Bellert, 2005; Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Carr & Thompson 1996; Paris, Lipson, & Wixson,1983). Also, William (1993) conducted a study to examine the students' comprehension of a modified story and their ability to recognize story themes. The study involved adolescents. The results indicated that adolescents with learning disabilities brought incorrect or irrelevant information into the story and have difficulty understanding the text. These difficulties raised a result of their inappropriately using of their prior knowledge related to the topic. Also, William found that when these students were asked to respond to inferential questions, they resorted to either totally depend on their previous knowledge or disregarded their previous knowledge (William, 1993).

According to this study, teachers helps their students to overcome their issues with background knowledge through several strategies. These include graphic organizers, explaining, demonstration, brining things in, teaching vocabulary, and showing pictures.

The second problem is the issue with reading fluency. Issues with fluency was found as another problem that impacts the students' comprehension of a text. Based on the results of this study, the issues with fluency are organized into two parts: fast reading and slow reading (lack of fluency), which both impact students' reading

comprehension. All teachers pointed out that the lack of fluency (slow decoding) is a problem that prevents some students from comprehending a text well. According to the results, when students are reading in a very slow and choppy way, they are using most of their working memory and energy trying to decode words in a text. As a result, they start losing the meaning of sentences.

Not only slow reading, but also, super-fast reading negatively impacts reading comprehension of some students. Fast readers miss the meaning of what they are reading because they just thinking about finishing what they are reading. while reading so fast students are missing punctuation marks and pausing as needed while reading, which all are a very important to be considered while reading to understand a text. What is found regarding lack of fluency is broadly in line with those found in the literature (Graham & Bellert, 2005; Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002; Perfetti, Therrien, 2004; Therrien, Gormley, & Kubina, 2006; Wolf and Katzir-Cohen, 2001).

Also, Chard, Vaughn, and Tyler (2002) concluded that students often experience difficulty with reading fluency, which directly influence their reading comprehension. According to the present study, teachers help their students to improve their reading fluency through implementation of rereading strategies. Rereading strategy helps students through providing them with a good model of reading, so they can recognize where to pause and using the intonation. It allows students for more rereading practices.

Another problem is the difficulty with informational text. According to the results, some students have a hard time comprehending informational text when compare to narratives. That difficulty with understanding informational text is due to the hard academic vocabulary that have been used in these types of text. Also, informational

text usually is written at a higher level than the students' grade level, which makes it difficult to be understood. It also requires students to recall certain facts and sequence events, which is a major problem with most students. My findings in this area are that comprehending expository text is more difficult than narrative text for most students.

Also, students face more difficulty with comprehending expository text than with narrative texts. The majority of the literature focuses on the difficulty that students have regarding distinguishing between the different types of common text structures, which impact their reading comprehension. Although knowledge of text structures is an important skill, some students, have difficulty distinguishing between different types of text structures, which negatively impact their reading comprehension. Therefore, teachers who participated in this study helped their students to understand informational text better through teaching vocabulary and reading the text loudly to the students.

According to the results, difficulty with making inference is another problem that prevents some students from understanding concepts and knowledge that are not literally stated in the text. Making inference as a reading skill is very hard for these students because it requires them to go beyond looking for literal fact by analysing information and making connection between facts in order to make meaning. What is found in this study is the comprehension tool kit and questioning are the two strategies that teachers used to assist their students improving their ability in making inference.

Another problem is issues with vocabulary. Knowledge of vocabulary plays a critical role in facilitating readers' understanding of a text. According to the results, the limited amount of academic vocabulary negatively influences comprehension of some

students. The lack of academic vocabulary as a problem that prevents some students from comprehending a text is generally consistent with those found in the literature (Clemens & Simmons, 2014; Jitendra, Edwards, Sacks, & Jacobson, 2004). Also, Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, and Baker (2001) noted that students with learning disabilities face difficulties to accurately understand many of the vocabulary and terminology that have been employed in academic texts. It was found in this study that besides the limited amount of academic vocabulary, some students have difficulty with understanding vocabulary that have multiple meanings. Also, some students have difficulty recognizing words when they are written in different shapes (noun, verb, adverbs) than what they were taught. According to this study, teachers helped their students improving their vocabulary amount through showing the students different examples of text and different sizes of words.

Another problem that prevents some students from comprehending the text well is having low reading level. According to the results, some students are below with their peers in reading. Thus, they are struggling with the basic reading skills, such as recognizing letters, letters' sound, decoding, and putting the parts of the whole sentence together to gain meaning, which all are important to facilitate understanding of a text. Also, memory issues were identified as a problem that negatively influence reading comprehension of some students.

Challenges

I defined challenges as any factor that influences students that is outside schools and that might impact their reading comprehension. According to this study, a lack of opportunity to practice reading outside school is the only challenge that was identified, which negatively influences students' reading comprehension. Thus,

practicing reading at home is a significant factor that helps students improving reading comprehension skills through learning new vocabulary and giving them more information and learning experience.

Manifestation of the Problems

According to the results, teachers start to observe the manifestation of these reading problems before their students reach third year. Teachers usually start to notice these problems when their students fail to learn the pre reading skills. Even though, teachers start to notice reading problems with their students. the gap grows so much bigger by third year.

That is logical because third year is kind of shift where students are expected to read more informational text. That notion, which was found as a result of this study is broadly in line with those found in the literature. For instance, it is especially important to help students overcome the reading problems that may prevent them from literacy success. Failing to solve reading difficulties during students' early years in school dramatically increases the likelihood that the reading difficulties will follow them into their final years. Thus, the critical role that reading plays in students learning emphasizes the importance of identifying students with reading difficulties early and providing them with the most appropriate reading strategies.

5.3 Research Question 2: Effective Strategies

The second research question asked, "What effective reading comprehension strategies do teachers utilize in order to improve reading comprehension skills of students?" The teachers' responses regarding the effective reading comprehension strategies emerged as two major categories: the effective strategies and the impact of

the teachers' experience on selecting these strategies. These two categories and their sub-categories are separately discussed in the following sections.

The effective strategies

Five sub-categories emerged from the effective strategies as a main category: (a) non computerized strategies, (b) computerized strategies, (c) criteria for selecting the strategies, and (e) onset and reasons behind using these strategies.

Non-computerized strategies*:* In this study, non-computerized strategies were defined as any strategy that does not require a computer when it is implement by teachers or students.

According to the results, teachers mentioned several non-computerized reading comprehension strategies as effective strategies to improve reading comprehension of their students. Graphic organizers, questioning, story mapping, peer assisted reading strategy, using different grouping, thinking aloud, and discussing the text with the students were the top seven strategies that are mentioned as effective by the majority of teachers. Most of these strategies are broadly aligned with the strategies that are highlighted by the National Reading Panel (2000) as an effective for improving students' reading comprehension. These strategies involve monitoring comprehension, using graphic organizers, answering questions, generating questions, recognizing story structure, and summarizing (the National Reading Panel, 2000).

According to the results, regardless of the different forms that graphic organizers may take (Venn Diagram, T chart, and Spider map), they are found to be an effective strategy that can be used in different stages of reading (during and after reading) for improving students' reading comprehension. That finding is broadly in line with those

of researchers such as Sam and Rajan, (2013). Also, Chang et al. (2002) pointed out that "among the numerous reading strategies, graphic strategies are one of the few approaches that can be applied at the preview stage before reading, during the reading process itself, and at the stage after reading" (p. 5). Also, Kim, Vaughn, Wanzek and Wei (2004) concluded that although improving reading comprehension is a very difficult task, it could be done through using graphic organizers.

According to this study, graphic organizers help students to understand text through

(1) organizing ideas in the text,

(2) sequencing events in the story,

(3) showing differences and similarities between characters or objects,

(4) encouraging them to bring in and organize their own ideas and background knowledge regarding the text,

(5) providing them with an opportunity to think deeply about the text and analyse it,

(6) breaking down the text into smaller parts,

(7) identifying main idea and details,

(8) making connections between main idea and related details, and

(9) making predictions.

Most of what teachers shared about how using graphic organizers helps students to understand text generally aligns with previous research. For example, graphic organizers help students in several ways: they connect students' prior knowledge with the new information in order to facilitate their understanding (Sam & Rajan, 2013); they provide students with a visual presentation that shows the relationship and connection between ideas and concepts (Anders, Flip, & Jaffe,1989; Darch & Gersten, 1986; Sam & Rajan, 2013); and lastly they help students to better

comprehend textual information through making a prediction about the text. Questioning is another strategy that helps to improve reading comprehension of students.

According to this study, questioning as a strategy takes two forms based on students' ability: (a) teachers frequently stop and question the students while they are reading and (b) students are questioning themselves about the text while they are reading.

These two forms of questioning are broadly consistent with what was found in the literature (Rouse, Alber-Morgan, Cullen, & Sawyer, 2014; Swanson & De La Paz, 1998; Taylor, Alber, & Walker, 2002). In addition, questioning as a strategy improves students' comprehension through encouraging them to think while reading, stay focused on reading task, thinking about the best answers, and go back to the text and reread it if they miss some information. It also improves students' understanding of main ideas and details of the text by encouraging them to ask, "what if" questions and connecting the text to their background knowledge.

What was reported by teachers generally align with what is in the literature. For example, it was found that asking questions while involving in the reading process provides students with an opportunity to think about what are they reading, be active and independent readers, and be able to appropriately reflect on their own reading. the impact of using self-questioning on reading comprehension of high-school students indicated that the students' reading comprehension of narrative texts and retelling significantly increased after teaching them through using self-questioning. Also, the results show that after implementation of the strategy, all participants were able to maintain their reading comprehension outcomes.

According to the results, story mapping is another reading comprehension strategy that helps students to comprehend what they are reading. Story mapping is an effective reading comprehension strategy that increases comprehension of a text through providing them with a template that organizes and summarizes the different parts of a story (characters, plot, setting, problems, and solution), which are very important for identifying and recalling the important details and ideas. It also facilitates students' comprehension through visualizing their thought, allowing them to match the main ideas with their details, and sequencing events.

These findings are generally in line with those found in the literature. For example, story-mapping template works as a framework to guide students' attention in order to identify the story grammar elements while reading and writing them on the provided template. In addition, using story-mapping has positively impacted reading comprehension skills for students by improving their abilities to successfully identify story grammar elements, such as setting, conflict, and characters.

Peer-assisted reading strategy was another reading comprehension strategy that was frequently mentioned as effective by the teachers in this study. Similarly, Peer assisted learning strategy has been demonstrated as an effective instructional method. According to the results, the peer-assisted reading strategy increases reading comprehension of students through allowing them to work with and listen to a peer, increasing their motivation to learn, predicting, and learning from each other's personal connection to the text. It also facilitates students' comprehension through allowing them a cooperative learning experience in which they coordinate and discuss information that has been in the book and share with one another. It also helps

improving students' confidence to share and confirm what they learn from the text with others.

Using different grouping was another strategy that was mentioned as effective by the majority of the teachers. These different grouping include small group and one-to one. According to the results, teachers group their students based on different factors, such as their friendship, their abilities, their personalities. According to this study grouping students while engaging in reading activities is an effective strategy to increase reading comprehension. That is because it allows students to discuss their thoughts and retelling with others, learn from each other, bring in their past experience and connect it with the new information, formulate their thoughts and opinions, and work together to answer questions that are related to text.

Thinking aloud is an effective reading strategy that helps to improve reading comprehension of students. It facilitates students' understanding through providing them with a good model to follow when they are reading and an opportunity to share their thoughts with other classmates. Also, having a loud discussion with the students about the reading is another effective strategy that helps to improve their reading comprehension. That is because it provides them with a cooperative learning environment, which allows them to learn from teachers and from each other and confirm their understanding of a text.

One teacher surprised me when he shared that he uses Cloze procedures, which is known as an assessment technique, as a strategy to teach reading comprehension to his students. According to the results, Cloze as a reading strategy helps students improve their comprehension through allowing them to think of the context clues within the text. It also allowing them to determine which words (noun, verb, or

adjective) they need to be filled in the missing blank to make sense of whatever the sentence is.

Criteria for selecting the strategies: According to the findings, reading comprehension strategies are not one-size-fits-all. Therefore, teachers took into consideration numerous criteria when selecting an appropriate strategy for their students. The first criterion is the students' abilities and needs. Teachers pointed out that each student is unique based on his/her ability and needs; therefore, they emphasized the importance of taking into account the students' abilities and educational needs when selecting a strategy for their students.

The second criterion is current pre-reading skills and reading level. According to the finding, teachers select strategies based on their students pre-reading skills, such as identify the alphabet, knowing diphthongs and digraphs, and sight words. The third criterion is the student's prior knowledge. According to this study, teachers take into account their students' previous knowledge. Also, it was found that having the same students for two or three academic years helps teachers to have better idea of their students' prior knowledge, which results in utilizing the most appropriate strategies with them. The fourth criterion is the student's learning style.

According to the finding, not all students have the same learning style; therefore, it is very important to utilize an appropriate strategy that satisfies the students' way of learning. Another criterion is strategies that used in the general classroom. According to the results, looking at the reading comprehension strategies that are used by the general education teacher in the general classroom is helpful when selecting a strategy to use in the resource room. Doing that allows the teachers to incorporate the same strategy with the students, which provides students with an opportunity to frequently

practices the same strategy over and over. Thus, I believe it is very important for teachers to create and keep an ongoing and effective cooperation with education teachers. That kind of relationship benefits the students in several ways. For example, both teachers can plan and implement the most appropriate intervention for a particular student, discuss the students' growth, identify the student's weaknesses and strengths, and decide which changes or modifications should be made to the student's intervention.

Onset and reasons behind using these strategies: According to the results, teachers start to use different reading comprehension strategies with their students in first year. Teachers teach their students through strategies because they want their students to recognize that the main goal of reading is understanding. Teachers also emphasized that the earlier their students learn to read the better for them. According to the results, teachers start to use reading comprehension strategies in first year because that time is usually when the reading problems manifest. I believe that teaching students to utilize reading strategies while reading early is a key factor that we all as educators should consider. Also, all students need to learn how to overcome their reading difficulties in early stage through using reading strategies.

According to this study, teachers' responses differ regarding the reasons behind using reading comprehension strategies while teaching student. All teachers teach reading comprehension through the use of different strategies as a response to the reading developmental process. That is because they want to help their students right away from the beginning instead of waiting for students to fail in order to receive help. That is because they believe that even though all students need to learn how to read through the most appropriate strategies, some students have issues that required

teachers to provide special support through using a specific instructional method. I support the opinion that teachers should use reading comprehension strategies with all students from the beginning and do not wait until the students fail in order to receive the help. If some students still need more support after implementation of general strategies, teachers should provide them with more intensive and individual supports.

The Impact of the Teachers' Experience on Selecting These Strategies

Two sub-categories emerged from this category. These include: how experience helps teachers to select appropriate strategies for their students and ways to modify strategies.

How experience helps teachers to select appropriate strategies for their students.

According to the results, as teachers' experiences of working with students increase year after year, they become more experienced in determining which strategies might work better with a particular student. Also, having the same students for more than one year allows teachers to know the students well, which is critical to satisfy their educational and learning needs through using the best instructional methods. Also, teachers were very interested in selecting only research-based strategies to teach reading comprehension for their students. Teachers used only research-based practices because school require them to use only research-based strategy, their past education experience emphasizes best practices, and they want to beneficially use their instructional time with students rather than trying methods that may or may not work well.

Ways to modify strategies: According to the results, although teachers use only reading comprehension strategies that have been approved as effective by research, they modify some of these strategies based on the students' needs and abilities. For

instance, one strategy might originally require students to write down their ideas on worksheets or other instructional means. However, students might be weak at writing, so teachers allow their students to verbally express their ideas and write these ideas down for them. Also, teachers do modify some strategies by breaking them into smaller pieces and modify strategies for students who have low reading level, which prevent them from comprehending a text well. For example, if one strategy requires students to independently read a text, teachers may read to these students instead of having them read by themselves.

5.4 Research Question 3: Informal Assessments

The third research question asked, "What are the classroom-based reading assessment tools teachers use to measure the students' reading comprehension growth and to determine the effectiveness of these strategies?" The teachers' responses regarding this question emerged as four main themes: (a) importance of assessment, (b) informal assessment tools, (c) how often is reading comprehension assessed, and (d) ways to modify assessments based on students need and abilities.

Importance of Assessment

Based on the results of this study, informally assessing students' reading comprehension serves teachers in several ways. First, informal assessment provides teachers with a clear picture of their students' reading comprehension level. Second, it guides teachers' instructions in a way that benefits the students. In other words, it helps teachers to determine what strategy and practices that needs to be modified or totally changed. Third, informal reading assessment helps teachers to measure the effectiveness of a particular strategy on the students' reading comprehension. The results regarding the advantages of informal reading assessment generally align with

what other researchers found. For instance, assessment is an essential tool to measure the effectiveness of teaching reading and to check the efficiency of a reading intervention method designed to respond to educational needs of students (Woolley, 2011; Caccamise & Snyder, 2005). Also, Serafini (2010) pointed out that informal assessment helps teachers to;

(1) develop the most appropriate instruction for students,

(2) make a better determination about what lesson would be more effective to teach, and

(3) determine what supportive material to use during their lessons.

Informal Assessment Tools

According to the results teachers informally assess their students' reading comprehension through using different assessment tools. The five common reading assessments are discussed in the following section.

The first assessment tool is retelling. Based on the results, teachers assess reading comprehension through asking students to either verbally or in writing retell the reading passage through using their own words. Some students have a hard time retelling and summarizing what they just read. Therefore, teachers verbally prompt them to retell more ideas and details regarding the text. Teachers believe retelling is a beneficial assessment tools that allows teachers to determine whether or not their students understand the most important part of the texts and whether or not they sequence events in the text. Retelling is not only beneficial for teachers, but it also allows students to confirm their own understanding. The results regarding the benefits of retelling allows students to demonstrate their understanding of the passage by either producing a verbal presentation or engaging in a written activity. Also, having

students use their own words while retelling allows teachers to determine that the students accurately understand the passage rather than just literally restate the authors' words (Spinelli, 2012). Furthermore, the retelling activity allows teachers to determine students' reading comprehension by assessing the accuracy of the information that they are retelling when compared to the original passage (Serafini, 2010). Retelling provides teachers with helpful information about their students' abilities to organize, classify, integrate and make an inference about a textual information (Han, 2005).

The second assessment tool is questioning. Teachers use questioning to informally assess reading comprehension of their students. According to the results, questioning as an assessment can take two forms: orally and written. Also, students' responses regarding these questions can be expressed orally or in writing. Questioning is a beneficial assessment that allows teachers to determine whether or not their students have understood information in the text and organized it to higher order thinking. It is also a quick assessment that allows teachers to decide what changes or modifications that need to be made in their instructions. I totally agree questioning is one of the assessment tools that can be used quickly and multiple times throughout teaching the lesson. It can be used to check students' comprehension while reading and after reading.

The third assessment tool is Cloze procedure. Teachers use Cloze procedure to informally assess reading comprehension of their students. It allows teachers to determine whether or not students know what word to select in order to make meaning of the text. It assesses student's comprehension and word skills. Also, in the literature Cloze procedure is found to be a beneficial assessment to assess reading

comprehension. For instance, Williams, Ari, and Santamaria (2011) conducted a study to compare the achievement of 100 students on a sustained silent reading test and two types of Cloze Assessment tests (Maze and open-ended) to determine which test format makes greater variance in reading comprehension.

The participants were two group of post-secondary students, struggling and typical. The findings of this study indicated that there is high correlation between both Cloze Assessment and the reading comprehension test ($r = .68$ and $.52$, $p < .00$). More recently, Gellert and Elbro (2013) developed a quick 10-minute Cloze Assessment that required participants to accurately comprehend information and concepts across the passage in order to correctly guess and fill in the deletions. The participants were 204 Danish adults. The results indicated that students' performance on the Cloze test were highly correlated ($r=.84$) with their performance on a 30-minute standard question-answer comprehension test. Therefore, Gellert and Elbro (2013) concluded that cloze test could be employed to assess reading comprehension.

The fourth assessment tool is having students fill in graphic organizers. According to the results, having the students fill in graphic organizers as an assessment tool allows teachers to quickly determine what the students know, what did they learn, and did not know. The next assessment tool is having the students express their understanding through a writing activity.

According to the results, having the students express their understanding through a writing activity is a beneficial assessment tool. That is because teachers can always have the students work in front of them in order to determine whether or not students understand what they read, compare and contrast what they gain from the reading, and how they connect information to their past experiences. I do agree that having the

students express their understanding through writing is a useful assessment. That is because teachers always have the students' work in front of them for reviewing and grading purpose.

How often is Reading Comprehension Assessed

According to the results, teachers informally assess their students reading comprehension every day every assignment. Also, they do informally assess the students once a week to write it down in their official records. These assessments are important to both guide the teachers' instructions and determine what the students have learned. As teacher, I think that assessing students every day is very beneficial to determine the students' achievement level, monitor their progress, and allow teachers to determine the most appropriate instructional method for their students.

Ways to Modify Assessments Based on Students Needs and Abilities

Based on the results of this study, teachers do some modifications on these informal assessment tools based on the students' needs and abilities. These modifications include simplifying the assessment for the students. For example, teachers might simplify questions based on the students' abilities and knowledge. Teachers also might reduce the amount of details that students have to retell or summarize. Other teachers allow their students who are not good writers to orally retell the information. According to my experience, I really believe that teachers should modify some assessment tools based on their students' abilities and learning styles in order to accurately assess their reading comprehension. That is because assessment tools are not one size-fit-all. Each individual student has his/her abilities and needs, which need to be considered.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the finding of this study, the following recommendations should be considered for future research.

1. Conducting a quantitative study that investigates the effective reading strategies that experienced teachers utilize to improve the students' reading comprehension. Based on the responses of teachers of English in this current study, a unique survey could be developed as an instrument for collecting the data from participants.
2. Replicating the present study and including a larger sample size that would be collected from more than one region. The results of that replication could support the finding of this study.
3. A further qualitative study investigating the research questions of this study through using additional data collection methods, such as observation would be very interesting.
4. Even though Cloze procedure is a well-known assessment technique that is used to assess the students' reading comprehension, one teacher shared that she uses Cloze as a strategy to teach reading comprehension for her students. Therefore, further research exploring the effectiveness of using Cloze procedure as a strategy to teach reading comprehension is worth more investigation.
5. Conducting further research examining the impact of the students' social economic status on their background knowledge and life experience would be very interesting.

6. Conducting further study to investigate the effectiveness of using Fast Forward and Raze kids as strategies to increase reading comprehension of students.
7. Conducting a study that explores the most effective methods that encourage students with reading difficulties increasing their reading practice outside the school setting.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS GUIDE FOR TEACHERS IN ENGLISH DEPARTMENT-ZORKOR SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

This interview is being administered to gather information for a study that is investigating students' reading problems and ways to help them. Please be assured that data collected is only for the purpose of the research.

1. Please describe your own philosophy of reading comprehension, its definition, and how it occurs.

2. Please describe the reading comprehension problems and challenges that may prevent

your students from comprehending a text?

A. Would you please provide me with more examples about the comprehension problems?

B. When are you first seeing the manifestation of the problems?

3. Please describe the effective reading comprehension strategies that you use in order to

improve comprehension of your students.

A. When do you find yourself first introducing reading comprehension strategies?

B. Do you use the same strategies with all students?

4. How does your teaching experience assist you to either select or adapt comprehension

reading strategies? Can you provide me with examples?

A. Do you usually come up with strategies on your own or do you use research-based strategies?

B. Have you modified the use of some strategies base on the students' abilities and

educational needs? If yes, how do you do that? Please provide me with an example?

5. What criteria do you use to select the appropriate strategies for your students?

A. When you select your strategies, do you take into consideration some factors, such as the students' pervious knowledge, socio-cultural aspects, abilities, needs?

B. If yes, please provide me with an example.

6. Please describe the class-room based assessment tools that you use to measure the students reading comprehension growth and to determine the effectiveness of these strategies.

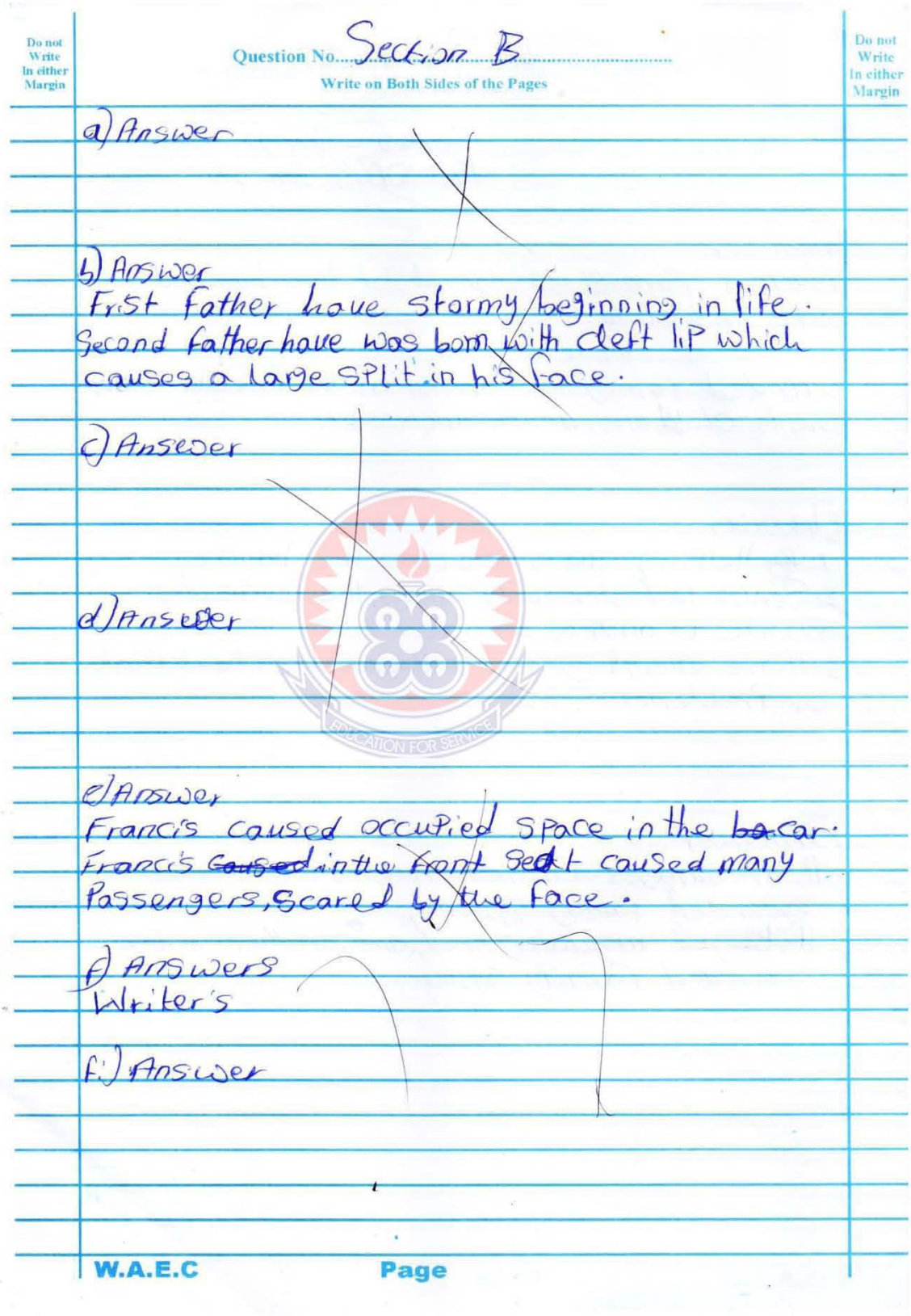
A. How do you determine that these strategies are effective?

B. How do you select these assessment tools

C. Do you modify some of these assessment tools based on the students' needs or abilities? If yes, please explain.

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE OF STUDENTS COMPREHENSION MARKS



Do not Write In either Margin

Question No. Section B

Write on Both Sides of the Pages

Do not Write In either Margin

a) Answer

b) Answer
First father have stormy beginning in life.
Second father have was born with cleft lip which causes a large split in his face.

c) Answer

d) Answer

e) Answer
Francis caused occupied space in the ~~ba~~car.
Francis ~~caused~~ in the front seat caused many passengers, scared by the face.

f) Answers
Writer's

f) Answer

W.A.E.C Page

Do not Write in either Margin

Question No. Section B

Write on Both Sides of the Pages

Do not Write in either Margin

(a) The writer find one of members who was todster and he was those children who have a stormy.

(b) Both fathers where patient for their children

(c) Writer's attitude to the two fathers was that they are gods future and they were patient for their children to grow.

(d) Their truants was wicked and unfair to Francis family.

(e) (i) Francis occupied space in the car
(ii) Francis stared many passengers by the face

(f) (i) Adventure

(ii) modifies time many

(g) metaphor

(ii) he was see wonful thing that he has ever see before.

(i) stormy — lake
(ii) defect — reality
(iii) persistent — look
(iv) Petrified — look
(v) Embarrassed — annoyed

09/20

W.A.E.C Page

Do not Write In either Margin

Question No..

Write on Both Sides of the Pages

a. He was just learning to walk. One of the memb of the congragation who could not sit throught the service was to
(b) Many father of the children will chept feel too embarrassed to allow them out of the home

(c) All this while, the father was never impatient nor did he shout at the body to sit still

(d) The defect could be repaired but not until he was older.

e. (1) The child occupied space in the car
(2) disappointment

f.

W.A.E.C Page

Do not Write In either Margin

Question No. Section B

Write on Both Sides of the Pages

Do not Write In either Margin

a beca

because ~~had~~ which is a normal occurrence in ~~Pa~~ this part of the world

(b) ~~The~~

The members of the congregation

c /

But their troubles were just beginning

d

was born with cleft lip

e

- The child occupied space in the car /
- could have been taken up by a paying passenger

f

i personification

ii ~~A~~verb

02/20